The aim of this leaflet

This advice sheet provides you with information on various learning materials for academic writing. It also offers learning strategies and tips for improving academic writing skills.

Materials in the Language Commons

There are a number of books on academic writing in the Language Commons, Room 3018. We suggest that you flip through the books on the shelves and then decide which book(s) you find most useful. The next step is to identify the most useful chapters in those books and plan realistically how you are to use the books.

Do not attempt to finish the whole book no matter how good it is – only select the most useful chapters for yourself. Remember you are now the teacher so you decide how and what you want to learn.

General courses on academic writing

[All books are on the Writing Shelf, unless mentioned otherwise]

- **Exploring Academic English: A workbook for student essay writing**
  The units in this book provide you with useful discussions and practice of some very important concepts of academic writing; for example, you will learn how to ‘express opinions tentatively’, ‘report the research of others’ and ‘draw conclusions’. All the examples used in this book are taken from authentic academic texts of different disciplines.

- **The Process of Composition**
  As the title suggests, this books takes a ‘process-approach’ and illustrates clearly the different steps of essay writing. It also offers useful planning, drafting and revising strategies. There is an Instructor’s Manual to complement the book. While the Manual is mainly for teacher use, you will find answers to the writing exercises and useful suggestions/tips for writing.

- **Prentice Hall Handbooks for Writers**
  This book basically teaches three areas: writing effective sentences, the writing process and grammar. Pages 108-140 of this book are devoted to critical thinking and argument – recommended. Those who want to have a thorough revision of grammar may begin with Part 2. Part 2: 9 - parallelism (pp.160-165) is particularly useful for HK students; another useful bit is Part 2:30 -Verbs: special concerns for ESL writers.

- **Academic Writing for Graduate Students**
  As the title of the book suggests, this is specially written for graduate students who want to improve their academic writing skills. It introduces the writing of different parts of an academic paper. Year-three Engineering and Science students will also find this book useful for writing project reports and research papers.

- **Study Skills in English** [Study Skills Shelf]
  Excellent introduction to writing academic essays. Read chapters 5, 6, and 7.
• **Academic Writing Course**
  Introduces different types of academic writing.

• **How to Write Essays**
  Want to have a quick browse on how to write essays? This will suit you.

• **Writing Academic English**
  This book adopts a process approach and explains all the essential learning points in the writing process. In addition to exercises on style and grammar, there are also ‘models’ for different parts of an academic essay.

• **The Written Word (I & II)**
  There are lots of grammar activities and exercises on punctuation, organisation and sentence structures.

**Grammar for writing**

Do you want to have a systematic revision of basic grammar while you practise your writing? If so, you will find these books useful:

• **Writing Clearly: An Editing Guide**
  [Writing Shelf]
  This book guides learners through 15 common English errors (eg. Verb tense, connectors, active/passive voice etc) with a combination of explanations, grammar rules, self-help strategies and language exercises.

• **Focus on Grammar: a high-intermediate course for reference and practice**
  [Grammar Practice Shelf]
  This book contains contextualised exercises and links grammar well to writing. The ‘editing’ exercise at the end of each of the units is specially recommended if you want to have a quick evaluation of your writing. The Self-Test at the end of each part of the book can be taken as a summative test.

• **Focus on Grammar: an advanced course for reference and practice**
  [Grammar Practice Shelf]
  Read the description for the previous item: **Focus on Grammar: a high-intermediate course for reference and practice.** The design and functions of the two books are the same but the level of this book is more advanced.

**Materials on the Web**

**General and comprehensive**

• **Chuck Guilford’s Online Paradigm Writing Assistant**
  [Writing Shelf]
  [http://www.powa.org](http://www.powa.org)
  This website contains excellent materials on writing different types of essays: informal essays, thesis/support essays, exploratory essays, and argumentative essays. It also contains materials on organisation and developing arguments.
• **Advice on academic writing** [University of Toronto]  
  http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/  
  This website provides comprehensive information about academic writing and sound advice from writing instructors at various institutions.

• **Brainstorming ideas for your academic writing** [Capital Community College, Connecticut]  
  http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/composition/brainstorm_block.htm  
  This website shows you how you can brainstorm ideas for an academic essay. Examples of brainstorming are provided.

• **E-handouts from the Writer Centre of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute**  
  http://www.rpi.edu/web/writingcenter/handouts.html  
  There are e-handouts on various topics related to academic writing:
  
  * Revising prose  
  * Thesis writing  
  * Abstracts  
  * Definitional Techniques  
  * Critiques

**Research Papers**

• **Information Strategies for Research Assignments** [HKUST]  
  http://libguides.ust.hk/content.php?pid=230193&sid=1904285  
  This pathfinder created by HKUST is intended to help HKUST undergraduates do their research paper assignments. It focuses on the research process of identifying, accessing and collecting information relevant to the topic.

• **Research Papers** [Purdue University]  
  http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/  
  In this website, Purdue University offers guidelines on different aspects of research papers and the writing of research papers. Some thumbs-up links are these:

**Referencing**

The following sites provide useful information for writing citations and references:

• **Documenting different sources** [Paradigm: Online Writing Assistant]  
  http://www.powa.org/documenting

• **APA formatting and style guide**  
  http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/664/1/  
  http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/1/

• **MLA formatting and style guide**  
  http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/675/1/  
  http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/1/

• **A guide for writing research papers and different documentation styles** [Capital Community College, Connecticut]  
  http://www.ccc.commnet.edu/mla/index.shtml

• **MLA online source documentation**  
  http://www.mikeleal.com/speech/mlamainmenu.html
Grammar for writing

- **Common errors**
  
  
  This website entitled ‘Serendipity’ explains a number of common errors. You will find excellent examples and clear explanations.

- **Guide to grammar and writing**
  
  [Capital Community College, Connecticut]
  
  [http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar](http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar)
  
  This website gives a comprehensive guide to grammar at sentence, paragraph and essay levels.

- **Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling**
  
  [Purdue University]
  
  [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/1/5/](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/1/5/)
  
  A comprehensive site for anyone who wants to learn and practice English grammar.

Learning tips

Who will read your writing?

Who is going to read your academic writing? Why are they reading it? The more you understand your audience and their requirements, the easier it is for you to produce the article which serves the intended purpose. We suggest that you start collecting articles written by others which are of a similar nature to the writing you are going to produce. A close reading of those articles can certainly help you understand more the requirements of the ‘audience’.

What to include in your academic writing?

- Do you have a clear idea about what to write? Many student writers have to spend a lot of their time trimming the content or narrowing down the scope after they have finished the writing. Why? Because their academic essays may be described as ‘too vague’. Always ask yourself what the ‘argument’ or the main point is in your writing.

- You should not simply put forward a number of references and viewpoints in your academic writing just to show off your reading — you are expected to show critical thinking in your academic writing and to present your own argument, backed up by appropriate references.

- Stay focused all the time. Delete any ideas which don’t fit in no matter how good they are (but keep the notes as you may want to use them later).

- Keep writing and editing. Allow yourself to have sufficient time to do the editing and proofreading. If possible, ask a friend to have a critical look at your paper at different stages.

- Once you have decided the central idea of your academic essay, you will be able to select appropriate references/citations to back up your argument. One effective way to make the organization of your academic paper transparent is to ‘draw’ them out. You can use a picture, mind map, flow chart, tree diagram or anything that you find useful to make the relationship of your arguments explicit.

- When you are writing an academic paper, ask yourself if you can summarize the central idea in one or 2 sentences. If you can’t do it, then maybe you haven’t quite developed your central idea. You probably need to read more to develop your own argument. You will find writing your academic paper so much easier if you really know what exactly you are talking about.
What aspects of writing skills do you want to improve?

- What aspects of academic writing skills that you want to improve: organization? Style? Constructing an argument? Organizing your points? Sentence structure? **Focus on the area that you really need to work on and then select appropriate materials** for yourself. The Writing Advisers are all very happy to give you suggestions, but more importantly, you choose the materials that you like and make sure that you find the learning experience positive.
- Do you often feel that you lack the vocabulary you need? If this is the case, read the Advice Sheet *Learning Vocabulary for Speaking and Writing (V8).*
- Do you feel that you want to improve the grammar and sentence structures in your writing? If so, read the Advice Sheets *Grammar For Writing (G4)* and *Sentence Structure and Style (G5).*

How can you evaluate your writing?

- **Do a diagnostic test** for grammar and / or vocabulary level (please read Grammar Advice Sheet *G3* and / or Vocabulary Advice Sheet *V5* for more information on online tests), find out your weaknesses in writing and then decide what practice you need to improve your academic writing. You need to identify the areas that need improvement – simply writing more won’t necessarily make your writing better.
- Another effective way to evaluate your writing skills is make an appointment with a Writing Adviser and ask him / her to comment on your writing.

Any more tips?

- **Make writing a habit** — you can write diaries and learning journals. Set a regular time to write, either in English or Chinese, or both. Just write and get used to the mechanism of using writing to generate thinking. When you get stuck and don’t know what to write, you can scribble in your notebook: “It seems that I am stuck, what is next, any ideas….” Many people find this a useful way to overcome the so-called ‘writer’s block’.
- Last but not least, remember to **read more**! If you want to improve your academic writing skills, not only do you need to learn writing skills, you also need to read a large amount of academic essays so that you can internalize some of the rules. The more input you get, the more competent you will become in writing. If you need advice on reading, please read the Advice Sheets on Reading, or make an appointment to talk to our Writing Advisers.

And now…

If you would like any help or advice, or just a chat about your progress, please get in touch - **we are here to support your independent learning!** To contact us:
- make an appointment to see an adviser. For details of advisers and their availability, please go to [http://ilang.cle.ust.hk/writing-adviser-timetables/](http://ilang.cle.ust.hk/writing-adviser-timetables/).
- e-mail your questions to iLANG (leilang@ust.hk).
- ask at the reception counter of the Language Commons — if the receptionist cannot help you directly, s/he will pass your query on to one of the advisers.

What else can you do?

- browse the many [physical](#) and [online](#) materials for Writing.
- join a Writing [activity](#) or short course.

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