

# Student Hub Live people



Margaret Greenhall is a study skills specialist. She has taught thousands of people about their memory. She tutors on science level 1 and 2 courses. She is also an OU student of geology. Her hobbies are baking, rowing and Lego.



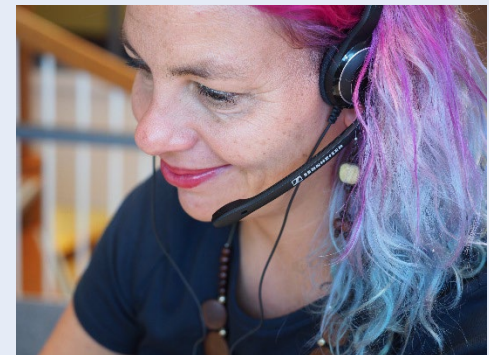
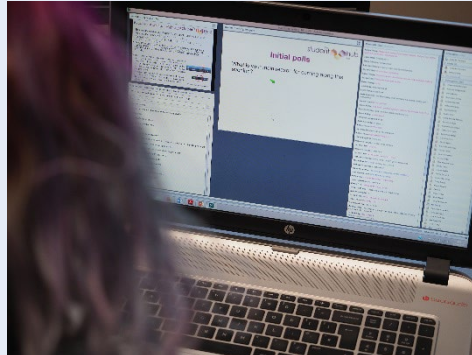
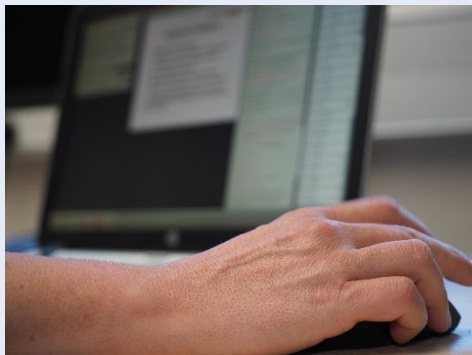
Amanda Smith has been an OU Law School tutor at levels 1, 2 and 3 since 2009. During that time, she has discovered the pleasures and pitfalls of being an OU student by studying for an MA in Online and Distance Education, worked as an Educational Advisor, written tutorial, skills, and research materials.

In her (very little) spare time she can be found walking the hills, tending her garden, travelling Italy, ballroom dancing and knitting to keep warm!

# What are Student Hub Live online sessions?



- All student hub live sessions are non-modular and focus on skills relevant to study at university level
- Polls are anonymous to other participants, but the chat box will have your logged in name associated with your comments during the live session.
- All online sessions are recorded and available to view on catch up on a public facing website.
- Slides and resources are available to download during the session from 'file downloads box (*not accessible on mobile devices*) and from within the event's page at <http://studenthublive.open.ac.uk/>

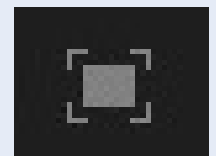


# Workshop

- This is going to be a structured workshop to help you advance your academic writing skills
- It is not subject related as we have people from all over the university on the session
- There is a lot of interaction so please be ready to answer polls (questions) or add to chat pod during the session

## Please be aware

- These sessions are large scale
- They are very busy
- There is lots of interaction
- They are not the same as other tutorials
- Chat may be off topic – that's OK
- You can maximise slides on your own screen by clicking the icon



# Please

- Do NOT share any personal information in the chat pod during the session
- On the recording names will be anonymised to user number
- However if you type anyone's full name or any other personal information in the chat pod it can be seen by everybody and it would also show up on the recording

# Improve your academic writing



# Initial poll

What's your main reason for coming along today?

- Never written academically before
- Not sure what is the right way to write
- I want to get better marks
- I get writer's block
- Hints and tips to get better
- To get new ideas
- Other – please use chat

# This was our advert...

- What are the main characteristics of great academic writing? In this workshop you'll learn about the main aspects of effective academic writing. You will also gain insight on how to develop an approach that is unique to you while also meeting the academic requirements. With input from tutors and students you'll leave with a better understanding of what makes good writing great.



# Poll:

What types of writing do you know of?

# Types of writing

- Fiction
- Journalistic
- Recipes
- Reports
- Poetry
- Biography
- Academic
- Short communications – emails etc.
- Minutes
- Reflective

# Word cloud

What does the term academic writing mean to you?

Please add the word or phrase that best explains.  
We will be building a word cloud to see what words are common.

You need to state individual words or up to 3 words as a phrase, if you press the space or enter button your entry will be sent through.

Look for the box that says enter word here.

# Poll:

How is academic writing different from the other forms of writing?

# Academic writing is...

- Factual and to the point
- Objective (not opinionated or subjective)
- Not flowery (unless creative writing!)
- Evidenced
- Appropriately planned and structured
- Specific to the question you are answering
- Convincing the reader that you know and understand that question and are answering it accurately
- Usually third person
- Usually past tense

# Academic English

- This is more formal than everyday English.
- Look for specific module guidance as some modules have prepared primers and pre-module guides, part of their module or faculty guide which covers expectations for academic English.
- Studenthome study skills section  
<https://help.open.ac.uk/developing-academic-english>

## Poll what's wrong with this as academic writing?

I went to Buckden woods near my house and I measured the bases of 20 trees. It's where I walk my dogs. I choose my trees because there was easy access to them and it has a lots of different trees. I used a sewing tape measure. It worked for me because it was flexible and I found it easy to put round the tree.

## Poll what's wrong with this as academic writing?

On a perambulation to Buckden woods in close proximity to my habitation I had a marvellous encounter with the lower parts natural arboreal vegetation. The canines in the locality frequently have their daily constitutional there.

A soft non-elastic bendable measuring device was utilised to ascertain the magnitude for the circumference at a height of 1300000 micrometres.



# Poll: Why is this a better example of academic writing?



Buckden woods in South Lancashire was chosen as the sampling site because there was easy access and a variety of species. The diameters of 20 trees, at a standard height of 1.3m (Portland, 2018), were measured in cm to the nearest 0.5 cm with a fabric tape measure.

# Poll:

How can you improve your academic writing?

# Ideas for improving

- Read other people's work
- Be very critical of it
- Break it down into parts
- Use tutor feedback
- Space out your writing process
- Ask others around you for feedback

# Language and structure

- ‘Big word bingo’ is not appropriate
- Past tense and impersonal
- Objective
- Sentences have ~12-25 words
- Paragraphs have 100-300 words but should always be focused on a single topic each
- It should have a clear single meaning
- Must not be a direct copy of someone else’s words (plagiarism)

These are not hard and fast rules but broad guidelines as a starting point

# Stages of academic writing

- Preparation (analysing the question, reading the sources)
- Planning
- Writing
- Editing/proofing
- Checking

# Preparation

- Read the question before you read the related material
- Identify three parts
  - process words,
  - topic words,
  - criteria words
- What is the topic?
  - What is not the topic?
- What are the criteria you're given –
  - Word length?
  - Must include.....
  - Do not.....

# Planning

- Allocate time just to plan
- Make a quick overview of everything you could put in
- Make sure no more points than paragraphs – if too many cut some
- Leave a day between planning and writing
- Map your thoughts
- Think about the big picture of the flow of the work
- Think about the detail of the types of words you need for the individual sentences

# What to include?

- Read your TMA instructions and use the sources that you are asked to use (not others that you might like and not material from other modules)
- Clearly relate the answer to the question (but not the question says this so I am answering that)
- Take cues on style from what you are asked to do – e.g. short answer q (<50 words) or longer prose (500+)



# Poll

- What helps you write?

# Writing

- Write a first rough full draft
- Leave it at least a couple of hours
- Revise your draft
- Read it aloud
- Ask someone else to read it
- Evidence your ideas
- Third person
- Objective
- Do a word count,
  - OK to be well over word count here

# Editing poll

- What do you need to think of when you edit?

# Editing

- Spell and grammar check
- Reread the question
- Tick (/highlight) and parts that definitely answer the question
- Delete unnecessary parts
- Have you missed anything?
- Reorganise the order to help it make sense

# Questions for editing

- Does it answer the question?
- What have I missed?
- Is my meaning clear?
- Are there any extra words?
- How long are my sentences?
- How long are my paragraphs?
- Does it flow?
- Have I used personal pronouns?
- Is my tense consistent?
- Have I evidenced my writing correctly?

# Checking

- Have you spell/grammar checked it?
- Are the sentences the right length (12-25 words)?
- Are they in the right order?
- Is it the right length?
  - Not too short (you're prob missing marks)
  - Not too long – you may get penalised

# Checking

- Does it make sense?
- Does it tell the story?
- Are any numbers right  
(value, sig fig, sci notation, units?)
- Does it answer ALL parts of the question?
- **What mark would you give it?**

# Tutor tips!

- Make sure you say what you meant to say, not what was ‘in your head’
- We hear “but that’s what I meant” a lot 😊
- You cannot assume your reader will automatically know what you mean if you are not clear, or have difficulties with spellings / grammar
- Don’t just word drop because you have seen the word in the module, make it clear that YOU know what it means
- Tutors invariably don’t need to know what *I*, *we*, *you* think / did – you need impersonal language



# Academic third person

- I/we/me first person
- You second person
- Third person standing outside as an observer
  - he/she/they
  - proper nouns (names/places)
  - nouns (e.g. job types, scientist, teacher, student)

# Academic third person

- I went to the shops and bought a zebra, a chair, a xylophone and an ostrich.
- A visit to the shops was made. The following items were purchased a zebra, a chair, a xylophone and an ostrich.

# Tense

- Past tense using the ed form of the verb
- Smith presented the theory that attending studenthublive sessions provided valuable support for student skills
- **Not** Smith was presenting her theory that attending studenthublive sessions will be providing valuable support for student skills

# Academic third person poll

- Try rewriting the excerpt below in academic third person and past tense to cover the key information. Please use the short answer poll provided

“There are 10 species of trees in my garden. I measured the heights using triangles.”

# Idea

Ten species of trees were found in the garden of M.Greenhall. The heights were measured using triangulation.

# Things to be aware of

- Trying to paraphrase short sections is very hard as you can see the words and know what they mean
- It is much better to step back and try and consider the overall purpose of the writing and think more holistically
- If you keep very closely to any original source then you are less likely to be able to write in a way that shows your independent understanding
- Read the day before, don't look at it whilst you write

# Finding your voice

- Go back to the purpose of what you are trying to convey
- You are using evidence and information from your module but why do you as a student find this the best evidence?
- Remember you are not giving your own personal subjective opinion but you are showing that you can convey the information as a module representative
- This takes time and practice so when you first start out please don't expect to be perfect immediately!

# Value laden words

- Words that have biases attached to them can alter the focus of your reader. They often have an emotional weighting.
- Bad
- Awful
- Tragic



# Objectivity

- Look at the following piece of text and then use the poll option to indicate which is the value laden word (a word that tries to influence the reader in possibly a biased and emotional way)
- They presented the theory that attending studenthublive sessions provided extremely useful support for student skills

# Adverbs

- Adverbs are often value laden –as they take something from being a statement (even if it predicts an outcome or gives a result) to an opinionated statement. They can be used but you need to be aware that you are appealing to the reader's emotions not their logical thoughts.
- Add to a verb
- sadly, happily obviously, bravely,

# Poll

What words can you think of that mean something similar to the word

“good”

but have a worse or better emotional meaning?

# Some ideas

- OK
- Satisfactory
- Good
- Wonderful
- Outstanding
- Superb
- Exceptional

# Paragraph structure 1

- PEEL
- Point – make it
- Evidence – support it with facts
- Explain – why the evidence is supportive and relevant
- (Link to another part of the writing or the question)

# Paragraph Structure 2

- PESELS

- Point - make the point for this paragraph
- Explain - what do you mean by this point
- Support - provide evidence from studies and research
- Evaluate - what is there about this point that is for/against
- (Link - to the essay task)
- (Signpost - to the next paragraph)

# Referencing poll

- Why do you need to use references in academic writing?

# What is referencing?

- Referencing has 2 parts – an in text citation and the full reference details
- The in text citation indicates that a piece of information, idea or fact has been drawn from a specific named source
- The reference details give the full details of what that source is and where it can be found
- The actual format of this does differ according to module and subject which reflects the requirements of the overall academic world



# Example



Satellite imaging provides a unique method of understanding our geological environment. Figure 1 shows the San Andreas fault from space as a very high resolution, false colour image (Nasa, 2009).

Nasa, (June 2009), *NASA Gives California's San Andreas Fault a 3-D Closeup* Available at: <https://www.nasa.gov/image-article/nasa-gives-californias-san-andreas-fault-3-d-closeup/> (Accessed: 03 May 2025)

# Referencing is not

- ...a way of getting out of writing in your own words
- An essay that is a string of quotations, even with a matching string of citations, is not your own work so would not be appropriate at university level

# Useful resources

- The library runs excellent sessions on referencing and SHL always sends students to their resources (we are not able to run sessions directly about referencing ourselves)
- <http://www.open.ac.uk/library/training-and-events/the-why-and-how-of-referencing>
- Live sessions are advertised on <http://www.open.ac.uk/library/>

# SHL live events

- Busting myths about academic integrity (which included referencing and why it should be done)
- <https://youtu.be/jy34UaeRDHA?si=9jgYEL-jiVnNkWPG>
- <https://studenthublive.open.ac.uk/content/busting-some-myths-around-academic-conduct-23-nov-2023>

# Discussion activity

- There will be 2 specific questions in chat pods for you to explore some of the elements we have discussed further.
- *I have developed my academic writing by...*
- *I intend to work on my academic writing by...*
- You are welcome to add your thoughts and we will then pick up some of the themes and talk through them.
- Chat does have names on but the recording will be anonymised so you will appear as 'user number'

# Follow up resources

- Eats shoots and leaves, Lynn Truss  
<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Eats-Shoots-Leaves-Lynne-Truss/dp/0007329067>
- Essay and report writing skills,  
<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Essay-report-writing-skills-University-ebook/dp/B0BP2J3RDY>
- The Arts Good Study Guide  
<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Arts-Good-Study-Guide-University/dp/0749287454>
- The Sciences Good Study Guide  
<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Sciences-Good-Study-Guide/dp/0749234113>

# Take home message

- Academic writing has a specific focus and style and takes some work to get used to but is straightforward in purpose
- It conveys information in an objective balanced way without personal viewpoints or inflection and sticks to the point
- Writing is not a single step but an iteration from draft to a polished piece of work
- Learn but don't copy from others

# Your thoughts

- There will be 2 specific questions in chat pods for you to explore some of the elements we have discussed further.
- *I MANAGE MY TIME WELL WHEN ....*
- *TECHNIQUES I'D LIKE TO GIVE A GO...*
- You are welcome to add your thoughts and we will then pick up some of the themes and talk through them.
- Chat does have names on but the recording will be anonymised so you will appear as 'user number'



# Feedback please

Please use the following link to provide feedback to help the studenthublive team to continue to improve what we do

- <https://forms.office.com/e/9fkk7iMb6n>

# Selected upcoming events



- 22 May 11 am Power Reading; boost your reading skills
- 29 May 7 pm Creative Note taking
- 5 Jun 4 pm Moving on levels: building on your experience
- 10 Jun 11 am ND reflecting and consolidating learning
- 11 Jun 11 am Support and wellbeing for student carers
- 12 Jun 11 am Let's talk research: Q & A with OU Librarians
- 24 Jun 7 pm SHL summer party – inspiration and creativity
- 01 Jul 7 pm Applying other people's ideas with confidence
- 08 Jul 4 pm Taking stock of study
- 10 Jul 11 am Keeping motivation

For more information on all past and upcoming events, go to <http://studenthublive.open.ac.uk/>