

WRITING SKILLS AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL

At university, students learn to write specific types of technical texts that are pertinent to the fields they are studying. This includes adopting a style of writing appropriate to the academic field and genre the student is writing in. Students must also learn to apply a rhetoric that is characterized by an exact, systematic logical argumentation and empirical rationale. Academic writing requires students to incorporate and synthesize diverse sources of knowledge into an authoritative viewpoint.

However, as times have changed, so have the needs of students and the society they live in. Universities are under pressure to respond to these new needs of students and society.

Most writing students do at university today has taken on the all-encompassing role of being a method of evaluation. Writing is often the factor which decides whether a student is successful at university or not. A student's ability to master seminar papers, reports and exams determines whether a student will be successful at university. Writing has become the key to survival in many fields of study.

Despite the need for evaluative material and the time pressures of mass education, the real objective in teaching and learning academic writing at universities extends long past the day of graduation. Today's technological advancements in our globalized world have underscored the importance of life-long learning for the individual and society at large. The learning for today must also focus on continued learning tomorrow.

In a broader sense, written communication is essential to the successful continuation and future development of important institutions – professional, governmental, industrial, commercial, and nonprofit – that increasingly depend on specialized written communication in a global environment.

Students will need a greater diversity of linguistic resources and rhetorical flexibility to successfully enter professions and institutions and to transform those institutions as the pace of change continues. Students need sufficient practice in the new genres and rhetorical strategies that belong not only to universities but to the world which the students will be entering after university. Research in genre theory verifies the need of students to gain practice in the targeted genres.

In addition to students' needs to practice writing in multiple genres and rhetorical modes while at university, they also need opportunities in which they can practice writing for the sake of practice. Academic writers need opportunities to practice academic writing when there is no grade or teacher evaluation at stake. When writers feel free to experiment and to express themselves, they are also more likely to enjoy

putting their ideas down on paper so that others can read them. It can also be assumed that when students are given the opportunity to practice expressing their ideas in a stake-free environment, they will be likely to acquire a more favorable attitude toward writing.