An Introduction to Academic Writing
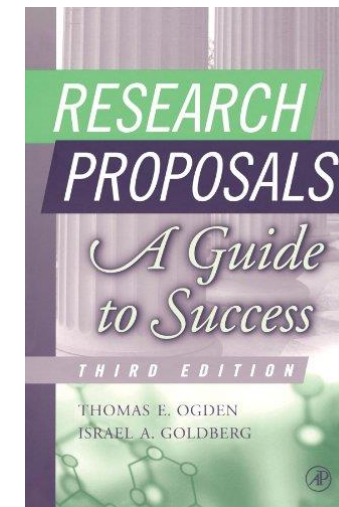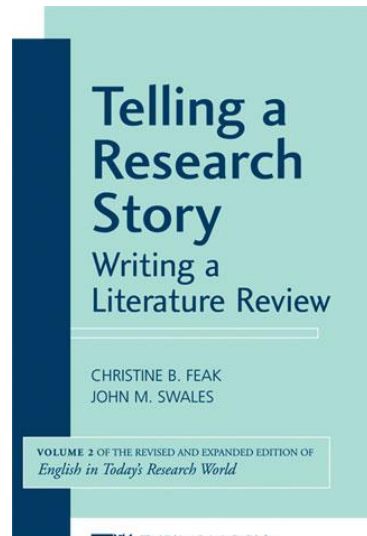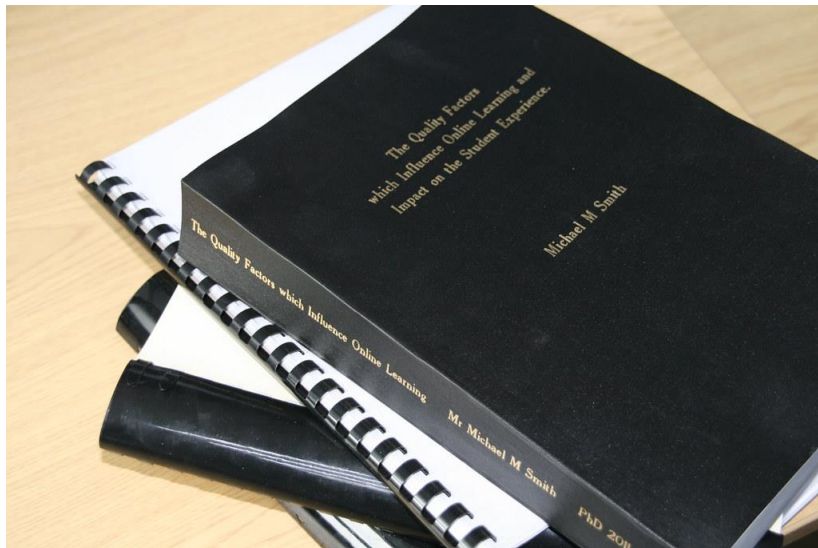
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Agenda

- Discuss academic writing and its features
- Visual comparison of academic writing to other types of writing
- Academic writing resources

Academic Writing Is…

▶ Academic writing is writing which communicates ideas, information and research to the wider academic community.

▶ There are many sub-genres that fall under the umbrella of academic writing, however, these sub-genres share similar features to one another.

Features of Academic Writing Include

- Formal
- Structured
- Evidenced-based
- Persuasive
- Critical
- Balanced
- Precise
- Objective
- Complex (in ideas, language, and sentence structure)

Academic Writing is Formal

- For the most part, academic writing uses American English as the standard way to communicate.

- American English is a tough phrase to unpack, mostly because people living in America speak in different dialects and vernaculars, and so "American English" as a descriptor doesn't account for this.

- My suggestion in helping you get a better sense of what is meant by "American English" is to use the writing in your discipline/field as a model for how you should be writing your assignments.

- Additionally, colloquialisms, slang, and casual language aren't typically used in academic American English.

Academic Writing is Structured

- Academic writing follows structures or formulas. These vary based on the genre of the writing and disciplinary expectations.

- Stylistic conventions influence the structure as well (APA, MLA, ACS, etc.) You will need to know your discipline's preferred stylistic conventions in order to write effectively for academic writing purposes.

- Many types/genres of academic writing follow an IMRAD structure. **I**ntroduction, **M**ethods, **R**esults **a**nd **D**iscussion.

- On the paragraph level, information tends to follow in a general to specific pattern.

- Headings and sub-headings are often used, as are figures and tables.

Academic Writing is Evidenced-based

▶ Academic writing is persuasive in nature, and as such it requires that you establish a chain of evidence to prove your assertion or claim.

▶ Evidence can be many things, but this evidence needs to be valued by your discipline and come from a reputable source. This can include statistics, primary data, information that's been paraphrased or quoted from scholarly journal articles, etc.

▶ Citations are necessary.

▶ If your claims are unsubstantiated (not backed by evidence), readers are not likely to believe you.

Academic Writing is Persuasive

▶ To be persuasive and prove your credibility/ethos as a scholar, you need to create a thorough argument.

▶ To do so, you can follow the Toulmin method (this is not the only way to be persuasive, but it's a good option and it's a formula, so that's helpful).

▶ The Toulmin method is a style of argumentation that breaks arguments down into six component parts: **(1)claim, (2) grounds, (3) warrant, (5) qualifier, (6) rebuttal,** and (4) **backing**.

▶ A **claim** is the assertion that authors would like to prove to their audience. It is, in other words, the main argument.

▶ The **grounds** of an argument are the evidence and facts that help support the claim.

▶ The **warrant**, which is either implied or stated explicitly, is the assumption that links the grounds to the claim.

▶ **Backing** refers to any additional support of the warrant. In many cases, the warrant is implied, and therefore the backing provides support for the warrant by giving a specific example that justifies the warrant.

▶ The **qualifier** shows that a claim may not be true in all circumstances. Words like "presumably," "some," and "many" help your audience understand that you know there are instances where your claim may not be correct.

▶ The **rebuttal** is an acknowledgement of another valid view of the situation.

Academic Writing is Persuasive
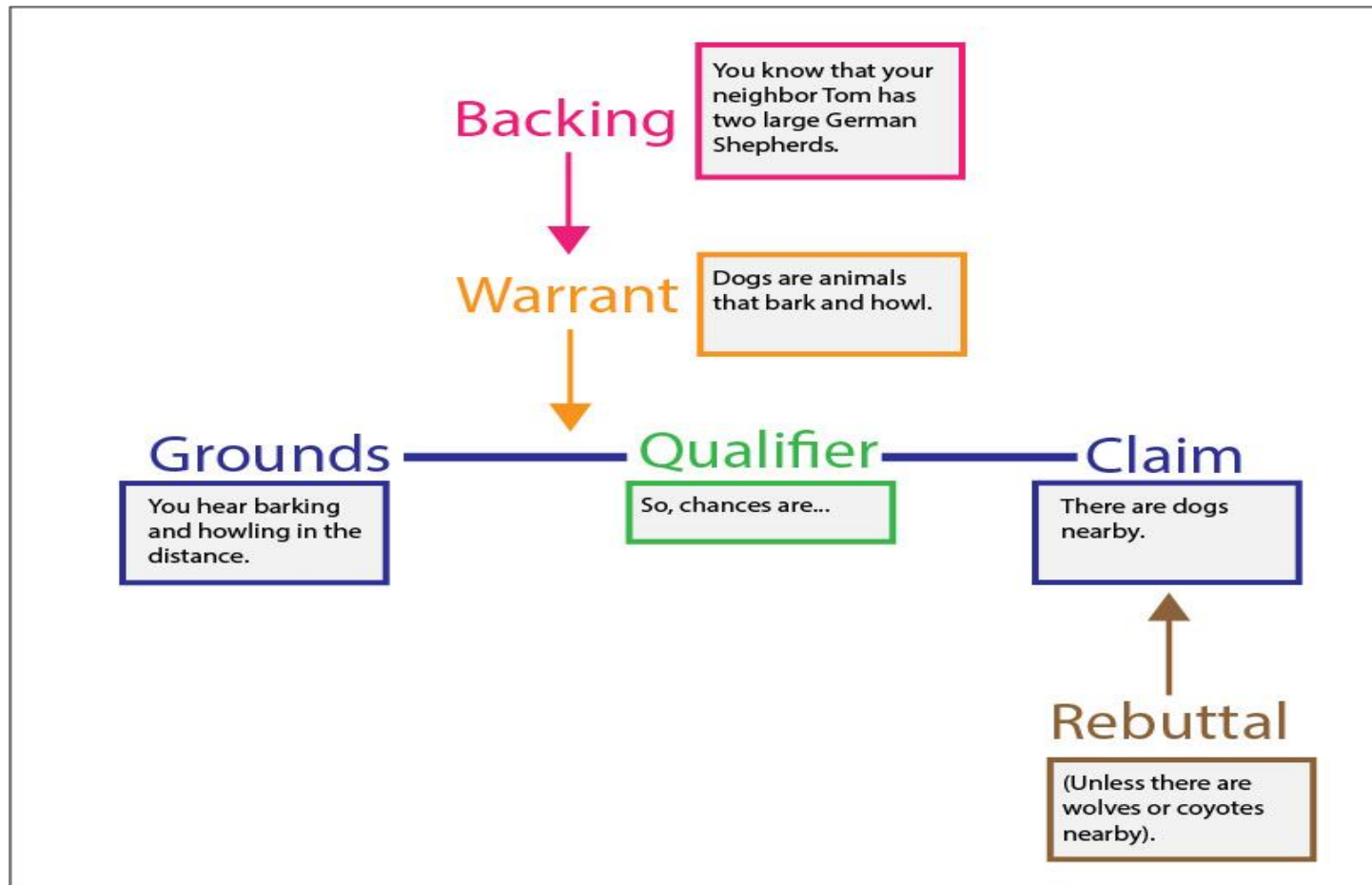
Academic Writing is Critical

- Academic writing is critical in the sense that your habit of mind as a scholar needs to be toward a critical disposition, or one that doesn't accept and believe information at face value. Critical thinking on your part is crucial!

- As you know, you need to do a lot of reading in graduate school. For you to fully comprehend what you are reading, you need to be an active, engaged reader. Take notes in the margins, ask questions of the text, look for incomplete analysis or blind spots in the readings, think of next steps or additional research that is needed to support the claims. Reading actively will help you have more to discuss when you write. It'll also help you to anticipate the sorts of questions readers might have of your text so that you can make sure you address them as you write.

"Don't just teach your children to read ... teach them to question what they read. Teach them to question everything."
- George Carlin
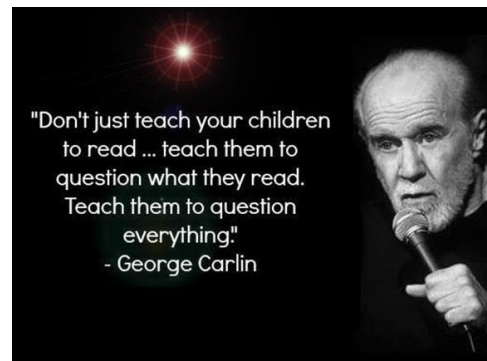
Academic Writing is Balanced

- What "balanced" means, is giving consideration to all sides of the issue and avoiding bias (this is achievable through using the Toulmin method).

- In order for your writing to seem balanced, effective academic writing contains hedges and boosters.

- Hedges express caution.

- Boosters are the opposite of hedges because they includes language that emphasizes or strengthens points. They are used when writers commit to their statements or claims, but are utilized much less than hedges in academic writing.
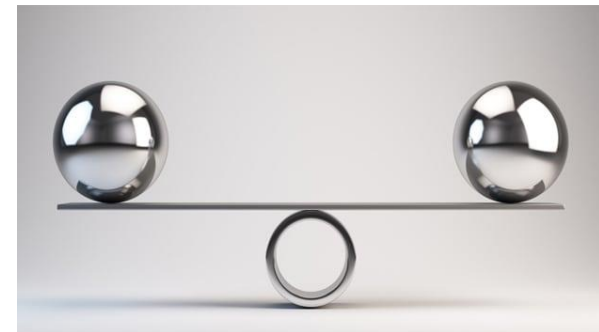
Caution vs. Assertion

Hedges

- the evidence suggests
- this could be caused by
- perhaps
- possibly
- indicate
- tend to
- may
- might
- can
- could

Boosters

- certainly
- indeed
- always
- undoubtedly
- in fact
- clearly
- actually
- obviously
- conclusively
- evidently

Academic Writing is Precise

- The language used in academic writing needs to be clear and precise so that readers understand what is being communicated to them.

- Precise language includes language that is used in the discipline, or disciplinary language.

- At times, disciplinary language may need to be defined for understandings sake.

Academic Writing is Objective

- The emphasis/content is placed on the arguments and information and not on the writer (personal narratives feature less in academic writing).

- Because academic writing is less personal, academic writing uses noun and noun phrases more than verbs and adverbs.

  - Nouns: words (part of speech) used to identify people, places, and things. They are proper nouns if they name a particular one of these.

  - Noun phrase: a group of words that function like a noun (they act like subjects or objects in a sentence, but *are not a complete sentence*). They act as replacements for personal pronouns and focus on complex nouns to describe concepts, ideas, and theories.

- Examples of noun phrases: **"Most scientists agree that drastic action must be taken immediately."** The noun phrase "most scientists" is a noun plus a determiner, meaning that the word "most" determines something essential about the noun. In this case, it is a specific kind of determiner known as a quantifier, because it is revealing how many scientists agree.

- **Every man of courage** is **a man of his word**. (French dramatist Pierre Corneille)("Every man of courage" is the subject of the verb "is." The noun phrase "a man of his word" is a subject complement following the linking verb "is."

- I never learned from **a man who agreed with me**. (Science-fiction writer Robert Heinlein)(The noun phrase "a man who agreed with me" is the object of the preposition "from." Here's the "pronoun test": I never learned from **him**.)

Types of Academic Writing

Essay

Research Paper

Research Proposal

Master's Thesis

Dissertation

Lab Report

Literature Review

Annotated Bibliography

Expressive Writing vs. Academic Writing

Personal Essay

- The subject veers almost uncontrollably toward metaphor, but I mean to take it literally: I have unusually poor vision, minus 1300 diopters and still losing ground, ordinary progressive myopia that never stopped progressing. In me, the process by which light is supposed to focus images at the back of the eye has gone berserk, and the point of focus shifts ever closer to the front, like the projection of a movie falling short of its screen.

- Here are some of the things I can find when I narrow my eyes and look: tiny new weeds in the front garden, fleas scurrying across my dog's belly, gray hairs. My mother, watching me struggle before the bathroom mirror for ten minutes while I spray and brush and bobby-pin to hide the worst of the gray, comments, 'I don't know why you bother. You don't have much. No one even sees it."

- "I see it every time I look in the mirror."

- "Well, you see what you're looking for."

- "Bad Eyes" Written by Erin McGraw

Journal Article

- **Introduction**

- The process of writing a master's thesis can be both rewarding and challenging for university students. The thesis is generally viewed as a pinnacle of university studies, as it usually is required at the end of studies. Students commonly experience the thesis as an unforgettable achievement in their career and an important milestone in learning to conduct research (Ylijoki, 2003) and becoming specialists. However, the thesis can also be a source of challenges for students (de Kleijn et al., 2014; Wagener, 2018; Ylijoki, 2003). Through the thesis work, students have to demonstrate their capacity to conduct and report their research independently while at the same time they are still learning how to conduct research and report on it (de Kleijn et al., 2012; Ylijoki, 2003).

- Writing a master's thesis: Associations between the grade, self-efficacy for thesis writing, approaches to writing, and experiences of the thesis as a teaching and learning environment by Laura Mendoza, Sari Lindblom-Ylänne, Tuula Lehtonen & Heidi Hyytinen

More Resources on Academic Writing

- https://wwwcp.umes.edu/grad/writing-resources/

- https://wwwcp.umes.edu/grad/graduate-writing-center/

- https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/academic_writing/historical_perspectives_on_argumentation/toulmin_argument.html

- Noun phrases: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eoMIfeQdcYk

- https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/academic_writing/

Questions?

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