Benchmarks of Effective Academic Writing

The Centre for Academic Communication
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Learning Objectives

By the end of this workshop, you will know more about

• The 40/20/40 process approach to writing
  • Prewriting/planning (the first 40)
  • Effective drafting (the next 20)
  • Revising/editing (the final 40)
• Benchmarks of effective writing
Getting started

With your colleague beside you, please discuss:

1. What writing have you done recently?

2. In what way(s) is writing challenging for you?
A strategic academic writing process: The “40/20/40” approach

- Consider how much time you have
- Allocate your time according to this formula:
  - 40% for planning
  - 20% for drafting
  - 40% for revising/editing
Benchmark 1: Effective writing starts with **solid pre-writing practices** (the first 40%)

- Careful consideration of the task/project
  - Who is the audience?
  - What is the purpose?

- Generation of ideas
  - What do I already know about the topic?
  - Where can I find secondary information?

- Planning
  - What strategy will I use to organize my ideas? (Outline? Mind map? Index cards?)
Narrow or focus your research scope by considering…

- How is “X” defined?
- How is “X” described?
- What is the history of “X”?
- What are the advantages/disadvantages of “X”?
- What are problems/solutions related to “X”?
- How is “X” similar to/different from “Y”?
- What are the causes/effects of “X”?
Combine questions to help shape your focus:

- What are the main issues and who does the topic directly and indirectly affect?
- Why is this issue important, and is there evidence to back this up? If so, what type of evidence?
- What might happen if this issue is not addressed?

- Ideas adapted from SPA_Proposal Template_2
Write a thesis statement that

- states the most general point of the paper
- answers the main research question
- is concise (not vague or off-topic)
- is the last sentence of your introduction
The first “40” summarized:

1. Choose a research topic
2. Narrow the topic by asking different questions (E.g. History? Description? Analysis? Causes/effects? Problem/solutions?)
3. Choose a narrowed topic and create a more specific research question
4. Answer the question: Write an effective thesis statement
Small Group Practice

In groups of 3; move in front of a large paper along the wall.

Imagine your course instructor has asked you to write a 1200-word essay on this topic:

*Development of community leaders*

Work together to narrow the topic, write a research question, and formulate a thesis statement.
The first “40” continued

5. Generate supporting ideas
• Definitions of key terms
• Ideas of other writers and researchers
• Data (survey results, experimental and statistical data)
• Interviews
• Observations
• Personal examples and anecdotes

6. Develop a plan
• Create a map or “outline”:
  - What key main ideas will you include in paragraphs?
  - In what order will you present your paragraphs?
  - What will your introduction/conclusion emphasize?

- AWE, p. 86
Benchmark 2: Effective Writing demonstrates wise drafting practices (the next 20%)

- Use your “plan” to guide you as you work on one section at a time
- Write without polishing word choice, sentence structure, or grammar
- Write fluently, focusing on paragraph development
- When you notice more ideas are needed, note this and more on to your next paragraph
- When you notice an issue (a repeated word, sentence errors, grammar mistakes), highlight it so that you can address it later
Training for leadership begins in the home. Children can learn to lead younger siblings. For example, older children can guide younger ones in basic routines: teeth brushing and getting dressed (Smith, 1996). Older siblings can even teach younger children to help out with household tasks that parents have taught them, according to a recent study at the UBC (Michaels, 2016). Parents should recognize older children for their leadership at home and encourage them to lead peers in skill development and school activities.
Learning activity: Drafting

Write for 3 minutes about a leader who inspires you:

- Draft a paragraph without stopping
- Underline words you want to change later
- Circle sentences/grammar you want to ask about
- If you run out of ideas, write your next steps to find them: "More ideas to come; I will do a google search for…"

Pair-Share: Talk about your experience drafting with your classmate
Benchmark 3: Effective writing is a product of careful revision practices (the final 40% continued)

- Examine the “Benchmarks of effective writing” checklist
- Go over your draft focusing on each benchmark separately
- Make notes for improvement
- Revise your draft one step at a time
Learning Activity: Revising

In pairs/small groups, analyze the sample paragraph

1. Locate the topic sentence
2. Note the supporting sentences
   - What supporting ideas do the writers use to explain their main idea?
   - What details could the writers develop/add?
3. Examine the last sentence. Is this an effective concluding sentence?
Benchmark 4: Effective writing is a product of careful editing practices (the final 40%)

- **Analyze** previous assignments: What are your grammar weaknesses?
- **Edit** your paper carefully, focusing on one grammar point at a time (work backwards from the last sentence in your conclusion?)
- **Use a blank white paper** as a guide and check each line carefully
Learning Activity: Editing

Review tips for writing strong sentences and make changes to these sentences (on your handout, too)

1. Developing leaders, which many communities need to make a lot of effort to do given the economic and social changes that are occurring on a daily basis, is critical for community growth.

2. Nowadays, despite the focus on developing strong leaders who have solid training and education.

3. Leaders are important. Leaders need to support their communities. Their communities are struggling. The struggles are mainly due to economic downturn.
Learning Activity: Editing

Using the suggestions for writing strong sentences, rewrite the following:

1. Developing leaders which many communities need to make a lot of effort to do given the economic and social changes that are occurring on a daily basis is critical for community growth.

2. Nowadays, Despite the focus on developing strong well-trained, educated leaders who have solid training and education, local governments cannot afford their salaries (Added to complete the sentence)

3. Leaders are important. Leaders need to support their communities. Their communities are struggling. The struggles are mainly due to economic downturn Community leaders play a critical role supporting their struggling communities in an economic downturn.
Who we are

The Centre for Academic Communication (formerly The Writing Centre) helps UVic students with academic writing (and more)

Visit us for more information!
We offer distance appointments!

Our online tutor can assist with
• Real-time feedback
• Written feedback within 48 hours

More information is available:
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