SLD

Academic and Essay Writing

Student Learning Development
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SLD Handouts on Blackboard

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Website for information

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Session objectives

- Look at what academic writing is
- Focus on writing process instead of product
- Look at the phases of writing
- Explore strategies for starting writing earlier
- Understand the importance of structure to an academic essay
- Review examples
- Learn about some useful writing resources

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Essay Writing Phases

- Planning
- Thinking
- Researching
- Writing
- Editing

Plan   Think

Write
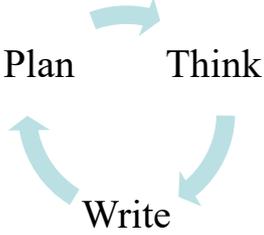
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Planning time frame

- List tasks
  - Preliminaries
  - Gathering Information
  - Organising Information
  - Rough outline
  - Draft 1
  - Draft 2
  - References
  - Proofreading
- Create deadlines
  - _____
  - _____
  - _____
  - _____
  - _____
  - _____
  - _____
  - _____

http://www.kent.ac.uk/uelt/ai/ask/index.php

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Planning the assignment

- Requirements
  - Length, Wording
  - Referencing
- Understand the question
  - Breakdown
  - Verbs

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Example of Topic

Examine the general categories of stressors that can be experienced by an individual at work and **describe** the likely consequences of prolonged stress levels for that individual.

Examine = Present in depth & investigate implications

Describe = set out main aspects of topic or sequence of things

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Analyse the assignment

- Write down in your own words what you think the assignment is asking you to do
- What do you already know about the subject matter?
- What information do you need to help you complete the assignment?
- How are you going to choose your reading material?

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Thinking

- Initial ideas
- Brainstorm
  – Mind maps
  – Lists
  – Drawings
  – Discussion/Audio
  – Post-it notes
- Preliminary reading
- Initial outline!

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Outlines are your recipe

| planning | What do you want to say? Structure |
| writing | Communicating your ideas |

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Structure

- Introduction
  – outline of essay
- Main section
  – Main point A
    • details, evidence
  – Main point B
- Conclusion
  – summary of main points
  – personal conclusions

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I. Introduction
  Definitions of Stress
  Views of Stress
  General Categories of Stressor
  Consequences of Stress
II. Main Point (A) - Views of Stress
  1. Physiological
  2. Psychological
  3. Job Stress
  Summary and identification of categories
III. Main Point (B) - Categories
  1. Organisational
  2. Home-work, Interface, Life stress
  3. Individual
  Evaluation of categories and their impact
IV. Main Point (C) - Consequences
  1. Physical
  2. Behavioural
  3. Psychological
  Summary of impact
V. Conclusion
  Summary of main points and personal conclusions

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Reading & Researching

- Use rough outline as guide
- Gather information relevant to topic
- Keep good notes
  - Organise content according to outline
  - Choose what to include
- Types of evidence to support points?
  - Quotes
  - Tables
  - Paraphrasing

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Reading & Researching

- Keep references!

- Digest and reflect on information
  Continue your thinking!

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Writing

- Start writing early
  - extend outline
  - one idea or section at a time
  - get something down!
- Write first, rough draft
- Revise & improve draft
- How many drafts?

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What is a paragraph?

- A group of sentences
- What groups them?
- One idea

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Paragraph structure

Students require more recreational time in order to better focus on lessons in class. In fact, studies have shown that students who enjoy a recess of more than 45 minutes consistently score better on tests immediately following the recess period. Clinical analysis further suggests that physical exercise greatly improves the ability to focus on academic materials. Longer periods of recess are clearly required to allow students the best possible chances of success in their studies. Clearly, physical exercise is just one of the necessary ingredients for improving student scores on standardized tests.

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Slide 1

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Paragraph structure

Students require more recreational time in order to better focus on lessons in class. (TOPIC SENTENCE).

In fact, studies have shown that students who enjoy a recess of more than 45 minutes consistently score better on tests immediately following the recess period. (SUPPORTING SENTENCE)

Clinical analysis further suggests that physical exercise greatly improves the ability to focus on academic materials. (SUPPORTING SENTENCE)

Longer periods of recess are clearly required to allow students the best possible chances of success in their studies. (CONCLUDING SENTENCE)

Clearly, physical exercise is just one of the necessary ingredients for improving student scores on standardized tests. (Transitional sentence)

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Slide 2

SLD **Assertion versus Argument**

Assertion/Opinion
Between 1945 and 1980, the Australian Senate prevented the Labor Party from governing effectively by persistently failing to pass important legislation.

Supported Statement
Between 1945 and 1980, the Australian Senate prevented the Labor Party from governing effectively by persistently failing to pass important legislation (Brown, 28; Smith 36-6).

Argument
Between 1945 and 1980, the Australian Senate prevented the Labor Party from governing effectively by persistently failing to pass important legislation. For instance, in 1974 the Senate blocked eighty pieces of important legislation (Smith, 23). McGuire's analysis of Senate voting between 1950 and 1980 shows that the Senate blocked 850 Labor bills but only five of the non-Labor party bills (41).

(From Dunn, 2007, p. 7)

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Slide 3

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Descriptive V Analytical Writing

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Structure your argument

- Reasons for and evidence/Reasons against and evidence
- Compare & contrast
- Outline of points, charts, diagrams

Introduction: Main themes:		
Areas to be compare and contrast	A	B
Similarities		
1		
2		
3		
4		
Differences		
1		
2		
3		
4		
Significance of these		
Conclusion:		

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Develop your argument

- Use source material
- Compare and contrast
- Show awareness of complexities
- Show line of reasoning
  - link points
  - central guiding line
- Your conclusions - based on evidence

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Signposting your line of reasoning

- Indicator words for claims
  - Therefore, thus, hence, so, as a result

- Indicator words for reasons
  - Because, since, on account of, for, in view of, for the reason that

- Tentative or 'hedging'

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Bodo Slotta, T.A. (2000) Phylogenetic analysis of Iliamna (Malvaceae) using the internal transcribed spacer region. Unpublished master's thesis. Retrieved from http://www.uwc.ucf.edu on 8 Jun 2007.

In large gene families with tandem repeats, as is the case for nrDNA, unequal crossing-over may be more important than gene conversion in the concerted evolution process (Li, 1997). For example, the number of repeats can fluctuate without having any adverse effects. With a larger number of repeats being exchanged, the rate of concerted evolution increases as well. Correspondingly, homogeneity increases as the number of repeats increases. Rate then increases as homogeneity among the copies increases, leading to a self-feeding repetition. As a result of this process, it is believed that nrDNA is found in up to thousands of copies in the nuclear genome (Baldwin et al., 1995).

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1.7 Phylogenetic Utility of the Internal Transcribed Spacer

Several factors make the ITS region valuable for use in phylogenetic analyses (Baldwin et al., 1995). First, the ITS region is highly repeated in plant nuclear genomes, along with other components of the nrDNA multigene family including a highly variable region between the ribosomal repeat, the intergenic spacer. The high copy number of the nrDNA repeat facilitates the amplification and sequencing of the nrDNA.

Secondly, the nrDNA multigene family undergoes rapid concerted evolution as described above (Baldwin et al., 1995). This property of the ITS region is most important from a phylogenetic standpoint and promotes accurate reconstruction of species relationships from sequencing. However, non-homologous copies are occasionally present with point mutations and/or insertion/deletion events, causing small variation among the copies within a species.

Lastly, the ITS region is relatively small (ca. 700 bp) and is flanked by highly conserved sequences, the 18s and 26s nrDNA genes (Baldwin et al., 1995). Because of this, universal primers can be used to amplify and sequence the ITS region. Primers were originally designed for amplification of fungal rRNA and derived from sequences of fungi (Saccha romyces), animals (Drosophila), and plants (Oryza sativa and Hordeum vulgaris) (White et al., 1990). These primers have been used successfully with members of the Liliaceae, Asteraceae, Rosaceae, and Araliaceae.

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Tips – make every sentence count

"The story makes an interesting comparison between the upper and lower classes"

Filler sentence without specific information. Add **why** you consider the comparison interesting.

Explain what makes your argument or topic interesting!

So What??

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References

Why?

- Credit sources of information & ideas
- Reader can locate for further information if required
- Demonstrate breadth of reading & knowledge

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References

When?

☐ Direct quotes
☐ Paraphrases
☐ Statistics/Studies
☐ Theories
☐ Interpretations
☐ Facts

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Plagiarism

- Using someone's words or ideas and presenting them as your own (Marshall & Rowland, 1998)
- Inappropriate use of ideas from books, articles, internet, or other students' work
- **http://tcd-ie.libguides.com/plagiarism**

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References

- How?
  - Reference system e.g. APA
  - https://blog.apastyle.org/
  - https://www.apastyle.org/learn/quick-guide-on-references
  - https://www.apastyle.org/learn/faqs/index

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References

  - Record sources
  - Take careful notes
  - Reference list
  - In-text citing or referencing

  *Tip – put author/title etc on top of page before you start writing notes

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Academic writing

- In groups, come up with three characteristics of academic writing

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Characteristics of Academic Writing

- Formal – no contractions, colloquialism
- Unambiguous – can't be misinterpreted
- Explicit – don't leave reader guessing
- Critical vs descriptive
- Evidence based – supported by research, refs
- Objective vs biased
- Precision – facts/numbers not 'extremely hot'
- Third person?
- Complexity
- Hedging – how sure are you?
- Jargon

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Sample marking criteria

- Focusing on a topic
- Structuring an essay
- Content
- Formulating arguments
- Presentation
- Referencing
- Evidence of language skills
- Use of learning resources

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Editing

- Proof read
  - out loud
  - time out
  - peer
- Write up references
- Final draft
  - presentation

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Submit!

- Final deadline
- Checklist
- Feedback

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ACADEMIC WRITING

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How to improve your writing

- Academic texts – your recommended books, articles
- Peer feedback, share writing
- Good resources online – SLD Blackboard module
- Other?

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Formal

- I just want to explain
- The purpose of this essay is to explain
- Avoid colloquialisms/slang: lashing rain, at the end of the day, roaring his head off
- No contractions: don't, can't, won't
- Do not, cannot, will not

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Third person vs First person

Third person
- It has been found…
- Brown discovered that…
- The importance of has been demonstrated by …

First Person
- I believe that …
- I think it is more important that …

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Precise Vs vague

Precise
- 75%
- The majority
- 9/10ths
- Three studies
- 45 respondents
- In Ireland
- In Dublin
- In July 1945

Vague
- A lot of
- Everyone
- Loads
- It always
- A few years ago
- In Africa

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Ambiguous vs clarity

Ambiguous/Unambiguous?

- They're having a barbecue in the garden behind **the house they are renting next Saturday at 8.**
- (They're only renting the house at eight o'clock?)

https://annehodgson.de/2011/06/01/practice-academic-writing-skills-2-ambiguity/

Ambiguous/Unambiguous?

- **They're having a barbecue next Saturday at 8** in the garden behind the house they are renting.

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Concise vs verbose

Wordy

- For each and every book you purchase, you will receive a free bookmark.
- The reason for the failure of the basketball team of the University of North Carolina in the Final Four game against the team from Kansas was that on that day and at that time, some players were frequently unable to rebound the ball.

Concise

- For every book you purchase, you will receive a free bookmark.
- UNC's basketball team lost the Final Four game against Kansas because it could not consistently rebound the ball

https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/conciseness-handout/

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Evidence based - objective

Objective

- Based on evidence
- Reliable information
- Referenced appropriately

Subjective

- Opinion based
- No scientific evidence
- Unreliable evidence
- Not referenced

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In pairs/groups, identify the issues with this paragraph

Academic Writing

A lot of people think that the weather is getting worse. They say that this has been going on for quite a long time. I think that they are quite right. Research has shown that we now get storms etc all the time.

https://slideplayer.com/slide/9992367/

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SLD

A lot of people think that the weather is getting worse. They say that this has been going on for quite a long time. I think that they are quite right. Research has shown that we now get storms etc all the time.

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https://slideplayer.com/slide/9992367/

Passage	Problem
A lot of people think…	Imprecise – how many is 'a lot'?
…the weather…	Imprecise – 'weather' is a short term concept
…getting worse…	Informal
They say…	Imprecise pronoun
…going on…	Informal phrasal verb
…quite a long time.	Imprecise – how long is this?
I think…	Informal - personal pronoun
Research…	Vague – whose research?
…we now get…	Informal
…storms, etc…	vague
…all the time.	Overgeneralized

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Re-written in academic language

Re-written:

Experts widely believe that the climate is deteriorating. Climatologists claim that this process has been continuing for nearly 100 years. McKinley (1997) appears to support this belief, demonstrating a 55% increase in the frequency of severe winter gales since 1905.

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Use of plastics in the environment

Academic Text
- 'Plastics offer considerable benefits for the future, but it is evident that our current approaches to production, use and disposal are not sustainable and present concerns for wildlife and human health…There are solutions…There is a role for individuals, via appropriate use and disposal, particularly recycling' (Thompson, Moore, Vom Sall & Swan 2009)
- https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2873021/

Non-Academic Text
- I think it's very important that everyone should think about using plastic in the environment. It's really bad and needs to be stopped but it's like there's no tomorrow as far as some people are concerned. There should be a lot more done to stop them using plastic.

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Websites/resources

- http://www.learningdevelopment.plymouth.ac.uk/wrasse/ sample essays

- http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/679/01/ general advice & grammar

- http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk academic phrases

- https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/uploads/production/document/path/1/1710/Critical_Thinking.pdf

- http://vimeo.com/44666462 paragraphs
- Dunn, R. (2007). James Cook University, personal communication

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