ACADEMIC WRITING SKILLS FOR ESL GRADUATE STUDENTS

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This workshop

- Improving fluency and comprehensibility of academic writing through focus on:
  - Audience
  - Purpose
  - Organization
  - Style
  - Flow
  - Presentation

Audience

- Who will be reading your work?
- Different audiences have different levels of familiarity with your subject matter
- Possible audiences:
  - Professors
  - Advisors/PIs
  - Thesis/dissertation committee members
  - Fellowship selection committees
  - Journal editors
  - General public

Audience

- More specialized audience → more technical language
- Ask yourself:
  - Who is the audience? Is it more than one person?
  - Are they likely to be familiar with the terms and theories I use? If not, how can I modify them?
    - Ways to make writing less technical:
      - Give definitions for less known terms
      - Use less technical language (terms specific to your subfield)
      - Offer clear, real-world examples
      - Provide more background or history

Purpose

- Interconnected with audience
  - How specialized is the audience?
- Possible purposes of writing:
  - Demonstrative (e.g., to display knowledge)
  - Instructional
  - Persuasive

Organization

- Be aware of common organizational patterns

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- Note patterns in articles, books
  - Sections
  - Subheadings
  - Balance

Style

- Why is style important?
- Most academic writing should be somewhat formal
- Style should be consistent throughout
- Familiarize yourself with your discipline's style

Style: Focus on Verbs

- Phrasal verb (informal) vs. single verb (formal)

  Example:

  *Given our fast-paced society, people must routinely **put** creative solutions to unexpected problems **into practice**.*

  *Given our fast-paced society, people must routinely **implement** creative solutions to unexpected problems.*

Style: Focus on Verbs

- Commonly used single verbs:

consider	decrease	develop
investigate	reach	constitute
determine	eliminate	maintain

Style: Focus on Nouns

- There may be more than one way to express an idea

- Nominalization: converting a verb or phrase into a noun (e.g., *discover* → *discovery*)

  - Be careful — nominalizations can be useful but in other cases can lead to wordiness

Style: Focus on Nouns

- *Original*: There was <u>erosion</u> of the land from the floods
- *Rewrite*: The floods <u>eroded</u> the land.

Style: Passive Voice

- Passive voice obscures the "doer" of the action

  Example:

  ACTIVE: <u>Werner Heisenberg</u> formulated the uncertainty principle in 1927.

  PASSIVE: The uncertainty principle was formulated by <u>Werner Heisenberg</u> in 1927.

Style: Passive Voice

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  Example:

  ACTIVE: <u>Werner Heisenberg</u> formulated the uncertainty principle in 1927.

  PASSIVE: The uncertainty principle was formulated by <u>Werner Heisenberg</u> in 1927.

- Some disciplines and genres use the passive voice more than others — be aware of your field's conventions

Style: No-No Words

- Some words and phrases are associated with informal, conversational speech and are best avoided altogether in academic writing. Some of the worst offenders are:

  a lot   *get/getting*

  really   *just (as an adverb)*

Internet Resources for Word Choice

- Google Scholar
- Other resources:
  - Just the Word
  - COCA
- Step-by-step instructions in "Internet Resources for Academic Writing" video workshop

Flow

- Moving from one sentence/paragraph to the next

Flow: Old to New

- Having "old" information early establishes context

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- Old/known information: Something you've already mentioned or implied or can assume the reader knows

- New information: something not known or that you want to stress and that you will expand on

Flow: Old to New

- *Original*: Most people's attitudes toward rural dialects are determined by urban snobbery. <u>However, the individual's relationship to rural America is more important than snobbery</u>.

- *Rewrite:* More important, however, than snobbery is the individual's relationship to rural America.

Flow: *This* and Summary Phrases

- *this/these* + a noun can be used to establish a good old-to-new flow of information

Flow: Transitional Devices

- Transitional devices (words or phrases) join sentences to make writing easier to follow

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- Some examples :
  - addition: again, also, furthermore, moreover
  - contrast: although, and yet, at the same time
  - emphasis: certainly, of course
  - example: as an illustration, for instance
  - summary: in all, all together, finally, in brief

Flow: Repeating Key Words/Phrases

- Keeping topic strings (names) consistent throughout your writing can help keep the reader from getting lost

Flow: Repeating Key Words/Phrases

To understand human evolution, <u>genomes from related primates</u> are necessary. For example, several <u>primate genomes</u> are needed to identify features common to primates or unique to humans. Fortunately, such <u>genome-wide exploration</u> is now a reality; in the past 5 years, <u>genome sequences</u> of several nonhuman primates have been released.

Flow: Punctuation

- Semicolons (;) join two completely independent clauses
- Colons (:) as well as dashes (—) can be used to introduce a list

Presentation

- Check for these at the proofreading stage:
  - incorrect homophones (e.g., too/two/to)
  - misspellings
  - basic grammar errors (e.g., subject-verb agreement)

Additional Resources

- *Academic Writing for Graduate Students* (https://www.amazon.com/Academic-Writing-Graduate-Students-Essential/dp/0472034758/ref=dp_ob_title_bk)

- UCLA ESL courses (check schedule of classes)

- Additional GWC workshops (check schedule on the website for live workshops)

- GWC one-on-one consultations
  - Make an appointment at https://gwc.gsrc.ucla.edu/Appointments