

**BENEMÉRITA
UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA DE PUEBLA**



FACULTAD DE LENGUAS

**An analysis of academic texts written by advanced students
majoring in English**

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Languages for the degree of

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By:

ANGÉLICA MACEDONIO ROSAS

Thesis Director:

MTRA: GICELA CUATLAPANTZI PICHÓN

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English**

This thesis has been read by the members of the thesis committee of:

Angélica Macedonio Rosas

And it is considered worthy of approval in partial fulfillment of
the requirement for the degree of:

Licenciatura en Enseñanza del Inglés

Mtra. Gicela Cuatlapantzi Pichón

Thesis Director

Mtra. Vicky Ariza Pinzón

Mtra. Laura Lima Xalteno

Committee Member

Committee Member

Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla

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ABSTRACT

This research was carried out at a language department of a large public university located in the center east of Mexico. The aim of this study was to analyze some academic texts written by advanced students who were majoring in English Language Teaching. These texts were analyzed following the next features: task fulfilment, audience, purpose, organization, style, flow, effective words, punctuation and presentation. Thirteen students participated in this study. A rubric was used to guide the analysis of the papers provided by the participants and it was divided into three sections that were established according to the Common European Framework for languages.

The analysis done showed that that in most essays, the audience was taken into account, the purpose was stated and the organization was good. However; in most essays, the use of linking words or phrases was poor; for instance, the linking words students used the most were “and” and “but”. In addition, there was no use of linking words in two essays and some linking words were not used properly. About punctuation, the coma and period were the questions marks used more frequently and some punctuation marks were used incorrectly. More results and implications are described within this thesis.

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¿Qué pasó, mi vida?- le respondió ella al contestar.

-A todo mundo le dices <<mi vida>>- reprochó él.

- A todo mi mundo- dijo ella, que le llamaba mi vida a sus hijos, a su madre, a sus hermanos, a sus amigos. Porque su vida estaba hecha de todas esas vidas y todas esas vidas eran su vida.

Ángeles Mastretta

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.0 Introduction to the problem	1
1.1 Rationale	2
1.2 Location of research.....	3
1.3 Significance of the study	3
1.4 The context of the research	3
1.5 Purpose of the study	4
1.6 Aims of the study	4
1.7 Research questions	5
1.8 Chpter conclusion	5
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	7
2.0 Introduction	7
2.1 Writing process	7
2.2 Academic writing.....	8
2.2.1 Communicating and purpose	9
2.2.2 Audience	11
2.2.3 Orgnization	13
2.2.4 Punctuation	13
2.2.5 Parts of speech	15
2.2.6 Sentence structures.....	16
2.2.7 Effective words	18
2.2.8 Flow.....	20
2.2.9 Presentation	21
2.2.10 Chapter conclusion	22
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY	23
3.0 Chapter Introduction	23
3.1 Setting	23
3.2 Participants	24

3.3 Research Methodology	24
3.4 Instruments	24
3.4.1 Rubric	24
3.5 Data collection procedure and analysis	25
3.6 Chapter conclusion	26
CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS	27
4.0 Introduction	27
4.1 Research questions	27
4.2 Results: Characteristics of good academic writing found in the texts	27
4.2.1 Audience	28
4.2.2 Purpose	28
4.2.3 Organization	29
4.2.4 Punctuation	32
4.2.4.1 Comma	32
4.2.4.2 Semicolon	33
4.2.4.3 Colon	33
4.2.5 Flow.....	33
4.3 Results: Characteristics of academic writing that were not identified	36
4.3.1 Organization	36
4.3.2 Punctuation	39
4.3.3 Flow	40
4.3.4 Presentation	42
4.4 Are students familiarized with the characteristics of a well-written academic text?... 43	
4.5 Chapter conclusion.....	44
CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS	45
5.0 Chapter introduction.....	45
5.1 Summary of the results.....	45
5.2 Accomplishment of aims.....	46
5.3 Limitations	46
5.4 Further research.....	46

5.5 Personal reflection.....46

REFERENCES 48

APPENDIX A..... 49

LIST OF TABLES

2.1	An overview of the writing process	8
2.2	Checklist for informative writing	10
2.3	Check list for persuasive writing	11
2.4	Check list of audience characteristics	12
2.5	Parts of speech and functions	16
2.6	Types of figurative language	19
2.7	Linking words and phrases	20
4.1	Linking words	31
4.2	Other linking words	33
4.3	Comma uses	37
4.4	Good use of linking words.	38

LIST OF IMAGES

1	External organizational essay 2	28
2	External organization essay 5	29
3	External organization essay 12	34
4	External organization essay 11	35
5	External organization essay 14	36
6	Inadequate word choice	40
7	Basic grammar errors	41

An analysis of academic texts written by advanced students majoring in English

Language Teaching

Chapter I: Introduction

1.0 Introduction to the problem

It is assumed that people learn to write since the very beginning of their academic lives. It seems that writing is an easy task; we can take a pen and write whatever it comes to our mind. However, according to White and Arndt (1991) writing is far from being a simple matter of transcribing language into written symbols: it is a thinking process in its own right. It demands the conscious intellectual effort, which usually has to be sustained over a considerable period of time. In other words, writing is more than taking a pen and drawing symbols on a paper, it has to do with a conscious intellectual effort that plays an important task in academic issues.

Writing is usually an arduous assignment for university students, thus, writing in a second language is even more difficult. The subjects of this study were students majoring in English Language Teaching (ELT). They needed to develop all the language skills and as part of their studies they needed to write different academic texts; therefore, this study explored how advanced students wrote academic texts after they had finished their last English course to find out what their strengths and weaknesses were.

1.1 Rationale

Hedge (1998) pointed out a question: Why is that for large numbers of English language students writing seems to pose great problems? She immediately answered this question by saying “possibly for the same reasons that large numbers of adult native speakers never achieve a high level of expressiveness in writing their first language. It has partly to do with the nature of writing itself” (p. 4). With this perspective it can be said that when students face academic writing they have to deal with many considerations, as it was stated before: audience, purpose, organization among others.

From my own experience, I did not use to like English, actually in high school I used to hate this subject, the main reason of my displeasure was that I literally understood nothing. Fortunately, I had an excellent teacher who helped me realize it was not difficult at all. For this reason I decided to start the English Language Teaching major. Lamentably, my English was not quite good when I started the major, honestly it was really bad, I had to study hard to improve it and facing academic writing made it even more difficult. Writing a paragraph represented a great challenge, but thanks to good teachers and hard work, now I am able to write this thesis.

In addition, Hedge (1998) states that compared with speech, effective writing requires a number of things: a high degree of organization in the development of ideas and information, a high degree of accuracy so that there is no ambiguity of meaning; the use of complex grammatical devices for focus and emphasis; and careful choice of vocabulary, grammatical patterns, and sentences structures to create a style which is appropriate to subject matter and the eventual readers.

1.2 Location of research

It is significant to point out that beginners and advanced students' writing necessities are different; for that reason, this paper took into account advanced learners who were majoring in English Language Teaching. They belong to a large Mexican university.

This language department was selected because it provided the subjects needed for this study, also because it is a recognized Mexican university that has offered the major related to teaching languages for many years.

Finally, it was selected because this university has a good academic level and it is one of the most important universities in the state.

1.3 Significance of the study

This study is important because it can help students to understand the characteristics of a well written academic text; Swales (1994) stated that academic writing is a product of many considerations: audience, purpose, organization, style, flow, and presentation. Moreover, it will provide a resource to improve academic writing by getting familiarized with academic writing considerations.

1.4 The context of the research

Analyzing academic writing is the basis of this investigation; it refers to how students take into account aspects required for academic issues, how the language works in academic writing, and how nonnative speakers face it. For that reason, the following areas of research are related to this study: academic writing (Swales, 1994) communicating and purpose,

(Troyka, 1990) audience (Troyka, 1990 & Swales). Those areas of research will provide the raw material needed to achieve the aims of this study.

1.5 Purpose of the study

The aim of this study is to analyze some academic texts written by advanced students who are majoring in English Language Teaching. These texts were analyzed following the features: task fulfillment, audience, purpose, organization, style, flow, effective words, punctuation and presentation of academic writing that students have to take into account to develop better writing products that fulfill the characteristics required for their major.

Advanced students in this context are required to produce a variety of tasks from simple to complex. It is for that reason that students have to be aware about the characteristics that academic texts have to fulfill. The awareness of these characteristics will allow students to be familiarized with the features demanded for an academic text and as a result they will improve their written products. Hedge (1998) stated that one approach to writing is to look at instances of writing and to analyze the features of written texts. This will tell us something about what it is that students have to produce. Therefore, this study focuses on finding out what features of good academic writing students take into account when writing and what they do not consider.

1.6 Aims of the study

The principal aims of this research study are:

1. To analyze the features academic writing texts require.

2. To analyze some academic texts written by students who are majoring in English Language Teaching to find out what features of good academic writing are taken into account.
3. To analyze what features of good academic writing students' academic writing samples lack the most.

1.7 Research Questions

MRQ: Are students familiarized with the characteristics of a well-written academic text?

RQ1 What are the characteristics of academic writing that the texts written and provided by students whose major is English Language Teaching have?

RQ2 Which of the characteristics of a well written academic text do advanced students' samples lack the most?

1.8 Chapter conclusion

This chapter provided background information about the research. The research aims, research questions, the purpose of the study, the location, the context, the significance of the study, the rationale and an introduction to the problem were presented.

Summarizing, it was said that writing is not a simple task; it requires managing grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, accurate spelling, sentence structures, linking ideas and some other considerations. Also, it was pointed out that this piece of investigation is focused on advanced English students and academic writing. Moreover students' awareness of the features

demanded for academic texts allow students to get familiarized with these features and as a result they improve their written products.

In the following chapter, the main areas of research related to this study and the main concepts needed to the analysis of a good academic text will be provided.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter some important points about academic writing were stated. To move on, it is important to specify the kind of writing that advanced students have to master. To look more closely, academic writing is the focus of this piece of investigation. In order to achieve a level of writing awareness it is necessary to have a guide that provides students with the sources they need to improve their writing skill. Brown (2000) quoted psycholinguistic Eric Lenneberg and pointed out this question: “How is writing like swimming? He answered: human beings universally learn to walk and to talk but that swimming and writing are culturally specific, learned behaviors. We learn to swim if there is a body of water available and usually only if someone teaches us” (pp. 334).

Teachers are the ones who provide students with the effective instruction in academic writing that allows students to be aware of these academic writing considerations. One of the major aims of the teacher is to guide students to the development of their English skills; talking about writing teachers can help students to familiarize with the academic writing features required for academic writing.

This chapter will provide the principal features that students have to take into account for academic writing and the writing process proposed by Peregoy and Boyle (2005).

2.1 Writing process

Peregoy and Boyle (2005) said that the process of writing is an approach to teaching writing that has been researched in depth over the past several years with both first language

learners and English language learners. In the process of writing students experience five interrelated phases: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. It is in these phases students have to take into account the features that Swales mentioned.

In addition Troyka (1990) proposed the writing process with these phases: planning, shaping, drafting, revising, editing and proofreading.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE WRITING PROCESS
Planning: calls for writers to gather ideas and think about a focus.
Shaping: calls for the writer to consider ways to organize their material.
Drafting: calls for the writers to write their ideas in sentences and paragraphs.
Revising: calls the writers to evaluate their draft and, based on their decisions, rewrite it by adding, cutting, replacing, moving and often totally recasting material.
Editing: calls the writers to check the technical correctness of their grammar, spelling, punctuation, and mechanics.
Proofreading: calls the writers to read their final copy for typing errors or handwriting legibility.

Table 2.1: An overview of the writing process

2.2 Academic writing

People can think that writing is just to draw in paper as many words as possible about any topic but it has to do with some other aspects that make writing a challenging task. Swales (1994) defined academic writing as a product of many considerations: audience, purpose, organization, style, flow, and presentation.

Writing, as it was mentioned before, has to communicate a message, this message involves a reader and the reader grasps the purpose; “writing is defined as a way of communicating a message to a reader for a purpose” (Troyka, 1990, p. 3).

Nunan (1989) stated that writing is an extremely complex cognitive activity in which the writer is required to demonstrate control of a number of variables simultaneously. At the sentence level these include control of content, formal sentence structure, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling and letter formation. Beyond the sentence, the writer must be able to structure and integrate information into cohesive and coherent paragraphs and texts. In addition, Nunan (1989) states that “In terms of skills, producing a coherent, fluent, extended piece of writing is probably the most difficult thing to do in language” (Nunan, 1989, p. 271). It could be said that although students at advanced levels are able to manage the four skills, it could be possible that they have not mastered the writing skill yet.

Writing has three major elements: communicating the message, purposes and the audience. There is a brief explanation of these elements in the next sections as well as other important elements.

2.2.1 Communicating and Purpose

Communicating in writing means to send a message that has a destination. The message of writing is its content so it is worth to mention the ways in which writing is divided: narration, description, exposition and argumentation. This leads us to point out that these forms are the purposes for writing and the final element is the audience who is the addressee. According to Troyka (1990), “thinking about purposes for writing means thinking about the motivation forces that move people to write”(Troyka, 1990, p. 3). Audience and

purpose are typically interconnected. Writing purposes have to do with goals, sometimes referred as aims of writing or writing intentions. Two major purposes for writing are expository and persuasive.

Expository writing: Informative writing seeks to give and to explain information. The aim is to educate not persuade. Besides this, the information presented has to be complete and clear. Finally, the material has to be accurate and verifiable. Examples of expository writing include encyclopedia entries, news reports, instruction manuals, informative essays, and research papers.

CHECK LIST FOR INFORMATIVE WRITING
Is its major focused on the subject being discussed?
Is its primary purpose to inform rather than persuade?
Is its information complete and accurate?
Can its information be verified?
Is its information arranged for clarity?
Is it interesting to read?

Table 2.2: Checklist for informative writing

Persuasive writing: Persuasive writing seeks to convince about a matter of opinion, this writing argues a position. The focus of this writing is to influence the reader. In contrast, informative writing focuses on the subject being discussed. Persuasive writing must offer convincing support of its point of view. Arguing and reasoning must be logical and clearly arranged. Some examples of persuasive writing include literary essays, editorials, advertisements, books, music or movie reviews.

CHECK LIST FOR PERSUASIVE WRITING
Is its major focused on the reader?
Is its primary purpose to convince rather than to inform?

<p>Does it offer information or reasons to support its point of view? Is its point of view based on sound reasoning and logic? Are the points of its argument arranged for clarity? Does it motivate the reader to action otherwise evoke the intended response?</p>

Table 2.3: Check list for persuasive writing

Narrative writing: Narration is story telling. In many ways, it is the easiest kind of writing because it comes naturally to most people. Practically everyone enjoys telling and hearing stories. Narratives usually progress chronologically, and must have a clear beginning, middle and end. Short stories, novels, personal narratives, anecdotes, and biographies are all examples of narrative writing.

Descriptive writing: The idea of description is to make the thing described seem real to the reader’s imagination. Not much writing is purely descriptive; writers typically weave description into longer narrative works. Some essentially descriptive writing, however, might include certain forms of advertising, character sketches, and photograph captions.

2.2.2 Audience

It was said that writing is a way to communicate a message (Troyka, 1990); if there is a message necessarily there is someone who the message is addressed to. This is better known as the audience; writers need to be aware about to whom they are writing. In order to be successful in the writing task, it is needed to have an understanding of the audience’s expectations and prior knowledge, because this will affect the content of the writing (Swales, 1994).

CHECK LIST OF AUDIENCE CHARACTERISTICS
WHO ARE THEY?
age/sex/education? ethnic background/political philosophy/religious beliefs? role(s): student/veteran/parent/wage/earner/voter/other? employments/economic status? interests/hobbies?
WHAT INFORMATION DO THEY HAVE?
level of education? experience with reading academic or business writing? amount of general knowledge about the subject? amount of specialized knowledge about the subject? perceptions brought to the material?

Table 2.4: Check list of audience characteristics

Audience can be divided into three major groups: general reading public, the instructor as a reader and specialist readers. *General reading public* is educated; they are people who frequently read newspapers, magazines and books. They often have some general information about the subject that the writer is dealing with. The general reading public expects the writer to know how to reach them. The general reader expects material to be clear and free of advanced technical information. Finally, the public reader expects to be treated respectfully.

When writers write for a class assignment the audience will be *the instructor as a reader*. The instructor is part of the general reading public; and someone who knows that the writer is an apprentice. The instructor is a judge and an academic; for that reason, he expects that what he reads includes everything writers wants to say or imply and this has to be written within the constraints of academic writing. .The writer must demonstrate he is doing his best to the instructor. *Specialist readers* are experts on specific subjects; in writing for specialists

writers are expected to know the specialty and also to realize that their readers have advanced expertise (Swales, 1994).

2.2.3 Organization

Writers have to communicate a message; therefore, the text has to be clearly organized. Swales (1994) states that “Information is presented to readers in a structured format, even short pieces of writing have regular, predictable patterns. Academic writing also employs a variety of organizational patterns; external organization features, such as chapters, sections, and paragraphs and internal organization as well. One very common strategy in academic writing is to organize information in terms of problem-solution” (p. 10).

2.2.4 Punctuation

Punctuation is important; an error in punctuation can convey a completely different meaning to the one that is intended. “When writers use punctuation according to currently accepted practice, they avoid errors that interfere with the delivery of the meaning that they want to communicate. Thus, punctuation is a tool that helps them deliver their message clearly to their readers” (Troyka, 1990 p. 475). In this section some punctuation rules will be presented.

The comma

The use of the comma might cause writers many problems; this is because the comma has more rules than all the other punctuation marks combined. Also “many times commas are simply a matter of personal preference” (Feierman, 1995, p. 31).

Langan (1985) stated six main uses of commas:

1. To separate items in series.
2. To set off introductory material.
3. On both sides of words that interrupt the flow of thought in a sentence.
4. Between two complete thoughts connected by and, but, for, or, nor, so, yet.
5. To set off a direct quotation from the rest of a sentence.
6. For certain everyday material.

Semicolon

Semicolons represent a pause that is longer than the comma but shorter than a period. Feierman (1995) proposes three main rules for semicolons:

1. Using a semicolon before a comma after any of the following words when they are used to glue two sentences together: *however, therefore, consequently, for example, furthermore, nevertheless, accordingly, otherwise, moreover, on the contrary, for instance, that is, besides, and instead.*
2. Using semicolons to glue two closely related sentences together if there is no word gluing the two sentences together.
3. Using a semicolon to separate items in a series if any of the items have commas in them. In other words, semicolons are used as “super commas” to separate items in a series.

The colon

“In sentence punctuation, the colon introduces what comes after it: a quotation, a summary or restatement, or a list. The colon has the effect of pointing a bit dramatically to what follows it. The colon has a few special separations as well” (Troyka, 1990 p. 521).

1. Using a colon to introduce quotations, summaries, lists.
2. Using a colon to separate standard material.

2.2.5 Parts of speech

It is important to take into account that in order to communicate a written message some rules need to be followed.

Using language is not just a matter of knowing words and knowing which words to use. Our ability to make ourselves understood in any language, whether it is our native language or a foreign language, depends on two things: First, we have to know the words that will express whatever it is we are trying to express. Second, we have to know how words behave in the particulate language we are trying to use (Burton, 1984, p. 1).

This leads to present the parts of the speech. Burton said: "The parts of speech are the classes into which words are placed according to the work that they do in a sentence" (pp. 22). Each word in a sentence can be classified by its function. Burton (1984) defined the parts of the speech as follows:

PART OF SPEECH	FUNCTION
Noun	The word noun comes from the Latin and means name. The function of a noun is to name someone or something.
Verb	A verb denotes action or being. Its function in a sentence is to tell us what the subject does or is.
Adjective	

	A word that functions as an adjective when it tells more about the person or thing named by a noun or referred to by a pronoun. In grammatical terms, the adjective that adds to the meaning of a noun or pronoun is said to qualify that noun or pronoun.
Adverb	The name adverb establishes the link between adverbs and verbs. Adverbs add to the meaning of verbs.
Preposition	A preposition is the first word of a phrase that contains a noun or a pronoun.
Conjunction	A conjunction is a word used to join together or connect words or groups of words.

Table 2.5: Parts of speech and functions

2.2.6 Sentence structures

When writers know how sentences are formed they have a tool for understanding writing. The sentence has several definitions, one suitable one is that a sentence is a group of words that expresses a complete thought. Unlike a phrase, it can stand alone and make full sense without the help of any additional words (Burton, 1984). In contrast, Troyka (1990) said that the concept “complete” is too subjective to be reliable but agrees with the second part of the definition by saying that a sentence contains an independent clause, a group of words that can stand alone as an independent unit. There are four kinds of sentences:

1. Declarative, they make a statement.
2. Interrogative, they ask a question.
3. Imperative, they give a command.
4. Exclamatory, they produce an exclamation

A sentence consists of two parts: a subject and a predicate those will be briefly explained.

Subject and predicate

The part of the sentence which names the person, idea or thing about which something is being said is called the subject of the sentence. The part of a sentence which says something about the person, idea or thing named by the subject is called the predicate of the sentence.

Direct and indirect objects occur in the predicate of a sentence.

The direct object

The direct object is that part of the predicate that names the person or thing on which the action denoted by the verb is performed. The action is carried across the direct object.

The direct object suffers the action denoted by the verb.

The indirect object

The indirect object is that part of the predicate that names the person or thing affected by the action denoted by the verb- the person or thing to whom or for whom the action is done. The indirect object can be replaced by a phrase beginning with to or for.

Clauses

According to Troyka (1990), a clause is a group of words that contains a subject and a predicate. Clauses are divided into two categories: independent and dependent clauses.

Independent or main clause contains a subject and a predicate. It can stand alone as a sentence because it is an independent grammatical unit. A dependent clause contains a subject and a

predicate and usually starts with a word that makes the clause unable to stand alone as a sentence. A dependent clause must be joined to an independent clause.

Sentence types

There are four types of sentences: simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex. A simple sentence contains one independent clause. A compound sentence contains two independent clauses. A coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so) often links the two independent clauses and is preceded by a comma. A complex sentence contains one independent clause and one or more dependent clauses. A complex sentence will include at least one subordinating conjunction. A compound-complex sentence combines complex sentence and compound sentence forms, it contains one or more independent clauses and one or more dependent clauses.

2.2.7 Effective words

This section explains the role of the meaning of the words in the text. Words communicate meaning and so have an effect on the audience. According to Troyka (1990) “when writers use words effectively, they choose words that communicate their message precisely” (Troyka, 1990 p. 417).

Appropriateness

Writers need to pay attention to diction choice of words. They have to use appropriate levels of formality when writing. Troyka (1990) classified language in three levels:

1. Informal language may include slang, colloquialism, and regionalisms. In addition, it includes sentence fragments and contractions.
2. Medium language level uses general English. Unlike informal language, medium level language is acceptable for academic writing.
3. Highly formal level uses a multisyllabic Latinate vocabulary.

Academic writing should range from medium to somewhat formal levels of language.

Figurative language

“Figurative language creates comparisons and connections that use one idea or image to explain another” (Troyka, 1990 p. 443).

TYPES OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE
<p>Analogy: a comparison of similar traits between dissimilar things (an analogy may extend for several sentences).</p> <p>Irony: the use of words to suggest the opposite of their usual sense.</p> <p>Metaphor: a comparison between otherwise dissimilar things without using the word <i>like</i> or <i>as</i>.</p> <p>Overstatement: deliberate exaggeration for emphasis.</p> <p>Personification: the assignment of a human trait to a nonhuman thing.</p> <p>Simile: a direct comparison between otherwise dissimilar things, using the word <i>like</i> or <i>as</i>.</p> <p>Understatement: deliberate restraint for emphasis.</p>

Table 2.6: Types of figurative language

Cliché

Troyka (1990) mentions the following about cliché:

A cliché is an overused expression that has lost its capacity to communicate effectively. It can describe both overused expressions and overused words. Some words can become tiresome and trite but they are not clichés, they are called vogue words. Vogue words can be heard and seen everywhere but they soon lose their popularity. The difference between a vogue phrase

and a cliché is that although a vogue phrase can return to being a useful part of the language, a cliché cannot. Language loses its punch and new ways of expressing ideas are needed. Proverbs are often confused with clichés. Although both are used frequently they are different. Proverbs are lean and economical phrases that express a great deal with a few words (p. 444).

2.2.8 Flow

Another important consideration for successful communication is flow, moving from one statement in a text to the text; establishing a clear connection of ideas is important to help the reader to follow the text (Swales, 1994).

In order to have a flow some linking words and phrases are needed.

	Subordinators	Sentence connectors	Phrase linkers
Addition		Furthermore In addition Moreover	In addition to
Adversative	Although Even though Despite the fact That	However Nevertheless	Despite In spite of
Cause and effect	Because Since	Therefore As a result Consequently Hence Thus	Because of Due to As a result of
Clarification		In other words That is i.e.	
Contrast	While Whereas	In contrast However On the other hand	unlike
Illustration		Conversely For example For instance	
Intensification		On the contrary As a matter of fact In fact	

Table 2.7: Linking words and phrases

2.2.9 Presentation

When students write an assignment to be handed in, they must pay attention to all details to avoid errors; Swales stated that “most instructors tolerate small errors in language in papers written by nonnative speakers; however, errors that could have been avoided by careful proofreading are generally considered less acceptable” (Swales, 1994 p. 29).

Writers must consider three significant points:

1. Considering the overall format of the written work.
 - Does the paper look as it has been carefully prepared?
 - Are there clear paragraphs?
 - Is the line spacing appropriate?
2. Proofreading for careless grammar mistakes.
 - Do subjects and verbs agree?
 - Have the appropriate verb tenses been used?
 - Have the articles *a*, *an*, and *the* been used when necessary?
 - Is *the* used too much?
3. Checking for misspelled words.
 - Has the correct homophone been used?
 - Did the spell-check routine miss anything?

2.3 Chapter conclusion

In this chapter a definition about academic writing was stated; also, some aspects about the writing process were explained; finally, the features required for academic writing were presented. The next chapter will present the methodology used to carry out this research paper.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

3.0 Chapter Introduction

This research was about features required for academic writing and how advance students who are majoring English Language Teaching apply them in their written works. The purpose was to analyze how these students write after they finish their target language courses, to analyze the features of academic writing texts required, and to analyze which aspects of the features required for academic writing students' samples lack the most.

In this chapter the setting, the subjects, the research methodology, the instruments, the data collection procedure and the data analysis are provided.

3.1 Setting

This research was carried out in a language department of a large public university located in the center east of Mexico. This department offers a bachelor's degree in English Language Teaching where students learn not only the methodology to teach the language but also the language itself. One of the goals of this undergraduate program is to have students develop the four skills (reading, speaking, listening and writing) so that they can get the B2 level of the Common European Framework. It seems that one of the most difficult skills for students is writing; therefore, the purpose of this study was to analyze some academic texts written by students to find out what features of good academic writing they take into account.

3.2 Participants

Thirteen students participated in this study. They were between 20 and 21 years old. The participants were selected because they were taking the last course of their target language which was English V.

3.3 Research methodology

This study was developed as a case study. Cohen (2000) stated that “a case study is a specific instance that is frequently designed to illustrate a more general principle; it is the study of an instance in action (p. 181). For that reason, this study includes a detailed account of the analysis of written texts and an attempt to raise writing awareness in students who are majoring in English Language Teaching.

3.4 Instruments

As it was stated before one of the aims of this study was to analyze how the participants wrote after they finished their target language courses; for that reason, a rubric was used to guide the analysis of the papers provided by the participants. The next section will provide detailed information about it.

3.4.1 Rubric

Goodrich (1997) stated that a rubric is an assessment tool that lists the criteria for a piece of work or what counts, and articulates gradations of quality for each criterion, from excellent to poor. In other words, a rubric divides the assigned work into small parts and provides descriptions of the characteristics of the work associated with each component. For

this research a rubric was designed. Although the main purpose of a rubric is to assess, in this study the rubric designed was used only to divide the texts into small parts to make the analysis easier. In this rubric the features for academic writing established by Haines (2006), Swales (1998) and Troyka (1987) were taken into account. Moreover, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages was part of the basis to do this rubric.

The rubric was divided into three sections that were established according to the Common European Framework for languages: first, the student can write clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects related to his interests as well as highlight the personal significance of events and experiences; second, the student can write an essay or report and letters; and third, the student can pass on information or giving reasons in support or against a particular point of view. Each point is related to the aspects stated by the authors mentioned before (see appendix A).

3.5 Data collection procedure and analysis

Several steps were followed in order to gather the necessary data for this study. First of all, there were three groups that were in their last target language course, the subject group was selected because they accepted to participate in the research. Second, the researcher asked the group's teacher for help to obtain some essays written by his students; the teacher accepted.

The principal aim of the data collection procedure was to gather essays written by the students; the essays were collected into two different moments. In the first moment, the teacher asked his students for an essay that they had already written. In this part just five essays were collected, the teacher did not provide the researcher the complete task required

for the essays he just said that his students had written an argumentative essay about the main characteristics of an oral presentation.

In the second moment, the researcher asked the participants to write an essay. The task fulfillment was to write an explanatory essay about effective openings in oral presentations. The requirements of the assignment were font Times New Roman. 12, double space. The participants had two days to hand in the essay; after this time eight essays were collected; those were the focus of the data analysis.

After collecting all the essays, they were analyzed one by one. These were analyzed considering the rubric done for this research. The analysis of this part was presented in some tables.

3.7 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter the setting, the subjects, the research methodology, the data collection procedure and the data analysis were presented. The next chapter will provide the results of the essays analysis and the raw material to answer the research questions.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

4.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter the methodology of the research was presented. This chapter will present the results gathered after the procedure was applied. The data was obtained from the analysis of some written works provided by advanced students who are majoring in English Language Teaching. In the following sections I will respond to the research questions posed at the beginning of the study.

4.1 Research Questions

In order to remember the research question they are provided bellow.

MRQ: Are students familiarized with the characteristics of a well-written academic text?

RQ1 What are the characteristics of academic writing that the texts written and provided by students whose major is English Language Teaching have?

RQ2 Which of the characteristics of a well written academic text do advanced students' samples lack the most?

4.2 Characteristics of good academic writing found in the texts

To answer the main research question, first, I will present the features of good academic writing that the participants took into account, next I will present what students did not consider and finally I will answer my main research question. To organize the presentation of the results, it is necessary to mention the main authors I included in chapter two and the aspects I considered for the analysis.

Swales (1998) stated that academic writing is as a product of many considerations: audience, purpose, organization, style, flow, and presentation; in addition, the role of the words' meaning in the text; that is what Troyka (1987) called effective words. Taking into account those features, a rubric (see Appendix A) was made and based on this rubric the essays were analyzed. As a result, it was found that most of those characteristics were identified in the good texts provided by the participants. The results will be divided in the features stated above.

4.2.1 Audience

Writers of good academic texts consider the audience when they write. This is in order to have a clear understanding of the addressee's expectations and prior knowledge. In the essays analyzed, the participants had to take into account the instructor as a reader; in other words, the writer had to demonstrate to his teacher that he was doing his best. The essays showed a reasonable endeavor at the addressee's expectations.

4.2.2 Purpose

The purpose of the essays was to explain effective openings in an oral presentation and how to be ready for it. Some of the essays showed that the writing aims were properly stated; this means that the purposes above were the main idea of the majority of the essay.

4.2.3 Organization

Ten (n=13) of the texts presented a structured format and an obvious understanding of external organizational features; such as chapters, sections and paragraphs. The next images illustrate the external organization of some of the analyzed essays.

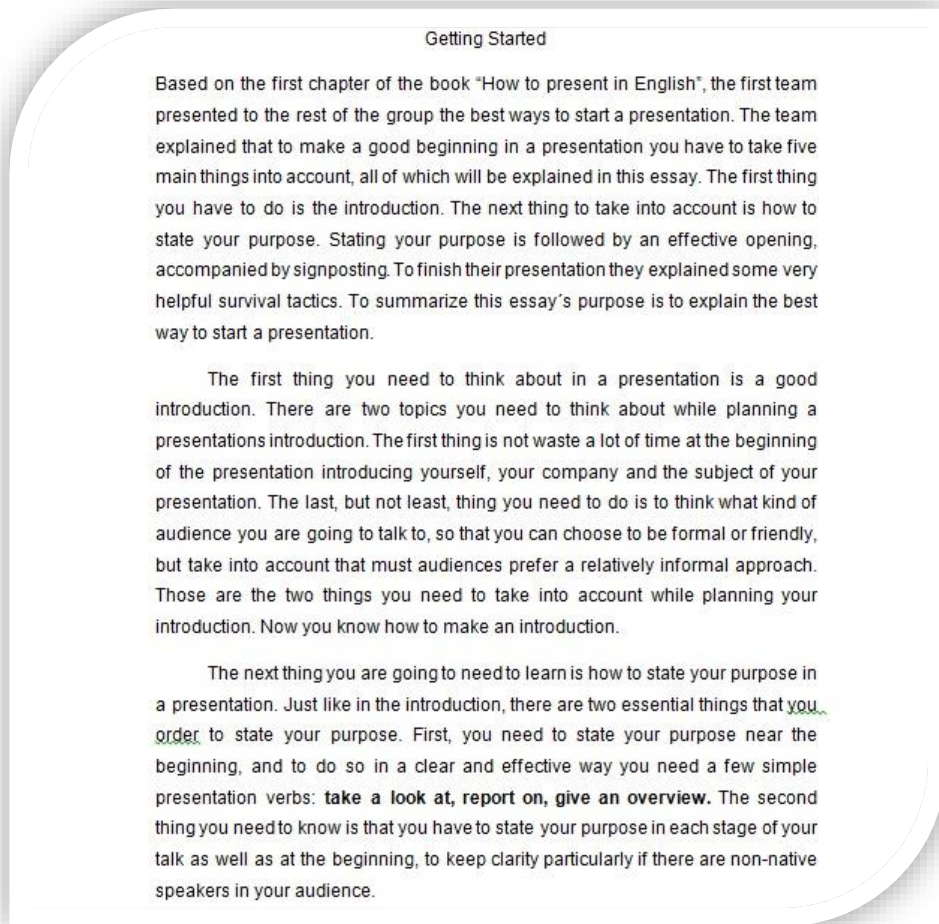


Image1. External organizational essay 2

Getting started

Giving a presentation in your own language is complicated, but it is even more if it has to be in a foreign language. It is important for lecturers to know how to introduce the topic to the audience in an interesting way. There are essential tips that help presenters to make an impact on the addressees and have a successful presentation, this essay is about getting started a presentation in a foreign language.

First, it is important to identify how formal the situation is in order to choose a formal or a friendly way of introducing yourself and the topic. For example in an informal situation we can use phrases like: As you know..., Morning everyone..., Ok let's get started. Remember don't waste a lot of time presenting yourself, the introduction has to be brief.

Stating the purpose is the second step in the presentation, for this purpose we can use these phrases: I'm going to be... talking to you about, telling you or showing you. The first minutes of a presentation are the most significant; there are three simple techniques for getting the immediate attention of the audience: give them a problem to think, tell them some amazing facts and tell them a story.

The structure of the presentation is essential to make the topic clear to the audience. To guide the spectators through the presentation we can use some phrases as signposts, such as To move on, To expand on, To digress, To go back, To recap, To conclude, To summarize, To turn to and to elaborate on. *Ok*. So is the simplest way of signpost the end of a point and the beginning of another.

Finally if we make mistakes we can use some survival phrases to sort out the problem in a confident way. For example if we realize we are talking too fast we

Image2. External organization essay 5

The images above represent the external organization of essays, even short pieces of writing have regular, predictable patterns. Academic writing employs a variety of organizational patterns; external organization features, such as chapters, sections, and paragraphs and internal organization as well.

The next essay has just one single paragraph; however, the ideas are organized with the help of linkers such as firstly, secondly, etc.

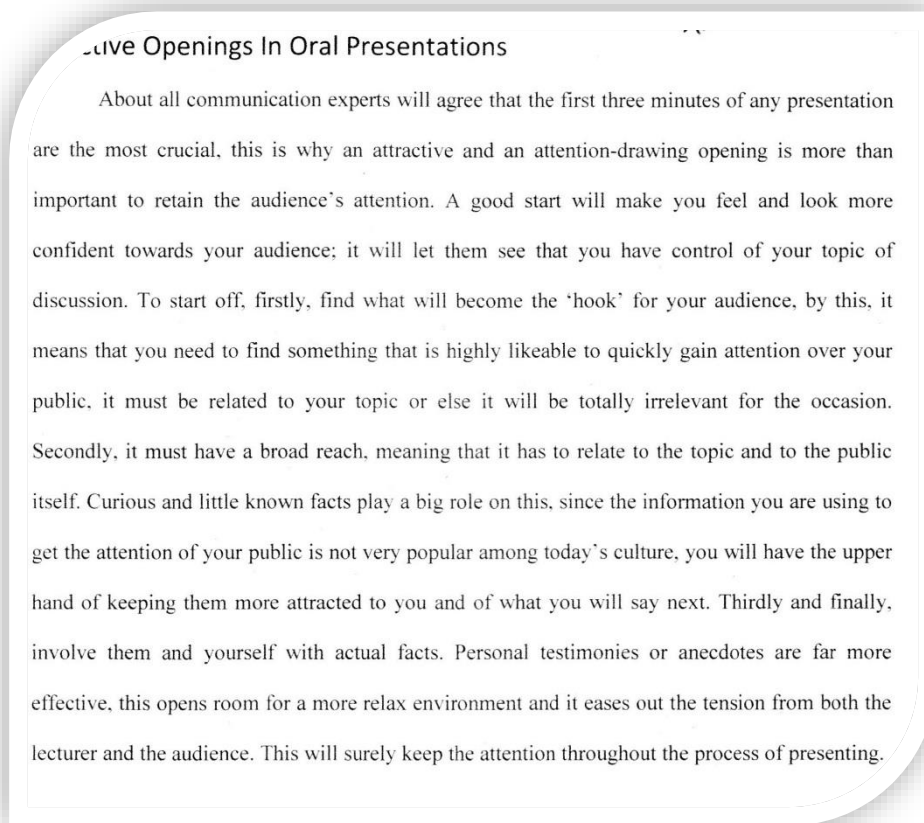


Image3. External organization essay 12

Even though essay 12 is a single-paragraph essay it has linking words that help to organize the whole text. Swales (1994) stated that an important consideration for successful communication is flow, moving from one statement in a text to the next; establishing a clear connection of ideas is important to help the reader to follow the text. In order to have flow some linking words and phrases are needed

4.2.4 Punctuation

The texts presented an adequate use of comas, semicolons and colons. Some examples will be presented in order to illustrate this point.

4.2.4.1 Comma

In order to have a clear understanding of the analysis, the use of the comma will be presented first and with it an example taken from the essays.

To separate items in series: “For example in an informal situation we can use phrases like: *As you know...*, *Morning everyone...*, *Ok let’s get started.*” (essay 5, line 8).

“you need to state your purpose near the beginning, and to do so in a clear and effective way you need a few simple presentation verbs: *take a look at*, *report on*, *give an overview.*” (essay2, line 21).

To set off introductory material: “But that is not a true fact, lectures can be an opportunity of enhance the level of knowledge and motivation in certain topics...” (essay 8, line 5).

On both sides of words that interrupt the flow of thought in a sentence: “The last, *but not least*, thing you need to do is to think what kind of audience you are going to talk to” (essay 2, line 14).**Between two complete thoughts connected by and, but, for, or, nor, so, yet:** “Giving a presentation in your own language is complicated, *but* it is even more if it has to be in a foreign language” (essay 5, line 1).

4.2.4.2 Semicolon

As in the previous section, the use of the semicolon will be presented first and then an example taken from the essays.

4. **Using semicolons to glue two closely related sentences together if there is no word gluing the two sentences together:** “The first three minutes of a presentation are the most important of it because it is when the presenter catches the audience’s attention; *to do this* there are simple techniques called hooks” (essay 6, line 1).

4.2.4.3 Colon

The last feature related to punctuation analyzed in the essays of this research was the colon. As it was done before, the uses of the colon will be presented followed by an extract taken from the essays.

3. **Using a colon to introduce quotations, summaries, lists:** “there are three simple techniques for getting the immediate attention of the audience: give them a problem to think, tell them some amazing facts and tell them a story” (essay 5, line 15).

4.2.5 Flow

In order to have a flow some linking words and phrases are needed. In texts analyzed several linking words and phrases were identified. There were eight (n=13) essays where there was a better use of linking words and phrases.

The following tables will show some linking words and how the participants used them in their essays.

Linking word	Extract
First	“ First , you need to state your purpose near the beginning...” (essay 2, line 21)
Second	“The second thing you need to know...” (essay 2, line 23)
Then	“ Then , think about how to make an effective opening” (essay 2, line 26)
First of all	“ First of all , if you have problems during your presentation...” (essay 2, line 43)
First	“ First , it is important to identify how formal the situation is...” (essay 5, line 7)
For example	“ For example , in an informal situation we can use phrases like...” (essay 5, line 8)
But	“The last, but not least, thing you need to do is to think what kind of audience you are going to talk to, so that you can choose to be formal or friendly, but take into account that most audiences prefer a relatively informal approach.” (essay 2, line 14)
And	“you need to state your purpose near the beginning, and to do so in a clear and effective way you need a few simple presentation verbs...” (essay 2, line 22)

Nevertheless	“universities had very large classrooms where lecturers presented their research and experiences; <i>nevertheless</i> , nowadays lectures are considered boring...” (essay 8, line 2)
Finally	“ <i>Finally</i> , like the book explains presenting in English is not a simple task...” (essay 2, line 39)
In conclusion	“ <i>In conclusion</i> , the beginning of a presentation is the key to get the attention...” (essay 5, line 27)
In the end	“ <i>In the end</i> , make sure to prepare your opening carefully...” (essay 9, line 35)

Table1. Linking words

Essay	Extract
12	<p>“<i>firstly</i>, find what will become the hook...” (line 5)</p> <p>“<i>Secondly</i>, it must have...” (line 8)</p> <p>“<i>Thirdly</i>, involve them...” (line 11)</p>
15	<p>“<i>First</i> you have to identify...” (line 5)</p> <p>“<i>Then</i> you have not use your opening...” (line 8)</p> <p>“<i>Another</i> important thing is the voice...” (line 12)</p> <p>“<i>As a conclusion</i> I can say that the opening...” (line 15)</p>

Table 2. Other linking words

4.3 Characteristics of academic writing that were not identified

Taking into account Swales' (1998) definition of academic writing, it was found that several of those aspects were not identified in the majority of the essays. The results of the analysis will be shown according to the features stated above.

4.3.1 Organization

Two (n=13) of the texts presented information inadequately organized, and inconsistent understanding of external organization features; such as chapters, sections and paragraphs.

The image bellow will illustrate this.

.

In this essay we are going to talk about the effective openings and some points that could help us to get a successful presentation in a different way it means not a normal academic presentation, we introduce some phrases and expressions to introduce the topic and our self in a way that the audience have their attention focus on the presentation.

To start with our theme there are some points, the first one is catch the attention of the public, you have to be in a place where everybody can see, your voice has to have the perfect volume and the way you pronounce the words has to be clear to transmit the correct message and don't get confused the audience once you know this tips you just have to practice by your self and then you are going to be ready for a big audience in a big place

Image4. External organization essay 11

Image 4 shows that the complete text has just two paragraphs and the main idea of the text is not completely stated. In order to give the reader a clear presentation of the writer's ideas, it is important to organize the whole text into different paragraphs; each paragraph develops a different idea and helps the reader to have a clear understanding of the text's meaning.

Image 5 illustrates something different, in contrast to the other two images the whole essay has just a list of phrases and expressions. This could be perhaps the first draft of the text, but

not the final product. A text is organized in paragraphs, and in order to organize lines into paragraphs some linking words are needed.

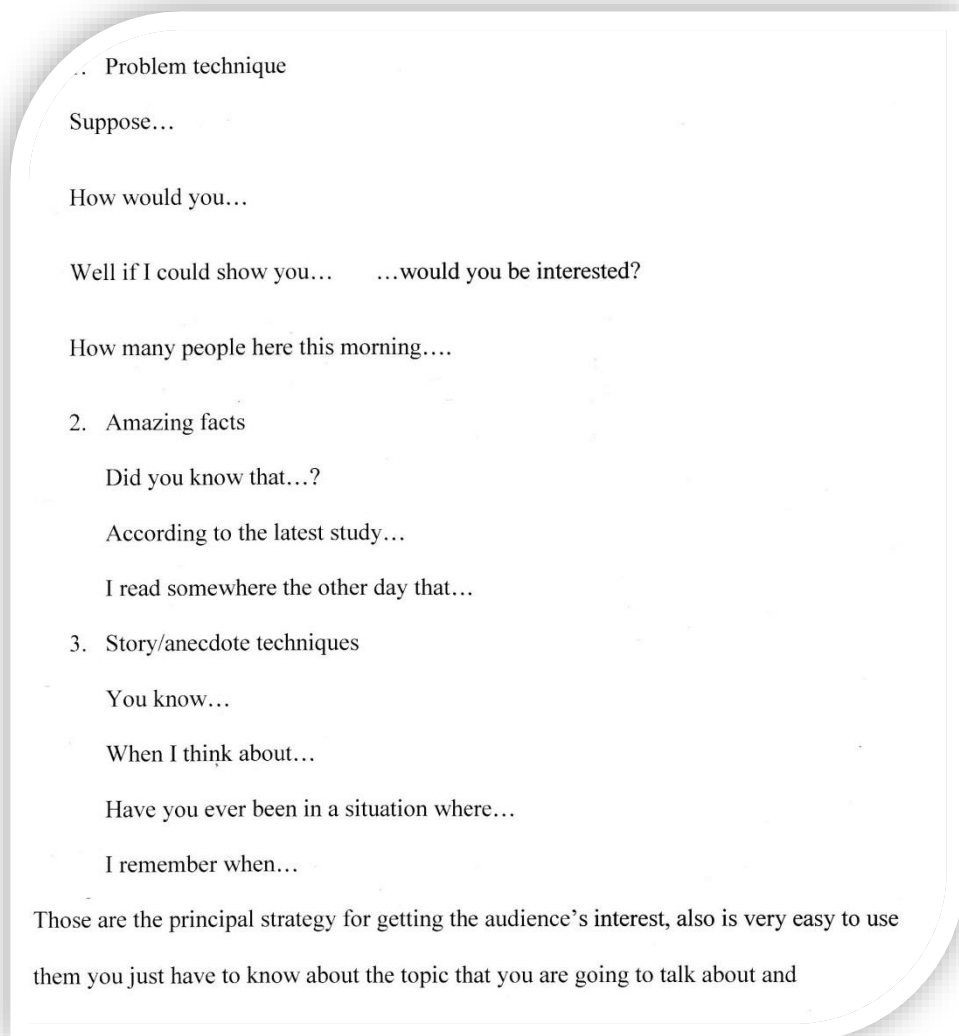


Image5. External organization essay 14

Not all the essays presented an unstructured format, but it is worth mentioning it because this issue is remarkable to answer one of the research questions.

Besides the external organization there are other aspects that help to have cohesion in the text. It is here where punctuation takes place as well as the use of commas, semicolons and colons.

4.3.2 Punctuation

The next table will show how the participants used the comma in their works.

Essay	Extract
11	“to start with our theme there are some <i>points, the</i> first one is catch the attention of the <i>public, you</i> have to be in a place where everybody can <i>see, your</i> voice has to have the perfect volume and the way you pronounce the words has to be clear to transmit the correct message and don’t get confused the audience once you know this tips you just have to practice by yourself and then you are going to be ready for a big audience in a big place” (lines 8-15)
13	“Don’t look down at your notes except when <i>necessary, or</i> at your hands or feet” (lines 14-15)
16	“To make an effective presentation, it is important to get your audience interested in the beginning <i>of it, you</i> need to hook your audience and cause them to pay attention to you.” (lines 5-8)
12	“To start <i>off, firstly, find</i> what will become the ‘hook’ for your <i>audience, by this,</i> it means that you need to find something that is highly likeable to quickly gain attention over your <i>public, it must</i> be related to your topic or else it will be totally irrelevant for the occasion.” (lines 5-7)

Table 3. Coma uses

As it is illustrated in table 3 the participants used the comma as a matter of personal preference, in other words, they used commas inadequately. The extract taken from essay 11 shows three commas; the first one is trying to replace the ‘colon’ use: “to start with our theme there are some *points, the* first...” the third and the second ones are used to separate items in series, but instead of commas, some linking words are needed..

In extract from essay 13 the participant wanted to use the comma to interrupt the flow of thought in a sentence, but two commas are needed for this purpose; on both sides of the phrase *except when necessary*: “Don’t look down at your notes except when *necessary, or* at...”

In the last extract taken from essay 12 there is an overuse of commas. “To start *off, firstly, find* what will become the ‘hook’ for your *audience, by this*, it means...”

4.3.3 Flow

As it was stated in the literature review linking words are used to establish a clear connection of ideas in order to help the reader to follow the text.

The analysis done showed that there was little use of linking words and phrases in six essays provided by the participants; besides that, some linking words were used incorrectly and there was no use of linking words in two essays. However, there were eight essays where there was a better use of linking words and phrases. To illustrate this some extracts from the essays will be shown in Table 4.

Essay	Extract
11	“ <i>the first</i> one is catch the attention of the public...” (line 8)
16	“ <i>Another</i> technique is giving them some amazing facts...”(line 17) “ <i>The last</i> technique is about giving them a story...” (line 21)
13	“to be successful in a presentation you must be able to know the skills that you need to have. <i>And</i> the types of presentation you can use.” (lines 2-3) “ <i>Also</i> in the informal way the sentences...” (line 9)
3	“ <i>Finally</i> to be a good presenter must be able to have...” (line 19)
1	“ <i>Another</i> important point is the use of visual aids” (line 12)
4	“ <i>Another</i> useful tool in lectures is the hooks...” (line 22) “ <i>Also</i> , it is very important let the audience...” (line 18)

Table 4. Good use of linking words.

Table 4 shows a good use of linking words; however, students lack punctuation when using linking words. Table 4 shows an extract from essay 13. This extract presents an incorrect use of the linking word ‘and’; this word is used to link two complete thoughts. The extract, in contrast, shows how it is used at the beginning of other sentence: “to be successful in a presentation you must be able to know the skills that you need to have. *And* the types of presentation...”

On the other hand, there were some paragraphs where there were no linking words; for example, this extract taken from essay 10:

“Opening with a question creates curiosity and jump starts the thought process. Thinking causes engagement with your topic-exactly what you and the audience are hoping for. When you raise a rhetorical question during your opening you don’t expect it to be answered by your audience. Instead you use the question to set the framework for your speech. You pose an answer and then build the interest.” (Lines 14-18)

In this extract some linking words are necessary.

4.3.4 Presentation

As it was stated in the literature review “most instructors tolerate small errors in language in papers written by nonnative speakers; however, errors that could have been avoided by careful proofreading are generally considered less acceptable” (Swales, 1998, pp. 29.)

Some of the essays had few incorrect uses of homophones, basic grammar errors or misspelled words. The next images will illustrate some examples.

Image4.Misspelled words

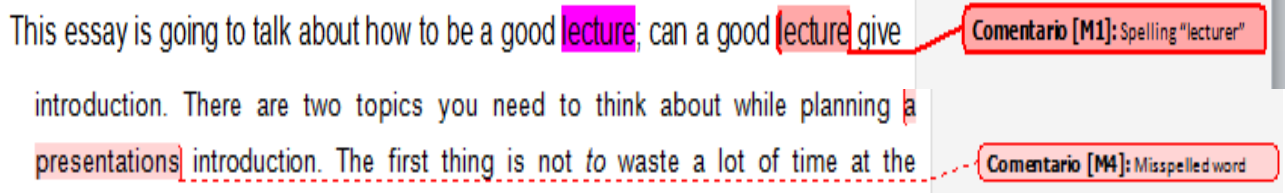


Image5.Misspelled words

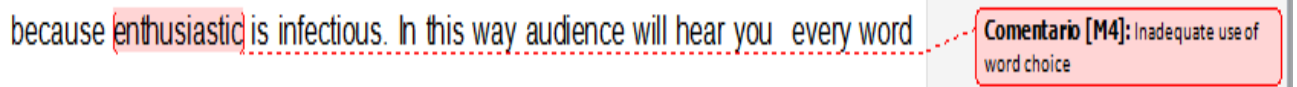


Image6. Inadequate word choice

use new and unusual content, they make that all topics that they are presenting it is really matters) and interesting, using the ability to make people laugh and think. In addition, in tone of voice (is valuable also), a clear, loud voice, a good presenter has the ability to pace speech and use voice to create impact, it is an important

Comentario [M5]: Check grammar

Comentario [M6]: Spelling

Comentario [M7]: Grammar: adverb position

Image7.Basic grammar errors

4.4 Are students familiarized with the characteristics of a well-written academic text?

According to the data presented above, the features that the essays lack the most are punctuation and flow, in other words, the essays showed that the use of commas, semicolon and colon is not adequate in the majority of the essays and there is lack of linking words. This fact makes it difficult for the reader to grasp the writer's intention.

Actually, the improper use of punctuation made the analysis of the essays difficult; for instance, sometimes it was necessary to read a paragraph more than once because there were a lot of commas or because there were no commas. Therefore, it seems that students are not aware or familiarized with the features of good academic writing. It is assumed that students in the last course of target language know about the use of good academic writing features; however, most of them did not take into account all the aspects required for it. From a personal point of view there may be three reasons to explain this: First, they think they write well; second, they do not revise and edit essays; or third, they do not really know what is required for academic writing. Unfortunately to know the reason it is necessary to carry on another research paper.

4.5 Chapter conclusion

This chapter presented the results of the research, the features found in the essays and the features the samples lacked the most. The next chapter will present a summary of the results found, the conclusion of the research, the limitations, further research and a personal reflection.

CHAPTER V: RESULTS

5.0 Chapter introduction

This chapter provides the significance of this research as well as the main conclusions obtained from this study; furthermore, I included an explanation about how the aims of this research were achieved, how the research questions were answered, the limitations of the research and the suggestions for further research.

5.1 Summary of results

The analysis done showed that in most essays, the audience was taken into account, the purpose was stated and the organization was good. In some essays, the use of commas, colons and semicolons was good as well as some linking words. Nevertheless, in most essays, the use of linking words or phrases was poor; for instance, the linking words students use the most were “and” and “but”. According to the analyzed papers, there were no more linking words. In addition, there was no use of linking words in two essays and some linking words were not used properly. About punctuation, the coma and period were the questions marks used more frequently and some punctuation marks were used incorrectly.

Furthermore, there were several incorrect uses of homophones, the analysis showed several words pronounced the same but with a different meaning. Also, there were basic grammar errors and misspelled words in six essays provided by the participants. In eight essays there was a better use of linking words and punctuation and there were few basic grammar errors and misspelled words.

5.2 Accomplishment of aims

The three aims of the research were accomplished; first, the required features for academic writing texts were analyzed; second, some good academic texts written by students who were majoring in English Language Teaching were analyzed; third, an analysis was carried out to find out which aspects of the features required for students' academic writing sample lacked the most; moreover, this information helped to answer the research questions.

5.3 Limitations

There were two limitations for this research: there were just three groups that were taking the last target language course. There were also some other people who were carrying out a research project that needed the same participants; therefore, the groups were not available. Fortunately, one of the groups accepted to participate on this research.

5.4 Further research.

For future research projects it might be useful to analyze more essays that could show a better overview of how students' writing improves. This project was based on students and how they take; for example, purpose, audience, organization, flow among others into account when writing academically. It might be interesting to research about the same considerations but from the teacher's perspective and how she/he raises students' awareness of these aspects.

5.5 Personal reflection

During the process of this thesis project, I have gone through different experiences of which I would like to talk about. Therefore in this section, I will write a personal reflection following

four different points. First of all, I will talk about the beginnings of this research project. Next, I will explain the development period of the project and, after that, I will write about the ending of the same. Finally, a main reflection will be given.

The beginnings of this research project started when I decided to investigate about writing; what led to this was that when I started the major in English Language Teaching I was not able to write a single paragraph, from my point of view this was the most difficult part about learning a new language. In other words, this was the main reason which inspired me to carry out this research.

Talking about the development period of the project; at first, it was disappointing to have to face the limitations, I did not want to change the topic of the research and the limitations made hard to continue with the project. Fortunately, the good will of a group made possible to carry out the research. As the project moved forward, it was interesting to read about how different authors define and state features of academic writing, but it was definitely fascinating to analyze those features on the students' samples.

What surprised me a lot at the end of the research project was that most of the students' samples lacked of even the simplest features required for academic writing. The subjects for this research project were advanced students; they were supposed to be able to produce from a simple essay to a whole thesis.

Finally, the main reflection about this research project is that I, as a student, could realize how my writing skill improved due to the awareness of the features required for academic writing. For this reason I think that it is important that students raise an awareness of these features with the teachers' help.

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1. Task fulfillment	Full realization of the task set. All content points asked for in the task are included.	Most content points included and/or with a little irrelevant information.	Some of the points inadequately covered in the task and maybe with some irrelevant information.	Considerably omission of the points asked for in the task and/or considerable irrelevant material.
2. Audience	Clear understanding of the writer's audience's expectations and prior knowledge.	Reasonable endeavor at the addressee's expectations.	Inconsistent endeavors at the addressee's expectations. Not very positive effect on the target reader.	Unclear understanding about the audience. Negative effect on the target audience.
3. Purpose	Writing aims are clearly stated. (Either persuasive, expository, narrative or descriptive writing.)	Writing aims are allowable stated.	Writing aims are inadequately stated.	Writing aims are no obvious stated.
4. Organization	Information is presented in a structured format. Obvious understanding of external organization features, such as chapters, sections and paragraphs.	Information is almost well organized. Reasonable understanding of external organizational features.	Information is inadequately organized at times. Inconsistent understanding of external organizational features.	Information is disorganized. Unclear understanding of external organizational features.
5. Style	Proper use of verbs, nouns and other parts of speech, it means the more formal alternative. Completely understanding of formal grammar style: a) Avoid contractions b) Use the more appropriate formal negative forms c) Limit the use of "run out" expressions, such as "and so forth" and "etc." d) Avoid addressing the reader as "you" e) Limit the use of direct questions f) Place adverbs within the verb	Allowable use of the more formal alternative: Two or three incorrect uses of formal negative forms, "run out" expressions, addressing the reader as "you", use of direct questions and place adverbs within the verb.	Inconsistent use of the more formal alternative: Four or more mistakes using informal negative forms, "run out" expressions, addressing the reader as "you", use of direct questions and place adverbs within the verb.	No clear understanding about the more formal alternative: Very frequent mistakes using informal negative forms, "run out" expressions, addressing the reader as "you", use of direct questions and place adverbs within the verb.
6. Flow	A clear connection of ideas is established. Linking words and phrases are adequately used.	An adequate connection of ideas is established. Linking words and phrases mostly used.	Limited range of linking words and phrases.	Few or none use of linking words and phrases.
7. Effective words	Appropriate selection of words that communicate the message precisely. None or one error of vocabulary. Avoid clichés	Reasonable selection of words to communicate the message. Two or three mistakes in the use of vocabulary.	Inadequate use of words that communicate the message. Four or more mistakes in the use of vocabulary.	Several mistakes in the selection of words to communicate the message.
8. Punctuation	Proper use of punctuation	Allowable use of punctuation. Two or three mistakes.	Inadequate use of punctuation. Four or more mistakes.	Very frequent mistakes in punctuation.
9. Presentation	None or only on use of an incorrect homophone, basic grammar error and misspelled words.	Two or three incorrect uses of homophones, basic grammar errors and misspelled words.	Four or more incorrect uses of homophones, basic grammar errors and misspelled words.	Very frequent incorrect uses of homophones, basic grammar errors and misspelled words.