The Style of Graduate Writing, Part One
About Me

• I’m Emily Rose Cole, the Graduate Assistant to the Academic Writing Center (coleer@mail.uc.edu)

• I’m a PhD candidate in the English and I’ve taught composition and creative writing for over seven years at the university level.

• I’m here to develop presentations through AWC and to assist you in your needs as grad students.

• Don’t hesitate to reach out!
Before we start, please quickly fill out the following attendance form (I’ll link it in chat), so we can get a sense of how many folks participated today.

I’ll link this form again at the end of the presentation for folks who join us halfway through!

Form link: https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=bC4i9cZf60iPA3PbGCA7YoXskGmaa55NuVdhoDzwiZFUN1FXNU5FNE9DR1RISkdSMDJNNzRMOVZYWi4u
In this presentation we will:

- Identify key differences between academic writing and general audience writing
- Understand how tone and clarity establish expectations in our writing
- Develop some specific strategies for clear writing
  - Use thesis statements effectively
  - Learn understand the difference between Active and Passive sentences AND when to use each.
  - Recognize and slay “zombie nouns”
What’s the difference between good graduate writing and good undergraduate writing?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Undergraduate Level Expectations</th>
<th>Graduate Level Expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clear</td>
<td>Clear, engaging, stylistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis based on points covered in class, not necessarily new ideas</td>
<td>Incorporates information from class AND proposes out new ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relies primarily on transition phrases</td>
<td>Transitions seamlessly between points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written for general audience/teacher</td>
<td>Written for a professional audience of experts in a specific field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follows prescribed structure</td>
<td>Structure determined by content and field expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adopted tone</td>
<td>Confident, articulate, and clear voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meets minimum citation requirements</td>
<td>Incorporates thorough research</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“THERE IS A MASSIVE GAP BETWEEN WHAT MOST READERS CONSIDER TO BE GOOD WRITING AND WHAT ACADEMICS TYPICALLY PRODUCE AND PUBLISH.”—HELEN SWORD
What is Tone?

- **Tone** refers to the word choice, sentence structure, and punctuation used to convey the attitude of a writer toward their audience.

- Think of tone like the written equivalent of verbal inflection:
  - In speech, one word can convey several different meanings based on how the word is said.
  - In text, tone is conveyed through written indicators such as punctuation, phrasing, word choice, and even (in some circumstances) emojis.
Assessing Tone

• Assessing tone is a skill you already intuitively possess! To get a sense of how, check out the following example:

• You receive the following text from your best friend. How is the tone different for each?
  ○ Hey
  ○ Hey.
  ○ Hey!
  ○ Hey!!!!!
  ○ Heyyyyyyyy
Unlike most types of writing designed for the public, academic writing is highly specialized. This type of writing may include:

- Field-specific jargon
- Complex sentences
- Formulas, graphs, and charts
- Field-specific citation formats (APA, MLA, etc.)
- Field-specific ways of presenting or organizing information
Formality vs. Clarity: A Balancing Act

- Informality can damage your credibility
- Informal tone can be conveyed through presentation, not just word choice
- Avoid slang
- Present the material according to guidelines outlined by your audience

- Being too formal, too complex in your language, or too reliant on jargon can impede clarity
- Remember that the goal of writing is to communicate ideas clearly
- Impress your reader with your ideas, not an unnecessarily complex style
Your thesis statement is the heart of your paper. Here’s what a good thesis statement should do:

- Summarize your main argument.
- Communicate the most important question you want to ask or answer.
- Give your reader a clear sense of where the research is going (a good thesis statement should be a “roadmap” for the rest of your paper)

Tip: When revising, look over your thesis and ask yourself whether it meets all these goals. If it doesn’t, clarify your thesis first, then revise the rest of the paper.
When researching, skim for a thesis first! This will give you a clear sense of a text’s main points.

State your thesis **early**. This helps the reader orient themselves to the text.

Sometimes a thesis can be multiple sentences, especially when the subjects discussed are highly complex.

Resist the temptation to jump right into your thesis! A good introduction provides important context to make the thesis clear.
Crafting a Thesis II

- **You** need to know what your text is trying to communicate in order to write a strong thesis!
- Your thesis can change as your paper develops.
- It’s useful to revise your thesis after a draft is complete.
- **Ask yourself:**
  - What does my **audience** need to know?
  - What big **question** am I asking or answering?
  - What am I **contributing** to my field?
Clarity of Style
Three Writing Habits That Impede Clarity

- Needlessly complex sentence structures
- Nominalizations ("zombie nouns")
- Passive Voice
What Makes a Sentence Complex?

- An **independent** clause can stand on its own and create a full thought. This kind of clause contains (at least) a subject and a verb:
  - It pours. (Independent clause)

- A **dependent** clause needs to be attached to an independent clause to create clear meaning:
  - When it rains (dependent clause)

- In grammatical terms, a complex sentence is any sentence that consists of at least one independent clause and at least one dependent clause:
  - When it rains, it pours. (Complex sentence)
Simple Sentences Are An Asset

• Academic writing demands some jargon and sentence complexity, but:

  o Sentence variety is also important!
  o Too many complex sentences in a row create density in a text.
  o Sentence complexity can obscure meaning.
  o Reading too many complex sentences at once can have a lulling effect on the reader.

When revising, pay attention to how many complex sentences you’re using in a row. Breaking some of them up into simple sentences will make your writing clearer.
Sentence Simplicity

Don’t overlook the simple sentence!

A variety of sentence structures keep your writing lively and clear.

Remember, formality and clarity should be in balance.

Complex sentence

“Our findings suggest a practice-induced tradeoff in auditory processing rather than a general improvement that benefits perceptual dimensions relevant for survival at the expense of those that are less relevant.”

Broken into smaller sentences:

“Our findings suggest that practice does not lead to a general improvement in auditory processing. Instead, practice leads to a bias that speeds up processing in some dimensions (e.g., pitch) only at the cost of delaying processing in other dimensions (e.g., loudness).”
Nominalizations occur when a writer adds a suffix to verb, adjective, or adverb to make a new (often much more complex) noun. Writer Helen Sword calls these “zombie nouns”:

“I call them ‘zombie nouns’ because they cannibalize active verbs, suck the lifeblood from adjectives and substitute abstract entities for human beings.”

consider → consideration, contribute → contribution, tend → tendency
Zombie Nouns in Action

Nominalization Examples:
The marine biologists engaged in an argument about the chemical properties of jellyfish.
The students handled the jellyfish with great carelessness.

Nominalizations Replaced with Verbs or Adjectives:
The marine biologists argued about the chemical properties of jellyfish.
The students handled the jellyfish carelessly.

Slay your zombie nouns by replacing them with action verbs!
Passive voice emphasizes the objects in the sentence instead of the actors in the sentence:

**The store is where he ran.**

Active voice emphasizes the actors in the sentence:

**He ran to the store.**
How Passive Voice Can Hinder You

- Passive voice can make your sentences wordier:
  - Why was the road crossed by the chicken? (passive)
  - Why did the chicken cross the road? (active)

- It can obscure who is acting and who is receiving an action in a sentence:
  - The vase was broken. (Passive – who broke it?)
  - My sister broke the vase. (Active, actors are clear)
How to Use Passive Voice Effectively

- Despite these drawbacks, passive voice can be a useful tool when applied appropriately. Passive voice can:
  - Communicate that the “doer” of an action is less important than the results of the action:
    - The honeybees were kept in a humidified chamber at room temperature.
  - Shift the reader’s focus toward the topic you’re discussing:
    - Green plants produce carbohydrates in the presence of light and chlorophyll. (Active voice, emphasizes the action of the plants)
    - Carbohydrates are produced by green plants in the presence of light and chlorophyll. (Passive voice emphasizes the production of the carbohydrates.)
Attendance... Again!

- If you haven’t already, please remember to fill out the attendance form before signing out!
- Form link: https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=bC4i9cZf6oiPA3PbGCA7YoXskGmaa55NuVdhoDzwiZFUN1FXNU5FNE9DR1RISkdSMDJNNzRMOVZYWi4u
Conclusion

- Academic writing is a balance of formality and clarity.
- A good thesis summarizes your main argument, communicates what you’re adding to the field, and gives your reader a roadmap for your paper.
- Simple sentences keep your writing varied.
- Nominalizations, or “zombie nouns” can inhibit clarity. Slay them by replacing them with action verbs or adjectives (get rid of the suffix!)
- Passive voice is useful in some circumstances (like science writing) but can make writing wordy and unclear.
The Academic Writing Center

- The Academic Writing Center is here to help you! We have tutors available, helpful handouts, other resources available from our website, Visit our website at uc.edu.awc. All our resources are online this year.

- Individual tutoring isn’t just for undergrads! There are graduate tutors who are excited to help you work through any of your writing assignments. Sign up using the “schedule an appointment” tab on the website.

- We thank you for attending our first AWC Graduate Workshop. The schedule for the seven other workshops this semester is posted at: www.uc.edu/learningcommons/writingcenter/grad.html


