



# The Academic Writing Challenges of Undergraduate Students

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## ABSTRACT

The article analyzes and discusses the difficulties faced by undergraduate students in academic writing. It highlights the challenges such as plagiarism, lexicology, grammar, lack of understanding that a student can meet during the academic year and tries to give some tips to get rid of these barriers.

## Keywords:

Academic writing, Academic literacy, Challenges, misunderstanding of a topic

## Introduction

Academic writing is a tool of communication that conveys acquired knowledge in a specific field of study. Writing academically will help students analyze, convey understanding, think critically and focus on technique and style. So academic writing plays an important role in forming the student's research and studies. The features of academic writing are:

- Complexity
- Formality
- Precision
- Objectivity
- Explicitness
- Accuracy
- Responsibility

Firstly, written language is relatively more complex than spoken language as it should be formal. In academic writing, facts and figures are given precisely. Because of these features many students in the higher education may face particular difficulties in writing, like lexical variety, grammar or inappropriate text structure.

The problem with words is among the biggest ones not only a first-year, but also any other student may encounter. Proper linking words and phrases is actually not that simple for many people especially in academic research writing, to say nothing of inexperienced people who have to write essays, reports, labs, etc. It's not a secret that errors in grammar and punctuation are one of the main reasons why students lose their marks in academic papers. While some students find it hard to get their thoughts and ideas down on paper, others just don't know how to properly incorporate quotations into sentences. Trying to do the assignment, they simply borrow passages from articles, books and even websites without identifying them; hence the problem of plagiarism. Whether it comes to a thesis, essay or article – each of them has a certain structure. Typically, they all are based on three main components: introduction, main body and conclusion. You may be surprised, but many students have problems with structuring their works for a variety of reasons, the main of which is the inability to draw up

every single part considering the singularity of all other.

### Materials and Methods

These academic problems are quite common among nowadays' students. So what is the way out? Ernest A. Pineteh did the research in this field and tried to find what are the challenges that students are facing and why are those students challenged by academic writing. To understand the academic writing challenges of undergraduate students at CPUT, the researcher used qualitative research methods to collect empirical data from students and lecturers. The researcher concludes that long ago majority of students who entered universities were expected to be intellectually and emotionally prepared for higher education (Meyer, 2012; Smith, 2012 & Leibowitz, 2004). Today, universities have transformed from elite to mass institutions, catering for diverse student bodies. Increasing access to higher education means universities have to deal with students with attitudes and skills that are not suitable for higher education. Because these students enter higher education with weak literacy skills, they struggle to cope with institutional literacy practices and disciplinary discourses including academic writing. [1]

Another researcher Burris-Melville, tried to find the answer for these questions and recommended that the university focus on the integration of writing into teaching pedagogies through the development and implementation of a writing-across-the-curriculum (WAC) initiative. Additionally, the university and, in particular, the language and linguistic division should consider investing in appropriate technological infrastructure to aid in the development of students' language competency. There is a need for a virtual writing center or language lab to be developed (Burris-Melville 2020).

A group of students with different levels of language abilities were given a questionnaire about how good they can write. And then the same students were asked to conduct a research on the given topic and write an academic report. At the end volunteers expressed the issues they experienced during

writing the report. All the data was collected and conclusion was made. According to the survey students with lower levels of language abilities think that they have more problems than those with higher potentials. But those who consider themselves as advanced language speakers think that they need to improve their knowledge of academic writing as they don't know how to properly use it.

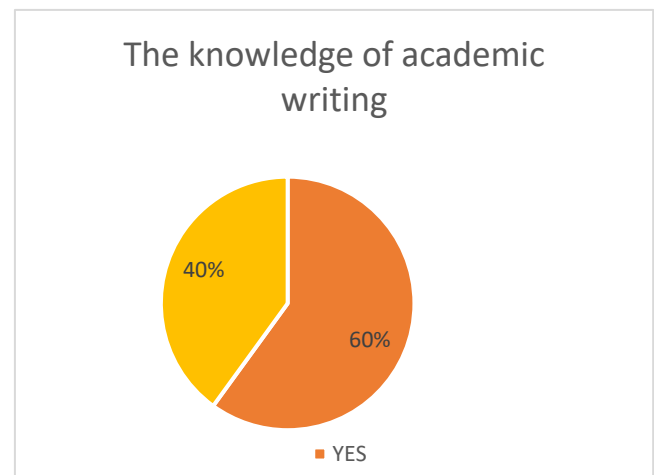


Figure 1. The knowledge of academic writing

The figure 1 shows that 40% of participant are sure that they don't know anything about academic writing. The rest of the participants, that is 60%, think that they know, even though they face difficulties. It is obvious that sometimes being good at language use doesn't mean that you can write easily with confidence. Academic writing is more than knowing the language and its daily usage. During the research the participants were given an opportunity to tell about the challenges they usually face when using academic writing. Most of the answers were related to lexicology. Some student consider that they lack vocabulary, others think that they need to look for academic words and a few of them can't manage their time and efforts while writing. The main reason for these obstacles is practicing less.

### Conclusion

At the end of the research some short conclusions were made. As pointed above the main problem that university students meet

while writing is lack of vocabulary. To cope with that is important to look for more formal and academic versions of words. More importantly it is known for everyone that practice is the mother of learning, so students need to be trained and made to practice academic writing during their lessons at the university. In this case creating practical lessons is important for both the university officials and the students themselves.

**References:**

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