

Table of Elements for Academic Writing

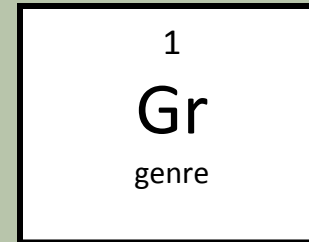
A Slide Show by
Van E. Hillard
Davidson College

Table of Elements for Academic Writing

| | | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 Gr genre | 2 Ma materials | 3 An analysis | 4 Re response |
| 5 Po position | 6 Ev evidence | 7 Rg reasoning | 8 Kw key words |
| 9 Md metadiscourse | 10 St style | 11 Qu quotation | 12 Ci citation |
| 13 Dd document design | | | |

a word about the table*

The table of elements is intended to remind its users of several of the key features of academic writing. It is a contrivance for representing these dimensions succinctly. It is neither exhaustive nor fully synthetic. In fact, writers who use the table may choose to include other dimensions pertinent to the writing task at hand, or to the particular disciplinary sites in which they are operating.



genre

Genre refers to a particular set of rhetorical and stylistic preferences that combine to create a document whose form readers will recognize as connected to a tradition of reporting, inquiry, analysis, or argument (essay, lab report, position paper, literature review, letter, grant proposal, etc.) Writers determine which genre is best suited for the rhetorical situation at hand.

2

Ma

materials

materials

Materials are the documents, texts, and other matter the writer draws upon, refers to, analyzes, or interprets before she begins her writing. These may include statistical data, scholarly literature, fictional or non-fictional narratives, archival documents, poems, visual or material objects, interviews, etc.

3

An
analysis

analysis

Analysis refers to the writer's scrutiny of the material in order to discern its special substance, structure, and approach to the subject. Analysis seeks to grasp the material "on its own terms." The analyst pays attention to how the material is formed and organized, is able to describe and differentiate between its various parts, and notes its similarity to and differences from other materials.

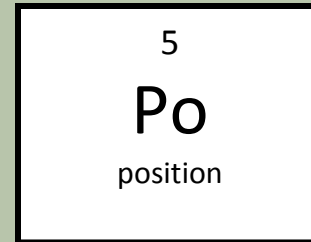
4

Re

response

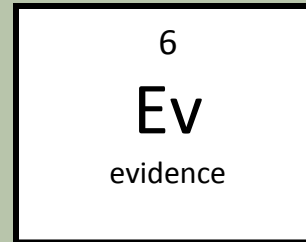
response

Response is the interpretive or evaluative action that the writer performs on the material at hand. Modes of response are driven by the writer's own interests, modes of attention, and commitments. Responses may include questioning, appraisal of strengths and/or limits, extension, reformulation, or counterargument.



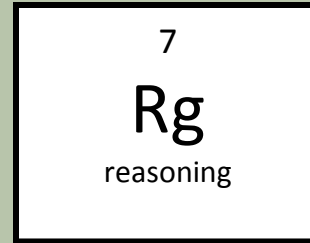
position

Position refers to the stance or set of assertions the writer chooses to advance based on her response to the materials. Position is akin to thesis, central claim, or guiding idea. Typically, it is formulated as a contestable assertion with which other interested persons may, for alternate reasons, choose to disagree.



evidence

Evidence refers to the specific examples, illustrations, and exemplifications selected by the writer to support or clarify her position. Evidence is found in statistical, material, or textual form. Evidence is the ground of detail in which one's position is anchored.



reasoning

Reasoning is the method a writer uses to connect claims with evidence. Reasoning typically takes the form of various appeals: logical, ethical, emotional—alone or in combination. When a writer highlights the assumptions upon which her conclusions rest, or shows how one phenomenon is caused by another, or otherwise demonstrates the relationship among ideas, she is articulating how her position is supported by reasons.

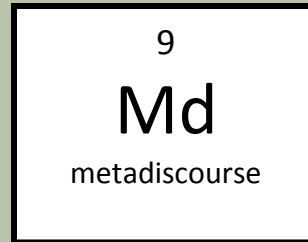
8

Kt

key terms

key terms

Key terms are those words and phrases that carry conceptual weight, call for differing definitions across various contexts, or warrant the writer's stipulated definition. Key terms also may include what are called commonplaces—terms and phrases regularly employed to represent socially-sanctioned ideas and ideologies (i.e., “family values,” “tax and spend liberal,” “partial birth abortion,” “land of the free; home of the brave,” etc.).



metadiscourse

Metadiscourse (literally *writing about the writing*) refers to the ways in which a writer attends to the needs and expectations of readers who are processing the text. Metadiscourse includes structural signals (“Finally, let us turn to a crucial distinction...,” “The first notion to consider is...,”) clarifications of purpose (“I don’t mean to suggest that...,” “My intention is to unsettle such common assumptions”) and writer-reader negotiations (“If, for the moment, we can agree that...,” “Before you reject this assertion, consider this:...”) Titles are also a form of metadiscourse, since they comment upon and set expectations for the document that follows.

10

St

style

style

Style refers to the strategies writers use to fashion their discourse for particular conventional, rhetorical, ethical, or aesthetic effects. Stylistic adjustments often follow interests in clarity, readability, aesthetics, or linguistic experimentation. Stylistic strategies inform the way in which a writer constructs sentences, modulates linguistic register (from colloquial to formal), adjusts distance by the use of grammatical person, and sets tone.

11

Qu

quotation

quotation

Quotation refers to the ways in which a writer makes use of the work of others to serve her own agenda, either through direct appropriation of others' terms, phrases, and passages (transplanted from one text into another), or through summary and paraphrase. The use and value of quotation differs across disciplinary traditions. Quotation involves *intertextuality*, the weaving together of others' remarks with those of the writer to create a virtual "conversation" among thinkers.

12

Ci

citation

citation

Citation refers to the professional conventions for making ethical use of the work of others in the context of one's own writing: footnotes, parenthetical references, lists of works cited, etc. The conventions for citational style differ across disciplines.

13

Dd

document design

document design

Document design involves preparing the writing for distribution to readers. Such design includes proofreading and correction, selecting typeface, inserting section headings, determining the appearance of visual materials (graphs, photographs, etc.), and choice of media (print or electronic). Document design is adjusted to the needs of readability and publicity.