

# Academic Writing Checklist

---

**Use this checklist to structure your writing process and to plan for your appointment at the Writing Center.**

**Before you book** a consultation session at the writing center please make sure

- 1) that you have reached at least point 2.c) in the pre-writing stage and
- 2) that you are familiar with the terminology introduced in Table 1 on page 5.

	Check if complete
1. My paper contains all the <b>necessary sections</b> (Abstract, Introduction, Methods, ...)	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I have introduced a <b>research gap</b> / formulated a clear <b>research question</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I have a clear <b>thesis statement</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. My writing is <b>cohesive</b> (individual paragraphs are structured logically: <u>topic sentence</u> followed by <u>supporting sentences</u> )	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. My writing is <b>coherent</b> (there is a <u>clear link</u> between sections and paragraphs and my argument develops logically)	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I have added <b>citations</b> whenever I refer to someone else's work (paraphrase, quote, summary)	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. All the works I have cited are listed in my <b>references</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. I have formatted my paper according to the <b>journal style guide</b> (headings, table captions, citations, references, ...)	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. I have <b>copy-edited</b> and <b>proofread</b> my writing (grammar, spelling, punctuation, sentence fragments, ...)	<input type="checkbox"/>

**The writing center does not offer copy-editing or proofreading of your writing!**

## **The Writing Process**

Writing a paper consists of different stages that are all important in the writing process. Make sure to allow enough time for each stage, especially the post-writing stage. If you have to meet a deadline for submission, start the writing process as early as you can!

### **1) Before you start writing think about**

- a) Your aim
  - x What is the main goal of your paper? What do you want to say? Why is your research important?
- b) Your audience
  - x Who are your readers? Your instructors and supervisors, your peers or a more general academic audience?
- c) Tone and style of writing
  - x What is the style in other papers in your field? Use your reading as a guide to find out what tone authors in your field adopt.

### **2) Pre-writing Stage**

#### **a) Reading**

- i) Find and read literature that is relevant to your topic.
- ii) Take careful notes of important points of a text. You can paraphrase, summarize or use direct quotes.

**Always add citations to your notes so that you can identify where the information comes from!**

- iii) Organise your notes
  - x See if some of your notes share the same topic or main idea. If they do, group them together.

#### **b) Topic**

- i) Based on your notes, decide what topic you want to write about.
- ii) Consider:
  - x Amount of previous research available
  - x Have you found research gaps?
  - x What interests you?
- iii) Try to formulate a **thesis statement** (talk to your supervisor/instructor if you need help to narrow down your topic) based on the research gap you have identified.

#### **c) Outline**

- i) Organize your thoughts, ideas about your topic.
- ii) Find connections between thoughts, ideas, arguments and evidence.  
Write these connections down in a format that works for you, for example:
  - x Mind-map
  - x A list of headings and sub-headings
  - x Flow-diagram

**Now is a good time to come for your first session at the writing center!  
Bring your checklist with you.**

### 3) Writing Stage

This is the stage when you actually write your paper. Follow the outline you have prepared and discuss and analyze your data/ideas in a logical manner. With regard to the overall layout, many academic papers follow the **IMRaD structure**:

Abstract	The abstract provides the reader with a <b>preview</b> to your paper. Mention what is currently known about the topic (short background, why is it important), what your study is about (research gap), what you have done (some information on methods), your main findings (results), and the implications of your results (what does it add to the field)
<b>Introduction</b>	Describe the topic you will address and provide some background on it (previous studies). Discuss the research gap/question that you focus on in your paper. Point out the relevance of your research. (Some introductions end with an overview of the individual sections that follow.)
<b>Methodology</b>	Describe your research methods. Explain clearly and concisely what you have done in your research. If you have used different methods/conducted different experiments, discuss them in separate sections. Make sure to provide enough details on your methods and data. For example, if you have conducted interviews mention how many people you interviewed, their age, their gender, any relevant factors that may have affected your results. You do not have to mention what your research means in this section.
<b>Results</b>	Present your results here. You can use Tables, Figures, Graphs, etc. to visualize your results. Remember that you need to discuss the information given in these visualizations. Draw the readers' attention to what is important and tell them how you interpret the data.
<b>Discussion</b>	The <b>most important section</b> of your paper. Explain what your results mean and mention how they relate to your research question. Summarize your key findings and compare them with results from previous studies. Offer explanations for why your results are similar/different to previous studies. Do not forget to mention the strengths and the limitations of your study, as this increases credibility. You can also point to research gaps that still need to be addressed.
Conclusion	The conclusion is where you can consolidate your major findings, discuss your contribution to the field and suggest further research avenues.
References	List all the resources you have cited in your text in the references section. Do not include anything that you did not cite in the text.

**NOTE:** Always consult journal guidelines (course requirements) to find out how to structure your paper. In some fields you will have to write a separate literature review, combine results and discussion, or have a more detailed conclusion.

The writing process is challenging for all authors.

- x Take your time to write down **all the relevant information** on your research in a clear and logical manner. From time to time, check your writing to judge if it says what you mean.
- x Make sure that the information you provide relates to your **thesis statement** and that individual paragraphs support the statement and elaborate on it.
- x Use **your own words** when referring to other people's work. You can **paraphrase, summarize and quote**.
- x Some sections are easier to write than others. To get you writing, start with your methods, continue with the results and discussion. Write the abstract, introduction and conclusion last.

**Now is a good time to come to the writing center with an early draft of your writing—it is okay to only bring individual paragraphs/sections to the session!  
Take your checklist with you.**

## 4) Post-writing Stage

Once you feel that you have finished writing up your research, take a step back and take a break from your writing. This can be a couple of days, a week or even a little longer if you have time.

When you decide to go back to your text, be prepared to make revisions; these can be minor, but more often than not they tend to be major.

### a) Revision

**Read your paper again and check:**

- i) Is your paper organized logically?
- ii) Do you need to rearrange sections, paragraphs, sentences, words?
- iii) Do you need to add or delete information?
- iv) Are there any unclear sentences or expressions?
- v) Does your writing flow?

**The revision stage allows you to make your writing better.**

### b) Editing and proofreading

**This is usually the final step before submitting your paper.**

- i) Check that all your sentences are complete
- ii) Check your spelling, grammar, punctuation, etc.
- iii) Make sure that you have used the style formatting specor grmed t

There is some specific language/terminology that we will use during the consultation session, see Table 1. Try to write down an example word/phrase/sentence for the individual terms. If you are not familiarly with this language, consult the sources in the Academic Writing Directory (Writing Center Website).

**Table 1: Terminology<sup>1</sup>**

Term	Your example
subject	
verb	
object	
an auxiliary very	
a transitive verb	
an intransitive verb	
a phrasal verb	
an adverb	
an uncountable noun	
a clause	
a phrase	
active voice	
passive voice	

Match the following types of clause (1–4) with the right definition (a–d):

1. <b>main</b> clause	a. clause joined to another by 'and', 'but', or 'or'
2. <b>relative</b> clause	b. clause that can stand independently
3. <b>co-ordinate</b> clause	c. clause beginning with 'who', 'which', etc.
4. <b>subordinate</b> clause	d. clause that is dependent on another clause

<sup>1</sup> Terminology and clause exercise adopted from Lynch, Tony, and Kenneth Anderson, revised and updated by Anthony Elloway 2013: 2, 3.