

The format of long and short writing tasks



1- Short essays (including exam answers) generally have this pattern:

Introduction
Main body
Conclusion

2- Longer essays may include:

Introduction
Main body
Literature review
Case study
Discussion
Conclusion
References
Appendix

3- Dissertations and journal articles may have:

Abstract/ List of contents/ List of tables/ Introduction/ Main body/ Literature review
Case study/ Findings/ Discussion/ Conclusion / Acknowledgements/ References/
Appendices

As you may already realize, academic writing is a product of many considerations: audience, purpose, organization, style, flow, and presentation
(see Figure 1).

AN APPROACH TO ACADEMIC WRITING



FIGURE 1. Considerations in Academic Writing

Audience: Designate the addressee to know exactly your presented material.



Purpose The objective of your academic piece must be stated in amplified manner.



Organization the structure of your essay must conform to the general guidelines of academic writing.



Style Fostering your own style of writing is the result of an excessive process of reading.



Flow the alignment of your ideas, sentences and shifts of focus must be drafted beforehand.



Presentation The mechanics of essay and articles writing are the keys for the successful piece.

* Purpose and Strategy

Audience, purpose, and strategy are typically interconnected. If the audience knows less than the writer, the writer's purpose is often instructional (as in a textbook). If the audience knows more than the writer, the writer's purpose is usually to display familiarity, expertise, and intelligence. The latter is a common situation for the graduate student writer. The interesting question that now arises is what strategy (or strategies) can a graduate student use to make a successful display. To explore this, let's consider the case of an international student who calls himself Sam in the United States. Sam is enrolled in a master's program in Public Health. He has nearly finished his first writing assignment, which focuses on the impact of video games on the cognitive development of children in the United States. This is a short five-page assignment rather than a major research paper. The deadline is approaching, and there is no more time for further data analysis. He wants to make a good impression with his concluding paragraph. He believes (rightly) that final impressions are important. Sam (quite appropriately) begins his last paragraph by reminding his audience (i.e., his instructor) of what he has done in the paper.

He begins as follows:

Conclusion:

The aim of this paper has been to examine the impact of video games on the cognitive development of pre-adolescent children in the United States. In particular, I have examined the effects of video games on visual attention.

So far, so good. His first attempt at concluding his paper is as follows:

As I have explained, video games can indeed account for differences in cognitive abilities of pre-adolescents, specifically the ability to switch attention from one task to another.

He thinks, "This just repeats what I have already written; repeating makes it seem that I have nothing new or interesting here; my paper falls flat at the end." Sam tries again. "This time," he says to himself, "I will take my results, summarize them, and then try to connect them to some wider issue. That's a better strategy." Here is his second version.

As the tables show, pre-adolescent children who play video games score better on tests of visual attention than those who do not. This relationship was quite strong among children between 10 and 12 years of age, while for children aged 6 to 9 the association was not so pronounced. Children who were very good at playing video games, mostly those who are older, appear to be able to effectively switch attention. These findings support the conclusion of other studies that playing video games may not simply be a mindless activity; instead video games can enhance the cognitive skills of gamers.

Sam likes this version; however, he is also worried. He knows—but he has not said so anywhere in the paper yet—that there is a problem with the data he has been using. He knows that there are many types of video games and so the effects of one game on cognitive development may be quite different from those of another. For instance, shooting video games are not the same as sports video games. And even within the

same game genre there is variation in terms of the skills that are needed to play. Luckily, he is not using his own research data for this assignment; he is using data that he has found in journal articles. He now adds this to his concluding paragraph:

The conclusions presented here, however, should be interpreted cautiously. This is because the data presented here are based on analyses of two sports video games, which differ in terms of visual attentional demand from other types of video games, such as first person shooting games that require an awareness of a full screen.

Sam is feeling somewhat unsure of his conclusion and is now asking himself the following questions: “Have I been too cautious in my conclusion when I use appear to, may, and can? Is it actually better to clearly state that there are problems with the data or to not mention this at all? Which strategy is better? Will I appear more or less capable by discussing the limitations of the data? And if I do discuss them, should I do so right at the end or at the beginning of my conclusions? In effect, how should I position myself as a junior graduate student?”

TASK

What advice would you give Sam? Consider the questions he raises about the strength of his points and the inclusion of limitations. Write this in a paragraph or two. Then edit or re-write his final paragraph to reflect your advice.

References:

Bailey, S. (2011). Academic writing: a handbook for international students. New York: Routledge.

Bowker, N. (2007). Academic writing: a guide to tertiary level writing. New Zealand: Massey University.