

Introduction to Academic Writing and Research Practices

Graduate Course, HBCSE, TIFR

2021-22 – Semester 1

Monsoon 2021

Instructors: Dr. Geetanjali Date, Dr. Anuttama Kulkarni

Credits: 2

Duration: 14 weeks (9 August to 27 November); some holidays may be adjusted

Time and Location: Friday 2 – 4pm; Online

Important date: Final paper (shared with another course) due on December 15

Course Description

This course seeks to offer scaffolding to navigate the academic community of practice in the early years. It aims to provide a hands-on introduction to some of the most common academic practices and skills.

Academic Writing

The ability to write clearly about complex topics is one of the critical skills imparted by a Ph.D. program. In interdisciplinary sciences such as education, apart from writing to communicate their research, scholars also ‘think’ through writing. Such writing is often learned in practice. Starting with course term papers, students are expected to progressively build this skill, as you generate the proposal, publications, synopsis, and finally the thesis. However, students with training in basic sciences find it difficult to transition to this practice, as such writing requires developing complex arguments.

Research Practices

Becoming a part of the academic community of practice also involves mastering the practices related to publishing, conferences, journals, and so on. During the doctoral process, these scholarly practices are gradually absorbed by becoming a part of the academic community, and formal courses for these are rarely offered. Primarily, you develop proficiency in these practices through exposure to other practitioners, hand-holding and supervision, and practicing to write.

However, a structured and hands-on introduction to the required skills could make the doctoral process more productive, and a little less confusing. This understanding may also practitioners more clarity and insight into their practices, and help identify their limitations. This could enable them to look for or develop better alternatives.

Learning Objectives

- 1) Understand and develop the habits of academic writing, particularly building a clear and persuasive argument, in terms of content, structure, and presentation.
- 2) Understand and develop ethical academic practices, related to literature review, scoping of research study, manuscript submission, presenting to peers, providing and receiving constructive feedback, and so on.

Class Structure

The only way to learn writing is to write, and *constructively* critique others' writing. The class will thus be driven by student writing, and critiques of student writing by students, in a highly interactive discussion mode. Students' hands-on work will start with small reports of events, and progress to more complex writing formats.

Assessment

Students taking the course for credit will be graded on the basis of two submissions. A final term paper (50%) shared with another course, and the in-class writing and critiquing (50%). Each In-Class-Writing carries 5 marks, and needs to be submitted in its final version by end of working day (11 pm) of the class. These should total a minimum of 10 submissions.

If you are not writing a term paper for any course, you may submit a draft of the term paper you wrote last semester. The submission deadline will be communicated later.

Course Plan

This is primarily a hands-on writing course, conducted in a workshop mode.

Each class will engage with different topics involved in academic writing and related research practices/ tools. Classes will be based on discussions, exercises, commenting and critiquing, and conclude with a writing session. The topics and writing assignments will be gradually scaffolded from simple to complex texts. During the discussions, students will provide constructive comments on others' exercises, and will sometimes be asked to curate information on, or make short demo presentations about, tools and practices.

While the discussions will be class-level, the exercises will be carried out in pairs, and all writing assignments will be carried out at the individual level.

As exercises will be done in pairs, please bear in mind that your counterpart will suffer if you miss a class. If unavoidable, please inform the instructor and your partner in advance, so as to make alternate arrangements.

It is expected that the learnings from this course will be applied to writing the term paper(s) for any of the other course(s) you are taking, one of which will be assessed for writing. During November, you may schedule a meeting with the instructor for comments on an interim draft of the term paper that you plan to submit for assessment in this course.

The course contents are as follows.

Week	Date	Topic	Discussion Points	Practices and Tools in Context
1.	Aug 13	Course introduction	Overview and goals, course content, class process, exercise pairing, safe storage (Baadal/ Dropbox/ Google drive)	Providing constructive review comments
2.	Aug 20	Introduction to academic writing	Texts you write as a scholar: types, features	

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3.	Aug 27	Writing a text	Understanding the organization/ structure: Title, subtitle, section headings, paragraphs	
4.	Sept 3	Organising a paragraph	Division into paragraphs, length, order	Note-making software (Notion, OneNote, etc.)
5.	Sept 10	Writing summaries	Reading, selecting key points, techniques of good paraphrasing Citing references and quotations	Searching publications online (Databases, Search strategies and engines) Citation syntax, formats, styles (APA, Chicago, etc.)
6.	Sept 17	Writing critiques	Combining sources/ synthesizing Avoiding plagiarism	Reference management systems (Mendeley, Zotero, etc.) Plagiarism checking tools
7.	Sept 24	Organising the main body	General-Specific, Specific-General, Problem-Solution Texts	
8.	Oct 1	Introductions	Purpose, constituents, sequence	
9.	Oct 8	Conclusions	Purpose, constituents, sequence	
10.	Oct 15	Dussehra break		
11.	Oct 22	Style, flow, and presentation	Analysing argument building styles, ways of reporting research (third person/ first person, descriptive/ analytical)	
12.	Oct 29	Style, flow, and presentation	Role of titles and keywords, etc.	Formatting/ applying styles and templates, References menu
13.	Nov 5	Diwali holiday		
14.	Nov 12	Editing	Re-reading, re-writing, reflecting, proof-reading	Review menu

Week	Date	Topic	Discussion Points	Practices and Tools in Context
15.	Nov 19	Constructing a research paper	Short (conference) paper (CP), long (journal) paper (JP)	Conferences, publishers, metrics (Impact Factor, Eigenfactor, Article Influence Score, CiteScore, etc.) Author IDs, citation indexes (ResearchGate, GoogleScholar, ORCID)
16.	Nov 26	Recap	Key learnings and future writing goals Feedback on course (content, pedagogy, outcomes)	