

Academic Writing Curriculum (12 weeks) SAMPLE

Introduction:

The Academic Writing Curriculum is a content-based course that advocates self-directed learning. Academic writing in a content-based learning context:

- Focuses on the process involved in writing a variety of academic essays, including response, descriptive, analytical, persuasive, research, and the literature review.
- Provides students opportunities for writing practice in response to prescribed readings.
- Compels students to convey an idea, an argument, or message in a precise, clear, and coherent way, relative to the type of essay being written.
- Allows students to understand what it is they are learning – as opposed to simply memorizing and regurgitating writing rules and vocabulary.

A content-based academic writing approach is easier to achieve because:

- There is a context to which students can relate.
- The increasing complexity of the language skills students acquire, apply and reflect on their own progress
- Content-based academic writing requires students to practice discernment, so these skills are enhanced over time.

Academic writing in a self-directed learning context:

- Advocates learning autonomously as well as collaboratively.
- Advocates independence and develops skills in critical thinking and self-initiative.
- Provides opportunities to learn and to acquire knowledge informally.
- Promotes mutuality between instructor and student through discussion and negotiation.
- Acknowledges students' extant knowledge and experience as assets that can inform their writing experience.

Who Is This Course For? :

This course is intended for students interested in:

- A holistic approach to learning about academic writing
- Learning about a variety of writing styles
- Developing the linguistic skills and self-confidence necessary to function in an academic writing environment.

Academic Writing Course Objectives:

Students who complete this course will be able to:

- Write coherent and compelling short essays in a variety of styles
- Understand the writing process, from pre-writing and research to editing and proofreading

- Read, analyze, and respond to a variety of texts
- Adapt their writing style and content according to their audience and assignment requirements
- Develop confidence in their own academic writing skills and have acquired strategies for improving their own writing on an on-going basis

Academic Writing Course Texts and Resources:

This course will rely mainly on textbooks and resources, which include:

- The Norton Reader by Linda H. Peterson and John C. Brereton (eds.)
- Handouts on grammar, the writing process, and a variety of writing-related topics

Enhancing the Four Language Skills Through Writing:

A general timetable for this course may be as follows:

Suggested Timetable for the Academic Writing Course

Total Time: 2 hours a week

| | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Section 1: Writing (30 minutes) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of the Writing Process • Introduction of Essay Style • Introduction of Academic Writing Conventions • Introduction/Review of Grammar • Introduction/Review of Mechanics |
| Section 2: Reading (30 minutes) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading a Short Story or Essay • Identifying New Vocabulary • Confirming Comprehension • Introduction/Review of Word Choice |
| Section 4: Speaking (30 minutes) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion of Story/Topic • Discussion of Students' own Experiences in the Context of the story/topic |
| Section 3: Listening (30 minutes) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer Review/Feedback of Essay Assignments • Introduction/Review of Skills-Development Handouts |

Instructors may adjust this schedule to suit their needs.

Strategies to Encourage Self-Directed Learning Through Content-Based Instruction:

One of the goals of self-directed learning through content-based instruction is to present new information to students that is appropriate to their language level, regardless of whether they are native or non-native English speakers. Being aware of the particular difficulties English-as-Another Language (EAL) and English-as-a-Foreign Language (EFL) students face will facilitate comprehension. Teaching techniques in content-based instruction generally falls into four categories:

1. Conducting a Needs Assessment:

Students who attend academic writing classes have varied reasons for doing so. For some, it is to gain literacy skills in order to pass placement tests (such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language [TOEFL] or the Test of English for International Communication [TOEIC]), which, in turn, will help them gain access to post-secondary institutions or that will help them acquire an immigration visa (such as the International English Language Testing System [IELTS]); others want to build on previous knowledge in order to function on a practical basis in an academic environment; still others want to increase employment prospects. Regardless of their reasons and taking into consideration that one academic writing course cannot address all students' needs, conducting a needs assessment early in the course will help instructors develop an understanding of student needs, interests, and personalities. Such knowledge can help inform the design of course curricula, syllabi, or lessons.

2. Designing Appropriate Lessons:

Effective lessons consider students' learning levels and past experiences, outline specific and clear objectives, propose a variety of activities, and provide on-going evaluation. Specifically, these lessons should include a focus on:

- a. The academic writing process (generating ideas, creating an outline, drafting, revision, and editing).
- b. Reading effectively.
- c. Vocabulary building/instruction.
- d. Providing consistency and continuity in lessons through lesson reviews; contextualizing lessons through students' own perspectives/experiences; and using brainstorming activities to help build a frame of reference for students especially for difficult subject matter/content.
- e. Comparing academic writing conventions of North America with those of other cultures for EAL students.
- f. Working collaboratively (e.g.: small groups, pairs, etc.) to build moderate structure, encourage interaction, build self-confidence, and develop autonomous learning skills.

3. Modifying Input for EAL Students:

It's very important for instructors to deliver instruction at a level that is at the learners' level of proficiency. The following techniques may produce desired results:

- a. a slower speech rate
- b. enunciating clearly
- c. limited initial usage of idioms, collocations, and slang

4. Using Contextual Cues for EAL Students:

Multiple cues to meaning can facilitate comprehension by allowing students to rely on factors other than the spoken or written word. These cues include:

- a. gestures
- b. dramatization of meaning: facial expressions, pantomime, role play, short plays
- c. visuals: pictures, photos, slides, maps, graphs
- d. realia (actual physical objects)
- e. bulletin boards
- f. word banks (e.g. charts that associate words with symbols/images)
- g. incorporating predictability and consistency into lesson routines (e.g. having opening and closing activities, homework assignments, and directions so that students can determine what to do through context without having to rely on complete understanding of spoken instructions)
- h. incorporating repetition, restatement, exemplification

5. Checking for Understanding:

Ensure that students comprehend both the language of the instruction as well as the concepts being taught.

- a. asking students to decide whether information is true or false
- b. asking students to provide examples
- c. having students paraphrase sentences/concepts in their own words
- d. having students summarize information
- e. asking students factual (Who? What?) in addition to referential (Why? What would you do....?) questions
- f. engaging students in Q & A forums

7. Teaching with Precision and Clarity:

Students taking this course may not be familiar with English grammar so it's important for an instructor to address grammar points as precisely and clearly as possible. It is important, however, to maintain the goal of this course, which is holistic language acquisition. This implies that all activities should focus on meaning, strategizing, self-direction, collaboration, and a minimizing of correction.

8. Teaching with Flexibility:

It is important for instructors to incorporate flexibility in teaching this course. Such flexibility accommodates students' individual needs and circumstances. This flexibility may involve deviating from the structure of a specific text. Flexibility in using a variety of resources as well as teaching approaches focuses on enhancing language skills. It would also help in vocabulary building with the added benefit of having such vocabulary explained by the instructor contextually. Allowing students to suggest topics or initiate discussion mitigates the superior role instructors are regularly placed in by students, cultivating a more equitable classroom environment. Finally, it's important to consider this curriculum as a guide, whose exercises and activities may be adapted, altered, or omitted according to what the instructor deems appropriate. In this way, flexibility plays a major role in conducting this course.

9. Learning English Contextually:

Contextual learning contrasts with traditional approaches to learning that involve memorization and regurgitation because when one learns a language in a more natural setting – for instance, when a language is incorporated into daily life – internalizing it is more likely. It is particularly important to take this approach in this course.

10. The Personal Dictionary:

This is a pre-made template consisting of a table with three headings: “Term”, “My Definition”, and “Context/Circumstance in which I Learned this Word”. Students are provided this template (or encouraged to create their own using a small notepad or notebook: the more personal the better) in which they enter a term, phrase, idiom, or sentence at the time (or as close as possible to it that) they hear or see it. If possible, they may ask the term’s meaning from the person from whom they heard it. Students are encouraged to consult the same person for the spelling of the term. Students then write, in their own words, the term’s definition in the appropriate column of the template. Finally, students are encouraged to write a description of the context or circumstance in which they learned the term. Of course, referring to a dictionary for a term’s “precise” meaning and grammatical use is an irreplaceable exercise, but having a context (circumstance, event, person, or time) helps students retain a term’s meaning. Because developing one’s own dictionary reflects a person’s individual experience with a language, it is this difference that assures retention. To review a sample template of the Personal Dictionary, please see Appendix II (p.).

11. Evaluation:

Evaluation is an important part of a course or program whose purposes can vary. It can be used to determine the effectiveness of a newly-created program; provide feedback to learners and instructors during the program; to determine whether learners developed important knowledge, skills, and attitudes as a result of the program; and determine if learners are able to apply what they learned after completing the program. For the purposes of this Academic Writing Course, evaluation may also be conducted throughout the course to determine whether students are able to apply what they are learning to their everyday situations. To review a template that can be used to plan effective evaluation forms, please see Appendix I (p.). Instructors are encouraged to develop their own evaluations in light of this template.

12. Course Evaluation:

Course evaluation allows students to provide their instructor with feedback on the structure, content, and delivery of a course and to do so anonymously. Instructors can then use the feedback to make adjustments and general improvements to the course for future implementation. Apart from its practical use, course evaluations also cultivates a climate of mutuality in the classroom, one in which students, knowing that their feedback was sought and valued, can feel affirmed.

Resources

- Blot, D. & Davidson, D.M. (1995). *Starting lines: Beginning writing*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle Publishers.
- Blot, D. & Davidson, D.M. (1994). *Write from the start (second edition)*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle Publishers.
- Brillinger, P., Jackson, & K., Shaw, C. (1995). *Write now: Process writing for ESL*. Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice-Hall Regents.
- Segal, M.K. & Pavlik, C. (1990). *Interactions I: A writing process book (high-beginning to low-intermediate)*. New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Co.
- Segal, M.K. & Pavlik, C. (1990). *Interactions II: A writing process book (low intermediate to high intermediate)*. New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Co.

Additional Resources

Grammar:

- Azar, B.S. (1984). *Basic English grammar*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall Regents.
- Azar, B.S. (1999). *Understanding and using English grammar (third edition)*. White Plains: Longman
- Azar, B.S. (2000). *Understanding and using English grammar: Chartbook: A reference grammar (third edition)*. White Plains: Longman

Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL):

- Murcia, M.C. (2001). *Teaching English as a second or foreign language*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

Evaluation/Needs Assessment:

- Mertens, D.M. (2005). *Research and evaluation in education and psychology: Integrating diversity with quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods (second edition)*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Vella, J., Berardinelli, P. & Burrow, J. (1998). *How do they know they know? Evaluating adult learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc.

Academic Writing Curriculum (12-Week Course)

Week 1

Note: SWBAT = Students Will Be Able To

Objectives – SWBAT:

1. Become familiar with the writing process: generating ideas, creating an outline, drafting, revision, and editing.
2. Become more familiar with various essay styles: the critical response
3. Improve their critical thinking, reading, and writing skills

Suggested Activities:

1. Welcome and Self-Introductions.
2. Review the Course Syllabus
3. Introduce the Writing Process Handout
4. Introduce the Critical Reading/Writing Handout
5. Conduct Needs Assessments (or defer until the end of the first class so students have a context for completing it).

Homework Assignments:

1. Review handouts.

Notes:

Week 2

Note: SWBAT = Students Will Be Able To

On-going Objectives – SWBAT:

1. Become more familiar with the writing process: generating ideas, creating an outline, drafting, revision, and editing.
2. Become more familiar with various essay styles.
3. Improve their critical thinking, reading, and writing skills.
4. Develop their vocabulary.
5. Become more familiar with specific English grammar.

New Objectives – SWBAT:

1. Apply the criteria outlined in the critical reading/writing handout to their own writing.
2. Become familiar with Peer Review procedure

Suggested Activities:

1. Introduce the Reading/Short Story.
2. Review new vocabulary/sentences; address students' questions; compare reading to ones students have done in the past.
3. Provide guidelines on/examples of critical reading/writing.
4. Introduce process of Peer Review: review handout if appropriate.
5. Discuss individual experiences in Canada as international students: share individual experiences related to academic, social, and personal lives as context/incentive for writing.

Homework Assignments:

1. Write a Critical Response Essay to the Reading/Story (500-1000 words).

Notes:

Week 3

Note: SWBAT = Students Will Be Able To

On-going Objectives – SWBAT:

1. Become more familiar with the writing process: generating ideas, creating an outline, drafting, revision, and editing.
2. Become more familiar with various essay styles.
3. Improve their critical thinking, reading, and writing skills.
4. Develop their vocabulary.
5. Become more familiar with specific English grammar

New Objectives – SWBAT:

1. Become familiar with compare/contrast essays.
2. Become familiar with using MLA/APA Style Guide.
3. Become familiar with Peer Review process.

Suggested Activities:

1. Review Critical Response Essays: Solicit writing samples from students
2. Discuss students' writing samples through Peer Review session: refer to Peer Review Guide for suggestions.
3. Introduce handout on Compare/Contrast Essays.
4. Review new vocabulary: explain in context, provide example sentences
5. Introduce Reading/Story
6. Review new vocabulary
7. Discuss story ideas in the context of Compare/Contrast Essay.
8. Introduce MLA/APA Style Guide(s)
9. Discuss individual experiences in Canada as international students: share individual experiences related to academic, social, and personal lives as context/incentive for writing.

Homework Assignments:

1. Write first draft of Compare/Contrast Essay based on the Reading/Story (500-1000 words).

Notes:

Week 4

Note: SWBAT = Students Will Be Able To

On-going Objectives – SWBAT:

1. Become more familiar with the writing process: generating ideas, creating an outline, drafting, revision, and editing.
2. Become more familiar with various essay styles.
3. Improve their critical thinking, reading, and writing skills.
4. Develop their vocabulary.
5. Become more familiar with applying MLA/APA Style Guide.
6. Become more familiar with the Peer Review process.
7. Become more familiar with specific English grammar.

New Objectives – SWBAT:

1. Become familiar with Parenthetical References (e.g. in-text citations).
2. Become familiar with Paraphrasing and Summarizing.

Suggested Activities:

1. Review Compare/Contrast Essays: Solicit writing samples from students
2. Discuss students' writing samples through Peer Review session: refer to Peer Review Guide for suggestions.
3. Introduce information on Parenthetical References from MLA/APA Style Guide.
4. Provide exercises on varied ways to incorporate ideas from other sources into students' own writing through direct and indirect quotations.
5. Discuss individual experiences in Canada as international students: share individual experiences related to academic, social, and personal lives as context/incentive for writing.

Homework Assignments:

1. Exercises on writing Parenthetical References (e.g. in-text citations)
2. Exercises on Paraphrasing and Summarizing.

Notes: