

Shaping Students' Writing Skills: The Study of Fundamental Aspects in Mastering Academic Writing

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Abstract:

Writing has become one of important skills in English language acquisition since a long time ago. Without leaving aside the importance of using active English to communicate, the passive one also plays important role to convey the message. Writing, as a way to explore our passive English is not merely intended to describe any topic without purposes. In this case, writing is a progressive activity. Oshima and Hogue (1997:2) explain the meaning of progressive in writing is when we want to start the first step to write about a certain topic, actually we have already known what we are going to write and how we explore it. After that, we read over our writing than we will do some corrections and also changes. In short, in order to have a better writing we should never stop only in one step. The more particular and specific urgency in writing is how to make our writing academic. This is what the most college students face in their writing tasks such as essays and final projects which become the requirement for them to finish their study in a university. In fact, academic writing is not as easy as the students think that they will just ask to write a passage freely. In this case, academic writing gives full description and complete guidance on how to make their writing sounds academic. So that is what the researcher tried to explained to the readers especially for students who need to shape their ability to in doing such academic writing.

Keywords: *fundamental aspects, academic writing, writing skill*

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing is an effective way to communicate and express our thoughts, feelings, and opinions to others (Zuhri & Sukarnianti, 2015:186). In addition, Setyowati (2016:80) claims that writing is not just about ideas to write but also the way they compose the elements of writing well. The author should have the ability to process the ideas to form something meaningful and logical for the reader to read.

Academic writing is not merely an ordinary writing. There must be some detail steps and important aspects which need to put on the top of priority (Irawati, 2015). Academic writing is a set of evaluation on a way a writer thinks, analyses, proves, and presents factual and academic data. In order to start with the correct step in writing in academic way, we had better to pay attention to the basic purposes of academic writing. In this case, Irvin (2010: 8) pointed out that firstly, academic writing is an argument. It is obvious that there are so many readers with different point of view in the world. An argument is needed to shape readers' point of view to have a belief on the fact we have presented. So that is why the writer should have many supporting sources to present the accurate data and all information needed by the readers.

Ningrum, Latief, and Sulisty (2016:150) state that prewriting or planning is the initial and important step in the process of writing. The activities in the prewriting are designed to help students in preparing their writing by assisting them developing their background knowledge, selecting and narrowing appropriate topics, brainstorming ideas, and organizing thoughts. Meanwhile, Nurhayati (2016:51) argues that the steps of learning writing are (1) Responding to the ideas that learners produce; (2) Composing Process: planning-writing-reviewing framework using dramatic structure: orientation, complication, sequence of events, resolution and coda; (3) Building Knowledge of Field, Modeling of Text, Joint Construction of Text, and Independent Construction of Text.

Academic writing is an analysis. An outcome of an academic writing is a result of analysis or we can say that in academic writing, the writer tend to write an analysis. So that in analysing a writing, the writer is suggested to seek questions of "HOW" and "WHY" rather than "WHAT". In order to analyse well, there are three important elements which are proposed by Irvin (2010: 9):

1. State a topic investigated where the answer is not known at first. At this point, the writer needs to let himself open to several probabilities.
2. Make a clear explanation on the key important points.
3. Examine two aspects above and relate them in a logic way.

Without leaving aside the importance of academic writing as argumentation and analysis terms, it is also highly urgent that the writer should accomplish a strong content with academic style. In this case, Fujieda (2012: 33) said that academic writing needs a scientific style such as the use of third person singular rather than first person "I". Supporting Fujieda's statement, Irvin (2010: 5) stated that we

should never use “I” since academic writing must be written in scientific and formal ways.

Moreover, Bailey (2006: 36-37) also had an important theory regarding with the things we should do in order to make our writing academic. They are:

1. Combining sources

In writing, we are required to have more than one source to make our writing scientific. We should present the different view of different sources because the more sources we have, the better and stronger our writing. The important points to highlight that it is alright to have different point of view from different references as long as they can support our ideas and relevant to our topic.

2. Mix the use of direct quotes and summary of arguments

A writer is allowed to have direct quotations as long as he summarizes them by using their own words.

2. AVOIDING PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism becomes a hot issue in writing when someone takes another person's ideas without quoting them in a required manner. This action can be harmful for the person who has the original ideas because it is considered to be a crime. As Dryden (1999) in Norris (2007: 4) explained that plagiarism means taking another person's words or sentences without quoting the ideas and it is considered to be wrong action because it is regarding with “kidnapping” and “piracy”. In addition, plagiarism is a serious problem as Shahabuddin (2009: 353) stated that plagiarism is potential to create “legal” and “ethical” problems where the action of this copying another person's idea without citing can have serious consequences.

Is plagiarism only dealing with taking or copying another person's theory? According to Bailey (2006: 7), there are several actions which are considered to be plagiarism. The first, someone who does not provide a reference when he has taken another person's idea. The second, someone copies a few sentences from an online article without giving a reference. The last, someone presents an idea as his own work. Fortunately, nowadays there is a new and modern ways of checking whether a certain writing or paper published is doing this kind of action.

Hence, it is highly important to make sure that one person is not making any mistake in writing in terms of becoming a plagiarist. In this case, Shahabuddin (2009: 352) pointed out that reviewers can use a certain software to detect the existing of plagiarism in someone's submitted articles. In addition, there are also several ways of making the plagiarists feel sorry for doing plagiarism. The reviewers can just prohibit for the next article submission for publication. The next way to stop plagiarism is the reviewers should be supported by journal's board and editors when they find some plagiarism symptoms. The last way is the board of reviewers in journal publishing article should provide clear terms regarding with plagiarism as well as asking the writer to sign a letter of authority that the article he has made is original to his work.

However, there is an influence of cultural aspect in plagiarism. The case that comes up in the surface is what Asian students understand about plagiarism is extremely different with what the Western students do. In this case, educational environment on Asian countries tend to emphasize how to memorize and write the exact text of a certain theory. As Thompson and William (1995: 2728) in Norris (2007: 4) explained that in many Asian countries the act of copying an author's ideas is considered or well respected as an indication of high intelligence. It is quite different from the Western students' perspective toward plagiarism where even in answering questions on a test by borrowing an expert's theory is still regarded as the act of plagiarism.

To the more particular effort that the students can do to avoid plagiarism is by doing paraphrasing. Even though paraphrasing comes up as a solution to avoid someone from taking another person's ideas without quoting them, to do paraphrasing is not as easy as pie. In this case, we should determine the difference between summarizing and paraphrasing. According to Hirvela and Du (2013: 88), paraphrasing and summarizing are different as tools in avoiding plagiarism. In summarizing, the writer needs to get the red line in a passage by capturing the main content by writing the entire ideas by using his own words. For instance, the writer makes several sentences from the original text into only one sentence but still in the same meaning. Meanwhile, in paraphrasing, the writer rewrites the author's idea by changing words and sentence structures. In other words, summarizing leads the writer to seek only the main points from the passage while paraphrasing will let the writer to write as the same length and specificity as the original source passage.

In line with Hirvela and Du, Colonna and Gilbert (2006: 81) state that "To avoid plagiarism, put all material in your own words in your essay. If you want to use someone else's exact words, you must add quotation marks around the quote and cite the source". In this case, using our own words in citation is really suggested because it shows our understanding towards the sources we have quoted. In short, summarizing, paraphrasing, and direct quotation by putting quotation marks on the author's theory can be effective ways of keeping away plagiarism in writing our essay.

3. WRITING AN ESSAY

Writing is not a simple and easy course to do. Hence, there are many students who think that they should write because their teacher asks them to do it. In another case, the students want to get a good grade from the teacher so that is why some of them will try so hard to get good and better scores even though some are not too curious in getting high score in writing because of displeasure feeling. In this case, most of students' reasons on writing also described by Barker (2013: 13-14) as follows:

1. To show my teacher what I know

Of course, a teacher will expect the students to rely on the material given, but it is not merely about how far the students understand and prove that the students can finish doing their homework. In this reason, actually they only prove that they can "think".

2. To show the students ability to argue
In certain kinds of essays, the students need to deliver their arguments toward a case. By having a practice on writing essays, the students will study how to use arguments regarding with a certain topic. Unfortunately, it is not merely about using arguments all the time, but it is also related to the matter of how the students learn to support their arguments by using scientific and academic sources.

However, we must be wondering of the real reasons on writing a good essay. Referring to that statement, Barker (2013: 16-17) pointed out the importance of writing essays for the students especially in part of their learning. Firstly, the writing of an essay will depend on the students' knowledge and understanding toward the topic and subject they are studying. Secondly, writing an essay can be an indicator of assessing the students' progress. Relying on this reason, the teacher will see the progress of the students by essay draft done by students. For example, on the first draft, the students still have weaknesses in terms of word choices, organization of the paragraph, grammar, etc. Then after the teacher revises the first draft, the students will try to make some revision regarding with the teacher's note on their essay. Soon, the teacher will be able to know the students progress not only in writing but also other important aspects in English acquisition such as vocabulary and reading. Lastly and the most important reason is writing an essay will make the students think better. Why? Because in writing, the students are required to be more creative in terms of creating ideas and arguments from information, creating an academic writing, and also building a good communication with academic people or community.

4. WRITING PROCESS

In order to write academically, there are six steps which proposed by Meyers (2005:3-11) that every writer should pay attention to:

Step 1: Explore Ideas

Before we sit down and write, let our mind explore and find any ideas. It is because ideas to write probably come in any situation and places such as when we are working, traveling, eating, etc. In this case, we are suggested to record those come up thoughts before they disappear in a piece of paper or another media such as napkins or even on the back of our hand. In terms of exploring the ideas, there are three main points that should be considered as follows:

1. Subject : Regarding with the material that we want to write and how far we know about it.
2. Purpose : Our writing should have a purpose such as to persuade, inform, etc.
3. Audience : It is closely related to our subject and purpose whether the content of the writing goes to professional musicians, overweight adults, etc.

Step 2: Pre-write

This step is including the process of writing our thoughts on paper or on the computer. In this step, we do not have to worry about grammar, exact word choice, spelling, or punctuation, because we probably change or correct our mistakes due to the process of writing draft. In doing this step, we can do below techniques to explore our thoughts:

1. Brainstorming : Listing thoughts as they come to us.
2. Clustering : Write the subject in the middle of the page and then circle it. We write related ideas around the subject and circle them so these related ideas can make sort of branches.
3. Free-writing : Just simply write anything about the subject without worrying the grammar, spelling, etc.

Step 3: Organize

On this step, we can organize our writing by doing selecting, subtracting, and adding ideas. We can see the illustration of how to do selecting, subtracting, and adding the ideas as follows:

1. Underline the interesting ideas on the brainstorming list then rewrite as well as put the related ideas together.
2. Select the best idea on the clustering diagram and then develop that idea in more detail on the second diagram. We are suggested to ignore the ideas which do not relevant to our choice.
3. Choose the best idea of our freewriting then redo the second freewriting regarding with the idea we have chosen in more detail information.

Step 4: Write a First Draft

After finishing our pre-writing, selecting the best ideas from brainstorming list, clustering diagram, freewriting, and developing them into more specific ideas, so it is the time for the writer to start to write the first draft. In this step, the writer does not have to be worry about being perfect because later on, new ideas will come as the writer arranges his first draft.

Step 5: Revise the Draft

In this step, the writer will take the most time among other steps because it is not easy to change and correct his writing. The writer will probably omit some points which are considered not really important. The same thing when the writer finds several ideas which are very urgent so that he can add them into his writing. Struggling on this step will make our writing better. Based on Muncie in Ketabi and Torabi (2013: 101), "Good writing requires revision; writers need to write for a specific audience; writing should involve multiple drafts with intervention response at the various draft stages; peers can provide useful feedback at various levels; training students in peer response leads to better revisions and overall improvements in writing quality; and teacher and peer feedback is best seen as complementary".

Step 6: Produce the Final Copy

After the writer has finished revising the draft, the next step is begin to produce the final copy. In this step, there are two highly important aspects that the writer needs to do, they are:

1. Editing : When the writer has finished revising his draft, then he can start to edit it. In editing, the writer is recommended to edit his writing very carefully. The writer should focus on the grammar, spelling, word choice, paragraph organization, verb agreement, capitalization, and also the punctuation. Read the paper more than once. Copy it over and print the result then check it over and over.
2. Proofreading : It means that the writer should examine the final copy again. Check the corrections that the writer has made and read through the paper slowly.

5. WRITING ORGANIZATION

5.1 Parts of Paragraph

A paragraph has three main parts, they are topic sentence, supporting sentences, and concluding sentence. According to Hogue (1996: 102), "An English paragraph is like a sandwich. The topic and concluding sentences are the top and bottom pieces of bread, and the supporting sentences are the filling. The bread holds the sandwich together, and the supporting sentences are the meat and cheese." In short, Hogue (1996: 104-114) mentioned that it is a must for us to learn very detail related to those three main parts of a paragraph.

1. The Topic Sentence

Topic sentence is the most important part in a paragraph because it tells the readers what the topic of the text is. To the more particular elements in a topic sentence, there are two major points in it which are a topic and a controlling idea. The first part namely the topic; it describes what the paragraph is about. Meanwhile, the controlling idea part limits what the paragraph will explain about the topic. Usually, the topic comes first following by the controlling idea. However, the controlling idea may come first. For example:

- | | |
|--|-------------------------|
| Topic | Controlling idea |
| a. <u>Violence</u> in American society has <u>several causes</u> . | |
| Controlling idea | Topic |
| b. There are <u>several causes</u> of <u>violence</u> in American society. | |

In addition to the explanation of topic sentence, Oshima and Hogue (1997: 71-72) said that stating the topic of a topic sentence is a process on narrowing an idea from general to specific. For instance, the topic of sport is too general to write. So that the writer should find the specific terms from

sport such as individual sport, team, and water sport to specify the content. Below examples can give illustration on how to narrow the topic:

Sports water sports on a river dangerous river rafting

Family husband/wife roles at home

2. The Supporting Sentences

Supporting sentences are the middle sentences in a paragraph. The function of supporting sentences is to support the idea in the topic sentence. For example, if a writer says that apples have three characteristics that make them become most favorable fruit, they are healthy, sweet, and cheap, and then the writer should explain them in order. In addition, there are rules of arranging good supporting sentences as follows:

- a. Unity : The rule of unity means all the supporting sentences in a paragraph should explain only about one main idea. In other words, it is not allowed to explain more than one main idea in one paragraph. For example, if a paragraph tells about the description of a Bank, so the writer may not explain about any other building.
- b. Relevant/irrelevant : It means that all information provided in the supporting ideas should be related to the main idea. If they are not, it means that they are irrelevant.
For example: If the writer tells about his father's job, a sentence such as *My sister also works at a Bank* will be irrelevant because the paragraph points out about his father's job, not his sister.

3. The Concluding Sentence

A concluding sentence indicates an end of a paragraph. It is because the function of a concluding sentence is to close the explanation in a paragraph so that the readers will not expect more. Usually, there are several ways on stating the concluding sentence as follows:

- a. Reminds the readers of the main point by restating the topic sentence in different words.
All year round, a beach is the place to have fun.
In short, there is more than one way to spend our holiday.
- b. Summarizes the main points briefly
In brief, consuming apples is one way of having our body and mind fresh as well as smooth skin without spending much money.

If we want to get healthy without visiting a doctor, we may try to eat one apple every day.

- c. Makes a personal comments

I never thought I would like cats, but my cat has made me change my mind.

With this kind of presentation, I will never feel bored in Math class.

5.2 Structures of Essay

An essay is divided into three parts, they are introduction, body, and conclusion which are explained in detail as follows which proposed by Colonna and Gilbert (2006: 31):

1. Introduction

The first paragraph of an essay called the **introduction**. The introduction should be written inductively or from general to the specific points. It usually begins with a **hook**. The function of a hook is to capture the readers' attention. Soon after a hook is settled, it is followed by background information about the topic and should be in general way. For instance, the topic is about transportation, the background information that should be provided is mainly about definition, the function, the importance of transportation, and so on. Finally, the introduction must consist of **thesis statement**.

2. Body

The body of an essay may consist of several paragraphs which contained the information which can support the thesis statement. The supporting information might be retrieved from articles or books which can be consisted of statistical data, anecdotes, facts, examples, or reasons.

3. Conclusion

The last paragraph in an essay called the **conclusion**. In beginning the conclusion, the writer must start to restate the thesis statement. On the next sentences, there should be provided with the summary of main idea from each body paragraph. After that, to close the essay, the writer has to shape one sentence to unite the whole content of the essay by using a statement which contained by suggestion, prediction, or opinion.

5.3 Get Practiced with Hooks and Thesis Statements

In an essay, especially in the introduction paragraph, hook is needed because it is like a hook to catch a fish by a fisherman. It is highly important so that the readers feel that they should read the content of the essay after reading the hook made by the writer. To sum up, the hook must be interesting enough to capture the readers' attention. Based on Colonna and Gilbert's book entitled "Reason to Write: Strategies for Success in Academic Writing" (2006: 35), there are several ways in building the hook:

1. Begin with a question: In this case, the readers will be eager to respond the question.
For example: *Have you ever spent your holiday in Cactus National Park in Arizona?*
2. Begin with a famous quote or some dialogue
For example: *Never judge a book from its cover.*
3. Use descriptive language regarding with the topic
For instance: *I was pursuing my post graduate degree when Tsunami came. My days were filled with fear because of thinking my family in Aceh.*
4. Begin with clues to build the interesting side of the topic
For instance: *My mother is a very strong woman. She raised me and my two little sisters by herself with her deficiency.*

Without leaving aside the importance of the position of the hook, it is also very urgent to know what the thesis statement is. In this case, Colonna and Gilbert (2006: 35) explained that the thesis statement should consist of the content of the essay. So, when the readers read the thesis statement, they will know what the writer wants to explain in the body paragraphs. Sometimes the thesis statement also state the writer's position toward the topic, e.g. whether the writer agree or not, in what paradigm that the writer wants to bring the readers so they can understand that the writer is trying to take them to understand what he wants to say about the topic. Moreover, in a descriptive essay, the thesis statement sometimes will be stated in general or indirect way.

Are a thesis statement and a topic sentence the same terms? It is important to know that the thesis statement is the same term as the topic sentence. However, the difference is only about the position of them where the topic sentence is located at the beginning of body paragraphs while the thesis statement is sited on the last part of an introduction paragraph. Below are the examples of thesis statements:

1. *It was my father who taught me to stand up on my feet.*
2. *It is very interesting that many people like English class.*
3. *However, his attitude is a product of Western life.*

5.4 Essay Models

There are several kinds of essays which commonly known by people. According to Colonna and Gilbert (2006), there are five kinds of essays where the differences are needed to be recognised which summarized as follows:

1. Descriptive Essay

In a descriptive essay, it requires the description of the topic. For example, if the topic is about someone's characters, it means that the general content of the essay is about the description of that person in terms of mental or physical traits. In addition, there are some steps in writing a descriptive essay:

- a. Deciding the topic and try to build general understanding towards the topic

- b. Using a summary as an introduction. In this part, the students are usually asked to summarize a reading source and use it to introduce the essay.
- c. Recognizing detailed information
- d. Writing detailed examples to support the description. In this section, the writer should provide some proof in the body paragraphs so that the readers can understand more and believe the information presented.

2. Classification Essay

A Classification essay is aimed to divide several categories from one topic so that the writer is required to classify the categories to be explained on the body paragraphs. There are several steps that need to pay attention on:

- a. Decide a single principle of organization

When we classify, we should determine only one group which has one characteristic for all categories. The consequence of having more than one characteristics will result overlapping towards the categories. For instance, the topic or the group is about animals, then it can be classified based on what they eat such as *herbivore, carnivore, and omnivore*.

- b. Identifying overlap. In this case, we have to check the categories before we classify them into the body paragraphs whether the categories have the same characteristic or not. Overlap can be seen on the following example:

Films: Comedies, dramas, independent.
overlap

Hairstyles: Curly, straight, fashionable.
overlap

- c. The set of things being classified into several categories
- d. Consider the importance, significance, relevance, and value of the set of things being classified.
- e. Each category will become the topic of each body paragraph. Moreover, there should be transition words that connect the previous to the next category to be explained.

3. Cause and Effect Essay

In designing a cause and effect essay, it is very important to pay attention on the common expressions used to express cause and effect in an essay as follow:

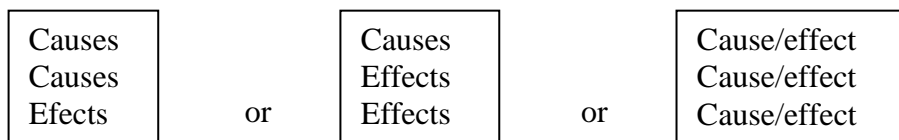
Table: The Common Expressions

Cause	Transition	Effect
a student is teased a lot at school	As a result, Consequently, Because of this,	Lack of confident
Some of teachers feel if	This is the reason for	Lack of confident

a student is teased a lot at school	This is responsible for This leads to This results in	
Effect	Transition	Cause
Someone is difficult to find jobs	Because Because of the fact that Since	Lack of life skill
The difficulty of finding a job	Is due to Is a result of Is a consequence of	Lack of life skill
Transition	Cause	Effect
Since Because	People have no skill in communication	It will be very difficult for them to find jobs

In addition, there are several steps in writing the cause and effect essay which explained as follow:

- a. On the introductory paragraph the writer should arise the problem to be explained. In this case, the writer can use a very common expression or proverb used in society such as regarding with a belief developed in society. For example, *money does not buy happiness*.
- b. On the body paragraphs, we use below alternative models as the style to write our cause and effect essay:



- c. On the concluding paragraph, the content may consist of future prospects, and reason why we believe that changing will be happened naturally.

4. Comparison and Contrast Essay

Generally, a comparison and contrast essay is regarding with explaining similarities and differences. In fact, it is not merely about try to figure out them, it is also about highlighting one aspect before noticing another aspect. Moreover, it is very important to have practice on how to build clauses of comparison, contrast, and concession.

Comparison: Similarity

just as in the same way as/that similar to like

For example:

In the same way that Metro TV always performs news most of the time, TV One also tries to present actual news everyday.

Similar to Metro TV, TV One also tries to present actual news in most of the time everyday.

Contrast: Difference

while/whereas in contrast to unlike

For example:

While other TV stations prefer to perform news and also serial of movie, Metro TV and TV One tend to explore the performance on presenting news most of the time everyday.

Unlike other TV stations, Metro TV and TV One tend to explore the performance on presenting news most of the time everyday.

Concession: Highlighting one aspect before stating another aspect

although even though though despite the fact that

For example:

Even though NET TV is a new TV station, the progress of getting almost the same rating to other TV stations should be rewarded and well appreciated.

NET TV can get almost the same rating as other TV stations despite the fact that it is a brand new TV station.

5. Argumentative Essay

An argumentative essay is aimed to identify arguments and counterarguments. In stating arguments, the writer should provide enough and strong sources in order to support the statements. In this case, the writer must make sure whether the arguments conveyed in the essay are strong or weak. It is very important to notice because the stronger arguments and sources to support the arguments, the more the readers will put their belief on the writer's point of view.

The next fundamental aspect is the ability of building counterarguments paragraph. In this paragraph, the writer is required to refute the arguments which disagree or not in line with the writer's arguments. In short, in counterarguments part, the writer tries to examine the opposing arguments which do not support the writer's point of view.

6. CONCLUSION

To produce a good writing, every writer should explore ideas, pour down our thoughts on paper or on the computer, organize our writing, writing the first draft, revise the draft, and produce the final copy. In order to have a better writing we should never stop only in one step of writing. The more particular and specific urgency in writing is how to make our writing academic. This is what the most college students face in their writing tasks such as essays and final projects which

become the requirement for them to finish their study in a university. In fact, academic writing is not as easy as the students think that they will just ask to write a passage freely. In this case, academic writing gives full description and complete guidance on how to make their writing sounds academic. So that is what the researcher tried to explained to the readers especially for students who need to shape their ability to in doing such academic writing.

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