Text A

We all know that if young children don't learn to read well they won't succeed at school. More boys seem to be having difficulty with reading than girls. So it's not surprising that girls are doing better in the VCE* results.

*equivalent to HSC in NSW

Text B

The relation between children's early literacy levels and academic outcomes is well established (Bloggs 1994; Carmody 1999; Drisdale 2000). A recent study of the literacy levels of grade 3 children attending state schools in Victoria revealed a correlation between gender and reading skills: it was more often boys who fell below desired standards (Arbott 2001, p.76). If intervention measures are not developed to address boys' early literacy needs, their longer-term academic outcomes can be expected to suffer.

Some questions to consider … answer true or false

Academic writing uses evidence and reason to persuade rather than emotive devices or appeals to common sense. For example, ‘as we all know’, ‘the result is not surprising’.

– True
– False

Use of colloquial expressions and contractions is acceptable in moderation. For example, ‘sort of’ and ‘can’t’.

– True
– False
Use of passive voice is more common in academic writing than in many other writing styles.

- True
- False

Academic writers do not make unsupported assumptions. For example, ‘is established’, ‘can be expected’.

- True
- False

Academic writers do not need to refer to other people's work because they become experts as they read more about the topic.

- True
- False


Writing at University is evidence based

- An academic text is generally written to develop an argument or point of view. They must be supported by reasons, examples and evidence.
- It is important that you use the right kind of evidence, that you use it effectively, and that you have an appropriate amount of it.

Selecting the right kind of evidence

- Primary and secondary sources; print and electronic sources
- Assignment instructions provide clues to the type of evidence you need to gather
- Think about what the lecturer has said about evidence in class
- Ask your tutor to clarify assignment requirements and the type of evidence required


Using evidence appropriately

- You need to do at least three things with evidence
  - Cite it – say what the evidence is and where it comes from
  - Interpret it – discuss what it means, demonstrate your understanding
  - Show how it relates back to your argument – your thesis. Evidence does not speak for itself

Writing at university uses critical analysis

- Critical analysis is a highly valued element of academic writing. It is often one of the criteria used to assess student work.
- To provide critical analysis in a piece of writing, you need to do more than reproduce information on a topic. In particular, you need to communicate your understanding and assessment of relevant issues, concepts and research.

Try this quiz

Which of the following activities would count as critical analysis in an academic context? (check as many items as you wish)

- Assessing whether an author's conclusions are justified by his/her reasons and evidence
- Making generalisations which are not supported by evidence
- Accepting information without questioning it
- Making connections between points so as to build a theme or argument
- Applying a model or theory to new materials

And these …

- Identifying opinion, bias and distortion in texts and representations
- Identifying unfounded claims or assumptions being made about a topic
- Providing a description of something
- Identifying persuasive evidence or proof for claims in a particular context
- Organising and synthesising information so as to facilitate better or new understandings

Academic texts develop logical arguments

- An aspect of critical analysis /critical thinking is identifying and developing logical relations between points
- Developing a logical argument requires clear thinking - an understanding of what logic means and how it works
- Can you recognise unclear thinking?
- When constructing an argument it is important not to introduce a logical fallacy - that is, a common error in clear thinking.

Logical fallacies … can you identify the problem with:

‘The government is very kind to refugees; you can prove this by reading the story of Falia, a refugee woman, on the government website.’

What's wrong with this statement?

- We don't know if Falia is really a refugee.
- Government websites are not trustworthy sources.
- Even if true, the story of Falia will not prove that the government is kind to all refugees, only to Falia.

‘If we allow safe injecting rooms, the rate of heroin use will go up and before you know it we’ll have a nation of drug addicts on welfare.’

What's wrong with this statement?

- Safe injecting rooms aren't going to be allowed.
- Allowing safe injecting rooms will not necessarily cause the rate of heroin use to increase.
- The nation is unlikely to provide welfare payments to drug addicts.
Writing at university tends to use complexity

- Writing in general tends to use more complex language than spoken language (Biber, 1988; Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad & Finegan, 1999; Chafe, 1982; Cook, 1997; Halliday, 1989)
- Academic texts are more complex than other written texts
- Complexity occurs in different ways. There is grammatical complexity and lexical (vocabulary) complexity.

Grammatical complexity

- Writing at university is grammatically complex in that it has more subordinate clauses, more "that/to" complement clauses, more long sequences of prepositional phrases, more attributive adjectives and more passives than spoken language
- E.g., The other way in which the economic aspects of military expenditure were presented was in the form of the public expenditure costs.
- This article analyses the constitutional aspects behind the formation of the first and second National Governments, examining in particular the role of the king in the formation of the two governments.

Lexical (words and phrases) complexity

- Written texts are shorter and have longer, more complex words and phrases. They have more nominalisations, more noun based phrases, and more lexical variation. Written texts are lexically dense compared to spoken language - they have proportionately more lexical words than grammatical words.
- For example, the written text:
  Obviously the government is frightened of union reaction to its move to impose proper behaviour on unions.
  is more lexically dense than the spoken version:
  Obviously the government is frightened how the unions will react if it tries to make them behave properly.

Formal vocabulary

- It is often the case that formal words are longer than informal words, formal words are single words not multi-words and formal words are of French/Latin origin rather than their informal equivalents which are of Anglo-Saxon origin.
- For example: "depart" is from French/Latin but "go" is Anglo-Saxon.

Can you complete the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formal</th>
<th>Informal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>seem</td>
<td>climb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>help</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cease</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>commence</td>
<td>use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>decrease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>demonstrate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>depart</td>
<td>word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enquire</td>
<td>and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References

college of Liberal Arts and Sciences, University of Iowa. Available at http://myweb.uiowa.edu/gand/f1x/20features.pdf
UEFAP, Features of Academic Writing. Available at: http://www.uefap.com/writing/feature/featfram.htm
The Writing Center, University of North Carolina http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/evidence_use.html

EDU workshops in Academic skills – Session 1 schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Date/Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lectures and Notetaking</td>
<td>Week 1, Thurs 12 Mar, 12.00-1.00pm</td>
<td>[ASB Bldg, West lobby G08]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making the Most of Tutorials</td>
<td>Week 2, Fri 20 Mar, 12.00-1.00pm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentations at University</td>
<td>Week 9, Thurs 14 May, 4.00-5.00pm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to WebVista</td>
<td>Week 3, Tues 24 Mar, 12.00-1.00pm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Management</td>
<td>Week 4, Thurs 3 Apr, 12.00-1.00pm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing your reading</td>
<td>Week 5, Mon 6 Apr, 12.00-1.00pm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing at University</td>
<td>Week 8, Thurs 7 May, 12.00-1.00pm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to referencing and academic argument</td>
<td>Week 6, Mon 20 Apr, 12.00-1.00pm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group work</td>
<td>Week 7, Fri 1 May, 12.00-1.00pm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>