



Academic Topic Paper Writing Guidance For Students of the Master of Applied Linguistic Study Programme

The main objective in writing academic papers for M-AL is to show that students have qualified knowledge on a specific topic. In addition, another purpose in writing academic papers is to provide opportunities for students to express their ideas with scientific questions in M-AL. This guide aims to ensure that you meet the requirements of a quality paper on some M-AL topic. In this connection, this guide will cover the following points: general principles, essential steps of the writing process, reviewing a paper using a rubric.

A. General Principles

In writing an academic paper, you should apply the following general principles:

- a. Your paper must have a clear purpose (inform, analyze, synthesize, persuade, or propose) and answer your topic question.
- b. Your paper must present your original point of view.
- c. Your writing must have a single focus – all paragraphs have to include relevant evidence (facts, expert opinions, quotations, examples) to support your thesis statement.
- d. You must follow a standard organizational pattern. Every academic text must include the following parts: an abstract, an introduction, the main body (divided into sections, which can further be divided into subsections), and a conclusion.
- e. As an author, you need to provide clear, logical, and simple explanations to your reader.
- f. You should refer to a number of scholarly sources. You need to **integrate** source materials into your discussion. Make sure that you include all sources (books, articles from a scientific journal, publications on online resources) that you cite, introduce, analyze or explain on a reference list in the bibliography page. For your reference, you minimally use 10 books on (English) language teaching and 15 journal articles, all written in English.
- g. To ensure academic integrity, your paper should be formatted in accordance with the APA that determines the rules for in-text citations, paper sections, format, reference list.
- h. You need to use your own words and your voice.

B. Essential Steps of the Writing Process

To ensure your efficiency in using your time, you are advised to do your writing step-by-step. Below are the steps you can follow:

1. Select an interesting topic from the area assigned to you. If you lack ideas, you may search the internet using Google, look through your lecture notes, and consider your course readings or current news.



2. Do research and record information from various relevant sources (books, articles). Remember that you may need to continue your search for relevant information (factual, conceptual, procedural) as you discover thesis, make an outline, write and revise the document.
3. Formulate a strong thesis statement that you will argue.
4. Plan your paper writing and make a basic outline. Take notes from your sources and add details to your outline and make sure that you have supporting evidence for your points. You can add a concept mapping here.
5. Write the first draft of your paper. You can start from any part and you should not worry about grammar, punctuation and spelling as you construct your sentences. You will fix it later after everything is okay with the substance and organization.
6. Self-review and then revise your first draft and improve the content, logic, and the flow. Make transitions (a) between your ideas (within paragraph) by using transitional words or phrases, between your paragraphs by using a transitional paragraph that will highlight a relationship that already exists by summarizing the previous paragraph and suggesting something of the content of the paragraph that follows, and (c) between your sections by using several paragraphs that summarize for the reader the information you just covered and specify the relevance of this information to the discussion in the following section. Make changes to improve the content and rewrite your draft. You may need to do it more than once. Remember that writing is a recursive experience.
7. Edit and proofread your final draft to ensure that your essay is flawless.

These are the basic steps of which the order you change as you gain more experience in writing.

Let's now discuss the major points of the writing process.

1. Selecting a Topic

You can select an interesting and currently relevant topic if you have an adequate knowledge of the M-AL area assigned to you. If you lack ideas, you can search for some in your lecture notes, articles published in the internet, or relevant books. Journal articles will give some hint on the current issues on M-AL. So, you may begin your first step by reading relevant materials.

2. Do Research and Make Necessary Notes

While you reading, you should make notes of points relevant to your chosen topic. If necessary, you quote important statements made by the author(s). Remember that you need to write down the author's name or authors' names plus the year of publication and page. This is to enable you to check later if you are doubtful about your notes and prepare writing your references.



3. Writing a Thesis Statement

A thesis statement determines the main argument of your topic paper. A good thesis statement should fulfil the following criteria: (1) expresses the main idea of your paper, (2) presents your own point of view, and (3) gives an answer to your research question. The success of your entire writing project depends on your thesis and you need to do your best to ensure that it is debatable, specific, and concise. It is important to write your thesis early because it will help you stay focused when you do research (searching for information in references) and take notes.

4. Writing the Contents of Your Paper

Your paper consists an abstract, introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion. Let's discuss them one by one.

a. Title

A good academic paper title: (a) Condenses the paper's content in a few words; (b) captures the readers' attention; and (c) Differentiates the paper from other papers of the same subject area.

A good title has the following characteristics: (a) it predicts the content of the paper; (b) It is interesting to the reader; (c) it reflects the tone of your writing; and (d) contains important keywords that will make it easier to be located during a keyword search.

Below are tips to keep in mind while writing a title:

1. Keep it simple, brief and attractive: The primary function of a title is to provide a precise summary of the paper's content. You should keep the title brief and clear, use active verbs instead of complex noun-based phrases, and avoid unnecessary details. Moreover, a good title for a research paper is typically around 10 to 12 words long. A lengthy title may seem unfocused and take the readers' attention away from an important point.
2. Use appropriate descriptive words: A good research paper title should contain key words used in the manuscript and should define the nature of the paper. Think about terms people would use to search for your study and include them in your title.

b. Abstract

If you write a topic paper (non-research paper), your abstract will contain a short summary of your topic paper. It briefly presents a problem you will solve by writing your topic paper. A problem is the gap between the desired condition and the reality. So, you may begin your abstract with some description of the desired condition. This is to be followed by your statement of the reality. In this way, you can state that there is a problem to solve. This is followed by your statement of how you will solve the problem as the objective of your paper. You end your abstract by mentioning the coverage of your



discussion. If you write a research paper, your abstract will contain a short summary of your paper as well as a description of the objective, method, result and conclusion of your study. Your abstract is between 200-250 words.

c. Introduction

The introduction introduces your argument to your reader and convinces them why they should care about reading your paper. Your task is to engage your audience. You may consider the following:

- At your paper's beginning, tell your readers about the main idea your paper will cover. Introduce your paper's subject in a clear manner.
- Focus on your paper explaining your audience the central issue of your discussion. You can do it in various ways. Pose a question, immediately suggesting answers that will be argued or state a thesis. It is possible to combine these two approaches. It is up to you to choose the most effective way.
- If you wish, you start a paper with a quote. This is one of the mind-catching ways to engage your readers from the very beginning. Keep in mind that when you are thinking how to begin an essay, you should take steps to make your readers fully understand why they might want to continue reading. This is the key.
- You have to catch your readers' attention with a hook, i.e. something that encourages them to read the entire paper. Your goal is to persuade the audience that your text is worth reading
- You should orient your readers. You need to provide necessary information and explanations to help your audience follow your arguments. You can do it by answering basic questions of who, where, what, how, when, and why or by providing a short overview of the sources you'll be analyzing.

In short, in your introduction you:

- briefly describes the focus of your overall paper and its main points;
- highlight background information or issues necessary to understand the direction of your paper.
- Define any key terminology necessary to understand the topic

d. Body Paragraphs (sections and subsections)

The body of your paper consists of at least two sections, which may consist of subsections, which support your effort to reach the objective of your paper. The sections and subsection will function well if each of your paragraph fulfils the requirements of a good paragraph in an academic paper. Below are some important points you should bear in mind when writing paragraphs.

Start each body paragraph with a topic sentence; do not begin a paragraph with a fact. The topic sentence should present the main idea of the paragraph and express your point of view. So, the topic sentence is purely your statement. In the next sentences, you should support the topic sentence with additional supporting ideas, specific details, interesting



facts, statistics, clear explanations, relevant examples. In this case, you should have references. All supporting sentences should be logical. You should make sure they are connected with connection words to help your reader follow your argument.

Finish every paragraph with a concluding sentence. It should be your own idea and not a source citation. The last sentence in a paragraph should review the key points you have discussed in it, emphasize your main idea, and prepare your audience to the points that you are going to discuss in the next paragraph.

Do not make your paragraphs too long. People find it difficult to focus on large blocks of text; paragraphs should not be longer than $\frac{3}{4}$ of a page. If you discover that your paragraph is very long, divide it logically into two separate paragraphs.

e. Conclusion

In writing your conclusion, you do the following:

- Restate your thesis from the introduction in different words
- Briefly summarise each main point found in the body of your paper (1-2 sentences for each point).
- End with a strong clincher statement: an appropriate, meaningful final sentence that ties the whole points of the paper together

f. References

You have to support your paper with at least 5 books published in the last ten years and at least 15 journal articles published in the last five years on AL in English. You can certainly have more books and articles to support your paper. The more references you have the better. Your references should be presented at the end of your paper by using the APA system. Please check *Panduan Penulisan Tesis dan Disertasi* published by *Pascasarjana*, the latest edition. Below are three examples of writing references: a book, a book chapter, and a journal article.

Brislin, R., Cushner, K., Cherrie, C. & Yong, M. (1986). *Intercultural interactions: A practical guide*. New York: Sage.

Chen, Y. & Sarossa, W. (1996). Intercultural communication competence: A synthesis. In B.R. Burleson (Eds.). *Communication Yearbook* 19 (pp. 353–383). Thousand Oak, CA: Sage.

Chen, G.M. (1989). Relationships of the dimensions of intercultural communication competence. *Communication quarterly*, 37(2), 118–133.

C. Self-review, peer-review and revision

Reviewing your paper is a necessity for you to ensure the quality of your paper. Your self-review is aimed at finding any flaw of your paper, firstly in terms of the content (coverage and organization), and secondly in terms of grammar. Following your self-review is your revision.



After you have revised based on your self-review, you should have your colleague to review your paper. In other words, you have a peer-review of your paper. The peer-review is to gain constructive feedbacks. The steps are the same, i.e. review the contents first, and then the grammar. After receiving your peer feedback, you should revise your paper to make it ready for submission.

For both self-review and peer-review, you need to use a review checklist to ensure that your review will help the fulfilment of the requirements of a good paper. (See the review checklist).

D. The Assessment of Your Paper

Your paper will be assessed according to some criteria, which are related to the questions below:

1. Is your full paper an accurate reflection of the title, abstract and keywords?
2. Does your paper clearly state the problem, outcomes, discussion findings, and conclusions? Is the structure of your paper clear and logical?
3. Does your paper clearly describe all the points clearly in your efforts to answer the question you pose in the introduction?
4. Does your paper include sufficient relevant theory and is such knowledge clearly portrayed and correctly cited or quoted?
5. Does your paper present new knowledge or insights, and suggest future work in the field of AL?
6. Are any parts of your paper weak or lacking, and how could these be improved?
7. Have ethical requirements been addressed by checking similarities?
8. Does your paper adhere to the style guidelines?

Note: Reading relevant sources (books and journal articles) is the key to your successful paper writing.

GOOD LUCK!