

The Academic Writing Centre and the
Academic Communication Centre warmly
welcome you to the
IOE Academic Writing Seminar Series

#IOEWritingSeminar





UCL

Writing at postgraduate level:
Showing, not saying, what you know

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#IOEWritingSeminar



UG to PG writing differences

Undergraduate writing

- Formal academic conventions (e.g., objective)
- Appropriate style (e.g., argument)

Postgraduate writing

- “showing” not “saying”* (*immerse readers in the story*)
- “criticality” and “originality” (or “creativity”)





HEQF Level 4 First undergraduate level

Marks	0-19	20-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80-100
	Fail (F)	Fail (E)	Pass: 3 rd (D)	Pass: 2.2 (C)	Pass: 2.1 (B)	Ist (A)	Ist (A)
Knowledge and understanding	Major gaps in knowledge and understanding. Significant inaccuracies.	Gaps in knowledge and superficial understanding. Some inaccuracies.	Broadly accurate knowledge and understanding of the material. Some elements missing and flaws evident.	Sound, routine knowledge and understanding of the material, main concepts and key theories. Some flaws may be evident.	Good, consistent knowledge and understanding of the material, main concepts and key theories at this level.	Detailed knowledge and understanding of the main concepts/ theories at this level. Beginning to show awareness of the limitations of the knowledge base.	Highly detailed knowledge and understanding of material, concepts and theories for this level of study. Awareness of the ambiguities and limitations of knowledge.
Intellectual skills <i>e.g. analysis and synthesis; deploying logical argument supported by evidence; focus on topic; drawing conclusions</i>	Brief and irrelevant. Descriptive. Only personal views offered. Unsubstantiated generalisations. Little or no attempt to draw conclusions.	For the most part descriptive. Views/ findings sometimes illogical or contradictory. Generalisations/ statements made with scant evidence. Conclusions lack relevance and/or validity.	Some awareness of issues. Sense of argument emerging though not completely coherent. Some evidence to support views, but not always consistent. Some relevant conclusions	Issues identified within given areas. An emerging awareness of different stances and ability to use evidence to support a coherent argument. Broadly valid conclusions.	Good analytical ability. Acknowledgement of views of others. Arguments generally logical, coherently expressed, well organised and supported. Sound conclusions.	Very good analysis throughout. Perceptive and persuasive points made within given area. Explicit acknowledgement of other stances. Arguments well-articulated, and logically developed with a range of evidence. Strong conclusions.	Logical, articulate analysis a consistent feature. Persuasive points made throughout the work within a highly articulate, balanced argument. Judiciously selected evidence, drawn from relevant research. Convincing conclusions.
Scholarly practices <i>e.g. use of relevant literature; academic writing; academic honesty, referencing and citation</i>	No evidence of reading. Views are unsupported and non- authoritative. Academic conventions largely ignored.	Evidence of little reading appropriate for the level of study, and/or indiscriminate use of sources. Academic conventions used weakly.	Some evidence of reading, with superficial linking to given text(s). Some academic conventions evident and largely consistent, but with some weaknesses.	Knowledge of literature beyond core text(s). Literature used accurately but descriptively. Academic skills generally sound.	Knowledge of the field of literature appropriately used to support views. Research-informed literature integrated into the work. Good use of academic conventions.	Critical engagement with appropriate reading. Knowledge of research-informed literature embedded in the work. Consistently accurate use of academic conventions.	Exceptionally wide range of relevant literature used critically to inform argument, balance discussion and/or inform problem-solving. Consistently accurate and assured use of academic conventions.

Criticality in UG marking criteria

Criterion: Scholarly Practices / Level: 1st (A)

Critical engagement with appropriate reading. Knowledge of research-informed literature embedded in the work. Consistently accurate use of academic conventions.

Exceptionally wide range of relevant literature used critically to inform argument, balance discussion and/or inform problem-solving. Consistently accurate and assured use of academic conventions.

Excellent knowledge of research informed literature embedded in the work. Consistent analysis and evaluation of sources. High-level academic skills consistently applied.

Outstanding knowledge of research-informed literature embedded in the work. Consistent analysis and evaluation of sources. High-level academic skills consistently and professionally applied.



A	B	C	D	E
Pass	Pass	Pass	Fail	Fail
70.00 -100%	60.00 – 69.99%	50.00 – 59.99%	40.00 - 49.99%	1.00 – 39.99%
GRASP OF FIELD OF STUDY				
A	B	C	D	E
Outstanding grasp, high level of critical insight	Clear understanding, good level of insight	Basic understanding and insight	Inadequate understanding and insight	Demonstrates little knowledge of the field
Extensive, insightful critical review of literature	Wide-ranging, coherent and critical review of literature	Basic critical competence in reviewing literature	Unfocused or inaccurate review of literature	Demonstrates significant weaknesses in the knowledge base, and/or simply reproduces knowledge without evidence of understanding
High creativity and independence of thought	Elements of creativity and independence of thought	Little development of ideas	Confusion in application of knowledge	Shows little or no critical ability Poor, inconsistent analysis
UNDERSTANDING & EVALUATING RESEARCH & METHODOLOGIES				
A	B	C	D	E
Sophisticated understanding, high level of critical evaluation of scholarship, research and methodologies	Consistent and fluent understanding and critical evaluation of scholarship, research and methodologies	Adequate understanding and evaluation of scholarship, research and methodologies	Lack of understanding and evaluation of scholarship, research and methodologies	Little or no skill demonstrated in selected techniques applicable to own research or advanced scholarship
Outstanding understanding of how research and enquiry create and interpret knowledge and how these apply to students' own research/practice	Thorough understanding of how research and enquiry create and interpret knowledge and how these apply to students' own research/practice	Basic understanding of how research and enquiry create and interpret knowledge and how these apply to students' own research/practice	Lack of understanding of how research and enquiry create and interpret knowledge and how these apply to students' own research/practice	Lacks any understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge
Creative and critical handling, presenting and inferring from data	Competent and critical handling, presenting and inferring from data	Rudimentary handling, presenting and inferring from data	Inadequate or confused handling, presenting and inferring from data	Inadequate or confused handling, presenting and inferring from data throughout

A sample PG assignment prompt

This assessment has three parts, which are submitted together as one assignment of 5,000 words in total. All three parts need to demonstrate engagement with and application of theories of language acquisition.

- 1. 2,500-word written study outlining a SLA theory. You will evaluate the effectiveness of a relevant approach informed by the theory and its impact on learners' skills development and include critical reflection on the learning gained from the assignment. (2,500 words)
- 2. Analysis of and reflection on approaches to language and literacy development used in an observed English language lesson (1,250 words).
- 3. Review of English language teaching related material (course book or online material) which demonstrates engagement with theories of language and literacy development (1,250 words).

The grade for the assessment will be awarded holistically, to include all three parts. If an element is missing, the assignment will be given a fail grade.



Example successful response – Part 1

Part 1. 2,500-word written study outlining a SLA theory. You will **evaluate the effectiveness** of a relevant approach informed by the theory and its impact on learners' skills development and include **critical reflection** on the learning gained from the assignment.

- 1. Background overview**
- 2. Theory outline**
- 3. Classroom application**
- 4. Evaluation**
 - 1. Effectiveness*
 - 2. Limitation*
- 5. Critical reflection**

Example response – Part 1 (evaluating effectiveness)

The lexical approach also obfuscates the vocabulary/grammar dichotomy, proposing “a fundamentally different attitude to the treatment of text” (Lewis, 1993: 106). It steers towards the teaching of words in combination (Dellar & Walkley, 2016) as a major linguistic resource for text analysis and meaning understanding. Following the notion of holistic, non-linear learning, the lexical approach criticizes the structural syllabus that divides grammar entities and minimizes the lexis interference. Instead, it encourages in which students can achieve language success through interaction targeting task-based language learning both communicative power and language skills. Only within such interactions can learners produce language naturally, based on the use of supra-sentential lexical links that illustrate the cohesive turns in a conversation (McCarthy, 1992; Lewis, 1993).

Competent & critical
(grade B):

lexical approach with
the vocabulary-
grammar dichotomy +

task-based language
learning

Example response – Part 1 (evaluating limitations)

With ELT [English language teaching] materials often failing to respond to research findings in the field of Applied Linguistics (Harwood, 2002), the ever-updating lexis also challenges the notion of “real lexis” in teaching EFL [English as a foreign language]. Without attested materials that serve as guidelines for teachers and institutes, some may fall into a deadlock that to teach “real lexis” means to use slang and idioms, and only “native” teachers are qualified for it. Regarding the use of a corpus, limited access to corpora database for individual teachers may escalate the polarization and stereotypes of native and non-native teachers in lexical teaching (Bao, 2018).

Creative & critical (grade A):

The challenge of “real lexis”

+

Native vs. non-native teachers

Example response - Part 1 (reflection)

Reflecting on my own English learning experiences, the lexical approach has been beneficial for me. Bearing in mind that language can be perceived as chunks pushes me to design and use my own vocabulary worksheets that require me to note the integrated units in the materials that I have encountered consciously. It also helps me form habits of self-learning. On the one hand, I always check the words or expressions that go together, and on the other hand, influenced by the notion of a spectrum of likelihood and conventionality (Lewis, 2008), it allows me to view critically the concept of “standard English”, and to be aware of the cultural and idiosyncratic features of the language.

(Grade A)

Outstanding understanding of how research and inquiry create and interpret knowledge and how these apply to students’ own research/practice.

Example less successful response – Part 1

Part 1. 2,500-word written study outlining a SLA theory. You will **evaluate the effectiveness** of a relevant approach informed by the theory and its impact on learners' skills development and include **critical reflection** on the learning gained from the assignment.

1. Background

1. Theoretical Features

2. Methodological Features

2. SLA theory of Approach

3. Its Application in class

4. Reflection

Example less successful response - ‘methodological features’

Notwithstanding, several linguists partly shift their opinion and in turn show the favor towards the approach recently or at least of lexical teaching. Timmis, who seems to blame the approach in sharp words, gradually senses that the partly useful approach could make a new scope via which teachers can raise the awareness of collocations and chunks since they are really of importance, though the measure still remains debatable (2008).

Woolard advocates to apply the approach in a limited way, he argues ‘the principle that the internal construction of a chunk should only be analysed when a learner needs to vary the structure in some way to create new messages’ (2013). The inspiration is that students can unveil the in-depth grammars that hide behind these ‘prefabricated chunks’, grasp the common law and replicate or reconstruct some new units or chunks in an appropriate way. Dellar and Walkley turn to ‘teach lexically’ because lots of patterns in the lexis are to a certain extent generative (2016), small units like hints and sources which are helpful to divergent thinking in creating some new phrases.



Tutor written feedback

The evaluation of the Lexical Approach shows sound knowledge of basic facts and arguments, **but it fails to cover key aspects of the link between theory and practice in teaching English, making insufficient reference to the task.** For example, in the introduction you state, “several linguists partly shift their opinion and in turn show the favor towards the approach recently or at least of lexical teaching.” As this was the framing of your paper, set up as a counter-argument to key criticisms from Swan and Thornbery, it’s a missed opportunity that their arguments aren’t more strongly critiqued, instead using a subjective critique of Timmins’ work and relying on thin support from Woolard.

Example less successful response – Part 1 (reflection)

However, the question is how to strike a balance between Lexical Approach adoption and obedience to test-oriented assessment system. Although as a beneficiary of the approach, I am so clear about the value of the approach, which can compensate for the shortcomings of grammar-translation—one of the most commonly-used methods in Chinese classroom, it may not be the mainstay in the foreseeable days to come. The main reasons are two as follow. One is lacking in necessity. In China, those who take up posts that has nothing to do with foreign literature, linguistics, translation and so on account for the majority of the working class, so there exists no incentive for them to learn foreign language as idiomatic as native speakers, instead, foreign language is more likely to be a tool or index to pass tests, not to mention to expose themselves to natural lexical chunks and command them. The other reason is infeasibility. Commoners in China (SLA learners included) have rare opportunities to immerse themselves in L2 language environment, because returned students as well as foreign teachers are in minority compared with the enormous population.

(Grade C)

Basic / problematic*

understanding of how research and inquiry create and interpret knowledge and how these apply to students' own research/practice.



How do we ensure students meet expectations?

- Provide examples showing how critical engagement requires support, but also a creative approach (that may best be achieved through reflection or personalised approaches)
- Confirm that the task prompt aligns with the marking criteria
- Provide formative feedback responding to both of these points
- What else?



Thank you!

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