

GETTING STARTED

CHAPTER 1

THE WRITING
PROCESS

Writing can be understood as a *process* and a *product*.

The writing product is the final text you write, for example, an essay, an email message, or lecture notes. The process is the stages of learning you go through to create the product, which involve reading, thinking, note taking, sharing ideas, organization, and writing.

In this chapter, you will

- study the six stages of the writing process
- answer questions about an article on students' experiences of academic writing
- apply four strategies for learning vocabulary
- study nouns and noun phrases
- learn about parallel structure
- do a personal writing task

TASK 1 EXPLORE THROUGH WRITING

What are your strengths and weaknesses as a writer?

Take five minutes to write as much as you can about the topic. When you do exploratory writing, the aim is to write down as many ideas as possible. The style of the writing is less important. After you have finished, share your writing with peers. You will revisit this exploratory writing later in the chapter.

SIX STAGES OF THE WRITING PROCESS

The following are six stages that many writers go through to produce effective academic essays.

Stage 1: Understand Your Audience, Genre, and Purpose

Before you start organizing your ideas for a writing task, you need to consider your audience, genre, and purpose. If you consider these three factors, it will help you engage critically with your topic and write in an appropriate style.

Audience

Your audience is the person or people who will read your writing. At college or university, this person is normally an instructor who has expert knowledge of your subject and who expects you to write in a certain way. The first step of stage 1 is to ask yourself two questions:

- Who is my audience?
- What are the expectations of my audience?

Genre

Put simply, *genre* refers to different text types, for example, a summary, a lab report, a diary, or a blog. Each type of text follows different *genre conventions*, that is, rules about the organization and style of the writing. Before writing, you need to ask yourself the following questions:

- What kind of text am I writing?
- What are the genre conventions of this text type?

Purpose

The purpose is your reason for writing. Are you taking lecture notes? Is the essay a first draft? Are you writing an assignment for a grade? In each case, you need to think about the following questions:

- Why am I writing?
- Should I take risks or play safe?

TASK 2 ANALYZE WRITING SITUATIONS

Taking into consideration the audience, genre, and context of each of the following writing situations, how would you write the required texts? Explain your answers.

1. Audience: a professor

Genre: a lab report

Purpose: for 50% of a course grade

Since the report will be assessed by a professor and counts for 50% of the grade, the style should be formal, objective, and scientific. The writer should avoid taking risks and follow the structure and style of a lab report.

- 2. Audience:** a teaching assistant
Genre: an email message
Purpose: to apologize for being absent

This text would be more personal and less formal. The degree of formality would depend on the relationship with the TA.

Stage 2: Understand Your Topic, Focus, and Task

There are two common types of writing assignments: open assignments, in which you can choose your own question, and closed questions that are assigned by an instructor. In either case, you need to keep your writing *in focus* and *on task*. You can do this by breaking questions down into these three components.

Topic

The topic is the general subject that you are writing about. You should not write too much about the general topic; simply mention it briefly in the introduction of the essay.

Focus

The focus is the specific aspect, or aspects, of the topic that you will write about. Most of what you write in the essay should be about the specific focus.

Task

The task is what you have to do, for example, analyze, compare, or summarize. Again, most of what you write in the essay should follow the specific task.

Remember to keep your writing *in focus* and *on task*!

TASK 3 IDENTIFY THE TOPIC, FOCUS, AND TASK

Identify the topic, focus, and task in each of the two essay questions below.

- 1.** Compare and contrast the styles of academic writing in English and in one other language.

Topic: Academic writing

Focus: Style in English and one other language

Task: Compare (look at similarities), contrast (look at differences).

- 2.** Why do many international students have difficulty with academic writing in English? What should colleges and universities do to support international students in their academic writing?

Topic: Academic writing in English

Focus: The reasons for many international students' difficulty and how colleges and universities should support the students

Task: Describe causes and argue for solutions.

Stage 3: Gather Information and Ideas

The next stage is to begin the process of gathering information. This is usually done in one of two ways: (a) searching for information online and then adding your own ideas or (b) gathering ideas from your existing knowledge and then searching for information online.



Searching for Information Online

Do a keyword search in a general or academic search engine, using the following strategies. (The examples are based on question 2 in Task 3.)

1. Use combinations of keywords from the essay question:
international students, academic writing, English, difficulties, support
2. Use combinations of synonyms of the keywords:
overseas/foreign students, college composition, academic essays, problems, solutions
3. Use quotation marks to narrow the focus:
“academic writing support”; “academic writing support for international students”

Using quotation marks will narrow the focus to sources that contain the words in the exact order given.

4. Assess the reliability of the sources.

Make sure the information you select is from recognized academic journals or other reliable sources. You will learn how to assess the reliability of sources in Chapter 2.

TASK 4 USE KEYWORDS AND SYNONYMS IN SEARCHES

Apply strategies 1 to 3 above to find information for the following question: Compare and contrast the styles of academic writing in English and in one other language.

Sample answers

1. Use keywords from the essay question.

style, academic writing, English, [other language]

2. Use synonyms of the keywords.

stylistic features; composition, essays; UK, Canada, United States, Australia

3. Use quotation marks to narrow the focus.

“academic writing style in English”; “compare academic writing styles”; “comparison of academic writing styles”

Gathering Ideas from Existing Knowledge

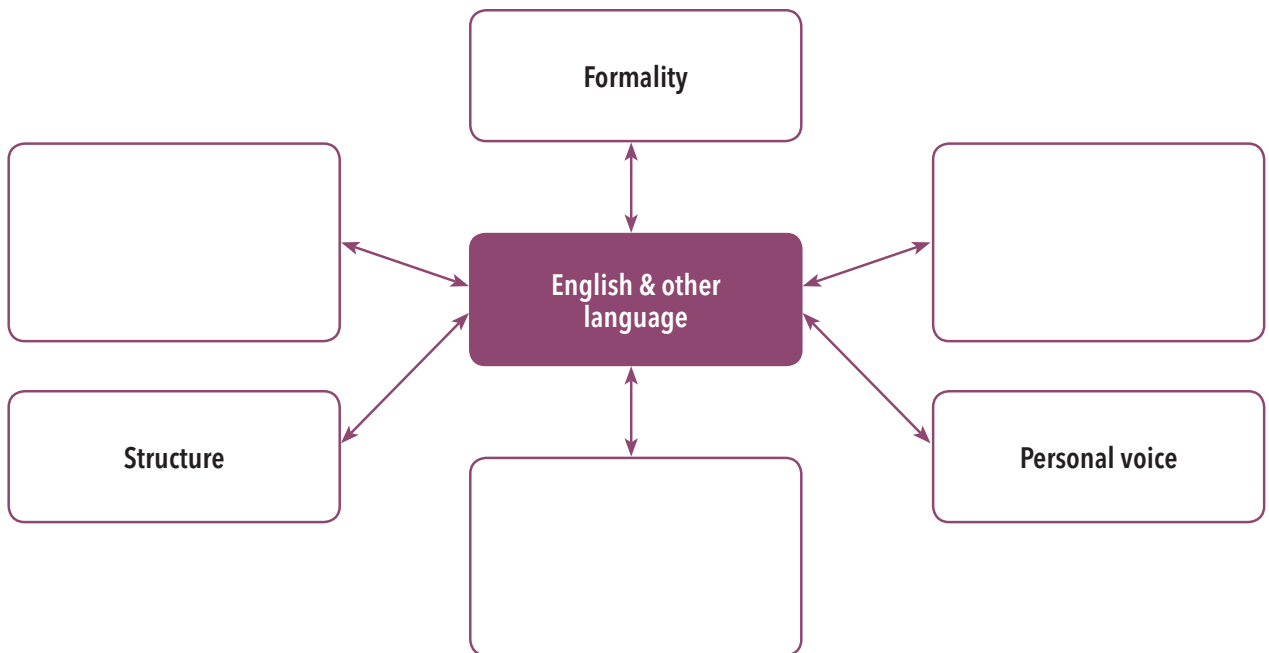
You can gather ideas from your existing knowledge before, during, or after your search for sources. Three strategies for gathering ideas are free writing, concept maps, and linear notes.

TASK 5 GATHER IDEAS

Gather ideas for the question in Task 4, using your existing knowledge. Decide which of the three methods works best for you.

- 1. Free writing:** For free writing, you should write down as many ideas as you can about the question. You can write in any form or style. The main aim is to generate ideas.

- 2. Concept maps:** To gather ideas with a concept map, fill bubbles with different ideas, link the bubbles with arrows or lines, add more bubbles as needed, and describe the relationship between each group of ideas.



3. **Linear notes:** To gather ideas with linear notes, list categories and take notes under headings and subheadings.

Academic Writing in English

- Structure: _____

- Formality: _____

- Personal voice: _____

Academic Writing in Another Language

- Structure: _____

- Formality: _____

- Personal voice: _____

Stage 4: Form an Outline

The fourth stage is to organize your information and ideas into a coherent outline, that is, an outline that is ordered logically. Different types of essays require different structures. In Chapters 13 to 16, you will study several outlining strategies for essays.

Stage 5: Write the Essay Sections

Now start writing the essay. Most essays require an introduction, several main body paragraphs (based on the outline), and a conclusion; include a reference list if you have brought others' ideas into your work. You will study how to write effective paragraphs in Chapters 4 and 5, introductions in Chapter 7, and conclusions in Chapter 8. As you write, remember to keep your writing *in focus* and *on task*.

Stage 6: Review and Edit Your Work

Remember to edit your work as you write and after you have finished writing. You should edit for the following: content (did you answer the essay question?); accuracy of grammar, vocabulary, and punctuation; and appropriate style for the genre of writing.

FIRST-YEAR ACADEMIC WRITING

The following are excerpts from an academic article in which students describe their experiences of academic writing as first-year undergraduates. Read the excerpts to get a general understanding, and answer the comprehension and vocabulary questions that follow. Do not use a dictionary while reading.

Students' Accounts of Their First-Year Undergraduate Academic Writing Experience: Implications for the Use of the CEFR

by Tim McNamara, Janne Morton, Neomy Storch, and Celia Thompson

The CEFR is the Common European Framework of Reference for languages, used to measure language levels, for example, B1, B2, C1.

W1/2/3 refer to three reflective writing tasks students did for the study.

The authors have presented the students' writing without correcting errors.

The article follows British spelling, so *emphasise* is written with *ise* rather than *ize*, which is the normal spelling in North American English. However, the spelling is inconsistent: see *summarizing* and *synthesizing* in the next paragraph.

When discussing structure, the students referred to elements that make paragraphs and texts well structured. Kelly, for example, wrote that “in academic writing, the paragraphs are usually well-structured with a topic sentence as the first sentence followed by explanations and supporting evidence”
5 (W1), and Alex that “parallel sentences can help the structure to be more clear and **understandable**” (W1). Qing noted how academic language **differs from** oral language:

10 Academic English are more likely to prefer formal language rather than oral speaking. For example, slang, numbers and daily words are best to avoid in academic writing (W1). . . .

While not emphasised by many students, **mastery** of grammar, structure, and vocabulary was still mentioned by several participants when asked to self-assess their progress over the year. This was mostly in relation to increased levels of confidence:

15 I feel . . . more confident in writing academic style . . . improved vocabulary through reading lecture notes and websites . . . I can say my English language **proficiency** has definitely improved (Alex, Interview 5).

However, all 13 respondents had begun to see *academic writing as cognitive process*—which involved selecting, summarizing, **evaluating**, and **synthe-**
20 **sizing** the ideas of **authoritative** others—rather than simply an end product.

Central to this were their perceptions of the importance of the type and range of sources used, and incorporating these into their own writing. The first and second **extracts** below represent the students' changing perceptions
25 toward incorporating sources, and the third illustrates an awareness of the challenges of doing this:

30 I'm getting better at looking at sources from the Uni library, rather than from Google . . . I think there should be less article from Internet (Judy, Interview 3).

35 At the start of the year I was more thinking about structure and language in academic writing—now I realize the reference and where you get information from is also very important . . . I'm more confident than before about using referencing conventions, but still not 100% . . . the issue of copying is very important . . . I use more targeted searches for sources and more professional websites (Alex, Interview 3).



40 I can't fit sources in my essay properly—I use a quote but I can't connect with my essay, I want to use more sources but I can't make them like my language, so I include less than I research (James, Interview 3).

By the end of the year, virtually all the students saw reading as closely linked to academic writing. A number noted changes in their approaches to reading and improvements in their academic reading abilities.

45 I read a lot faster than I used to . . . I don't read every single word . . . when I see that follows an argument I can like jump a few lines and get the main ideas instead of like reading word by word . . . to get the main idea is the most important thing, not reading the whole book (Laura, Interview 5).

There was also an increased awareness by students of the need to think critically about what they read. James elaborated on this issue in his final interview:

55 Every coin has two sides. We should consider different points of view about one thing . . . we should analyse the information we researched . . . (James, Interview 5).

Furthermore, when asked to describe a successful academic writing assignment in W3, more than half of the students mentioned the importance of the role of the reader. Kelly, for example, framed her description of a successful assignment from the reader's perspective:

60 A good research-based assignment should also use adequate resources so that the paper contains more ideas and interesting to the readers rather than being limited with information (Kelly, W3). . . .

A similar number of students talked about how they had developed an understanding that **expectations** for writing were firmly embedded within particular disciplinary cultures:

65 For finance assignments you might rely on online materials because you need to talk about real life and environment outside the university, but for management you might need to use academic books for theory (Fei, W3).

70 Commerce subjects are picking up knowledge, reading and remembering . . . arts subjects are reading and interpreting (Alex, Interview 5).

I feel I have to be a lot more stronger in Politics . . . more myself, my own opinions . . . Politics is something you have to create [in] your own mind, support ideas . . . History is more about remembering dates (Laura, Interview 5). . . .

75 When Fei was asked in her end-of-year interview what advice she would give to new students, she emphasised being **proactive** in seeking assistance and using all available resources:

80 Don't do it by yourself. You might need to talk to friends who do better than you. You might need to go to assistance from the Student Support Unit tutors. Use the resources of the university. Don't be isolated (Fei, Interview 5).

Fei also emphasized the multilingual nature of the resources she had come to rely on, including her Chinese peers who proofread her assignments, her Chinese friends on Facebook, who shared “powerful content websites that local students don’t know” (Interview 4), and her strategy of writing drafts in a mix of Mandarin and English.

Excerpts from McNamara, T., Morton, J., Storch, N., & Thompson, C. (2018). Students’ accounts of their first-year undergraduate academic writing experience: Implications for the use of the CEFR. *Language Assessment Quarterly*, 15(1), 16–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15434303.2017.1405420>

TASK 6 IDENTIFY FEATURES OF ACADEMIC WRITING

Identify the features of good academic writing described in the first paragraph of the article.

Sample answer:

- The paragraphs are usually well structured, with a topic sentence as the first sentence, followed by explanations and supporting evidence.
- Parallel sentences can make the structure clearer and more understandable.
- Academic language differs from oral language: formal language is preferred over conversational forms.
- Slang, numbers, and everyday vocabulary are best avoided.

Students will study parallel structure later in this chapter.

TASK 7 ANSWER COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Answer the following comprehension questions about the article.

Depending on students’ level, it may be advisable to do the vocabulary section on page 10 before this task.

1. Which of the descriptions below best matches the meaning of *end product* in the following sentence (lines 18–20):

However, all 13 respondents had begun to see *academic writing as cognitive process*—which involved selecting, summarizing, evaluating, and synthesizing the ideas of authoritative others—rather than simply an end product.

- A final essay
- A summary
- An expert essay

2. Which of the descriptions below best matches the meaning of *every coin has two sides* in the following excerpt (lines 51–54):

There was also an increased awareness by students of the need to think critically about what they read. James elaborated on this issue in his final interview:

Every coin has two sides. We should consider different points of view about one thing . . . we should analyse the information we researched.

- Writers should research relevant information.
- Writers should consider arguments and counter-arguments.
- Writers need to increase their general awareness.

3. Which of the descriptions below best matches the meaning of *were firmly embedded within particular disciplinary cultures* in the following sentence (lines 63–65):

A similar number of students talked about how they had developed an understanding that expectations for writing were firmly embedded within particular disciplinary cultures.

- Were closely connected to different subject areas
 Followed very strict rules
 Were general rules that applied to all subject areas

4. Do you think that Fei’s strategy of writing drafts in a mix of Mandarin and English (lines 86–87) is a good idea?

Sample answer: Research has suggested that using different languages in the process of writing a final product in academic English can be a good strategy.

VOCABULARY

FOUR STRATEGIES FOR LEARNING VOCABULARY

Academic texts like the McNamara, Morton, Storch, and Thompson article include a large amount of specialist vocabulary that you will not always understand. When you come across an unfamiliar word, apply one of the following four strategies.

Strategy 1: Move On

If you do not understand a word or phrase, but you understand the general idea of the sentence, you may decide to move on.

Strategy 2: Analyze the Word Structure

When you come across an unfamiliar word, you can analyze its structure to get close to the meaning. For example, in line 83 of the article, the authors use the word *multilingual*. You can get an idea of its meaning by analyzing its different parts:

- As a prefix (added to the beginning of a word), *multi* means “many.”
- *Ling* refers to language, as you can see in other words such as *linguistics* (the study of languages).
- The *ual* at the end of the word suggests that it is an adjective.

From this analysis, you get an approximate meaning of *multilingual*: an adjective used to describe a person who speaks many languages, for example.

Strategy 3: Guess the Meaning from the Context

Another strategy is to look for clues in the surrounding text—specifically, in the sentences before and after the unfamiliar word or phrase. For example, if you did not know the meaning of *fuel cells* in the examples below, you could look for clues such as those offered by the underlined text.



In the early 19th century, scientists began to carry out experiments to try to produce electricity from different chemical reactions. Today, the technology has advanced so that cars and other machines can run efficiently on electricity produced by **fuel cells**.

The history of **fuel cells** dates back to the 1830s, when Sir William Grove began to experiment with producing electricity through different chemical reactions.

Strategy 4: Use a Dictionary

The fourth strategy is to look up the word in a good dictionary. Sometimes, a word will have more than one meaning; in this case, you should look again at the text to try to find the best fit.

TASK 8 ANALYZE WORD STRUCTURE

Analyze the structure of each of the following words from the McNamara et al. article to try to guess the meaning. Do not use a dictionary. Think of other words (or parts of words) in English that are similar. Identify the different parts of the word that might help you, and explain what you think the word means.

Sample answers

1. understandable (line 6): understand + able (adjective): something that can be understood

2. differs (from) (line 6): different: is different from

3. evaluating (line 19): value: assessing the value of something

4. synthesizing (line 19): syn (together/with) + thesis (main idea, long essay): bringing ideas together

5. authoritative (line 20): authority (expert) + ive (adjective): like an expert

6. expectations (line 64): expect + ations (noun, suffix that indicates an action): ideas about what someone should do

TASK 9 GUESS THE MEANING FROM THE CONTEXT

Guess the meaning of each of the following words from the McNamara et al. article. You can find clues in the text before or after the word. Write the meaning you have guessed, and indicate which words or phrases before or after the word provided clues.

Sample answers

1. mastery (line 11): high level of skill or knowledge
Clues: **After:** This was mostly in relation to increased levels of confidence . . . more confident in writing academic style . . . improved vocabulary
2. proficiency (line 17): high level of skill
Clues: **Before:** more confident in writing academic style . . . improved vocabulary;
after: . . . has definitely improved.
3. extracts (line 23): selected text
Clues: **Before and after:** The first and second . . . below represent . . . and the third illustrates . . .
4. proactive (line 77): taking action before a problem arises
Clues: **After:** You might need to go to assistance from the Student Support Unit tutors. Use the resources of the university.

EXTEND YOUR ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

Learn more about how to use the following words from this chapter.

a number

disciplinary

nature

analyze

embedded within

proactive

authoritative

emphasize

synthesize

*Words in bold type are Academic Word List (AWL) entries.

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GRAMMAR AND SENTENCE STRUCTURE

NOUNS AND NOUN PHRASES

A noun is a word used to name a person or a thing (a place, an idea, or an action). A noun phrase is a phrase in which the main word is a noun. You will study two kinds of noun phrases in this book: *general noun phrases* and *specific noun phrases*. General noun phrases refer to all members of a group or category. Specific noun phrases refer to one or more specific things.

See Unit 1 of the Handbook for a detailed explanation of how to use articles and general and specific noun phrases.

Consider the general and specific noun phrases (in bold) in the sentence below from the McNamara et al. article:

1. When discussing structure, the students referred to elements that make **paragraphs and texts** well structured. (general noun phrase)
2. When discussing structure, **the students** referred to elements that make paragraphs and texts well structured. (specific noun phrase)

In sentence 1, the noun phrase *paragraphs and texts* is general because it refers to all types of paragraphs and texts in a general sense, not to specific ones. In sentence 2, the noun phrase *the students* is specific because it refers to specific students (those taking part in the study), and not to all students in general.

TASK 10 IDENTIFY NOUN PHRASES

Indicate whether the noun phrases in bold in the sentences below are general or specific. Sentences 7 and 8/9 are from the McNamara et al. article.

“The role of the reader” in question 8 is a specific noun phrase, but “the reader” in question 9 is a general noun phrase referring to all readers.

		General	Specific
1	To improve your vocabulary, you should buy a dictionary .	✓	
2	Online dictionaries are easy to use.	✓	
3	Time management is another important skill.	✓	
4	I got an A for the essay I wrote last week .		✓
5	The classes we had last week were on reviewing and editing.		✓
6	My teacher complimented the organization of my ideas .		✓
7	However, all 13 respondents had begun to see academic writing as cognitive process.	✓	
8	More than half of the students mentioned the importance of the role of the reader .		✓
9	More than half of the students mentioned the importance of the role of the reader .	✓	

Do Unit 1: Articles and Noun Phrases in the Handbook, pp. 171–176. Then consolidate your learning in the corresponding unit of My eLab.

WRITING WITH STYLE

PARALLEL STRUCTURE

In the McNamara et al. article, parallel structure is mentioned by one of the participants as a feature of good academic writing. Writing with parallel structure means using the same type of words when listing items or examples in a sentence.

For example, the authors wrote the following sentence with parallel structure:

However, all 13 respondents had begun to see *academic writing as cognitive process*—which involved selecting, summarizing, evaluating, and synthesizing the ideas of authoritative others.

The structure is parallel because the four actions—selecting, summarizing, evaluating, and synthesizing—are all in gerund form.

A gerund is a verb + *ing* that functions as a noun.

Compare the two sentences below, one with parallel structure and one without:

1. Students may lose points due to grammatical errors, disorganized ideas, and conversational style.
2. Students may lose points due to grammatical errors, because their ideas are disorganized, and for conversational style.

The structure is parallel in sentence 1 because each reason is a noun phrase, but not parallel in sentence 2 because the first and third reasons are phrases, while the second is expressed in a clause (with a subject and a verb).

TASK 11 REWRITE SENTENCES

The following sentences lack parallel structure. Rewrite them with parallel structure to improve the style.

Sample answers

1. The academic writing course helps students to improve accuracy, develop critical thinking, and effective style.

The academic writing course helps students to improve accuracy, develop critical thinking, and write with effective style.

2. The classroom was clean, bright, and had good equipment.

The classroom was clean, bright, and well equipped.

3. The teacher was popular with the students, knowledgeable of the subject, and always arrived on time.

The teacher was popular with the students, knowledgeable of the subject, and always punctual.

4. I improved my accuracy, style, and reading actively.

I improved my accuracy, style, and active reading.

WRITING TASK

Expand the exploratory writing you did for Task 1 by writing up to one page on the same topic: “my strengths and weaknesses as a writer.” Think about the ideas you have read in this chapter as you reflect on the areas that you consider strong points and those that you think you need to improve. After you have finished, share your writing with two peers to see if they have similar strengths and weaknesses.