

THE TEXT LAB

- Your support to
independent writing



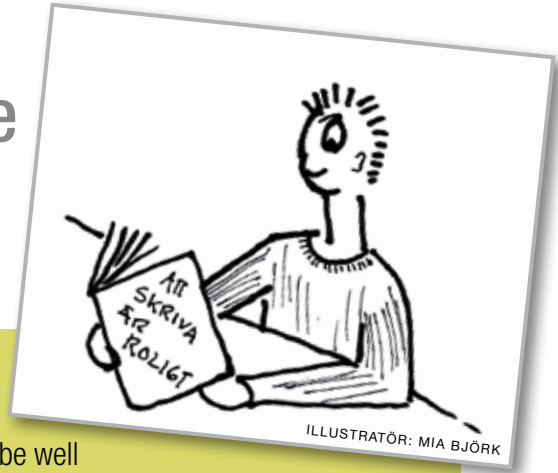
WRITING GUIDE



HÖGSKOLAN
I GÄVLE

Text Lab

– Writing guide



The texts you will produce as part of your education should be well written. This means, for example, that you should not wait until the last moment before you start to write – rather, let it be an active and ongoing process. By doing so, you will also gain in terms of knowledge. Why not use a log-book throughout the assignment where you write down ideas, valuable quotations etc. Or why not find a partner who is willing to read your drafts and give comments.

Make an effort to distinguish what is the main focus at different stages in the writing process; at the beginning when you are gathering material, brain-storming your thoughts, or at the final stages where you are writing pointedly for your receiver.

In this guide we would like to invite you to a few pieces of advice, to improve your writing and your confidence as a writer.

THE WRITING PROCESS

Think about what is important at different stages in the writing process!

- Before you start it is important to analyze the instruction – what shall be done, for whom, why, and how? Do you know what is meant by the exact wording used by the instructor? Are you familiar with the style and register appropriate for the assignment? This is also the phase where you gather material and make notes while reading to build a structure and plan for the assignment.
- Write a first draft of your text, a draft that in the next phase is altered, improved, and completed.
- In the last phase you proof read your text carefully paying attention to both content and form. Make use of spelling programmes, dictionaries etc.
- Print your text and read it to yourself. Does it make sense?

Work continuously on improving your text in terms of **CONTENT**:

- Do I bring up things relevant to the aim and objectives of the assignment?
- Do I support my argument by the use of both theoretical reasoning and specific examples?
- Is it clear which conclusions are mine and which are those of my sources?

and **FORM**:

- Is my text in line with the instruction given by my teacher? Am I aware of what structure to follow?
- Am I consistent in style and register to the type of text I am writing?
- Is my text logically consistent from beginning to end?
- Are abstract, paragraphs, headlines, tables etc. presented in the correct way and in the correct format?
- Are my references correct and have I presented a bibliography according to the standard requirements?

LANGUAGE IMPROVEMENTS

Your supervisor might have instructed you, for example, to 'reflect', 'analyze' or 'problematize'. Do you know what it means and how to express yourself in connection to those words?

- Are you aware of the difference between 'analyze' and 'evaluate'?
- Read the text aloud to yourself and pretend to be your own reader: is the text comprehensible? Too complex? Do you understand what you mean?
- Have you checked spelling and grammar? Sentence construction?
- Is your argument coherent and linked together through the use of transitional phrases?
- Remember – one idea per sentence, one aspect per paragraph.

There are a number of technical tools at your disposal, such as dictionaries, guides on how to write and build valuable arguments etc. Use those!

Avoid using software translations programs (such as googletranslate) for any length of text since these often give incomprehensible suggestions. D.I.Y!

A Thesaurus is a useful source for finding synonyms but be aware of the often subtle differences in meaning between 'synonymous' words.

- Proof read your draft carefully at the end of the process.



ILLUSTRATÖR: KRISTIN GERTH

WHAT IS WRITTEN STANDARD ENGLISH?

What is right or wrong when I write in an academic context?

What is considered standard is changing over time and varies across different types of text. Here we would like to bring your attention to a few recurring problems in text produced by students. However, keep in mind that for a more complete picture, refer to other sources on how to write good standard English.

When reading through your drafts, consider the following:

- ▶ **Genitive forms:** ownership in English signaled through the use of apostrophe 's. This is the only time you use the 's-form. The basic rule is that genitive of people takes 's while genitive of things is constructed with of. Example: *Bobby's car is red* but *The door of the car is blue*.
- ▶ **Third person –s:** verb forms in present simple tense takes s-endings when it involves an action by a *he*, a *she*, or an *it*. Example: *He cycles to work* but *They cycle to work*.
- ▶ **-ing-forms as verb-endings.** This rule is a little more complicated. The general question to ask is whether the action described is ongoing or completed. If still ongoing – use the –ingform (present continuous). Another question is if the action happens regularly. In that case – no –ingform.
- ▶ **Contraction:** form of words such as *can't*, *doesn't*, *havn't* etc. are fully written out in formal English. So, instead you write: *cannot*, *does not*, *have not* etc.
- ▶ **Pay attention to slang and colloquial forms of words**
Use synonyms instead.
- ▶ **Vary your language to avoid repetition.** This is one reason for why reading the text aloud to yourself might be a good idea. Use synonyms.
- ▶ **Word and sentences.** In academic writing it is quite common to find long sentences. However, there is a risk of becoming unclear and therefore losing your reader's attention if the sentences are too long. Also make sure each sentence only present one idea. On the other hand, you like to give your text

a good flow and don't want the sentences too short and staccato like either. A good idea is to vary the length of the sentences in the document as a whole.

- ▶ **Linking Phrases** One way to guide your reader and to make your text fluent is to give indications to your reader on what you are doing, and how a new aspect of a subject connects to the argument you have already presented. This is what is called the 'thread of the text'. Be generous with these type of expressions, but remember to vary them.

A few examples:

- *Firstly... Secondly... Thirdly...* when you have a line of factors influencing something.
- *On the other hand/ Even though/However:* to show the other side of the argument.
- *In addition to/ Moreover:* when you add another aspect in agreement to what you have just claimed.
- *Finally/ To conclude:* when you want to indicate that you are coming to the end of your argument, a section of your text or perhaps the ending of the text as a whole.

- ▶ **Omitted clauses what are they?** In modern writing, and in particular in emails and text-messages, it is common to find text where one or more of the word clauses have been omitted. This is not considered good standard of academic writing. The reason is that it changes the text into more of an oral style, and is another sign of informality.

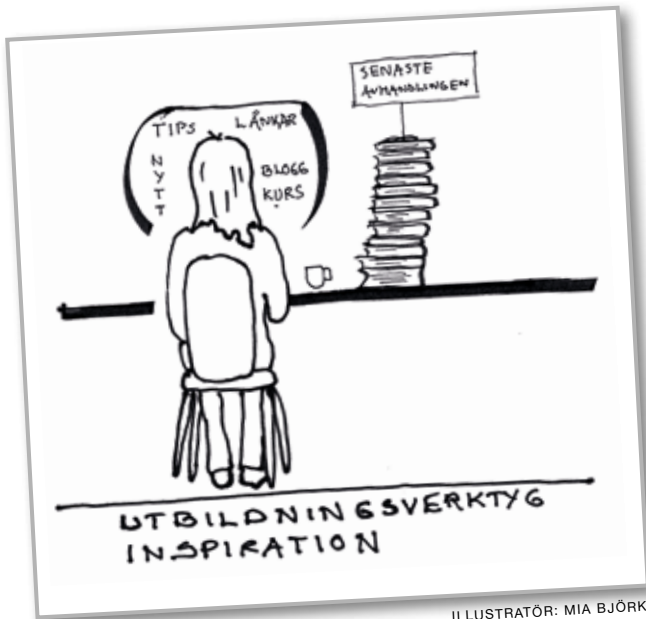
Some examples: "Simply don't get it!" (subject omitted) , "Sense of attack" (article and predicate omitted). Instead you should write full sentences.

- ▶ **Punctuation:** full-stop, comma, colon, semi-colon, exclamation mark, question mark, quotation mark or hyphen? When driving a car we use the indicator and the horn to signal what we mean. When writing we also have a number of signals to use. Do not forget to use commas, dare to use more than full-stops BUT avoid exclamation marks and SMILIES in academic text.

► **Paragraphing** To write a well-functioning structure of your text is essential for the way your text will be understood by other people. One suggestion is to construct a skeleton of your text before you start to write it. Then you are able visualize your line of argument and to see how different components connect with each other.

There are two ways of indicating a change in paragraphs. One is to move down to the line immediately below the previous, and start the new sentence after an indentation by the use of the TAB-key. The other is to leave a blank line in your text and start the new paragraph directly in the left hand side margin of the line following the blank one.

Changes in paragraphs should happen when you proceed to write about a new aspect of your topic.



ILLUSTRATOR: MIA BJÖRK

TO WRITE REFERENCES

In academic writing the aim is to describe, compare and contrast as well as to reflect/reason/argue/criticize/problematize, and/or analyze. This means that it is not enough either to express your own opinions, or to refer only to what other people have to say.

Moreover, when you make use of what somebody else have thought or said, it is very important that your source of information is acknowledged. If not your work can be seen as plagiarism which is an act of dishonesty and has severe consequences.

Make sure you repeatedly use reference markers reminding the reader on whose ideas the text is reporting. For example:

The author

- claims...
- states...
- argues...
- maintains..
- suggests....
- discusses...
- reasons....

► **How do I make references?** References can be done in a number of different ways, the most common are Harvard, Oxford, APA and Vancouver. Your teacher will clarify what system to use for the assignment. (Detailed instructions of each system can be found on the web, or at the homepage of the HiG library). In addition, when you refer to the thoughts, theories and arguments of your sources you must do so *in your own words*. However, it is very important that you do not alter the *meaning* of what is being said.

► **How do I mark quotations?** By quotation is meant when you use the exact wordings of your source. These always have to be clarified by the use of quotation marks, directly followed by a note of the source. To use text word by word without acknowledging its source is called plagiarism.

There are two ways of indicating quotations. Short quotations are signaled by the use of quotation marks "...", immediately before and after the text which is taken.

Longer quotations are written as block quotes. These are written as follows: firstly you leave out quotation marks. Secondly, you make a blank line between the quote and the text before and after. Thirdly, you write the letters of the quotation in a smaller font, and finally you indent the text from both margins.

► **How do I make a bibliography?** In a bibliography at the end of your document you shall list all the sources used in your text, in alphabetical order after the surname of the author, (or in some cases the work title).

One example: Golding, William (1954) *Lord of the Flies*. London: Faber & Faber.

This is not enough as a way of acknowledging your sources and is not replacing the need for references within the actual text of the assignment.

► **Electronic sources.** Even when you refer to sources such as web-pages, or web-forums it is important to give correct references. Does the page have a headline? Does it have a personal author? Organizations, companies and such could be seen as other types of originators or 'authors'. The reference is then written in the same way as a printed source with the exception of adding also the URL- code and the date of when the document was downloaded.

FINALLY – RE-THINK AND REVISE

Have I followed the instruction? Does my argumentation make sense? Is there a consistent line of arguing in the text? Have I deleted what does not fulfill a purpose in the text (killed your darlings)?

If you have any questions, on a text you have already written, or if you would like to discuss any aspects of academic writing – do not hesitate to contact us, either at a drop-in session or by booking an appointment on line.

Welcome to the Text Lab!

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