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The Essentials of Academic Writing for International Students

Author: Stephen Bailey (2015)

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The Essentials of Academic Writing for International Students, authored by Stephen Bailey, provides an effective overview of the core writing strategies inherent to successful academic writing. The book includes a variety of exercises which can be further extended and used for English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classes and is specifically designed for international students to help them build a steady foundation for academic writing. The introduction of the book indicates that it can be useful for both undergraduate and postgraduate students, and the variety of topics makes this book adaptable for all academic disciplines. The book also provides step-by-step instruction on academic writing, starting with pinpointing the purpose of writing and finishing with identifying the most efficacious elements of it, such as punctuation, morphology, and grammar peculiarities. The book is intended to distinguish among cultural differences in writing and answer any potential questions international students may have while studying at American colleges and universities.

The structure of the book is coherent and logically sequential. In the beginning, the author provides a set of questions to check general understanding and knowledge of academic writing and to assess students' learning by returning to them after the completion of the course. The book itself comprises three parts, each of which draws attention to specific skills in a process of writing: *Part 1 (Process and Skills)*, *Part 2 (Elements of Writings)*, and *Part 3 (Writing Models)*. Each unit of the book is structured in a way that after a thorough explanation of the topic, students are provided with a variety of practical exercises. This organization allows them to transfer declarative knowledge to procedural knowledge.

In Part I, Bailey not only reveals salient features of successful academic writing, but also describes how reading is as an inseparable and integrated part of writing. In this section, he includes a variety of authentic excerpts and abstracts to enhance readers' critical thinking and analytical skills. These resources are designed to help students also evaluate the validity and relevance of the information. Moreover, the book offers a comprehensive analysis of how to find essential tips in the text, interpret the text in order to find the cause and effect, and discern predominant facts from supplemental ones and reflect them in writing without repetition or unnecessary wordiness.

In Part II, Bailey emphasizes the importance of correct grammar, word choice, punctuation, and structure usage in an academic writing. Even though academic writing is often taught to upper-level students, drawing students' attention to explicit grammar points may either promote noticing or provide them with an opportunity for revision. This section, similar to the previous one, is characterized by concise, explicit explanations and a considerable number of relevant examples. One of the notable features of the book is a chapter which introduces the essentials of presenting and labeling statistical data in an academic paper. However, the representation of the instructions is quite cursory, so students who need to use graphs and charts in their academic writing may not find it satisfying.

In the last section of the book, the author differentiates between an essay and a report and mainly emphasizes the key features of the report, including the function, purpose, and main writing techniques for each of the individual elements. At the end of the book, readers can find answers for the majority of practice activities. Some answers are not included because they may vary depending on the point of view or topic chosen. This may be one of the drawbacks for self-learners in assessing their progress. For this reason, the guidance of a teacher is desirable.

The organization of the material in the book is effective, which makes it a comprehensible resource for beginners and a practical reference guide for experienced international students. Key phrases, strategies, and techniques are arranged in a systematic way in tables, italicized font, and schemes. As already mentioned above, the book provides an excellent overview of academic writing in American culture, and it describes how students can summarize, cite and incorporate other sources in the writing to avoid plagiarism. The book is replete with an abundance of vocabulary items which are specific for the academic environment, such as appropriate academic register synonyms, verbs of references, cohesion devices, and examples of poor word usage.

Nevertheless, there is a very limited number of collocations and bundles typical for academic discourse given. Considering the importance of formulaic expressions for written communication, this lack of vocabulary is a limitation of the book. As Hyland (2012) stated, "Academic writing draws on a much larger stock for prefabricated phrases than either news or fiction ... with over 450 different four-word clusters occurring more than 10 times in one million words" (p.153). Nevertheless, the book offers some easy-to-use websites to help students assemble endnotes, footnotes, and references, and it offers advice about how to use library catalogs and other online school sources. On the other hand, some of the topics may need more comprehensive explanations, especially for freshmen or novice writers. Thus, the inclusion of more examples would likely resolve any potential confusion. Even though the book is designed for independent study, inexperienced students may find it difficult to evaluate their own successes, mostly due to the complicated nature of writing assessment in general.

The Essentials of Academic Writing for International Students is an excellent guide to all stages of writing. This book can be seen as a fundamental resource for teaching academic writing instruction and serve as a reference guide when clarification is needed. Even so, for beginner writers, the guidance from the teacher is necessary to emphasize certain aspects, provide constructive feedback, and encourage students through the entire process of building a framework for academic writing. Therefore, it may be advantageous to include more texts in the first section of the book. As an alternative, for the purpose of keeping a book concise, some links may be provided to newspaper or journal articles sorted by the topics. Nevertheless, if the book is used in the classroom, it may not be needed because teachers typically choose materials and practice exercises. However, in this case, the book should not be promoted as a suitable for self-education resource.

Overall, *The Essentials of Academic Writing for International Students* is an excellent resource that may be used either for review or as a guide for academic writing classes. By following the sequence of writing process proposed in a book and completing all exercises, students can significantly improve their reading and writing skills. I recommend this book for EAP instructors, and I would definitely use this book as a pivotal source to build the syllabus on for future classes.

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