

Unit

1

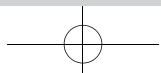
Academic Paper Writing: General Description

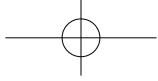
In the academic world, there is a popular phrase: “publish or perish.” Academics, therefore, always work hard to keep themselves academically alive through publications, especially through their academic paper publication. As a general description of academic paper writing, this unit will deal with the types of academic papers, the ways of preparing academic papers, the style of academic writing, the general structure of an academic paper, etc.

Unit Objectives

After completing this unit, you should be able to:

- 1 Understand different types of academic papers
- 2 Obtain ways of preparing academic papers
- 3 Identify the style of academic writing
- 4 Understand the general structure of an academic paper





Types of Academic Papers

Generally speaking, an academic paper is a formal piece of writing in which academics present their views and research findings on a chosen topic. It is also known as an “academic report,” “research paper,” “course paper,” “thesis,” “dissertation,” etc. in different settings. Whatever a paper may be categorized or labeled, the task of the writer may, in most cases, be the same: to do research on a particular topic, gather information on it, critically examine the issue(s), and report the findings of the research.

The following are four types of academic papers: academic report, research paper, course paper, and thesis / dissertation.

Academic Report

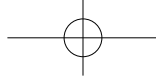
An academic report is an academic work made with the specific intention of relaying information or recounting certain events in a widely presentable form. It is often used to display the result of an experiment, investigation, or inquiry. The writer may not give his or her own opinion on the issue, nor evaluate the findings, but merely presents them in a sensible sequence. One of the most common structures for presenting academic reports is IMRAD: Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion. This structure is standard for the genre because it mirrors the principle of scientific research.

Research Paper

A research paper (also called “scholarly paper”), which reports empirical or theoretical work within an academic field, is usually published in academic journals and contains original research results or reviews existing studies.

A research paper can be intelligent, well-informed, and original in its conclusions. For example, a theoretical study draws its material from many sources. Its aim is to assemble facts and ideas and by studying them to draw new conclusions or interpretations, or to present the material in light of a new interest.

A complete research paper is usually composed of the following parts: Title, Author, Affiliation (所属机构), Abstract, Keywords, Introduction, Theoretical Analysis and / or Experimental Description, Results and Discussion, Conclusion, Acknowledgments, References, etc. A research paper usually deals with a relatively specific topic and a comparatively narrow subject.



Course Paper

Different from the academic report and research paper, a course paper is usually written by undergraduate or postgraduate students. A course paper mainly refers to the paper written either during a specific course, or at the end of a semester. Therefore, the contents of the paper usually should be in line with the course requirements and be decided under the instruction of the course instructor.

Thesis / Dissertation

A thesis / dissertation is usually a paper submitted in support of a candidate for a degree or academic qualification, presenting the writer's research and findings.

A thesis / dissertation takes a definite stand on an issue. It usually presents a proposition or point of view that the writer is willing to argue against or defend. Writing a thesis / dissertation requires the writer to exercise judgment, evaluate evidence, and construct a logical argument.

In general, included in a thesis / dissertation are such sections as Acknowledgments, Abstract, Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, Data Collection and Data Analysis, Findings and Conclusions, Suggestions for Future Work, etc. As is often required, a thesis for the master's degree should contain something new, while a dissertation for the doctoral degree should be something original and creative, and should substantially contribute to the existing knowledge in the field. After the thesis / dissertation is defended, the abstract and / or full text is often included in research databases and can be accessed by other researchers.

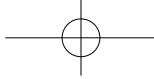
The thesis / dissertation should be independently completed, under the supervisor's guidance, reflecting the candidate's own research work.

Exercises and Practice

1 Work in pairs and discuss the following questions.

- 1) What are the similarities and differences between the different types of academic papers?
- 2) What do you find most challenging when you write academic papers?

2 Find an example for each type of academic papers and check if there are any features that are not covered in this section.



General Ways of Preparing Academic Papers

In order to write and publish an academic paper, the writer has to spend months or even years working on it. And in terms of preparation for an academic paper, there are usually seven steps to be taken for its final completion and submission.

Step One: Searching for Good and Original Ideas

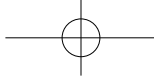
Academic papers are different from ordinary compositions in that they have to be highly specific in their topics and have practical, scientific, or economic value. Therefore, the whole process of academic paper writing should follow the general rule: coming from practice and going back to practice. For this purpose, investigations should be carried out based on laboratory or library research at the cutting edge (前沿) of the field. According to some experienced writers, one-third or even half of their time would be spent on searching for good ideas in order to make the research really valuable and original.

Step Two: Finding the Topic

Once ideas are formulated, they should be analyzed, replenished (补充), and finally sorted out after a long process of critical reading and thorough reconsideration. Usually, a suitable topic can be formulated and finally decided on by following five general rules: (a) It should be a topic within the reach of the writer and can possibly be finished within the assigned time. Ambitious topics can go beyond the writer's ability and be difficult to be handled; (b) it should be a topic of practical value for the development of the economy or the society in general; (c) it should be a topic for which sufficient materials and documents can be found available either through reading or through investigations; (d) it should bear being tested theoretically and experimentally as academic study demands accuracy and objectivity; (e) it should be free from the writer's personal bias or preference even when it is a humanistic topic. For instance, a topic like "Albert Einstein—My Favorite Scientist" can be a good topic for a general composition but not for an academic paper. For the above and many other reasons, it is worth making a careful choice of topics before starting a long research process.

Step Three: Researching the Topic

Researching the topic can be a daunting task. The writer has to gather materials, take notes, cite sources related to the topic, create a bibliography, and so on. The research will have to be justified by linking its importance to existing knowledge about the topic.



Step Four: Considering Readers and Purposes

By considering readers and purposes we mean analyzing “Information for Contributors” (稿约) or “Call for Papers” (征稿启事), and the possible readers of the journal to which your paper is to be submitted. For example, if you are going to prepare a paper for a conference, you will have to consider the possible participants of the conference. In general, factors that the writer has to take into account may include: levels of the readers; the purposes and intentions you are aiming at through your paper; the suggested uses and / or the potential applications your research may bring about, etc. These factors should be considered at the starting point of paper preparation in many cases.

Step Five: Brainstorming

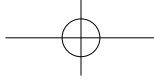
“Brainstorming” has become one of the popular terms in research circles. It may refer to a meeting of a group of academics to develop new and original ideas. And to this end, a writer can ask a group of friends to have a gathering to help him or her out with their suggestions or comments on his or her ideas.

Step Six: Drafting

A good draft organizes all the facts and ideas in a logical and systematic way, that is, all the details and related facts of the paper appear in the draft as a whole. A good research paper has to be finished through more than one draft.

Step Seven: Editing and Refining

When the writing of a research paper is completed, the writer has to bear in mind that even if he or she is an exceptionally skillful writer, he or she also has to make considerable revisions. In most cases, revision work would continue until the last minute for the submission of the paper. It is advisable to revise the paper from its general layout to slight omissions (疏漏) in language use. It is necessary to stress that the final manuscript is to be checked and proofread (校对) from the beginning to the end to make sure that the changes you have made do not result in inconsistency. Improvement at one point may make it necessary to change something elsewhere. Also, one final task is always to be performed: the close examination of the whole paper for errors in spelling, in form, in the truthfulness of quotations, and even in such simple matters as the order of pages. Errors in figures are especially likely to escape detection, so scrutiny (认真检查) is especially necessary.



The Style of Academic Writing

The word “style” has several senses: It may refer to a writer’s particular way of using language, for example, the lean and economical style of Ernest Hemingway (1899—1961), a famous American writer; or the prevalent features of the language of a certain period, say, the features of English in the age of Shakespeare. In this sense, the word “style” can be translated into Chinese as “风格。”

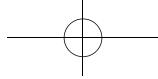
The word “style” may also refer to the style guide in writing that is recommended by associations or publications. For example, social sciences journals tend to follow the APA style (American Psychological Association); the Chicago Manual of Style is used in some social sciences publications and most historical journals; and the MLA style (Modern Language Association of America)—an academic style guide widely used in the United States, Canada, and other countries, provides guidelines for writing and documentation of research in humanities, such as English literature and the study of other modern languages and literatures, comparative literature, literary criticism, media studies, cultural studies, etc. The word “style” in this sense can be rendered as “格式。”

But the word “style” discussed in this section belongs to academic writing as a genre. The word “style” here, then, can be translated as “语体。” And our discussion of style will be confined to the characteristic aspects of the language of formal writing, especially academic paper writing. We agree to the saying by Jonathan Swift (1667—1745) that “proper words in proper places make the true definition of style.”

In general, all writings can be categorized into two main groups: informal and formal. The informal writing will utilize an informal tone and colloquial language, and the writer will often speak in the first person, as in letters, diaries, etc. Formal writing, on the contrary, is a more serious approach to a subject of great importance, and the writer will employ a formal tone and avoid using colloquial expressions. Academic paper writing is actually a kind of formal writing. The typical features can be detailed as follows.

More Formal Expressions

Academic papers are aimed at displaying the writer’s research results, or rather, reporting findings. The desired effect of publishing a research paper is secured, however, not so much by aiming at formality (正式性) as by avoiding noticeable informality. To achieve this effect, the writer has to relate everything to his or her readers in a clear-cut manner objectively and systematically by ruling out slang, colloquialisms, and informal contractions like “I’d,”



“gonna,” etc.

Read the following two versions of an abstract to see which version is more academic.

Ex. 1-1 (1)

In this paper, **we've given a reason why** the competitive ability of the national firms is weak. Because the non-national firms can **get** very cheap labor, under the same technical and economic conditions and the same cost, a non-national firm can produce more output than a national firm does. So it can **get** much more profit. **In this way**, the competitive ability of the non-national firms is stronger than that of the national firms.

Ex. 1-1 (2)

The paper **indicates the reason for the weakness of** the competitive ability of the national firms. Since the non-national firms can **obtain** very cheap labor, under the same technical and economic conditions and the same cost, a non-national firm can produce more output than a national firm does. Therefore it can **achieve** much more profit, and the competitive ability of the non-national firms is stronger than that of the national firms.

The second version sounds more academic because of the employment of formal expressions, e.g. “obtain” and “achieve” instead of “get.”

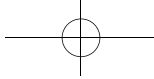
The following are some tips for formal writing.

- Avoid informal words and expressions, e.g. “get,” “go on,” “look into,” “turn out,” etc.
- Avoid abbreviated words used in informal writing, e.g. “ad” (advertisement), “gym” (gymnasium), “pop” (popular), “vet” (veteran), etc.
- Avoid contracted structures, e.g. “we’ve,” “you’re,” “don’t,” “can’t,” etc.
- Avoid using the second-person pronoun (you) in addressing readers.
- Avoid imperative sentences such as “please...,” “let’s,” etc.
- Avoid too many short sentences and simple sentences.
- Avoid conversational structures, e.g. “I think,” “you will,” etc.

More Objective Expressions

The formality and impersonality prevail to such an extent in an academic paper that the first- and second-person pronouns (“I” and “you”) are less often used. But “we” is usually used when both the reader and the writer are included.

In spite of the strong objection to using colloquialisms, it is also necessary to point out that the readers would also feel bored to see too many “the writers,” “we,” etc. as the subject of the sentences. This is one of the reasons that there are many sentences in passive voice in academic papers. Besides, the passive voice also gives the paper a sense of impartiality and objectivity.



For example, instead of writing “We carried out an experiment to investigate the effect of light on plant growth,” it would be more conventional to say, “An experiment was carried out to investigate the effect of light on plant growth.”

Formal writing sets an unusually high value on objectivity and accuracy. Therefore, nominal structures (名词性结构) are often seen in academic writing to serve this purpose. We may paraphrase the following sentence using nominal phrases:

Ex. 1-2

We analyzed the experiment and what we found made us realize that the technique is quite complex.
→ The experimental analysis showed technical complexity.

More Academic Expressions

In some cases, the subject matter of an academic paper restricts the language used so that it becomes fully comprehensible only to people familiar with that particular topic or specialty. Sometimes, it is rather difficult for readers to get a full understanding of all the points in a paper because it involves a highly specialized vocabulary and rigorous (严密的) sentence structures.

To some extent, we would say that academic English has its own vocabulary and grammatical patterns. Just as J. R. Firth (1890—1960), a famous British linguist, put it, “A restricted language serves a circumscribed field of experience or action and can be said to have its own grammar and dictionary.”

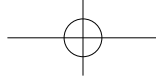
Needless to say, to write more effective academic papers, it is very important to have an overview of their linguistic features. The arguments will be more convincing if they are presented concisely, concretely, and objectively, and the thoughts and ideas will be acceptable if arranged logically and coherently. (Detailed description and actual examples of this kind of language use will be specifically given in Units 6, 7, and 8.)

Exercises and Practice

1 Work in pairs and discuss the following questions.

- 1) What is your own way of preparing an academic paper?
- 2) Who are the readers of a thesis / dissertation?

2 Find a major journal in your field and search for the requirements and specifications for papers laid down by the Editorial Board of the journal.



3 Read the following two passages and try to find out the stylistic features of each.

Passage 1

The American wife stood at the window looking out. Outside right under their window a cat was crouched under one of the dripping green tables. The cat was trying to make herself so compact that she would not be dripped on.

“I’m going down and get that kitty,” the American wife said.

“I’ll do it,” her husband offered from the bed.

“No, I’ll get it. The poor kitty out trying to keep dry under a table.”

The husband went on reading, lying propped up with the two pillows at the foot of the bed.

“Don’t get wet,” he said.

The wife went downstairs and the hotel owner stood up and bowed to her as she passed the office. His desk was at the far end of the office. He was an old man and very tall...

—from “Cat in the Rain” by Ernest Hemingway

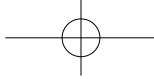
Passage 2

Evaluations of oral English abilities have become more important in China. Almost all such evaluations of spoken English are done by English teaching specialists, which is very time-consuming. As the number of examinees rapidly increases, the need to evaluate their oral English ability also increases. In this context, the automatic pronunciation evaluation (APE) algorithm is critical.

To improve the APE performance, many studies have focused on how to calculate the final APE score based on statistical data. The research focuses on applying a canonical model to the APE. The model includes two stages. In the first stage, adaptive training is used to eliminate the influence of speaker variations. In the second stage, speaker accent adaption is used to compensate for the mismatch between native and non-native speakers.

General Structure of an Academic Paper

Although different languages and cultures have different “rules” for organizing ideas in writing, it is necessary to follow the general structure in order to meet the requirements of international publications. A publishable academic paper in English is supposed to include

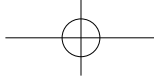


Title, Abstract, Keywords or Indexing Terms, Introduction, Literature Review, Research Methodologies and Procedures, Results and Findings, Discussion, Conclusion, References, and Appendices (if any).

Writing for academic purpose in English concerns how writers meet the requirements of international academic communities. Presented below are the major parts of an academic paper and their respective functions.

Items	Main Functions
Title	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summarizing the main text of the paper Attracting readers
Abstract	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explaining the background, topic, approach, conclusion, and significance Summarizing the paper Orienting readers to the paper
Keywords or Indexing Terms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highlighting the focus using noun terms
Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introducing the research background Making a research orientation Stating the research purpose
Literature Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviewing the previous research
Research Methodologies and Procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specifying the methods and procedures used in the study Explaining the theoretical framework or models and the research design Clarifying data collection and treatment, and experimental apparatus and procedures
Results and Findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summarizing the main results and findings Interpreting or commenting on the most important results with important figures (shown in graphs, tables, and diagrams)
Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expounding the interrelations between the observed facts and their underlying causes Analyzing the data Comparing the results with previous studies and the original hypothesis Developing the hypothesis and speculations Highlighting the viewpoints Mentioning the limitations of the study
Conclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summarizing the main points of the study Presenting the conclusion Providing implications and suggestions for future work
References	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Showing respect for previous work Facilitating the literature search

The above items of an academic paper will be specifically dealt with in the following units.



Exercises and Practice

1 Work in pairs and discuss the following questions.

- 1) Do you think the general structure of writing is culturally different? Why or why not?
- 2) What are the main parts of an academic paper and the functions of each part?

2 Find a paper from a major journal in your field and analyze the major parts of the paper and their functions.

Unit Summary

[学术论文写作：概述]

在国际性学术刊物上发表文章的质量和数量是衡量一个国家、一个机构或一个专业人员学术水平和学术地位的重要标志。国际学术界因此流行这样一句英文：publish or perish（要么发表，要么出局）。

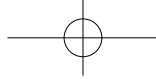
学术论文包括专业报告、研究论文、课程论文、学位论文等。

学术论文是专业人员的研究结果和学术总结。写作一篇学术论文大体上要经历：寻找有价值的思想、确定话题、展开研究、明确写作对象和目的、讨论并完成初稿以及修改与润色等过程。

在具体写作之前，有必要先见“林”后见“树”，弄清楚英语学术论文的主要结构和语体特征。

学术论文采用学术语体，是专业人员用来记录学术积累，展示科研成果，使之得到社会承认并广为传播的有效手段。这种以学术交流为目的的语言是“一种限定的语言，服务于限定领域的经验和行为，这种语言有其自身的语法和词汇特征”。因此，其特点是多用正式语体，包括正式的词汇和短语、客观描写的句型和人称及逻辑严密的语篇结构等。这些语言特点构成了学术语体的基本特征。

学术语体是说理性语言，是严谨推理和复杂思维活动的文字体现。从宏观上把握学术语体的语言风格，熟悉学术语体在遣词、造句、语篇等方面的基本特点，对于提高学术论文的写作质量和提高国际发表的成功率，无疑具有重要的意义。



More About R-W-C

“R-W-C” is made by the first letters of Research, Writing, and Communication. “More About R-W-C” is a supplementary section of each unit to further enrich your knowledge of academic research, academic writing, and academic communication. The section does not necessarily correspond to the theme of each unit, but systematically explains academic research, writing, and communication.

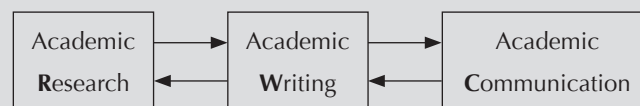
Section Objectives: This supplementary section aims to further broaden students’ knowledge of academic research, writing, and communication, and enrich students’ competence of international communication through academic writing and publication.

Main Contents: Academic communication is primarily based on academic writing; and academic writing, on academic research. These three processes are interdependent and mutually influencing, forming an integrated whole. Therefore, all of these aspects

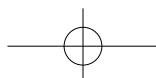
will be discussed in this section in the following units. The general definitions, functions, language features, principles, and the like will be discussed or illustrated.

Academic writing records, reflects, and summarizes academic research, and is also the means, basis, and preparation for academic communication. Being an essential link between academic research and communication, academic writing is closely associated with both academic research and international communication (see the figure below). The discussion of academic writing therefore should not go without the discussion of academic research and goals of international communication.

In this supplementary section, we will first examine the main features of academic research, academic writing, and academic communication, and, on the basis of the examination, the basic characteristics of academic writing are summarized.



Interplay Between Academic Research, Writing, and Communication



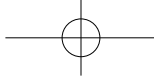


Table of Contents: This supplementary section consists of 14 sub-topics based on the “three-in-one” process.

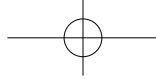
- Unit 1 Introduction of the Section
- Unit 2 Academic Research (1): Basic Process
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- Unit 7 Academic Writing (2): Humanities Papers
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- Unit 10 Academic Communication (1): General Features
- Unit 11 Academic Communication (2): Professional Exchange (To be continued in Unit 12)
- Unit 12 Academic Communication (3): Professional Exchange (Continued)
- Unit 13 Academic Communication (4): “CODES” of Competences
- Unit 14 From the “Three-in-one” Combination to the “Language + Communication” Teaching and Learning Approach

All the above features of the “three-in-one” process will be specifically discussed in the following units.

Reflections and Further Study

- 1 Find a paper in a major international journal in your field and analyze its vocabulary, sentence structures as well as its writing style.**
- 2 Brainstorm ideas on one of the topics below. Then write down an outline for an academic paper on the topic.**
 - 1) Fighting air pollution in some cities of China
 - 2) The difficulty of translating Chinese humor
 - 3) Maintaining academic standards in the age of consumerism in China
- 3 Work in groups and discuss which of the seven steps of preparing academic papers you find most difficult and in what way you can deal with it.**



Simulated Paper Publication Preparation

- Simulated Paper Publication Preparation is a kind of weekly-performed exercise, which will start from the first day of the course. It will prepare you for the course project at the end of the semester: Simulated International Paper Writing and Publication on Interdisciplinary Sciences.
- Find a writing peer according to your majors for future peer evaluation and cooperation.
- Start thinking about how to write an academic paper of your own. You may review your master's thesis / doctoral dissertation, a published academic paper, or any other scholarly writing to see whether there is anything that needs to be improved.