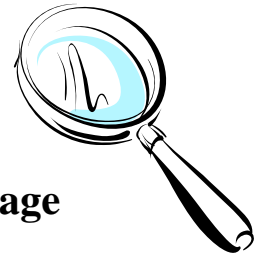


# LET'S TAKE A CLOSE LOOK AT U.S. ACADEMIC WRITING



## Two Main Components: Structure and Language

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### Structure

#### Linearity

- Think about guiding your reader efficiently from one “place” to another
- Organize thoughts and ideas *before* beginning to write
- Use an outline or some type of diagram to assist with organizing

#### Obvious Thesis

- A thesis is what you are claiming or the main point you’re making in your paper
- It occurs near the beginning, typically in the introductory section
- All claims that follow the thesis must connect to it by supporting or clarifying it

#### Flow

- This is the verbal connection of your ideas to each other throughout your paper
  - It applies at both the level of sentences and paragraphs
  - One tool for achieving “good flow” is using transitional words and phrases between sentences and paragraphs
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### Language

#### Clearly Written Thesis

- Usually one to three sentences long
- Makes a *specific* claim
- Examples:
  - Not very specific: "North Carolina apple farmers are responding to the current economic situation by finding new ways to generate income."
  - Better: "With hurricanes causing significant crop damage over the past decade, North Carolina apple farmers are increasingly relying on agro-tourism to generate supplemental income."

#### Transition Words and Phrases

- Use "this" + a linking word or phrase that refers to a previous sentence or paragraph. For example: "North Carolina apple farmers are increasingly relying on agro-tourism to provide supplemental income. *This new type of tourism* has proven to be more profitable than initially expected."
- There are specific words and phrases that indicate a relationship between sentences and paragraphs
- Examples:
  - "in the same way" for similarity
  - "however" for exception or contrast
  - "first," "next," "finally" for order or sequence
  - "currently" to indicate time
  - "in fact" for emphasis

## Direct and Concise Language

- Evaluate your sentences for length and complexity. Could your readers be confused by overly long and complicated sentences?
- Use words that fit your audience and that you can use comfortably
- Explain your points fully, but don't be redundant

## Appropriate Language

- Formal versus informal
  - Who is your audience? How well do you know them? Are you writing in a formal or informal setting?
  - Know your purpose: To impress your audience? To display your knowledge to your audience? To persuade your audience? To make your audience feel comfortable?
- Jargon
  - This is vocabulary that is used by people with a common knowledge set, for example, physicians, engineers, basketball fans, etc.
  - Know your audience! Will they understand specialized vocabulary? Do you need to demonstrate your specialized knowledge by using appropriate terminology?
- Idioms and slang
  - Can you use idioms correctly?
  - Are they formal or informal idioms?
  - Are you writing for native or non-native speakers?
  - Slang is usually inappropriate for academic writing
- Discriminatory language
  - Don't use:
    - Language that stereotypes a group of people  
("Mary is 13 years old, so she must be more interested in new clothes than in school.")
    - Sexist language  
("Man's greatest invention is the automobile." "My neighbor is a *woman doctor*.")
    - Masculine pronouns (he, his, him) exclusively for the generic singular  
("The average U.S. citizen likes to drive *his* car.")

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## Need a Bit More Help?

### References for the above information:

Duke University Writing Studio (<http://uwp.aas.duke.edu/wstudio/resources/index.html>)

"Developing a Central Claim":

[http://uwp.aas.duke.edu/wstudio/resources/documents/developing\\_claim\\_001.pdf](http://uwp.aas.duke.edu/wstudio/resources/documents/developing_claim_001.pdf)

Online Writing Lab (OWL) at Purdue University (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>)

"Basic Tips for ESL Students: Writing for an American Academic Audience":

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/print/esl/eslaudience.html>

"Using Appropriate Language": <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/608/01>

The Writing Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

(<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/>)

"Transitions": <http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/transitions.html>

### Books on academic writing:

*They Say / I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing* by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein

*Academic Writing for Graduate Students: Essential Tasks and Skills* by John M. Swales and Christine B. Feak

### Books on English language usage:

*Practical English Usage* by Michael Swan

*Essential American Idioms* by Richard A. Spears