

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS
SOUTHERN AFRICA

Academic Literacy

for Education Students



Judy Seligmann

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EXAMPLE

Research, I guess, it's about trying to find out something new about a topic.

Research is a careful study in order to learn about new facts or information.

Research is an intellectual journey that sets out to create new knowledge.

Research is a course of critical investigation that endeavours to discover facts by scientific study of a subject.

Vocabulary shift

Academic style is usually formal and aims primarily at **relevance** and **accuracy**. A very important indication of formality is related to the kind of words that writers use. Changing from an informal to a formal style often requires a vocabulary shift. Certain words are

bombastic use of words that sound important, but may be meaningless
obscure not easily understood

considered to be more suitable for a formal context than others. However, this does not imply the use of *bombastic* or *obscure* words. In fact, if the words are bombastic and inappropriate to the context, they may only succeed in obscuring the meaning of the text. A writer's vocabulary needs to be pitched at the appropriate level for his or her audience and should express the precise meaning of what the author wishes to convey. For example, English often has two or more words to express an action or an occurrence. For written academic style, the preferred choice is a single verb rather than a verb and a preposition.

EXAMPLE

Curriculum designers have been looking into the problem for a number of years. (less formal style)

EXAMPLE

Curriculum designers have been investigating the problem for a number of years. (formal and academic style)

**ACTIVITY 5****Substitute vocabulary**

1. Choose a more formal verb from the list provided below to replace the verb and preposition printed in *italics* in the sentences that follow.

produce raised fluctuating increased established
discovered reducing encounter detected postponed

- a. The pass rate *went up* significantly as a result of better teaching practice.
- b. Academies are publicly funded independent schools *set up* and run by sponsors.
- c. This issue was *brought up* in a number of educational meetings.
- d. The staff meeting has been *put off* till further notice.
- e. Researchers have *found out* that there is a relationship between literacy acquisition and cognitive development.
- f. As a result of the programme, teachers are likely to *come up with* better lesson plans in future.
- g. The intake of learners has been *going up and down* over the past ten years.
- h. Owing to the economic recession, the government will be *cutting down on* public expenditure on education.
- i. Students *come across* many unfamiliar words and concepts in academic texts.
- j. Symptoms of depression in adolescents are almost always *picked up* too late by teachers.

Interacting with texts to learn from subject content

This unit answers the following questions:

- How can annotation help one learn from texts?
- How can one summarise information effectively?
- How can one use graphic displays to remember what one learns?
- What is the purpose of self-questioning techniques?

Understanding and recalling information

When you have previewed a text and gained a general overview of what it contains, you can begin intensive reading. This strategy is associated with reading to learn and is generally the method adopted to learn from textbooks. It involves careful reading and requires you to read the majority of the information in the text. Study-reading a text requires more intense concentration than reading a newspaper or a novel. You may not understand everything you read the first time. You often have to go back and reread the texts or parts of the text, looking up words in a dictionary or checking on definitions.

Study-reading for academic purposes includes the following:

- reading to obtain background information
- reading to find specific facts
- reading to identify the structure of a writer's argument
- reading to understand a difficult concept
- reading to recall information for assessment purposes
- reading to prepare for an assignment
- reading to find information to challenge an argument.

purpose is to convince the reader that the views being expressed by the writer are correct. All claims are supported by further claims (secondary claims).

The thesis expresses what you believe is the main point of your paper. As you work to clarify your thesis statement, you also clarify your beliefs about the issue you are addressing. Remember, you are not trying to convince people who already agree with your thesis. You are trying to modify the opinions of people who do not agree with your thesis.

Since it is the purpose of an argumentative essay to justify a specific position or point of view, you need to state clearly which side of the debate you support. You need to explain why your topic is problematic and important, and why it deserves the reader's attention.

In the debate about school funding for sporting facilities, the statement that follows could serve as a thesis for an essay arguing that expensive school sporting facilities are not necessary.

EXAMPLE

Thesis statement: Money allocated to sports funding would be better spent on additional academic programmes, which would benefit all students.



ACTIVITY 3

Write thesis statements

- The following topics are widely debated in academic circles:
 - inclusive education
 - teenage abortions
 - single-sex schools.

In each case, write down an argument both for and against the issue, and then decide which side of the argument you support and why. Begin by jotting down answers to the following questions:

- What do you know about the subject?
 - What opinions do you hold about it?
 - What personal experience have you had with the subject?
- Write a thesis statement for each issue. Use the example for sporting facilities given above.

Provide an overview of the essay's organisation

A good introduction not only previews the content of an essay, but also gives an indication of its structure. Introductions are like maps that help the driver start out in the right direction. It is your responsibility as a writer to ensure that your readers do not get lost within the text by helping them to anticipate the structure of your argument.



ACTIVITY 4

Identify claims and sub-claims

1. Read the two texts below. They are the opening paragraphs of two student essays on different topics.

Text A

There is presently strong pressure on governments in developing countries to provide free nursery education. Those opposed to free nursery education argue that it implies a massive government responsibility that is not financially feasible in most developing countries. However, government funding of nursery schools is an investment in the future with long-term economic and social benefits. An early start can be made on educational basics, allowing every child a greater chance to achieve his or her full potential. In this essay, I shall discuss how free nursery education provides children with a more stimulating environment than parents can offer, affords opportunities for all and allows learning problems to be detected early in a child's education. Furthermore, knowing that children are being cared for in nursery schools enables women to return more quickly to the workplace, which not only benefits the labour force, but also reduces the government's welfare burden.

Adapted from Endersby, A. (2009). Nursery Education for Free. [Online], Available: http://www.idebate.org/debatabase/topic_details.php?topicID=117 Accessed 18 August 2011.

Text B

Home schooling is legal in most countries, but the extent and manner in which it is practised varies from country to country. Parents who are concerned about the quality of education in many government schools today are