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Introduction

According to the *Educational Program for the English Specialty* issued by the Ministry of Education, a university student majoring in English must write an academic research paper in the last semester before graduation as partial requirement for the degree of B. A. This pre-graduation paper writing is the last and most important of the tasks that English majors are required to undertake and fulfill during their undergraduate studies. It is also a key-link in the training of foreign language professionals for our country. As a test and reinforcement of the students' comprehensive quality including their scope of knowledge, their language competence and their ability to do academic research work and make creations and innovations, the graduation paper can also serve as a good yardstick to the educational and academic level of the English faculty of a university.

A thorough understanding of the task given is a prerequisite for its accomplishment, as is always the case in doing anything. So the first lecture introduces the students to the basic concepts of academic research paper writing.

1.1 **Academic/Scientific research**

What is research, in the first place?

“Research”, which originates in a Greek word in the sense of “search again”, means investigating thoroughly. To be more exact, it means searching where others have searched in the hope of finding what others have not found, namely, something new.

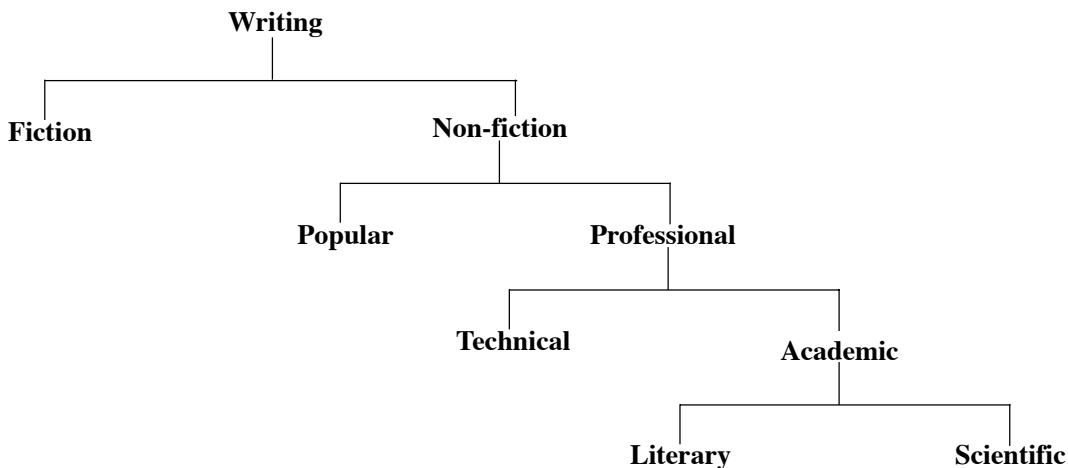
What on earth to search for?

This “something” as mentioned above does not mean anything that comes along. It refers to some academic or scientific matter that is of significance, something

that can promote scholarship, science and technology, productivity and human growth, for the betterment of the well-being of mankind. In what is said above lies the true worth and value of academic or scientific research, which was pinpointed by our late Party and government leader Mr Deng Xiaoping who said, “Science and technology is the first and foremost productive force of human society.” Therefore, academic or scientific research may be rightly understood as the human activity for the promotion of scholarship, science and eco-social development, and it is undoubtedly a glorious task undertaken by university academics as well as scientists and scientific personnel of the whole society.

1.2 Writing

Any university student is acquainted with the basic ideas of writing. The English majors should know more about it, especially after taking the course of “Writing in English” in the previous semester(s). In order to do a better job in their research and research paper writing, they may find it necessary to obtain a further knowledge of writing from a chart below representing a semantic field, which is provided by Harlen Seyfer (3).



The meanings of these kinds of writings and their relationships are as follows:

Fiction refers to creative writings based on imagination such as full-length novels, novellas, short stories, etc.

Non-fiction is not creative, referring to whatever writings that are based on facts, such as histories, biographies or autobiographies, news reports, statistic surveys, feasibility studies, memoirs, etc.

Popular writing is what is written for entertainment, such as magazine articles, captions, etc.

Professional writing is what is written for work-related purposes.

Technical writing is generally application-oriented or pragmatic, dealing with established information, such as users' manuals, instructions, status reports, sales literature for technical products, technical memos, etc.

Academic writing is theoretical, hopefully breaking new grounds in a certain academic area.

Literary writing includes the classics and literary criticisms or analyses of literary works.

Scientific writing treats of problems or issues concerning science and technology.

From the explanations above, we learn what the students are expected to do in their assigned undertaking—Academic Writing.

1.3 **Academic papers**

Research work entails paper writing, because new ideas the researcher develops need to be disseminated and new findings the researcher makes need to be presented or published for examination or application, generally in the form of papers.

An academic paper is a sort of report describing some original research a researcher has done or has been doing. It is usually a **formal, substantial and well-documented** paper that explores, discusses or analyzes some factual or theoretical questions. It is formal because it is written in standard language and in formal style devoid of contractions, ellipses, slangy words, vulgarisms, etc. It is substantial because it deals with academically important and serious issues and is of substance and length. It is well-documented because it rigidly follows the rules of citation and documentation with all borrowed ideas or facts fully acknowledged in the notes and bibliography.

The graduation paper is a special form of academic paper characterized by being **scholarly, scientific and original** to the greatest extent possible. The paper is scholarly because it is more or less theoretical and concerned with academic matters. In writing such a paper, it is important to make sure that the subject under discussion or investigation and the conclusion to be drawn are academically significant, and that the language to be used is standard and appropriate. The paper is scientific because the research is based on scientific theories and objective data, and the problem is approached with a scientific attitude and methodology. The conclusion is backed up by reliable evidence, the analysis or exposition is logically sound, and the writing conventions and paper format are strictly followed. It is original because it uses a new perspective or method, develops new arguments or conclusions, or even makes a breakthrough in a certain field.

The graduation paper is to be written in 3,000 to 5,000 English words, and to be submitted to the academic review committee for assessment and approval, as a requirement for the degree of B. A. in English.

1.4 **Purposes of the book**

Undertaking a task without a good knowledge of its purpose is like a blind man at a loss about the direction he is to follow and the destination he aims to reach. So this book, right in its **Introduction**, makes clear its purposes, which are:

to give the students some basic ideas of academic research—its nature, value and significance, essential features, techniques and methods, etc.;

to cultivate in the students a scientific attitude, a rigorous study style, a creative mind, and a great courage to explore unknown academic areas;

to make the students capable of discovering or putting forward and solving problems that exist and/or emerge in the academic or scientific fields;

to teach the students about scholarship, such as how to find subjects to investigate, how to collect and evaluate source materials, how to develop their own ideas and organize them into a coherent whole, etc., and acquaint them with the writing conventions and paper format, together with other technicalities.

to enable them to learn more about the academic circle and the society as a whole by wading through all sorts of reference materials originating in academic and social studies; and

to improve their language competence and comprehensive ability, and even their personality so that they are better equipped for tasks, academic or non-academic, that lie ahead.

In short, this book aims to help prepare the students as foreign language professionals for fierce competition and great challenges they are expected to face and take on after graduation from the university.

1.5 **Structure of the book**

This book consists of ten units:

Unit 1 is an introduction to the book as a whole.

Unit 2 gives an overview of academic paper writing, dealing with component parts of a paper, basic steps of writing such a paper, and procedures and requirements related to it.

Units 3 and 4 treat of how to choose subjects and topics for research and research paper writing. In this connection, it is most important to find the thesis for the paper as is illustrated in Unit 3. In order to make sure that the topic chosen and the thesis discovered are feasible and appropriate, each student is supposed to make his thesis proposal to his adviser or review committee to examine and approve of. So how to make a thesis proposal is also discussed as in Unit 4.

Unit 5 discusses collection and evaluation of source materials, which is necessitated

by all research and research paper writing. It involves the correct use of the library, the preliminary reading and efficient evaluation of the sources so as to focus on the materials that are most useful and relevant to the topic in hand.

Unit 6 is about intensive reading of the chosen materials and careful note-taking in reading for the purpose of gathering viewpoints or data from sources to be used in developing the arguments of the paper to be written. Mechanics are given in this unit for the students to learn.

These units (3—6) are concerned with preparations for paper writing, which serve as a key to success.

Unit 7 is on the drafting, revising and finalizing of the paper, which as a whole involves, apart from basic writing skills as discussed in the previous course “Writing in English”, forms of in-text citations, and technicalities for weaving the source materials into the text.

Unit 8 illustrates with examples the methods and mechanics of documentation: the making of notes and bibliography attached to the paper, which, together with its formal style and considerable substance, distinguishes academic writing from ordinary writing.

Unit 9 deals with the writing of some supplementary documents to the paper such as acknowledgements, abstracts, annotated bibliography, etc. required in higher level research paper writing.

Unit 10 presents the abbreviations and symbols most commonly used in academic research paper writing.

To give the students more practice to enable them to do things correctly in each step, some exercises are prepared for each unit.

At the end of the book are attached two appendixes:

- 1) Keys to some of the exercises at the end of each unit.
- 2) Sample papers involving the four basic areas of language, literature, culture and translation.

Exercises

1. Answer the following questions:
 - 1) What is your understanding of academic/scientific research?
 - 2) What are the main features of an academic paper?
 - 3) How do you think you can make your research and research paper writing successful?
 - 4) What do you expect to learn from this course?
2. Go over the book roughly and get familiar with its structure and content.

2

Overview of Academic Paper Writing

A bird's-eye view reveals the basics that the students need to get familiar with before making a start.

2.1 *Component parts of an academic paper*

- 1) Introduction, which presents the background of the research and the issue to be dealt with;
- 2) Materials and methods used in the research;
- 3) Facts and figures in the analysis, pros and cons in the argumentation or points of view in the exposition;
- 4) Research results or findings; and
- 5) Discussion and conclusion.

Each of these parts is important in itself, yet they do not call for equal attention or equal treatment in the paper. You may elaborate upon some of them more than the others.

2.2 *Steps of paper writing*

Paper writing usually follows seven steps, which are:

- 1) Topic selection;
- 2) Thesis proposal;
- 3) Data collection and evaluation;

- 4) Thesis formulation;
- 5) Organization of ideas;
- 6) Writing and revising of the paper;
- 7) Finalizing of the paper.

The first four of these steps constitute the main preparatory stages (as discussed in Units 3—6). Each step is of importance and contributes to the success of the paper writing. Admittedly, good paper writing is evolutionary, yet it does not always rigidly follow these steps, for research and research paper writing are more often than not a recursive and intermittent process, replete with starts and stops, setbacks and reverses, even dead ends and other interruptive factors, especially in the preparatory stages. That is why we regard many things in the beginning stages as tentative, preliminary, provisional or working, for example, a tentative topic, a preliminary thesis statement, a working bibliography, etc. It is only after constant efforts, repeated modifications and alterations that you come to a satisfactory end and get everything finalized.

2.3 Requirements

While working along, you should take note of the following:

- 1) Be clear about your aims and intention—what to investigate or research into, what to write about, what type of paper to write: analytical, expository, or argumentative, or a blend of them.
- 2) Choose a good topic. The topic, whether suggested by your tutor or adviser, or picked out by yourself, must be appropriate in every sense. The initiative for the topic selection should always be in your hands, for it is you, not anybody else, who must tackle the research and research paper writing.
- 3) Make penetrating research or investigation by doing extensive and intensive reading as called for by circumstances.
- 4) Take careful notes while reading.
- 5) Plan the paper with great care and draw a good outline with a proper thesis statement at the head.
- 6) Follow the writing conventions and paper format strictly.
- 7) Attach meticulously and correctly made notes and bibliography to the end of the paper.
- 8) Guard against plagiarism.

In doing all this, you should be good at:

- 1) Narrowing your focus on an issue (only one of the issues) to an appropriate topic that addresses the problem to a certain audience or group of readers;
- 2) Locating and evaluating source materials;
- 3) Taking notes of important and relevant information or points of view in your reading;

- 4) Sorting out useful materials you have collected and developing your ideas in contrast to others;
- 5) Defending your position with the weight of your arguments and the strength of the evidence you have gathered from the sources;
- 6) Organizing your thoughts for the writing of the paper with unity, coherence, clarity and accuracy; and
- 7) Documenting properly the sources you have made use of.

In short, as Sheridan Baker (246) says, a research paper is a “threefold elaboration”: presentation of your arguments, citation of facts or viewpoints from others as part of your arguments, and making of notes and bibliography.

The greatest value of a research paper lies in its discovery of something new.

In doing research, you are mostly dealing with some known facts and other people’s ideas. The research process is one in which you move from known information and ideas to new ideas. You generally begin by inquiring into what is known to people on a certain subject; then by making comparisons or contrasts and passing judgment, you perceive loopholes, inaccuracies, errors or fallacies; finally by analyzing the correct and the incorrect, you draw conclusions of your own and develop some new ideas or views on the topic under discussion. New ideas and views need expositions and assertions; assertions come after judgments and conclusions; and conclusions are supported by evidence and reasoning. So while engaged in research work, you are locked in the realm of values, where everybody is in pursuit of truth but in doubt about what is true and where it lies. To approach the truth, your best starting point is some controversy in the academic field, where you can make comparisons and contrasts of different viewpoints and hopefully discover what is right and what is wrong. Doing research and writing a research paper are, so to speak, to sift opinions and develop something new and original. The great scientist and mathematician Isaac Newton said that he had seen farther than others just because he stood on the shoulders of giants—his predecessors in scientific research. Every research result contributes to scholarship and science. Every researcher is making contributions to the treasure house of human knowledge and civilization, thus also offering his shoulders for others to stand on. His contributions are rightfully acknowledged and protected by law. So a key point that deserves your great attention is that you should acknowledge all the resources you have made use of in your research and avoid copycatting or blundering into plagiarism in your paper writing.

Exercises

1. Discuss the following topics:
 - 1) Component Parts of a Research Paper and Their Variations
 - 2) General Steps to Follow in Paper Writing
 - 3) Difficulties in Living up to the Requirements of Paper Writing
2. Write a composition on “My Understanding of Academic Research and Research Paper Writing” and present it orally in class.