

ACADEMIC WRITING: KEY FEATURES

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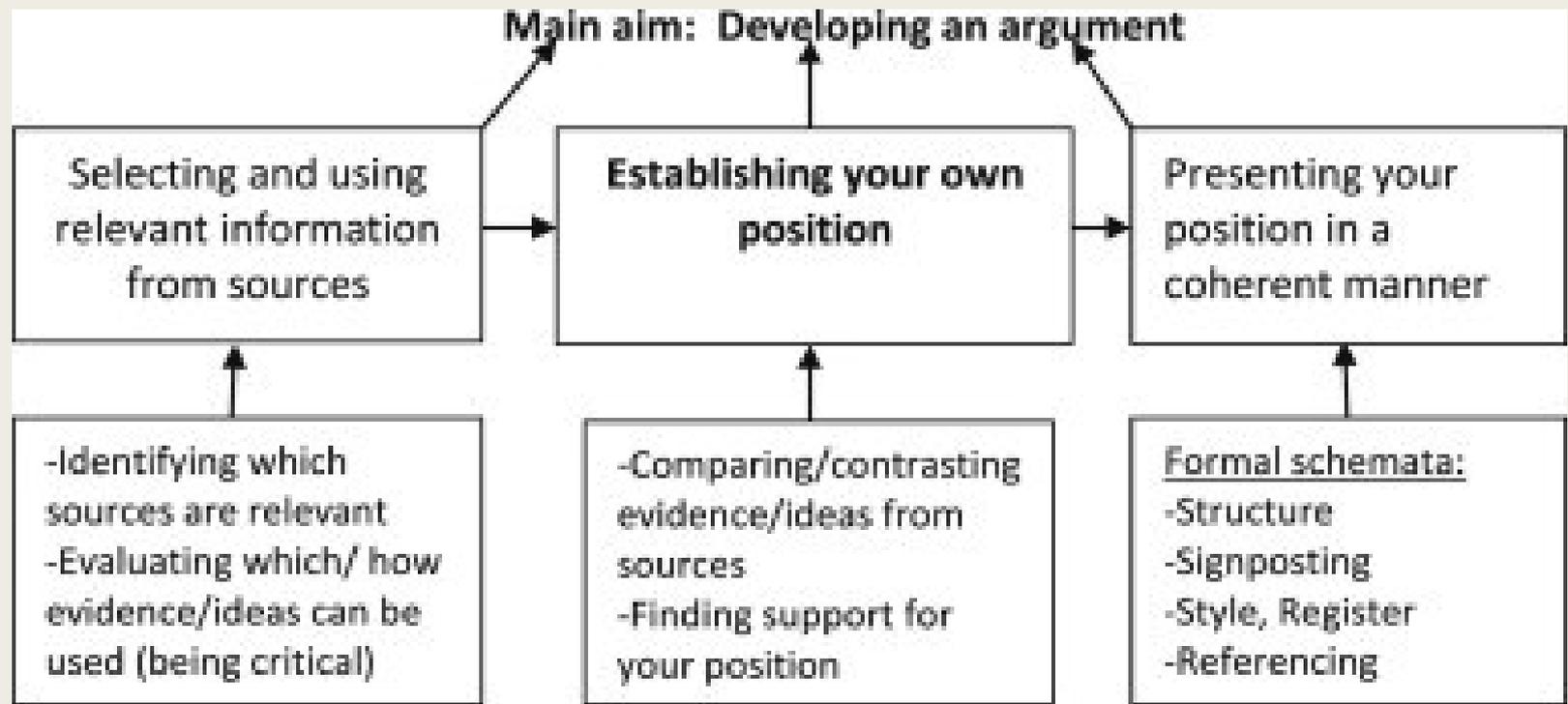


Fig. 1. Essay writing framework.

Ursula Wingate

'Argument!' helping students understand what essay writing is about

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STRUCTURE



Structure

The structure of the essay should reflect how you developed your **position**.

In the main body, discuss different viewpoints (compare, contrast), and explain **why you are taking your position**.

In the conclusion, briefly summarise the previous discussion and **state your position clearly again**.

Structure

Academic writing is clearly structured:

- it is the framework around which you construct your assignment
- it enables you to present your material in a coherent, logical manner
- it gives your work a sense of direction
- it helps the reader to understand the text

Structure

Different types of assignment have different overall structures:

- essays - introduction, body and conclusion
- research reports - introduction, methods, results, discussion, conclusion

Being aware of these general conventions is helpful.

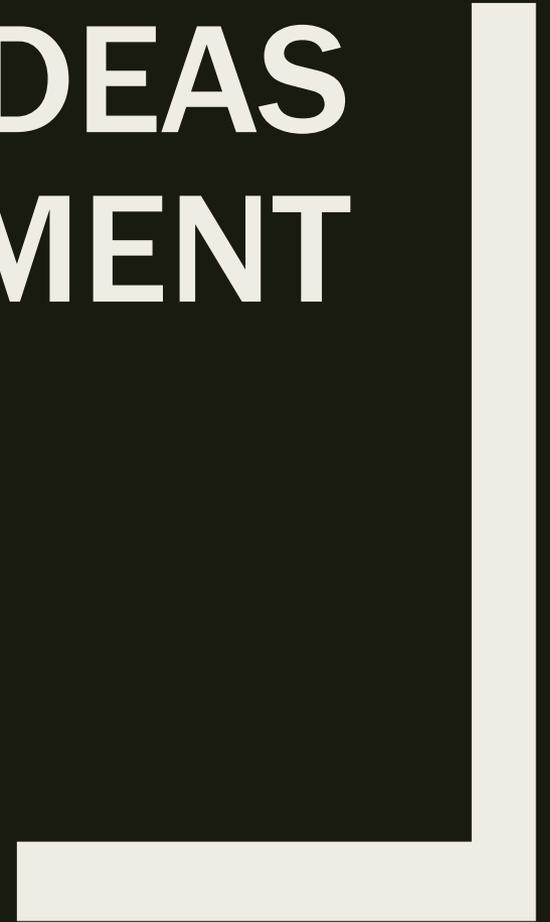
<http://www.uefap.com/writing/genre/genrefram.htm>

Structure

Commonalities

- grouping similar points together
- dividing sections into paragraphs
- ensuring that each paragraph deals with a main point or theme
- presenting the main point or theme in a sentence at or near the beginning of the paragraph
- developing the main point or theme of the paragraph in the sentences that follow
- ensuring that each paragraph links smoothly with the previous one

IDEAS DEVELOPMENT



Ideas development

Academic assignments contain clearly formulated central idea developed in logical manner, leading to conclusion.

The *central idea* - usually expressed in a single sentence (your answer to the question).

In answering the question, you have to follow a clear and sustained line of reasoning. This involves identifying points in support of your central idea and developing them using appropriate evidence. A smooth progression from one point to the next is important.

This process will lead naturally to your conclusion, which may or may not be clear cut - the available evidence may not justify a firm conclusion. What matters is that the 'thread of the argument' runs smoothly from beginning to end.

CRITICAL APPROACH



Critical approach

- “Too much description, not enough analysis”
- “Don’t just tell me what happened; tell me what it means.”
- “Elaborate”
- “Needs less description and more critique.”

Critical approach

Acknowledge and deal with the complexity of the subject matter:

- explaining; giving reasons; examining or anticipating consequences
- comparing, contrasting and evaluating
- considering both sides of an issue
- taking a position
- supporting your claims with credible evidence
- investigating claims made by others and, if appropriate, questioning the evidence
- drawing conclusions
- making suggestions and recommendations

SOURCES

and voices



Sources

Academic work builds on the work of others. When reporting, developing, applying, criticising or even rejecting the contributions made by others, you follow well-established conventions for citing and referencing sources.

<http://www.monash.edu.au/lis/lionline/writing/general/academic/index.xml>

Sources and voices

Your position, or stance, on the sources you cite must be clear to the reader. In other words, your own ‘voice’ must be distinct from that of your sources.

Identifying Voices

Infants also exert control over what their carers talk about. The topic of conversation usually involves what the infant is playing with or is guided by what the infant is gazing at (Bohannon, 1993). This practice means that infants hear speech that concerns what they are already paying attention to, which undoubtedly facilitates learning. In fact, Tomasello and Farrar (1986) found that infants of mothers who talked mostly about the objects of their infants' gazes uttered their first words earlier than other infants and also developed larger vocabularies early in life.

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Expressing *your* voice

There are two main ways in which you can show your view:

- Negatively - lack of mention of any other writer
- Positively - first person pronouns (*I*); comments and evaluations (*two major drawbacks, of no great merit, as X insightfully states*)

It will always be assumed that the words or ideas are your own if you do not say otherwise.

Expressing *your* voice

Which words show the writer's position?

Previous studies (Jones, 1997; Smith, 2006) have indicated that the intensity of physiotherapy provision may affect some patient outcomes including reduced mortality following a stroke.

Expressing *your* voice

Previous studies (Jones, 1997; Smith, 2006) have **indicated** that the intensity of physiotherapy provision **may** affect **some** patient outcomes including reduced mortality following a stroke.

Expressing *your* voice

You can show your position with respect to a particular issue by:

- Showing how *confident* - or not - you are with regard to your position.
- Being *explicit* about the relationships you are discussing.
- Indicating the *strength* of your claim.

Expressing *your* voice

Showing confidence

It was clearly proposed not as a permanent arrangement, but as a temporary measure of co-operation between different individual.

This latter point was perhaps the greatest concern for Britain's aviation planners as the war went on.

Expressing *your* voice

Showing confidence

It was **clearly** proposed not as a permanent arrangement, but as a temporary measure of co-operation between different individual.

This latter point was **perhaps** the greatest concern for Britain's aviation planners as the war went on.

Confident - use of boosters such as **definitely, will, must, cannot**

Cautious - use of hedges such as **perhaps, maybe, could, might**

Expressing *your* voice

Explicit about relationships

He is born into a family, he marries into a family, and he becomes the husband and father of his own family. *In addition*, he has a definite place of origin and more relatives than he knows what to do with, and he receives a rudimentary education at the Canadian Mission School.

Expressing *your* voice

Strength of your claim

- Research **suggests** that we have at least four types of memory.
- Research **shows** that we have at least four types of memory.

Expressing *your* voice

Introductory verbs	e.g. seem, indicate, suggest
Thinking verbs	e.g. believe, assume, suggest
Reporting verbs	e.g. claim, find, confirm, assert
Evaluative adjectives	e.g. important, misguided, wrong, misguided, inaccurate, incorrect
Evaluative adverbs	e.g. accurately, unsatisfactorily
Adverbs of frequency	e.g. often, sometimes
Modal verbs	e.g. will, may, might, could
Modal adverbs	e.g. certainly, definitely
Modal adjectives	e.g. certain, definite
Modal nouns	e.g. assumption, possibility
Signalling words	e.g. furthermore, similarly

EXPLICITNESS



Explicitness

Author is responsible for ensuring that the meaning of the text is clear and free from ambiguity. Anticipate the reader's questions:

- What is the purpose of this work?
- What does the author mean by this?
- How do these two ideas (or these two paragraphs) link together?
- Where is the evidence for this?
- What is the author's view about this issue?

Explicitness

- Explain what you intend to achieve /demonstrate /argue.
- Define key concepts. If you find different definitions for the same term in the literature, explain which one you will adopt or what the word means to you.
- Make sure that links between ideas are clear. Use linking words and phrases if necessary.
- Ensure that every claim is supported by evidence.
- Take a position in relation to the issues being discussed - make sure that your viewpoint is clear to the reader.

Explicitness

Academic writing is explicit in its signposting of the organisation of the ideas in the text:

- ... ever built in Britain. *However*, even by the end ...
- Partly this was *because* the current ...
- control of the land. *Similarly*, Marx was interested ...
- his own family. *In addition*, he has a ...
- between orders and bishops. *For example*, in the Northern context

Explicitness

Academic writing is explicit in its acknowledgment of the sources of the ideas in the text:

Several writers have argued that learners benefit from transcribing, whether working with other people's words or their own.

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Several writers have argued that learners benefit from transcribing, whether working with other people's words (e.g. *Clennell 1999*) or their own (e.g. *Johnson 1996*).

ACADEMIC LANGUAGE & STYLE

Vocabulary
Grammar
Signposting
hedging



By making things easy for your readers, you help yourself to convey information and ideas.

Barass R, (1982) Students must write: a guide to better writing in coursework and examinations. London: Methuen.

Language & style

Written academic English is **OBJECTIVE**

- a vehicle for logical argumentation; measured; fair; accurate
- (not emotional; avoids exaggeration and bias; shows respect for views of others)

Written academic English is **CAUTIOUS**

- language used reflects the strength of evidence available to support an idea or claim

Written academic English is **FORMAL**

- precise; avoids colloquialisms and slang

Language & style - vocabulary

1. Her paper made a tremendous contribution to the field.
2. The settlers got ill after drinking polluted water.
3. The proposal for regional representation was turned down.
4. Doris Lessing got the Nobel Prize in 2007.
5. Most of the patients reported that they put on weight after taking the new medication.
6. The study participants reported that they got better after the first course of treatment.

Language & style - vocabulary

1. Her paper made a **tremendous** contribution to the field.

1. Her paper made a **major** contribution to the field.

2. The settlers **got** ill after drinking polluted water.

2. The settlers **became** ill after drinking polluted water.

3. The proposal for regional representation was **turned down**.

3. The proposal for regional representation was **rejected**.

Language & style - vocabulary

4. Doris Lessing **got** the Nobel Prize in 2007.

4. Doris Lessing **was awarded** the Nobel Prize in 2007.

5. Most of the patients reported that they **put on** weight after taking the new medication.

5. Most of the patients reported that they **gained** weight after taking the new medication.

6. The study participants reported that **they got better** after the first course of treatment.

6. The study participants reported that **their health improved** after the first course of treatment.

Language & style - vocabulary

- avoid colloquialisms and idioms
- avoid using the verb 'get'
- avoid two-word verbs

Language & style - vocabulary

Formal	Informal
	understanding
deficiency	
opportunity	
perspiration	
	house
	sight

Language & style - vocabulary

Formal	Informal
comprehension	understanding
deficiency	lack
opportunity	chance
perspiration	sweat
residence	house
vision	sight

Language & style - vocabulary

Increasing numbers of students are choosing Media Studies as their university subject. What is the reason for this? Many students believe ...

Language & style - vocabulary

Increasing numbers of students are choosing Media Studies as their university subject. What is the reason for this? Many students believe ...

Increasing numbers of students are choosing Media Studies as their university subject. The reason for this is that many students believe ...

As a general rule, questions are not used in academic writing.

Language & style - vocabulary

This isn't easy to do since most historians persist in speaking of The National Government as if the same sort of government ruled from 1931 to 1940.

The first National Government wasn't intended to be a coalition government in the normal sense of the term.

Language & style - vocabulary

This ~~isn't~~ *is not* easy to do since most historians persist in speaking of The National Government as if the same sort of government ruled from 1931 to 1940.

The first National Government ~~wasn't~~ *was not* intended to be a coalition government in the normal sense of the term.

Contracted forms are informal and are not generally used in academic writing.

Language & style - grammar

A nominalisation is a noun phrase derived from another word class, usually a verb.

Nominalisations are useful in academic writing because they convey an objective, impersonal tone.

Nominalisations can also make the text more concise because they can pack a great deal of information in a few words.

Language & style - grammar

The government **banned smoking in public places in 2007**. Since then, **fewer people have been admitted to hospital for smoking-related diseases**.

The ban on smoking in public places in 2007 has led to a fall in hospital admissions for smoking-related diseases.

Language & style - grammar

Reproduction with variation is a major characteristic of life. Without reproduction, life would quickly come to an end. The earliest single-celled organisms reproduced by duplicating their genetic material and then dividing in two.

All organisms reproduce and sometimes when they reproduce, the children vary. This is an important characteristic of life. If organisms did not reproduce, life would quickly come to an end. How did the earliest single-celled organisms reproduce? They duplicated their genetic material and then they divided in two.

Language & style - grammar

Reproduction with variation **is a major characteristic of life.**

Without reproduction, life would quickly come to an end. The earliest single-celled organisms reproduced by duplicating their genetic material and then dividing in two.

All organisms reproduce and sometimes when they reproduce, the children vary. **This is an important characteristic of life.** If organisms did not reproduce, life would quickly come to an end. How did the earliest single-celled organisms reproduce? They duplicated their genetic material and then they divided in two.

Language & style - grammar

Pre- and post-modifiers

The unexpected decline in species that had previously thrived in the area was attributed to a sharp rise in temperature.

Pre-and post-modification enables the writer to pack a lot of information into a limited number of words, thus making the style more concise.

Language & style - grammar

**There isn't any evidence
in support of this claim.**

**The new study does not
support many of the
initial findings.**

**There is not much
research on this topic.**

Language & style - grammar

There isn't any evidence in support of this claim.

There is *no* evidence in support of this claim.

The new study does not support many of the initial findings.

The new study supports *few* of the initial findings.

There is not much research on this topic.

There is *little* research on this topic.

Language & style - grammar

'not' negative forms

- Avoid the 'not' negative form if an alternative form is available.
- If you do use the 'not' negative form, avoid contracted forms.

Language & style - grammar

Second person pronoun 'you'

Neither qualitative interviews nor focus groups are likely to give you easily quantifiable, factual or objective data.

Language & style - grammar

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Language & style - grammar

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As you can see from the data, two-thirds of respondents are satisfied with the current provision.

Language & style - grammar

Second person pronoun 'you'

As you can see from the data, two-thirds of respondents are satisfied with the current provision.

As can be seen from the data, two-thirds of respondents are satisfied with the current provision.

Language & style - grammar

A reader will normally assume that any idea not referenced is your own. It is therefore unnecessary to make this explicit.

- "In my opinion, this a very interesting study."
- "This is a very interesting study."

Language & style - grammar

I would call Wagner a subjective artist. What I mean is that his art had its source in his personality; his work was virtually independent, I always feel, of the epoch in which he lived.

Language & style - grammar

Wagner was what might be called a subjective artist in that his art had its source in his personality. His work seems virtually independent of the epoch in which he lived.

Language & style - grammar

TABLE 1
Average frequency of
writer pronouns per
research paper

Discipline	All writer pronouns	Singular (<i>I, Me, My</i>)	Plural (<i>We, Us, Our</i>)
Marketing	38.2	1.6	36.5
Philosophy	34.5	33.0	1.5
App. Ling.	32.3	17.2	15.0
Sociology	29.4	11.7	17.7
Physics	17.7	0.0	17.7
Biology	15.5	0.0	15.5
Electronic Eng.	11.6	0.0	11.6
Mechanical Eng.	2.6	0.0	2.6
Overall	22.7	7.9	14.8

Language & style - grammar

TABLE 2
Personal reference in
research articles and
essays (per 10,000
words)

Field	Totals		Singular Pronouns		Plural pronouns	
	Articles	L2 Essays	Articles	L2 Essays	Articles	L2 Essays
Science & Engineering	30.7	11.7	0.1	7.7	30.6	4.0
Business & professional	46.9	16.1	22.2	9.2	24.7	6.8
Overall	41.2	14.4	14.4	8.6	26.8	5.8

Language & style - grammar

Personal reference?

Check with the person whose responsibility it is to assess your assignment as to their feelings on this matter!

Language & style - signposting

Need to make your writing **CLEAR**. How? By being **EXPLICIT**.

Signposting language:

- major signposts that signal key aspects of the work, such as purpose, structure, author's stance, main points, direction of the argument, conclusions.
- linking words and phrases that show connections between sentences and paragraphs.

Language & style - signposting

Major signposts

- The aim of this study is to
- The purpose of this thesis is to....
- This essay argues that
- The main questions addressed in this paper are
- This essay critically examines....
- The above discussion raises some interesting questions.
- This paper begins by It will then go on to Finally,
- This chapter reviews the literature
- In conclusion,

Language & style - signposting

Linking words and phrases

- **Listing:**
first(ly), ... / second(ly), ... / finally, ... /
- **Indicating addition or similarity:**
also, ... / besides, ... / in addition, ... / furthermore, ... / as well /
similarly, ...
- **Indicating contrast:**
however, ... / nevertheless, ... / on the other hand, ... /
- **Giving a reason:**
for this reason, ... / because ... / because of ... / due to ...

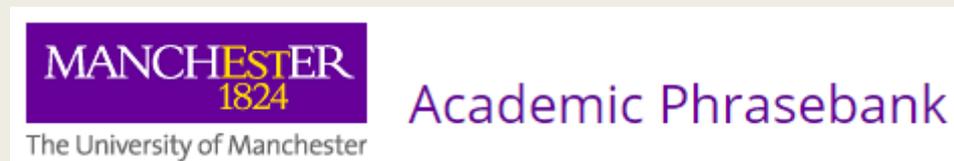
Language & style - signposting

Linking words and phrases

- **Indicating result or consequence:**
therefore, ... / thus, ... / as a result, ... / consequently, ...
- **Reformulating an idea:**
in other words, ... / to put it simply, ... / that is ...
- **Exemplifying:**
for example, ... / for instance, ... / to exemplify, ...

Language & style - signposting

<http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/>



<http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/summary-and-transition/>

Language & style - hedging

Written academic English is cautious

- **Water shortages trigger conflict between nations.**

Language & style - hedging

Written academic English is cautious

- Water shortages trigger conflict between nations.
- Water shortages may trigger conflict between nations.

Paying due attention to accuracy helps to avoid, or at least reduce, criticism of your work.

Language & style - hedging

The fire was **probably** caused by a fault in the engine temperature gauge.

The fire **could** have been caused by a fault in the engine temperature gauge.

Paying due attention to accuracy helps to avoid, or at least reduce, criticism of your work.

Language & style - hedging

Hedging is also used to mitigate criticism of other authors' work, as in the examples below:

- Johnson (2007) **appears** to ignore the adverse psychological side-effects of this approach.
- The risks of the new vaccine **may** have been overstated.

Language & style - hedging

1. Introductory verbs: e.g. seem, tend, look like, appear to be, think, believe, doubt, be sure, indicate, suggest
2. Certain lexical verbs e.g. believe, assume, suggest
3. Certain modal verbs: e.g. will, must, would, may, might, could
4. Adverbs of frequency e.g. often, sometimes, usually
4. Modal adverbs e.g. certainly, definitely, clearly, probably, possibly, perhaps, conceivably,
5. Modal adjectives e.g. certain, definite, clear, probable, possible
6. Modal nouns e.g. assumption, possibility, probability
7. That clauses
e.g. It could be the case that .
e.g. It might be suggested that .
e.g. There is every hope that .
8. To-clause + adjective e.g. It may be possible to obtain .
e.g. It is important to develop .
e.g. It is useful to study .

Language & style - hedging

1. There is no difficulty in explaining how a structure such as an eye or a feather contributes to survival and reproduction; the difficulty is in thinking of a series of steps by which it could have arisen.
2. For example, it may be necessary for the spider to leave the branch on which it is standing, climb up the stem, and walk out along another branch.
3. *Escherichia coli*, when found in conjunction with urethritis, often indicate infection higher in the uro-genital tract.
4. There is experimental work to show that a week or ten days may not be long enough and a fortnight to three weeks is probably the best theoretical period.
5. Conceivably, different forms, changing at different rates and showing contrasting combinations of characteristics, were present in different areas.

Language & style - hedging

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4. There is experimental work to show that a week or ten days may not be long enough and a fortnight to three weeks is **probably** the best theoretical period.
5. **Conceivably** different forms, changing at different rates and showing contrasting combinations of characteristics, were present in different areas.

Language & style - hedging

<http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/>



<http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/using-cautious-language/>

FINAL TASK



Academic style

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Academic style

Lots of times in many years, different professional people who were interested in making education better have asked me what we know about how people learn so we can use it to make education better.

On a number of occasions during a considerable period of years, various professional people interested in educational improvement have asked what is known about the process of learning that can be put to use in designing better education.

RESOURCES



Select websites

<http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/>

<http://www.uefap.com/>

<http://www.eapfoundation.com/writing/>

<http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/>

<http://www.jurassicacademic.com/materials>

<http://www.monash.edu.au/lis/lionline/writing/general/academic/index.xml>

<http://www.thelecturette.com/>

UoE ELE ELSIS!

English language support for international students

- Courses
- Workshops
- Independent Study Materials

www.ed.ac.uk/english-language-teaching/elsis

Key Points

Spend a minute or two reflecting on the session.

What are the most important points to take away from this workshop?

Compare your points with another student.

Questions