

Academic Writing & Register

What is academic writing?

- ▶ Academic writing is a formal type of communication.
- ▶ It is used to communicate information and arguments in written format.
- ▶ It is the type of writing you will read in academic journals and books.

What academic writing is not!

- ▶ Academic writing is not a transcription of what you would normally say.
- ▶ Academic writing is generally not the type of writing you read in novels, magazines or on the web.

And why is this academic writing useful?

- ▶ Academic writing is similar to other types of formal writing.
- ▶ It is a skill that you will find useful not only during your studies but also when you go into the world of work.

So how do I write...academically?

- ▶ Academic writing is a skill that you need to develop.
- ▶ It is not an instant process but there are tips and tricks that can help you on the way.

Academic Writing: Tips and Tricks

I...you...they

- ▶ Academic writing is formal.
- ▶ So you should never address the reader.
- ▶ Also, the use of the first person must be as sparing as possible.
- ▶ Passive voice is your greatest friend.

What is wrong with this text (T1)?

- ▶ Diodoros begins his work with one of the most powerful statements in the history of historiography: “The writers of universal history bring great good to all people, since they are willing through their own toil to help the common good”. As you can see, Diodoros does not refer to history in general! No, you can tell he talks about universal history. I read that universal history was not a new phenomenon in the period. People think though that it had not yet reached its apogee.

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How could this be corrected?

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- ▶ Diodoros begins his work with one of the most powerful statements in the history of historiography: “The writers of universal history bring great good to all people, since they are willing through their own toil to help the common good”. Diodoros does not refer to history in general but particularly to universal history, which at the time was not a new phenomenon but had not yet reached its apogee.

Don't...or...do not

- ▶ Contractions have no place in academic writing and they detract from the quality of your argument by giving it a very informal tone.
- ▶ So: Don't, won't, didn't, shouldn't, wouldn't etc should never be used.
- ▶ The same is true of any informal grammatical forms.

What is wrong with this text (T2)?

- ▶ You can say that Diodoros marks an important milestone in the evolution of the genre, since he's the first writer of holistic universal history. I read he believes that he's the first truly universal historian. In the opening of the *Bibliothèque*, Diodoros relates his vision and his aim to you: a scope of historical inquiry so vast that his claim of being the first to attempt it seems fully justified.

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► Yet, Diodoros marks an important milestone in the evolution of the genre, since he is the first writer of holistic universal history; he believes that he is the first truly universal historian. In the opening of the *Bibliothèque*, Diodoros relates his vision and his aim to the reader: a scope of historical inquiry so vast that his claim of being the first to attempt it seems fully justified.

S...s...'s... or why grammar is paramount

- ▶ Using correct grammatical forms is essential in any type of formal writing.
- ▶ The most common mistake that students make is to confuse genitives and plurals.

Genitive vs Plural

- ▶ Cup = 1 cup
- ▶ Cups = many cups
- ▶ Cup's = of the 1 cup
- ▶ Cups' = of the many cups

What is wrong with this text (T3)?

- ▶ Polybios' is the first of the extant historians to claim that his work's a universal history. You can tell that for Polybios, universal means the history of the recent past and his own time's, albeit from a pan-Mediterranean perspective created by the unification of the region affected by Roman conquest. Diodoro's perspective of a holistic universal history'd be, as Momigliano rightly noted, "alien" to Polybios.

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- ▶ Punctuation is important in the presentation of your work.
- ▶ Too often wrong punctuation can change the meaning of a sentence or make it appear non-sensical.

What is wrong with this text (T4)?

- ▶ More importantly, Polybios' has a definite aim; to explain the momentous and rapid rise of Rome. Which as he rightly says was "unprecedented". You see his focus is on political events and their connection's - since to Polybios there lays the key to achieving his aim. Thus: his history is an account of causality and it's implications. In that; he follows the vision of another famous exile; Thucydides the first pragmatic historian who also sought to explain another unprecedented event.

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register... Register... REGISTER

- ▶ The register or tone of your work must be appropriate to the audience.
- ▶ You would not use the same language in a job interview as you would talking to your friends in the pub.
- ▶ Register has to do with the vocabulary that you use.
- ▶ At the same time, there is the danger of going too far.

What is wrong with this text (T5)?

- ▶ Diodoros' is not an idiot. He thinks different on what you'd say universal history is all about. Diodoran universal history is the history of mankind and the main actors aren't what happens and causality but you and me. The stage, temporal and spatial, is wider than Polybios, since for Diodoros' it is the *oikoumene* that provides the spatial setting and all time the temporal. What Diodoros is looking at is people rather than event's. That's clear as day in his vision of the purpose of universal history; it's a teacher, what people need to do to be shiny; not merely an explanatory tool for current political circumstances.

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- ▶ Diodoros has a different perspective, both on what universal history is and what its uses are. Diodoran universal history is the history of mankind and the main actors are not events and causality but people. The stage, temporal and spatial, is wider than Polybios', since for Diodoros it is the *oikoumene* that provides the spatial setting and all time the temporal. The focus of Diodoros on people rather than on events is obvious in his vision of the purpose of universal history: it is a teacher, a moralising force for the betterment of mankind, not merely an explanatory tool for current political circumstances.

Do you need help?

- ▶ If you think that your work is not of the appropriate academic style, then speak to your module tutor or your personal tutor.
- ▶ Also you can use the Academic Skills programme in UWTSD Student Support. The sessions happen in the Canterbury Building every day.