

Academic Writing Guide with Resources for Graduate Students

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Approaching Academic Writing as a Process

1. Identify the keywords in your topic or question.
 - a. Sample Question: What is the role of American foreign policy on academic outputs?
 - b. Keywords: American foreign policy and academic outputs
 - c. *Since academic outputs is a nebulous term, it is important to identify what items it will entail, for example research, courses, policies, programs, student performance
2. Use a general Google search to identify handbooks or textbooks that frame some of the core elements of the topic/question to increase your understanding about it.
 - a. I Googled: American foreign policy and American higher education textbook
 - b. I looked among the list of recommended books from the search and chose the one that seemed best aligned with my overall keyword/topic: Altbach, P. G., Gumport, P. J., & Berdahl, R. O. (2011). *American higher education in the twenty-first century: Social, political, and economic challenges* (3rd ed.). Johns Hopkins University Press.
 - i. This text "... offers a comprehensive entree to the central issues facing American colleges and universities today. It plac[es] higher education within its social and political contexts, leading scholars discuss finance, federal and state governance, faculty, students, curriculum, and academic leadership. Contributors also address major changes in higher education, especially the influence and incorporation of the latest technologies and growing concern about the future of the academy in a post-Iraq War setting."
 - c. It is available for EZBorrow at SHU's library
 - d. Review and take notes about key issues, those of interest, and those that may excite you to write.
3. Take a deeper dive into academic databases such as ERIC, Google Scholar, among the other 38 education databases available through SHU library. Let's look at ERIC for more information about our topic in 1(a) above!
 - a. Put your keywords with the appropriate [Boolean operators](#) in the [ERIC](#) search bar
 - b. Document your search results for future reference and continuity. Let me demonstrate how:

- i. Search Term: American foreign policy AND academic research; Results: 21,059; Link:
<https://eric.ed.gov/?q=American+foreign+policy+AND+academic+research&pr=on>
 - ii. *If you did not use majuscule (upper case) letters for your Boolean operator(s), do so and run the search again.
 - iii. * Try different search term combinations. Some may be more effective for what you are seeking.
 - iv. * Filter your search results to home in on what you need.
 - v. The search may seem overwhelming, but if you plan it and dedicate time to these initial steps—a day or two for qualifying exam, a week for comprehensive exam, and recursively for the dissertation, it will be less daunting.
4. Download your articles into Zotero or if you prefer to do so in a folder on your computer and then move them immediately after to Zotero. Using Zotero will shorten your article review time and reduce stress when writing and citing. See more about Zotero in the resources section.
5. Do not Plagiarize! Read to understand and to get genuine A HA! Moments. If you are taking notes in a notebook, write the name of the author above the notes that you will take from that source. Avoid writing verbatim notes. Instead, write your key takeaways, note any new theories found, reference any statistics that will bolster your arguments, and if compelled to document a direct quote, keep it short, sweet, and write down the page number.
 - a. As an aside, get stationery that motivates you to work and gets you excited about writing. I am a sucker for gel ink pens. I found white ones at Staples the other day! Get new notebooks, book markers, binders, whatever tickles your writing fancy!
 - b. Create a space at home where you will be motivated to write. Protect that space. Writing academically is no walk in the park. It requires burning the midnight oil!
6. Building your academic writing muscle requires practice if you are to be good at it. To write well, you must read academic writing. An apple a day keeps the doctor away. An article a day helps you develop the vocabulary, insight, expertise, and thought fluidity for great writing.
 - a. Don't write for concision. JUST WRITE! Concision is for editing.
 - b. Don't waste time counting pages. JUST WRITE! When you count pages, you are not enjoying what you write.
 - c. Challenge yourself to write about new things in your general area of interest. Writing the same thing repeatedly leaves you bored and demotivated by the Phinished line!

- d. Seek to be a subject matter expert of your sub-field and you will find the drive to research and write.
 - e. Find your academic voice. When you read my writing, you can almost hear me speaking! Drowning your work with citations strips away your voice. Maintain a healthy balance.
- 7. Keep your paragraphs at three to five sentences in length to avoid cramming more than one idea in a paragraph and to provide a framework for covering the core components of an idea—introduction, evidence, and conclusion. Remember paragraphs should express and discuss an idea well. Sentence 1 is your topic sentence that introduces the point you are making in the paragraph, Sentence 2, 3, 4 are your supporting sentences with evidence such as citations, statistics, quotations, Sentence 5 is your concluding sentence that summarizes the point you are making. If I should read your first and last sentence, I should be able to tell you about the focus of the paragraph. It is like writing your chapter or section—first paragraph introduces, and last paragraph concludes.
 - a. Your manuscript should be smooth. Transition from one point seamlessly into the other, from one paragraph seamlessly into the other, from one section seamlessly into the other, and from one chapter seamlessly into the other.
 - b. I recommend that you read your writing aloud to hear it. If you can't hear it, it is likely you won't be able to tell if it transitions smoothly. There is something about the mouth to ear coordination when refining your writing.
- 8. Cite and reference as you write. When you leave this for the end, you elevate your risk plagiarism and the concluding writing steps become daunting, rather than just reading to hear your wonderful work.
 - a. Keep your APA manual with you as you write. Put your citations and references into the correct format from the get-go!
- 9. If English is not your primary language or you struggle with grammatical correctness, Get [Grammarly](#)! Grammatical and punctuation issues detract from the great research ideas that you have, and people will struggle to understand your work. Grammarly will also help you to see if your writing is unacademic.
 - a. If you keep paying a writing editor, you won't learn to write academically.
 - b. Ask if the library provides Grammarly for students.
- 10. If you are unsure about plagiarism and the extent to which the work you produce is likely not yours, use a plagiarism checker, such as [Turnitin](#) to assess your entire manuscript! Turnitin gives you the originality percentage, so you are assured that you are within acceptable originality threshold for specific sections, as well as the full manuscript.
 - a. Review and correct, where possible, areas of attention elevated by Turnitin.
 - b. [Originality scores](#) that are above 20% may be a red flag.
 - c. The originality score will vary by institution.
 - d. Ask if the library provides Turnitin for students.

Academic Writing Resources

<https://library.shu.edu/home>

- The Database tab on the homepage is critical for deepening your search
- The [Education research guide](#) has helpful tabs
- There are [librarians](#) who can help! Be prepared for the conversation. Your appointment will be as helpful as you are prepared.

<https://www.zotero.org/>

- A reference manager is helpful as you read increasing numbers of papers. In Zotero, you can click on the citations as you read, which automatically navigates you to the full reference. I found this useful as I read and searched for other articles on my exam and dissertation subjects. You can make annotations in each article and highlight key information. These make writing simpler as you can look only at your annotations as you write, rather than being overwhelmed by plethora of content in the articles. You can also create folders for each topic/subject/exam and store relevant articles there. Mendeley is another option to Zotero.
- **Set up [Zotero](#) and use it from Day 1 of your research!**
- * Check your Zotero-generated APA references for accuracy.

<https://scholar.google.com/>

- In addition to using Google Scholar for article search, set up your library by the different research topics/subjects/purposes. This allows you to save articles you identify in the relevant libraries that you created. Don't forget, to create alerts for newly published articles on the subjects of interest—this allows you to have treasure trove of current publications, which is necessary for your dissertation.

<https://library.shu.edu/citation/apa>

- Every doctoral student must have the most recent version of the APA manual if it is the required citation style for your program. It is my best friend! I have gone through three APA manuals—5, 6, and 7. Purdue Owl and SHU library cannot help you with the nuances needed for doctoral writing and publication.
- Spiral bound is the better option as you will be using it copiously!
- * If you use Zotero, Google Scholar, Purdue Owl, etc. to help you with references, I strongly recommend that you check against your APA manual to ensure they are accurate.

YouTube Academic Writing Resources

Academic Writing

- [Definition and Features](#)
- [Academic Vocabulary](#)
- [Paraphrasing](#)
- [Reading a Journal Article](#)
- [The Problem Statement](#)
- [Types of Literature Reviews](#)
- [Using sources to support us write](#)

Writing your Dissertation Chapters with the Grad Coach series

- Chapter 1: [The Introduction](#)
- Chapter 2: [The Literature Review](#)
- Chapter 3: [Research Methodology](#)
- Chapter 4: Presentation of [Quantitative Results](#) OR [Qualitative Results](#)
- Chapter 5: [Discussion of Results](#)
- Chapter 6: [Conclusion](#)