



Life after IELTS

Helping students to meet
academic (writing)
expectations



- **What about you?**

- **Poll**

- Do you teach EAP (English for Academic Purposes)? Yes/No
- Do you teach EFL (English as a Foreign Language)? Yes/No
- Do you teach in Further or Higher Education? Yes/No
- How many years of teaching experience do you have? 1 or less/ 2-5 years/more than 5 years/ more than 10 years
- **If you are not a teacher, can you introduce yourself briefly?**



- I teach at the International Academy at the University of Birmingham in the UK.
- I have taught students with IELTS 4.0 to IELTS 7.0 as a starting point
- The following is part of an essay that one of our students wrote:



- Does this look familiar/typical to you?

Surly education is essential and important to all people around the world. I do believe that everyone should have the opportunity to learn but, should the governments pay for all their people to go to the university free? In my humble opinion I don't think they should. Let's see the benefits of free universities, first of all there will be a lot more student which means a lot more people learning, this can also be a downfall but we will get to that later. Also free universities means an opportunity for those low income students to learn. In the other hand, free universities will be filled with both good and bad students and (...)



- What elements are acceptable for an IELTS essay but not for an 'academic' essay?

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Not acceptable for an academic essay:

- **Level of formality**

“I don’t think”, “downfall” , “we will get to that later”

- **Academic register**

rhetorical questions, ‘speaking’ to the reader (*“Surely...”, “Let’s see”*), inappropriate phrases (*“In my humble opinion”*)

- **Grammatical mistakes**



But the writing is quite skillful too:

- **Many of these issues can be ‘remedied’ in one informative teaching session**

(topics: the distance between reader and speaker [the use of ‘I’ and ‘we’, addressing the reader], other academic conventions [the use of full forms])

- **Clearly this student understands the essay genre**



- What does this student already know about essay writing?

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- What does this student already know about essay writing?

Surly education is essential and important to all people around the world. **Introduction: importance of the topic**

I do believe that everyone should have the opportunity to learn but, should the governments pay for all their people to go to the university free? **Introduction: problem statement**

In my humble opinion I don't think they should. **State own opinion/answer the essay question**



- What does this student already know about essay writing?

Let's see the benefits of free universities, **looking at both sides**
first of all **structuring/signposting**
there will be a lot more student which means **explaining**
a lot more people learning, this can also be a downfall **looking at**
both sides
but we will get to that later. **signposting**
Also **signposting**
free universities means an opportunity for those low income
students to learn.
In the other hand, **looking at both sides**



This student knows a lot about essay writing:

- Writing introductions (structure, content)
- Guiding the reader
- Stating points, giving reasons, explaining reasons
- Looking at both sides of an argument
- ...

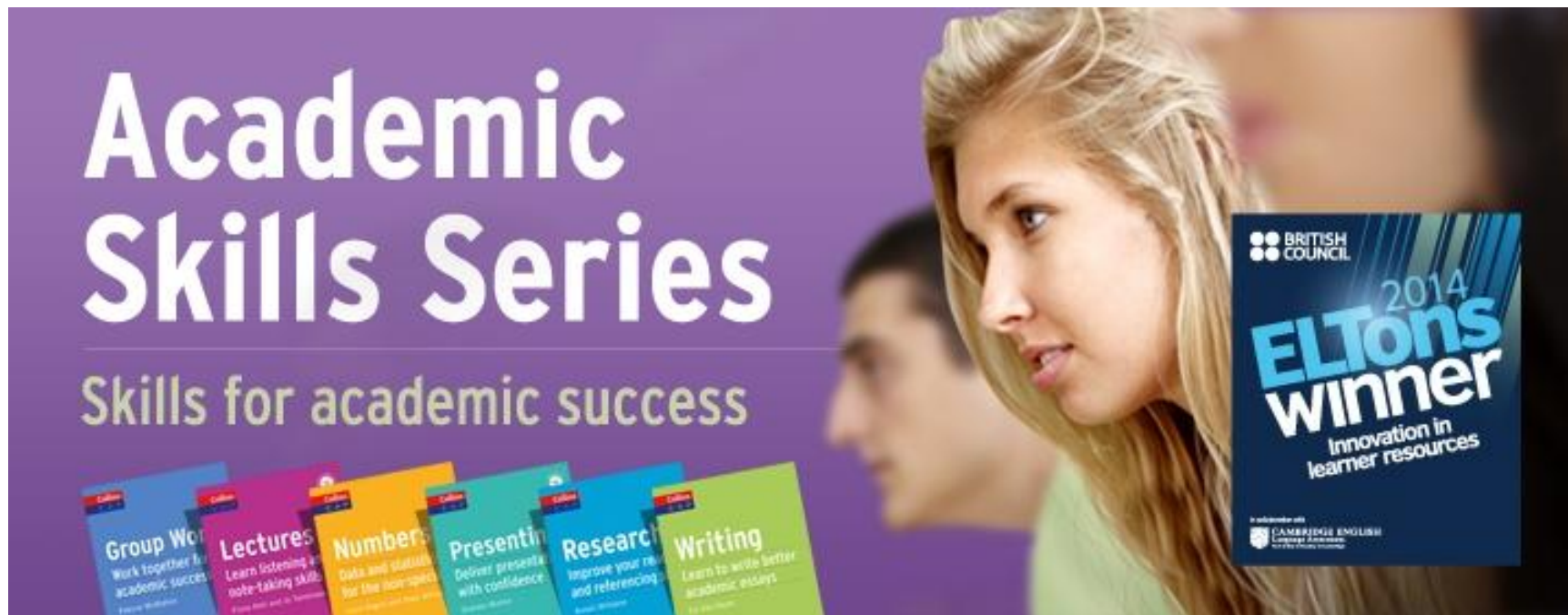


What other skills and deficiencies did you see?

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The idea behind ‘Writing’, and the whole Collins Academic Skills series: to acknowledge that students already have many skills, to identify what they need to (un) learn, and to build on what they know.



Academic Skills Series

Skills for academic success

Group Work
Work together for academic success

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Learn listening and note-taking skills

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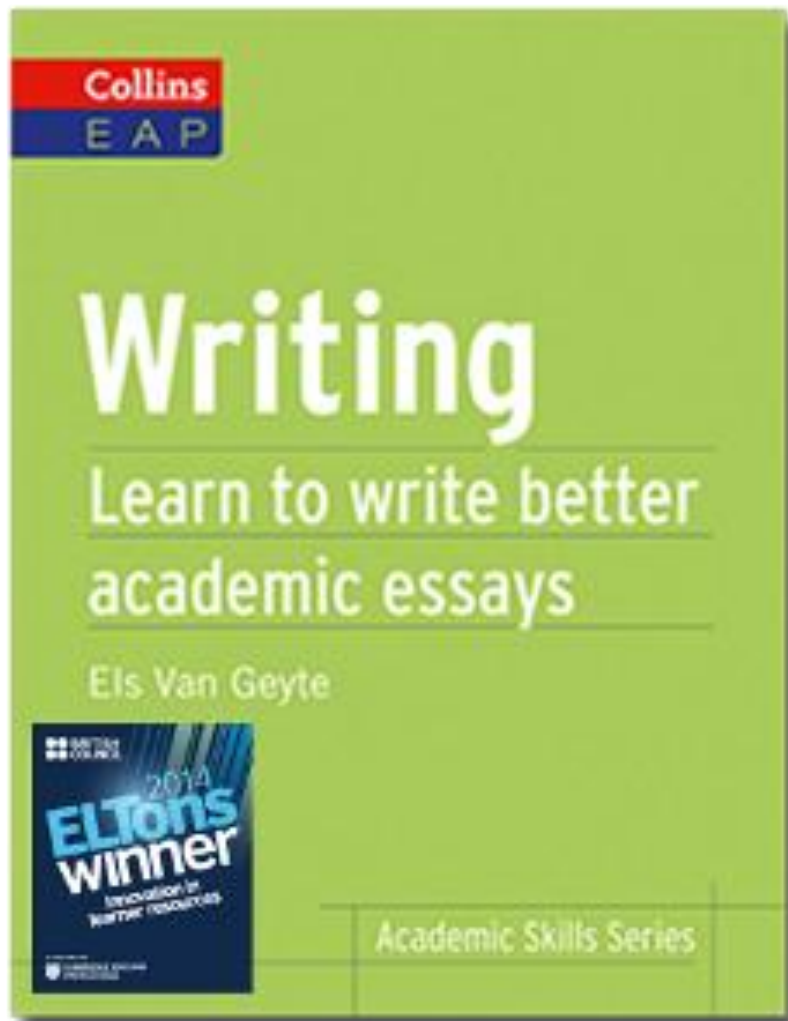
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Improve your research and referencing

Writing
Learn to write better academic essays

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winner
Innovation in
learner resources

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Most assessment in Higher Education in Britain is based on written assignments, with the essay being the ‘default in the humanities and in many of the arts and social sciences’ (Andrews 2010:93).



Many differences:

IELTS essay	University essay
250 words	1,000 + words
3-4 ideas are enough	Many complex points
Simple organisation	More intricate organisation
'Brainstorming'	Research
No other sources	Quoting/ paraphrasing
No reference list	Requires references
...	...



Perceived difficulty:

- There are extra skills to learn (variety of referencing conventions, research skills, ...)
- L2 students worry about their use of English (in comparison to L1 / English writers and to their own abilities in L1).



- **Perceived difficulty:**
 - They receive conflicting advice about L2 writing:
 - introductions need to be short/ can be more than one paragraph long/ are 10% of the essay
 - you cannot write too many linking words/ be careful when using linking words
 - you should never use 'I'/ you can use it in certain parts of the text/ in certain cases.



- **What aspects of writing do your students worry about/ struggle with?**



How can teachers help students become better writers?





- **Link with:**

- the communicative purpose of essays
- reader expectation

- **Focus on why, rather than what/how.**



WHAT/ HOW

WHY

- Don't use rhetorical questions
- Don't use 'you'
- Don't use words such as 'lots', 'big', 'nice'
- Use 'investigate' instead of 'look into'

Formality

= writing is different from speaking:
 you should not 'talk' to the audience or use 'spoken, general' words

= *a lot to remember*

= *a useful guideline*

if you received conflicting advice or are not sure about an expression



WHAT/ HOW	→	WHY
Don't use 'you'		Formality
Don't repeat yourself		Efficiency
Check your spelling		Accuracy
Use cautious / hedging language (<i>may be, could be</i> etc. vs. <i>is</i>)		Modesty
Quote appropriately		Integrity
Don't use vague words		Clarity
= a lot to remember ...		= a useful guideline



Noticing activity: compare the extracts and find examples of (lack of) formality, efficiency, accuracy, modesty, clarity.

Retailing (i.e. the sale of goods from a fixed location) is changing: shopping is becoming a leisure activity as much as a necessity and the rise of home delivery services is an indication that convenience is a powerful motivator for shoppers' behaviour.

Retailing (ie: selling things from a agreed position) is changeing shopping is becoming a leisure activity as much as a necessary activity and people always get more and more home delivery so therefore convenience is now the most powerful motivator for shoper's activities.



*Noticing activity: compare the extracts and find examples of (lack of) **formality**, efficiency, accuracy, modesty, clarity.*

Retailing (i.e. the sale of goods from a fixed location) is changing: shopping is becoming a leisure activity as much as a necessity and the rise of home delivery services is an indication that convenience is a powerful motivator for shoppers' behaviour.

Retailing (ie: selling **things** from a agreed position) is changing shopping is becoming a leisure activity as much as a necessary activity and **people always get more and more** home delivery so therefore convenience is now the most powerful motivator for shoper's activities.



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Retailing (ie: selling things from a agreed position) is changeing shopping is becoming a leisure **activity** as much as a **necessary activity** and people **always** get **more and more** home delivery so therefore convenience is now the most powerful motivator for shoper's **activities**.



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Retailing (**ie**: selling things from **a** agreed position) is changing **shopping** is becoming a leisure activity as much as a necessary activity and people always get more and more home delivery **so therefore** convenience is now the most powerful motivator for **shoper's** activities.



*Noticing activity: compare the extracts and find examples of (lack of) formality, efficiency, accuracy, **modesty**, clarity.*

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Retailing (ie: selling things **from a agreed position**) is changing shopping is becoming a leisure activity as much as a necessary activity and people always get more and more home delivery so **therefore** convenience is now the most powerful motivator for shoper's activities.



Paraphrasing

WHAT?

A paraphrase of something written or spoken is the same thing expressed in a different way [*Collins COBUILD Advanced Dictionary*]

HOW?

“Techniques for paraphrasing:

- (a) Changing vocabulary by using synonyms
- (b) changing word class
- (c) changing word order”

[*Bailey, S., Academic Writing for International Students of Business, Routledge, 2013: 46*]



Paraphrasing

WHY?

...

Answering this first will help students with WHAT and HOW.

Here are some real examples from students who have followed the advice on HOW to paraphrase:



Student paraphrase

... beginner and good writers use options such as studying replica dissertations with small tasks on personal documents (Ferris, 1994).



Original

Ferris, D. R. (1994). Lexical and Syntactic Features of ESL Writing by Students at Different Levels of L2 Proficiency, p.419

(...) utilized by successful and novice writers (e.g., through in-class analysis of model essays), together with microlevel work on individual papers (through teacher-student conferences, written teacher commentary, or peer or self-evaluation) ...



How to paraphrase

Using synonyms ✓

utilize

model essays

individual papers

microlevel work

use options

replica dissertations

personal documents

small tasks

changing word order ✓

successful and novice

beginner and good



Original

Ferris, D. R. (1994). Lexical and Syntactic Features of ESL Writing by Students at Different Levels of L2 Proficiency, p.419

(...) utilized by successful and novice writers (e.g., through in-class analysis of model essays), together with microlevel work on individual papers (through teacher-student conferences, written teacher commentary, or peer or self-evaluation) ...

Student paraphrase

... beginner and good writers use options such as studying replica dissertations with small tasks on personal documents (Ferris, 1994).



Student paraphrase

They believed then that the main concern was taking action on accommodation trouble.



Original

At that time, dealing with housing problems was considered the greatest priority.



How to paraphrase

using synonyms ✓

greatest priority

housing problems

dealing with

main concern

accommodation trouble

taking action on

changing word class ✓

[type of verb form]

was considered

they believed that

changing word order ✓

... the greatest priority.

The main concern was ...



Original

At that time, dealing with housing problems was considered the greatest priority.

Student paraphrase

They believed that the main concern was taking action on accommodation trouble.



Paraphrasing

WHY?

- Integrity, clarity
- Demonstrating academic skill:

Paraphrasing is done to demonstrate understanding of a source text:

- (a) You can explain somebody else's idea
- (b) You can make the idea part of your own ideas
- (c) You indicate what others say and what you say about that



Original

At that time, dealing with housing problems was considered the greatest priority.

Possible paraphrase

As the poor quality of housing was becoming increasingly urgent, ...

- Idea explained in own words
- Idea is part of the point the writer is making



- **Does anyone (else) want to raise issues or to comment on teaching paraphrasing?**



Hedging (using cautious language)

Some problems:

- not hedging
- not understanding that there is a difference in meaning between ‘may’, ‘might’, ‘could’
- believing that hedging makes statements weaker
- indiscriminate use (overuse after learning)



Student examples		Improvements
<p><i>Trait theory is the best leadership theory</i></p>		<p><i>A major advantage of trait theory is ...[statement toned down]</i></p>
<p><i>Students have a weak mathematical knowledge because of overreliance on calculators</i></p>		<p><i>Some students' mathematical knowledge may have been affected by an overreliance on calculators</i></p> <p>[hedging: <u>some</u>, <u>may</u>]</p>
<p><i>The company should apply the following promotional methods:</i></p>		<p><i>The company could apply the following promotional methods: ...</i></p> <p>[command is now suggestion]</p>
<p><i>As we all know, an enterprise ...</i></p>		<p><i>It is commonly known that an enterprise ... [refers to general, not personal, knowledge]</i></p>



- **Hedging (using cautious language)**
- Academic modesty, reader expectation



Student examples	Problems:	Improvements
<p><i>Trait theory is the best leadership theory</i></p>	<p>Too strong</p>	<p><i>A major advantage of trait theory is ...[statement toned down]</i></p>
<p><i>Students have a weak mathematical knowledge because of overreliance on calculators</i></p>	<p>Too strong: no evidence</p>	<p><i>Some students' mathematical knowledge may have been affected by an overreliance on calculators</i></p> <p>[hedging: <u>some</u>, <u>may</u>]</p>
<p><i>The company should apply the following promotional methods:</i></p>	<p>Too arrogant</p>	<p><i>The company could apply the following promotional methods: ...</i></p> <p>[command is now suggestion]</p>
<p><i>As we all know, an enterprise ...</i></p>	<p>Potentially insulting</p>	<p><i>It is commonly known that an enterprise ... [refers to general, not personal, knowledge]</i></p>



Conclusion

- **Remind students of the ‘why’, the academic principles**
 - **Link activities to reader expectation and the purpose of the writing**
- **Put academic skill before linguistic exercises – the language will follow**
- **Try to convince students that CLARITY overrides other concerns.**



- **What did you think?**

→ Poll

- **How interesting was this session for you?**

Very interesting/ a little bit/ not interesting

- The last question is for teachers of academic writing:

**will you be able to use some of today's information
to inform your lessons?**

Yes/No



THANK YOU for watching!



REFERENCES

- Andrews, R. (2010) *Argumentation in Higher Education: Improving Practice Through Theory and Research*. New York: Routledge.

CONTACT DETAILS

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Essay structure

Introductions

Student questions:

- How long should it be?
- How is it different from a conclusion?
- What do I / don't I say yet in my introduction?

→ Reader expectation

To answer these questions:

1. Analyse the essay question to decide on the essay structure
2. Ask yourself what the reader needs to know and when



Introduction	<i>Main body paragraph</i>	Conclusion
General explanation or description of a problem	<i>An introduction of the specific topic (and possible link back)</i>	Summary of main ideas (related to importance)
State importance of (an aspect of) the problem	<i>Development of the topic (analysis, evidence, detail)</i>	Summary of evidence (with evaluation)
Give your aim/ your position/ the essay organisation	<i>Concluding sentence (and possible link forward)</i>	Overall conclusion/ answer



How would you improve the following introductions of 1000 word essays?

It may be a good idea not to let students use calculators in maths classes, but there are also reasons why they can be helpful. This essay will first address the role calculators play by considering their benefits, as well as possible drawbacks. Then I shall present a simple argument for the use of calculators by examining the fundamental purpose of an educational system before concluding that we should not reject the use of calculators in a learning environment.

Calculators are useful pieces of equipment and are very popular in mathematical learning. However, some of their functions have raised concerns with maths teachers about the harmful effects on the students' ability to improve their learning. This is why the idea of forbidding the use of calculators is being discussed. I think this opinion is too extreme and limited.



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- The writer clearly indicates the structure of the essay: ‘first ... the role calculators play ... benefits ... drawbacks ... Then ... argument for... by examining ... before concluding ...’.

- What she has not done is explore the situation and shown why this question is worth discussing.

- In this particular case, she nearly did this: there is a suggestion that the question has to be discussed in the context of the purpose of an educational system – but she should have said more about this.



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-This student is saying why this particular question is being raised and is therefore worthy of discussion. In the last sentence, he also says whether he agrees or disagrees with the comment.

- It is a good idea to 'answer' the question. Not only does it show that the student understand what the question is, but it also tells the reader what he is going to argue, which guides the reader the text.

-This student has not really included enough about the actual problem, and there is no comment about organization.