

Six Features of Academic Writing: A Guide For Students

MT0200S07IRSKWR

THE MORPHING TEXTBOOK • RHETORIC DEPARTMENT INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY PROJECT

Notes for Instructors:

One of the problems students run into is that they are often expected by their professors to produce a reasonably persuasive argument, but few of them really understand how to construct one. They don't understand the conventions of academic argumentation and they haven't noticed that there are some key things most writers do. This handout focuses on a few of the key features of academic writing. You can use it to help guide the students' reading, help them analyze an argument, and help them make a stab at structuring their own arguments. It can also help you focus your teaching around a few of the most important things you want the students to learn how to do by the end of the semester.

*Using this guide,
students can practice:*

Identifying key features of an argumentative essay

Tracing the structure of an argument

Putting together their own arguments

Wolfe, John J. "Six Features of Academic Writing." *The Morphing Textbook* 2.1 (2007). <http://www.uiowa.edu/~rhetoric/morphing_textbook/pdfs/MT0200S07IRSKWR.pdf>.



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Context	Use the introduction to sketch out a context for your paper or speech. Usually that means quickly sketching the issue, summarizing the argument, and/or sketching the “mistaken position.”
Thesis	Make a bold claim that you will go on to support with evidence. Every thesis is a promise; you’re saying: “I promise you that I will convince you that X is true.” <ul style="list-style-type: none">• If something is self-evident, you can’t convince someone.• If everyone agrees with something, you can’t convince them.
Navigation	You use navigational techniques to guide your reader through your texts. The main navigation techniques are: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Occasional summaries of your argument.• Logical transitions• Keyword/key concept transitions
Evidence	You’ve got to do at least three things with evidence <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cite it – tell us what the evidence is• Interpret it – tell us what it means• Tell us how it relates back to your argument – your thesis Evidence doesn’t speak for itself.
Counter-argument	This is called the “conversational turn.” It means that you bring an opponent’s argument into your essay. Here are some examples of how to do that: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• “This solution, however, won’t appeal to everyone. Some people might argue that...”• “At this point there’s a natural objection. What about ...?”• Scholar X, however, has argued / pointed out that.... And then deal with the objection.
Conclusion	Extend then summarize at the end of the paper. Go wide then come home. It sounds kind of like this: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• “There are something we can’t yet know. We can’t know A, or B, or C. But we do know that ...” (and then summarize). Something like that – find some way to go wide and then some way to get back to your summary.

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