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Ysgrifennu Academaidd a HacA Academic Writing and Q&A

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Trawsnewid Addysg; Trawsnewid Bywydau
Transforming Education; Transforming Lives



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Academic Writing and Q&A

1. Presentation (ca. 30 minutes)
2. Q&A (30 minutes)

Forms of academic writing?

Academic writing has many forms:

- Journal article
- Book review
- Textbook
- Monograph
- Report
- Website
- Computer programme
- Exhibition catalogue
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- **This presentation is about writing a thesis**
- **Your thesis will draw on academic writing in different genres**

Why Academic Writing

- Research students often come with significant (professional) writing experience as
 - Journalists
 - Clerics (sermons)
 - Lawyers (court cases, contracts)
- Academic language is a *metalanguage*.
- Need to learn writing in a new context.
- Who are you writing for?

How would you characterise academic writing with ONE adjective?

Features of Academic Writing

"Academic writing in English is linear, which means it has one central point or theme with every part contributing to the main line of argument, without digressions or repetitions. Its objective is to inform rather than entertain. As well as this it is in the standard written form of the language. There are ten main features of academic writing that are often discussed. Academic writing is to some extent: **complex, formal, objective, explicit, hedged, and responsible**. It uses language precisely and accurately. It is also well **organised and planned**."

(Source: Andy Gillett, "Academic writing: Features of academic writing", <http://www.uefap.com/writing/feature/featfram.htm>. Accessed 11/09/2020)

Criticality

Shuowen jiezi 說文解字 (1st century CE)

Written characters are the foundation of the classics, the origin of royal government, the means by which former generations passed on to posterity, the channel through which later generations can learn from the past. Therefore it is said: "As the root has been established, the Way is generated."

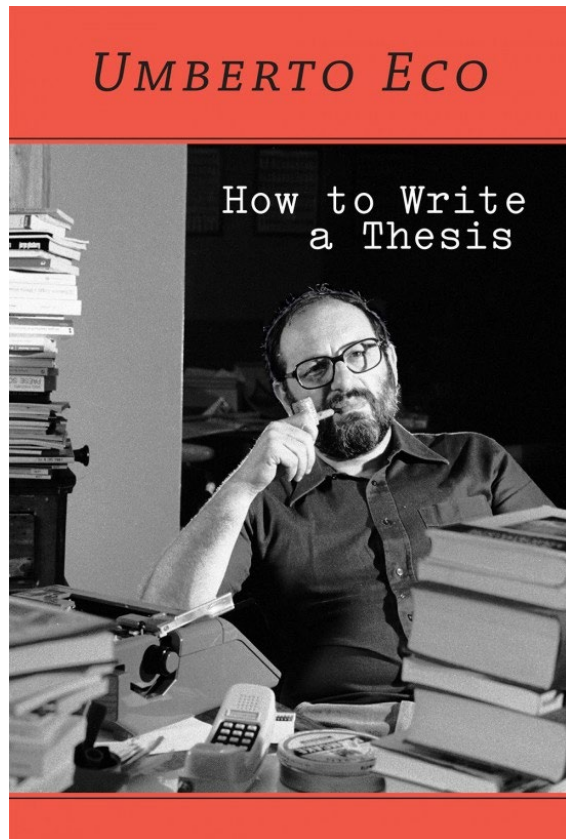
From Introduction PhD thesis:

"The significance of characters lies in their role of being the carrier of a culture. The prerequisite foundational study of a culture starts with its characters. Chinese characters serve as the keys to understand the classics of Chinese ancient sages. By mastering the principles and applications of Chinese characters can we truly understand the profound meanings and learn from the wisdom embedded in those written works."

Positionality



One of many guides to academic writing

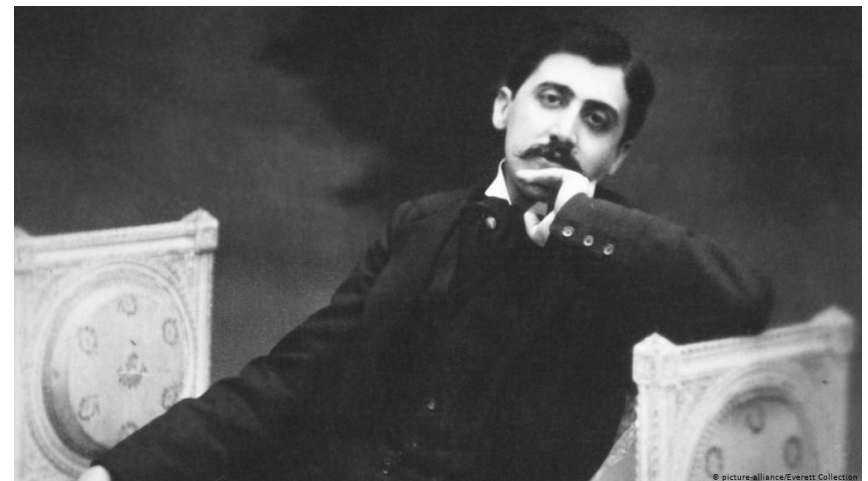


- Dates: 5 January 1932 – 19 February 2016
- Author of *The Name of the Rose* (1980)
- *How to Write a Thesis* (orig. publ. in 1977; English transl. 2015)

"You are not Proust"



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Example

The pianist Wittgenstein, brother of the well-known philosopher who wrote the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus that today many consider the masterpiece of contemporary philosophy, happened to have Ravel write for him a concerto for the left hand, since he had lost the right one in the war.

The pianist Paul Wittgenstein was the brother of the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. Since Paul was maimed of his right hand, the composer Maurice Ravel wrote a concerto for him that required only the left hand.

Use short(er) sentences whether possible (tho' some complex ideas clearly deserve complex, nuanced consideration)

- Hamlet is essentially about the hero's struggle for sanity in a world of baffling contradictions, but being a typical tragic drama of the period, it tries to enlist the audience's support for an act of revenge and the play is thus often distracted from its subtle characterization of the Prince's thought processes by a clumsy pursuit of melodramatic plot.
- Hamlet might be seen in terms of the hero's struggle for sanity in a world of baffling contradictions. However, at moments, it is still typical of its period in encouraging the audience to support a decisive act of revenge. So the play is often distracted from its subtle characterization of the Prince's thought processes by a clumsy pursuit of a melodramatic plot.
- **[Read essays. In revision you will nearly always want to recast sentences.]**

Formality

- **Seriousness of approach:** (but not unnecessary pomposity!)
- Avoid colloquialism; but also verbosity, circumlocution:
- *The play commences by making manifest the ruminations of the hero.*
- *The play starts by telling us what its hero thinks.*
- *Dahli was not ignorant of the fact that human beings are not always au fait with what passes in their own minds and not always capable of organizing their observations into logical sequences.*
- *Dahli knew that thoughts are often unconscious and disorderly.*

Referential vs figurative language

- *referential* language is “language that is recognized by all, in which all things are called by their most common name, and that does not lend itself to misunderstandings” (Eco). Example, “The Venice-Milan train”. A figurative example would be “The Arrow of the Lagoon”
- “Everyday” communication is possible with partially figurative language. However, a critical essay or a scholarly text should predominantly be written **referentially** (with all terms well defined and univocal).

Example

- *[Figurative version:] We are not convinced that Krasnapolsky is the sharpest critic of Danieli's work. In reading his author, Krasnapolsky gives the impression that he is putting words into Danieli's mouth. Consider the line, "in the evening gazing at the clouds." Ritz interprets it as a normal geographical annotation, whereas Krasnapolsky plays the symbolism card and sees an allusion to poetic activity. Ritz is not a prodigy of critical insight, but Krasnapolsky should also be handled with care. As Hilton observes, "if Ritz's writing seems like a tourist brochure, Krasnapolsky's criticism reads like a Lenten sermon. Truly, two perfect critics."*

Example

- *[Referential version:] Krasnapolsky is not a very sharp critic of Danieli's work. His interpretation draws meaning from the author's text that the author probably did not intend. Consider the line, "in the evening gazing at the clouds." Ritz interprets this as a normal geographical annotation, whereas Krasnapolsky sees a symbolic expression that alludes to poetic activity. One should not trust Ritz's critical acumen, and one should also distrust Krasnapolsky. Hilton observes that, "if Ritz's writing seems like a tourist brochure, Krasnapolsky's criticism reads like a Lenten sermon." And he adds, "Truly, two perfect critics."*

Use the present tense when talking about a text

- *Aliens presents a compelling role model for the post-feminist women.*
- *Hitchcock is the master of suspense.*
- **[Tho' what figures actually did in the past is described in the past tense: Ted Hughes was the poet Laureate.]**

Register

Use modern English; aim for objectivity of tone: modality: 'it could be said that', 'it might be argued/ suggested'

Criticizing/ critiquing doesn't mean rubbishing:

- *Spielberg's films are obviously sentimental nonsense.*
- *Spielberg's films have a tendency to rely upon conventions derived from recognisably sentimental narrative structures.*
- [Avoid using phrases like: 'I think' 'I feel' This is implicit in the essay anyway – **who else is writing it?** Such phrases can be used sparingly if you are suggesting that in some way you stand out from a consensus.]

Argue with evidence: don't assert, generalize:

*Pope's use of the couplet form is splendid
All of the output of channel 5 is pornographic.*

- **[Carefully phrased overviews should be followed by specifics: quotations, examples, critical evidence, data]**

A considerable amount of the material screened on Channel 5 after the watershed might be considered to be soft porn. As Joe Bloggs demonstrates Typical of such output is the film The Lecturer Gets Excited in which

- Avoid statements which overestimate, particularly your own opinions:

*It is impossible to ignore ...
No intelligent reader could help but agree*

Do not promise: DO

Before beginning my essay

- **Don't define where definition can be assumed**

Before writing this essay I must first define what the word essay means

- **[Consideration of key terms --- *expressionism, realism, comedy* etc. etc. --- particularly where there are differing opinions or a complex history to a key word is always valuable]**