

Writing for Academic Purposes

For students in the English Seminar

Course leader: Anthony Clark

Introduction

The overall goal is to help you produce better assignments for the English Seminar. This requires:

- understanding of the writing process and of academic assignments as writing tasks
- improved ability to evaluate your own writing according to relevant criteria
- regular practice: writing and rewriting

From the contents below you will see that although the course has frequent recourse to literature in examples and assignments, it is not primarily a literary experience. This is essentially a language course focussing on formal written English in essays and also other more basic text types, many of which native speakers normally start to produce during secondary education. As students are predominantly from the Arts Faculty, there is a bias for the humanities. The course does not teach writing for natural science or commercial purposes, although there may be one class on formal letter writing.

Specific learning objectives

Typically up to now students will have written largely intuitively. The course aims to transform this approach by adding an analytical component. This allows students to become more versatile and knowing in their writing. Over the two semesters students write regularly in English and by the end of this time will have improved significantly in a number of important ways:

- Fluency and speed in initial drafting of texts
- Ability to rewrite successive drafts to improve text structure and communicative impact
- Ability to write in formal style, excluding informal language
- Ability to write less personally, handling meanings with ‘gloved fingers’
- Ability to write idiomatically, using structures easily understood by native speaker users of English. This means recognizing and excluding non-native features.

Methods

Writing & review of out-of-class assignments, group discussions & exercises, teacher presentations

Individual work required

An assignment of **500**, or **1000** (counts as two assignments) words will be set each week. The total number of words required is 5,000 words per term, spread over 8 – 10 short assignments (about the same as on a typical US freshman composition course). Students choose and write **eighteen** assignments in all, including the final double assignment in the second term, and **at least two of the three essays on short stories**. **Each assignment has to be accepted**, i.e. it will be necessary for students to resubmit work which falls below the required standard or does not respect the presentation requirements: **text double-spaced, font size 14, paragraphs indented**.

Tasks include: general essays, literature essays, personal pieces, work on specific text types, rewriting, summarizing of articles, letters, a report, and other language exercises. Two assignments require rewriting and extending a previously accepted essay. Reading: please note that for the writing tasks students must read two or three longer articles or chapters from books and six short stories.

In order to bridge the gap between the 500 word assignments asked for in this course, and the much longer literature papers required for the English Seminar, students can apply for help to their proseminar teachers, who will be happy to advise them.

Plan of course content

<p><i>Winter Term</i></p> <p>Foundation:</p> <p>Basic considerations in writing academic English</p>		
<p>1. WRITING BEHAVIOURS, THE WRITING PROCESS AND THE 'FINISHED' PRODUCT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Writing and planning: unexpected outcomes * Computer (re)writing: 'writeread' and 'readwrite' * Writing purposes and genres * Academic writing: a new challenge * The importance of audience * Requirements of English Seminar teachers * English Seminar style sheet * Checklist of common problems * How writing is evaluated: the example of Cambridge Proficiency * Understanding and using key assessment criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>task</i>: understanding assignment questions – <i>text</i>: structure, clarity, brevity and spice – <i>style</i>: understanding formality and 'register' – <i>presentation</i>: appearance and linguistic acceptability 	<p>2. PERCEIVING AND IMPROVING THE STRUCTURE OF COMPOSED TEXT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Genres, functional text types & the discursive essay * Understanding essay questions * The structure of a discursive essay * Paragraphs: What is a paragraph? * Seven different types of paragraph * Common structures in formal texts: Problem-solution texts * Common structures in formal texts: General-specific movement * Introductions * Conclusions * Summary writing * Plagiarism 	<p>3. IMPROVING STYLE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The six problems in style: 1) street language & spoken style, 2) non-native influences, 3) basic language errors, 4) lack of vocabulary, esp. verbs and adjectives, 5) lack of insider language, 6) inability to compose complex sentences * Exercises on formality in style * Important verbs * Adjectives for the arts * How to choose vocabulary * Communicative micro-functions in formal writing * Complex sentences * French and English style * German influenced sentence beginnings * Commas
<p><i>Summer Term</i></p> <p>Applications:</p> <p>Analysis of relevant genres and text types</p>		
<p>4. VERB GRAMMAR AND LEXICAL VERBS IN BASIC FUNCTIONAL TEXT TYPES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * description: people & routines * narration: biography * description: processes * description: places 	<p>5. DISCURSIVE ESSAYS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * generating and organizing ideas for a literary essay: short stories * examining the structure of the argument in sample discursive essays 	<p>6. OTHER IMPORTANT ACADEMIC GENRES/FINAL REVIEW</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * oral presentations * formal reports * formal letters * final review