



Aston University  
Birmingham

# Writing at University

John Murray – Learning Development Centre

# Writing at University

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Outcomes:

- ▶ Identify the key features of good academic writing
- ▶ Examine the importance of being a critical writer

# What is good academic writing?

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- ▶ Academic View: Dr. Patrick Tissington (Lecturer ABS)



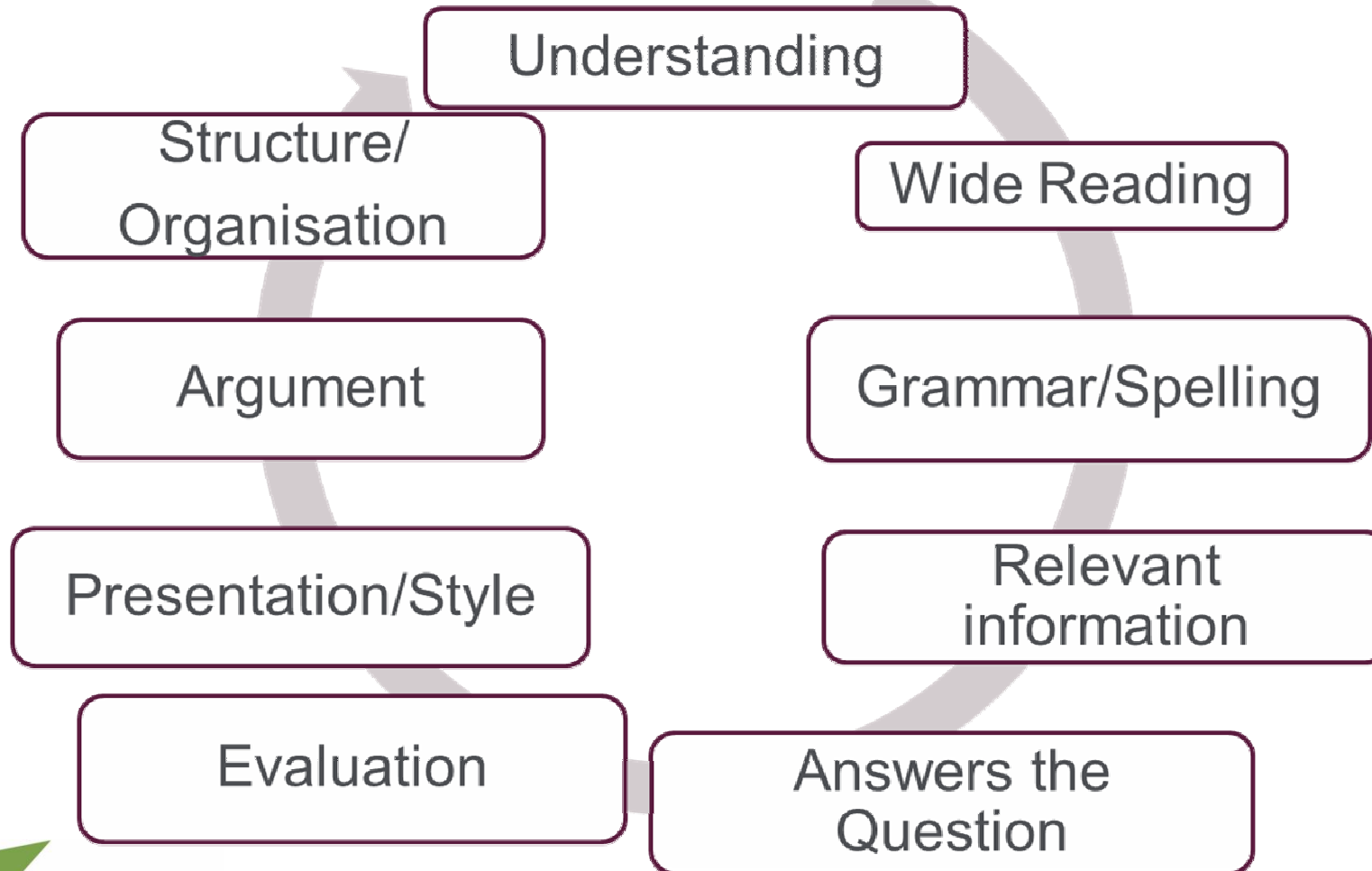
key\_features\_of\_a\_good\_piece\_of\_writing.mp3

- ▶ Student View: Holly (Psychology Student)



Tips\_on\_a\_writing\_a\_good\_essay.mp3

# Good writing – What lecturers think



# What lecturers think

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This is how lecturers ranked the list:

1. Answers the question
2. Understanding
3. Argument
4. Relevant information
5. Structure/Organisation
6. Evaluation
6. Presentation/Style
8. Wide reading
9. Grammar/Spelling

All of them are  
important!

(Norton, 1990/ LDC Aston University, 2007)

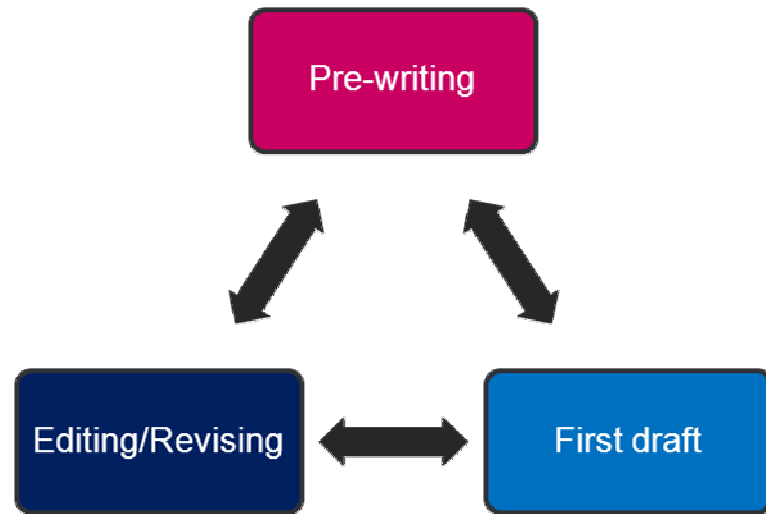
# Key features of good academic writing

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Good academic writing has the following features:

- ▶ well structured - there is a clear sense of direction
- ▶ logical - the points made are supported and developed
- ▶ cohesive - cohesive language can support structure  
*Cohesion: There are three key functions..... These functions*  
*No Cohesion: Two Prime Ministers were key to this development, Wilson and Callaghan. He put forward...*
- ▶ clarity - neither over-wordy or vague
- ▶ coherent - the writing can be read and understood by the audience

# Stages involved in good writing



- ▶ Pre-writing
  - ▶ Developing initial ideas
  - ▶ Researching and selecting material
  - ▶ Developing an outline plan

- ▶ Drafting
  - ▶ Remember this is a first draft – avoid editing at this stage
  - ▶ Keep paragraphs clear and to the point
  - ▶ Support what you write with evidence
- ▶ Revising
  - ▶ Making changes to the final draft, or section of a draft.
  - ▶ Global revision: focuses on structure/development of argument
  - ▶ Surface revision: considers language/grammar/spelling
  - ▶ Make sure you have referenced – and referenced correctly

# Descriptive or Critical writing

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- Feedback from lecturers can, and often does, include comments such as:
  - Little evidence of critical thinking
  - More analysis needed
  - Too descriptive
  - You have described the theory – you need to analyse and evaluate it
  
- Academic writing requires you to demonstrate your knowledge and understanding
  
- You need to show that you can interpret and evaluate information



## Quick Question: Using Evidence

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**Which of the following statements would you take more seriously and why?**

- ▶ 1) The number of tourists has increased considerably in the last year.
  
- ▶ 2) The number of tourists has increased by 10 per cent since last year, according to the most recent government report on the economy (UK Government Statistics, 2007).

# Critical writing questions

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- ▶ For each section/paragraph you are writing ask:
  - ▶ Why am I writing this?
  - ▶ What point am I making?
  - ▶ What evidence am I using?
  - ▶ How does it link to the task?
- ▶ For each source you are referring to ask:
  - ▶ Why am I referring to this source?
  - ▶ How does it link to other research?
  - ▶ How is it supporting the point I am making?

# Being the editor

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- ▶ When editing your work:
  - ▶ Check whether structure is clear
  - ▶ Check whether arguments follow logically
  - ▶ Check whether ideas are fully developed
  - ▶ Rewrite awkward or confusing sections (at word, sentence and paragraph level)
  - ▶ Remove unwanted sections (at word, sentence or paragraph level)



# Summary

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