

UGRC 110

Academic Writing

Session 1 – Nature Of Academic Writing

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College of Education

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Session Overview

This session will introduce you to the new environment you find yourself in.

OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this session you should be able to

- identify what the **'academic discourse community'** means
- note the purpose of Academic Writing
- note the nature of Academic Essays

Session Outline

The key topics to be covered in the session are as follows:

- The Academic Discourse Community
- Language of the University
- Other Discourse Communities within the Academic Community
- Advantages of Diversity to Writing

Reading List

Read

- a) Chapter Eighty-Three of *Reclaiming Human Sciences Through African Perspectives* Vol. 2., Adika, Gordon S. K. pp. 1493-1502
- b) Chapter One Of *Academic Writing: A Handbook For International Students*- Bailey, Stephen pp. 3-10

Topic One

THE ACADEMIC DISCOURSE COMMUNITY



WHAT IS AN ACADEMIC DISCOURSE COMMUNITY?

- A discourse community is a group of people bound by specialized use of language, and membership of such a community is by special qualification rather than by birth. For example, the community of lawyers, the community of physicists, the community of engineers etc.
- The university community constitutes an academic discourse community with several sub-communities. You will find in this community experts in various disciplines who interact through the specialized language of the discipline and who train others to also become experts.

Sample Question

1. Identify a discourse community and show why it is different from the Academic discourse community.
2. Identify two sub-types of academic discourse communities found in the University of Ghana.
3. Write down ten terminologies used within one of these communities.
4. Explain any five of these terminologies.

Topic Two

LANGUAGE OF THE UNIVERSITY



LANGUAGE OF THE UNIVERSITY

- In the Ghanaian Primary or Junior High Schools, the instructors are referred to as **teachers** but this term changes in the Senior High School where it is more appropriate to use the terms **Master or Mistress** when addressing the subject teachers. The name of instructors change in the university as well. They are generally referred to as **Lecturers**. Titles like **Doctor** and **Professor** are also used.
- The space within which teaching takes place which are called **classrooms** from the Primary School right up to the Senior Secondary School, changes to **Lecture Halls**.
- Many **freshmen** (new entrants into the university) have problems getting to know, and use these new **terminologies** but no one takes time to explain these new terms to them! This is because the people who are already in the community assume that everyone knows the terms. They may even forget about their own struggle to learn these terms when they first entered the university.



Activity

- Think of any discourse community and write the name down.
- Write five words that will be used in the discourse community you have identified.

Topic Three

DISCOURSE COMMUNITIES WITHIN THE ACADEMIC COMMUNITY



DISCOURSE COMMUNITIES WITHIN THE ACADEMIC COMMUNITY

- The University is a large discourse community. Within it, we have smaller discourse communities which are marked by separate disciplines, departments and majors.
- The School of Arts of the University of Ghana, for instance, is made up of academic departments that deal with subjects like Study of Religions, Philosophy, Classics, and Heritage Studies. The School is marked separately from the University Of Ghana Business School for instance which deals with subjects like Marketing, Human Resource Development and Finance.



DISCOURSE COMMUNITIES WITHIN THE ACADEMIC COMMUNITY

- A discourse community may be further divided into sub communities. For example, in the School of Languages, we have the sub-community of linguists, and those interested in English literary studies.
- The sub-community of linguists for instance will use such terms like **'phonology'**, **'assimilation'** and **'honorifics'** etc while the community of literary experts will use such terms as **'paradox'**, **'analepsis'**, **'synecdoche'** and **'iambic pentameter'**.
- Therefore, the larger Academic Discourse Community and its sub communities need some form of introduction to the new entrant else, the new entrant (freshman) spends a greater part of his time trying to learn about the language of this new environment.

DISCOURSE COMMUNITIES WITHIN THE ACADEMIC COMMUNITY

- The Academic Discourse Community is vast. There are mainly Ghanaians here in the University of Ghana and for that matter any public or private university in Ghana. We must also note that the university is also made up of foreign students like Nigerians, Americans, Chinese, Koreans and a host of others from French-speaking West Africa!
- Because of this mix of students from various countries, various cultures and with various backgrounds, Lecturers cannot assume that all students have the same experiences, values and belief systems



OTHER DISCOURSE COMMUNITIES WITHIN THE ACADEMIC COMMUNITY

- As a Discourse Community, the university is very interested in the smooth running of things. This is where the third category of staff of the university, the supporting staff comes into play.
- There are porters at the various Porters' lodges of the various Halls of residence. There are libraries in each Hall and each Library has a librarian. We can also find libraries in each academic department and there is also a central library, and together, they help to foster effective communication within the university.

TOPIC FOUR

ADVANTAGES OF DIVERSITY TO WRITING



ADVANTAGES OF DIVERSITY TO WRITING

- Writing in the university requires a good demonstration of research. This therefore requires that the student will have to make good use of the other sub-communities, especially their libraries. Students will also use the advantage of the diversity of peoples in the university to gather information about the various cultures.
- For example, with the novel **Things Fall Apart** by Chinua Achebe, a philosopher studying this novel would have already gone into the field of Literature in English. This philosopher will need a sociologist to explain why the Ibos are governed by a group of elders and not a king. That same philosopher would want to use the services of a psychologist to understand why Okonkwo had to join in the killing of Ikemefuna. He needs himself (Philosopher) to find out whether Okonkwo is morally right to join in the killing of the boy. He even needs some History of such practices and how long they occurred in Ibo land for him to arrive at any reasonable conclusions of his study.

ADVANTAGES OF DIVERSITY TO WRITING

- Members of the academic discourse community always WRITE. Whatever they present orally is written first. So, writing is a very important aspect of the university community.
- Academics or people who live in the academic discourse community are generally looked upon as people who use 'big English' in their writings. This is not always the case. Lecturers or Academics have a way of presenting issues related to their fields of specialization.
- Therefore academic writings will be concerned about **accuracy, objectivity**, use of **qualifying** expressions, avoiding **plagiarism**, and these should be presented in **Standard English**.

ADVANTAGES OF DIVERSITY TO WRITING

- Normally, academic writings will use such qualifying expressions such as: **usually, probably** and **under normal circumstances**. There are also words used to modify, support or to infer answers such as: **according to the data, from what has been discussed so far** and **the data shows**. Most of the time researchers remove themselves from their writings by adopting the passive voice or by remaining impersonal.
- Academic writing also makes use of such markers as **introductions, body** of the work where discussions or arguments are done and **conclusions**. Academic writing also prefers that good and well documented sources are seen within the paper presented. In other words the scholar or researcher must show an in depth knowledge of the topic, especially what others have done in the area which are different from, or similar to what they have done.
- It is also expected that a complete list of all books consulted and which have been referred to in the research work, is documented. This affords other scholars interested in the topic to know which books to consult for their own work. Sometimes a scholar will do the same things as another scholar but will use different geographical areas or methods. For instance a scholar can choose to work on 'Ecological studies in a Moist Semi- Deciduous Forest' and another ecologist can work on a deciduous forest. In such a situation, the two ecologists will be doing the same things but using different types of forests.

ACTIVITY

a) Write out three things that are important in Academic Writing.