



THE UNIVERSITY
OF ARIZONA

Overview of Academic Writing in U.S. Higher Education

Andy Jiahao Liu
Global Professor of English
ajliu@arizona.edu

Land Acknowledgement

We respectfully acknowledge the University of Arizona is on the land and territories of Indigenous peoples. Today, Arizona is home to 22 federally recognized tribes, with Tucson being home to the O'odham and the Yaqui. Committed to diversity and inclusion, the University strives to build sustainable relationships with sovereign Native Nations and Indigenous communities through education offerings, partnerships, and community service.



Overview of Academic Writing in U.S. Higher Education



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL & BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES
Writing Program

Academic Writing: Which one is from an academic writing text?



A. *“The stream does not blame the cold wind, it just quietly spends the winter with the wind, and accompanies those species which are trying to survive in winter.”*

B. *“The new academic year has seen 70 Primary One classes at 66 Hong Kong Schools axed as the city contends with a shrinking student population, as a sector representative warns that tens of thousands of youngsters arriving under talent policies have done little to alleviate the shortfall.”*

C. *“I hope your semester is off to a great start.”*

D. *“This paper challenges the widespread view that writing is somehow peripheral to the more serious aspects of university life – doing research and teaching students. It argues that universities are ABOUT writing and that specialist forms of academic literacy are at the heart of everything we do.”*



Academic Writing: Which one is from an academic writing text? (cont'd)

“The stream does not blame the cold wind, it just quietly spends the winter with the wind, and accompanies those species which are trying to survive in winter.”

Creative Writing / Li (2021, p. 3)

“The new academic year has seen 70 Primary One classes at 66 Hong Kong schools axed as the city contends with a shrinking student population, as a sector representative warns that tens of thousands of youngsters arriving under talent policies have done little to alleviate the shortfall.”

Newspaper / Yiu (2024)

“I hope your semester is off to a great start.”

Personal Email / Liu (2024)

“This paper challenges the widespread view that writing is somehow peripheral to the more serious aspects of university life – doing research and teaching students. It argues that universities are ABOUT writing and that specialist forms of academic literacy are at the heart of everything we do.”

Research Paper / Hyland (2013, p. 53)

- Hyland, K. (2013). Writing in the university: education, knowledge, and reputation. *Language Teaching*, 46(1), 53–70. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S026144811000036>
- Li, T. (2021). Thinking like a stream. *Elsewhere*, 4, 3–4.
- Yiu, W. (2024, September 2). *Hong Kong schools forced to axe 70 Primary One classes as student population shrinks*. South China Morning Post. <https://shorturl.at/mcNh3>



Academic Writing: Myths (adapted from Irvin, 2010, pp. 4–5)

Myth #1: Academic writing is a linear process.

Myth #2: Academic writers write perfect first drafts.

Myth #3: Academic writing is five-paragraph essay.

Myth #4: Good grammar is good academic writing.

Myth #5: Academic writing discourages the use of first-person pronouns (i.e., *I* or *We*).

Myth #6: Only non-native English speakers encounter trouble in academic writing.

Myth #7: Academic writing can't be done well.

Irvin, L.L. (2010). What is 'academic' writing. In C. Lowe & P. Zemliansky (Eds.), *Writing spaces: Readings on writing* (Vol.1., pp. 3–17). Parlor Press. <https://writingspaces.org/past-volumes/a-students-guide-to-collaborative-writing-technologies/>



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL & BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES
Writing Program

Academic Writing: Myths (cont'd) (adapted from Irvin, 2010, pp. 4–5)

Myth #1: Academic writing is a linear process.

Truth: Academic writing is a *recursive* process. You often need to recycle, repeat, and revisit the drafting, revising, and editing processes when you write.

Myth #2: Academic writers write perfect first drafts.

Truth: There is no perfect first draft. A draft is often terrible and requires further editing and feedback from others.

Myth #3: Academic writing is five-paragraph essay.

Truth: No. Academic writing goes beyond the five-paragraph essay.

Myth #4: Good grammar is good academic writing.

Truth: Absolutely no! Grammar is only one part of academic writing. Evidence-based argument, reader awareness, and other components collectively make an academic writing piece good.

Academic Writing: Myths (cont'd) (adapted from Irvin, 2010, pp. 4–5)

Myth #5: Academic writing discourages the use of first-person pronouns (i.e., *I* or *We*).

Truth: First-person pronoun is encouraged. You sometimes should use first-person pronouns to highlight your contributions and opinions in writing.

Myth #6: Only non-native English speakers encounter troubles in academic writing.

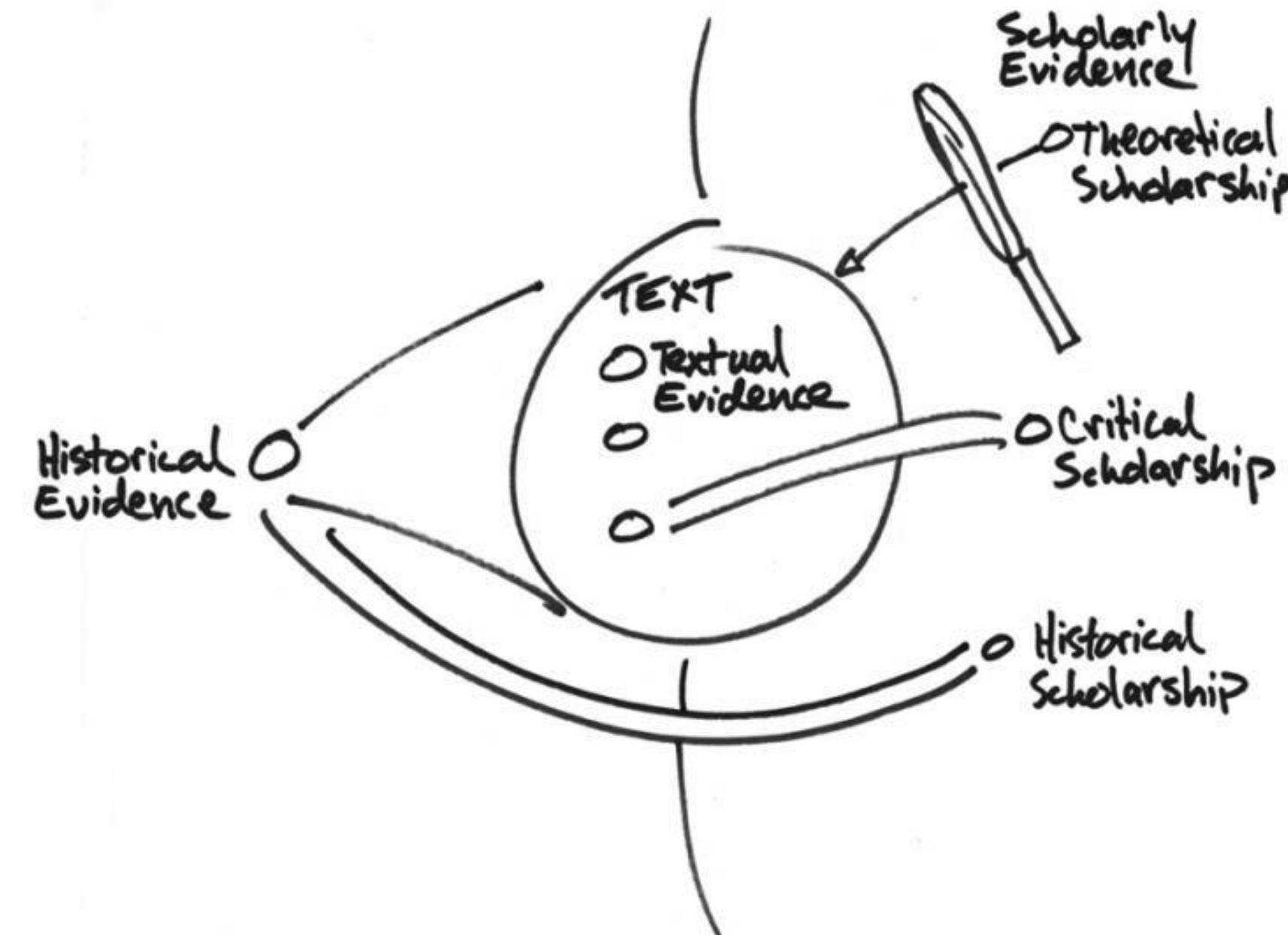
Truth: Academic writing is new and additional to all writers, regardless of their language backgrounds. However, native speakers do get much exposure to the target language.

Myth #7: Academic writing can't be done well.

Truth: No. You learn to write and write to learn. Though individual differences do exist, you, with effort and study, steadily progress in your writing abilities. Trust me; you can be a good academic writer!

Academic Writing: What is it?

- Academic writing is **analytical and evidence-based**. The purpose of academic writing is “to tell us something about the world that we don’t already know” (Wilson, 2022, p. 3). Specifically, academic writing is “where we go to learn about the world we live in—about what is true, how things come to be, and how we know” (Wilson, 2022, p. 3).



(Source: Wilson, 2022)

Academic Writing: What is it? (cont'd)

- ❑ Academic writing is **analytical and evidence-based**. The purpose of academic writing is “to tell us something about the world that we don’t already know”(Wilson, 2022, p. 3). Specifically, academic writing is “where we go to learn about the world we live in—about what is true, how things come to be, and how we know” (Wilson, 2022, p. 3).
- ❑ Academic writing is a process where you shift your role from knowledge receiver to knowledge transferer (or even creator), focusing on **How and Why** questions.

Academic Writing: Characteristics (Thaiss & Zawacki, 2022, pp. 5–7)

- Clear evidence in writing that the writer(s) have been persistent, open-minded, and disciplined in study (p. 5).
- The dominance of **reason over emotions or sensual perception** (p.5).
- An **imagined reader** who is coolly rational, reading for information, and intending to formulate a reasoned response (p. 7).

There are no simple correct/wrong or yes/no answers in academic writing. More importantly, you should use evidence to argue for your claim(s) and to convince your reader(s).

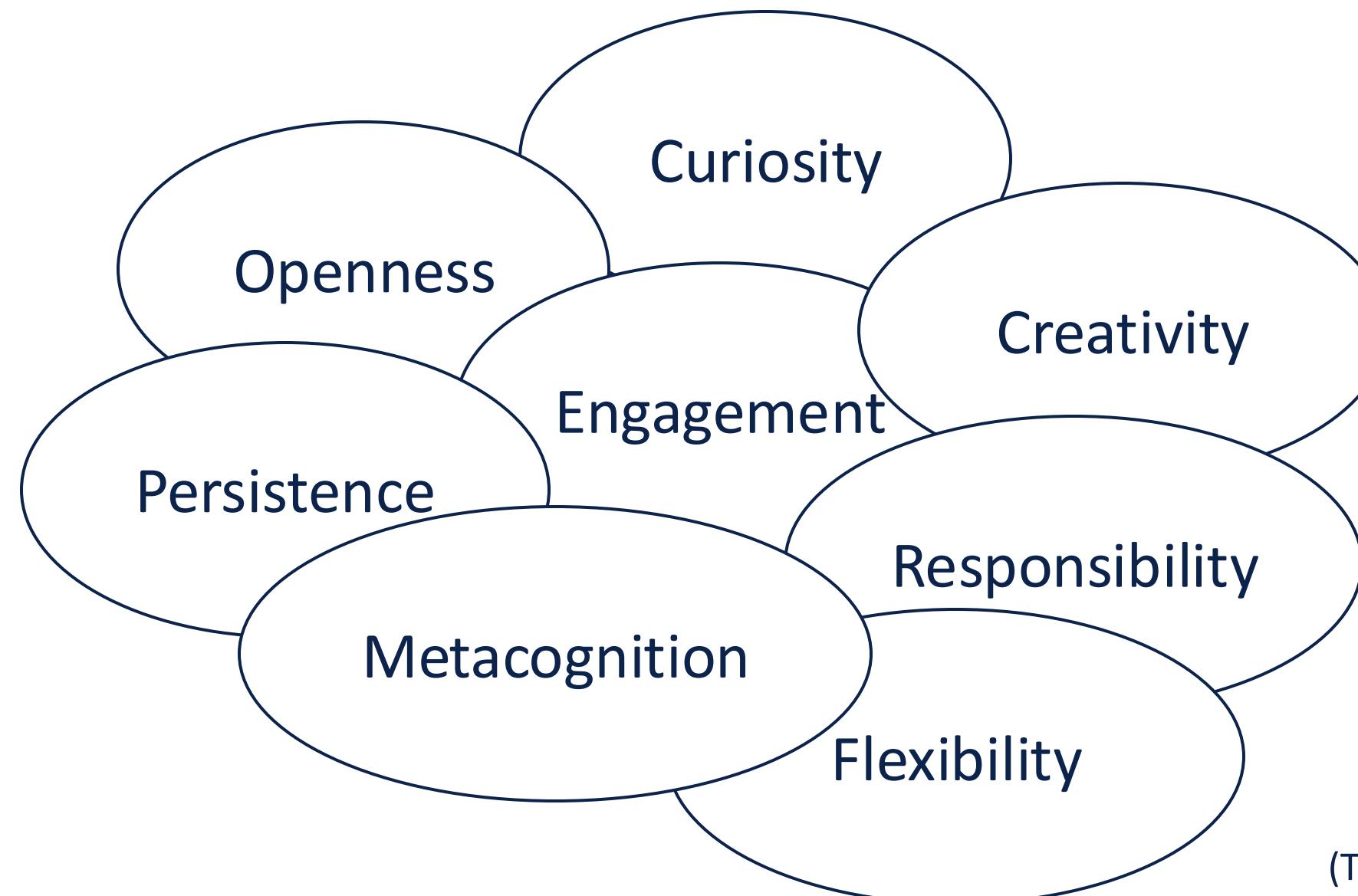
Academic Writing: Why it Feels so Hard?

- Academic writing goes beyond writing correct sentences. It typically requires “knowledge of research skills, ability to read complex texts, understanding of key disciplinary concepts, and strategies for synthesizing, analyzing, and responding critically to new information, usually within a limited time frame” (Carroll, 2002, pp. 3–4).
- Academic writing involves **substantial noticing and cognitive processes in our brains**. You make numerous decisions in your writing “as to which knowledge sources to draw on, the assessment of their linguistic choices, or how to redefine their choices” (Manchón & Cerezo, 2018, p. 2)

- Carroll, L. A. (2002). *Rehearsing new roles: How college students develop as writers*. Southern Illinois University Press.
<https://wac.colostate.edu/books/ncte/rehearsing/>
- Manchón, R. M., & Cerezo, L. (2018). Writing as language learning. In J. L. Lontas (Ed.), *The TESOL encyclopedia of English language teaching* (1st ed., pp. 1–6). Jon Wiley & Sons.



Fostering Your Academic Habits of Mind



(Textual source: CWPA et al., 2011)

Visual design: Liu, 2023)

Council of Writing Program Administrators., National Council of Teachers of English., & National Writing Project. (2011). *Framework for success in postsecondary writing.* https://wpacouncil.org/aws/CWPA/asset_manager/get_file/350201?ver=7548



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL & BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES
Writing Program

Do we still need to learn academic writing in the Artificial Intelligence age?

- Academic writing is learning and thinking.
- Academic writing is reader-oriented.
- Academic writing is author-represented.



Academic Writing as Learning and Thinking

Academic writing is an important site for second language learning, as you get exposed to new knowledge (i.e., input) and make your way to express your ideas straightforwardly with various word choices (i.e., output). During this process, you also develop your academic literacy, information literacy, and multitasking skill.

Academic writing is “not what you do with your thoughts” (Wilson, 2022, p. 2). In the recursive writing process, you make numerous decisions, including but not limited to word choices, feedback acceptance/rejection, paragraph/sentence organization, and source use. Though most of the time you are struggling, you are making good progress in enhancing your abilities to think as a writer.

Wilson, J. R. (2022). *Academic writing*.

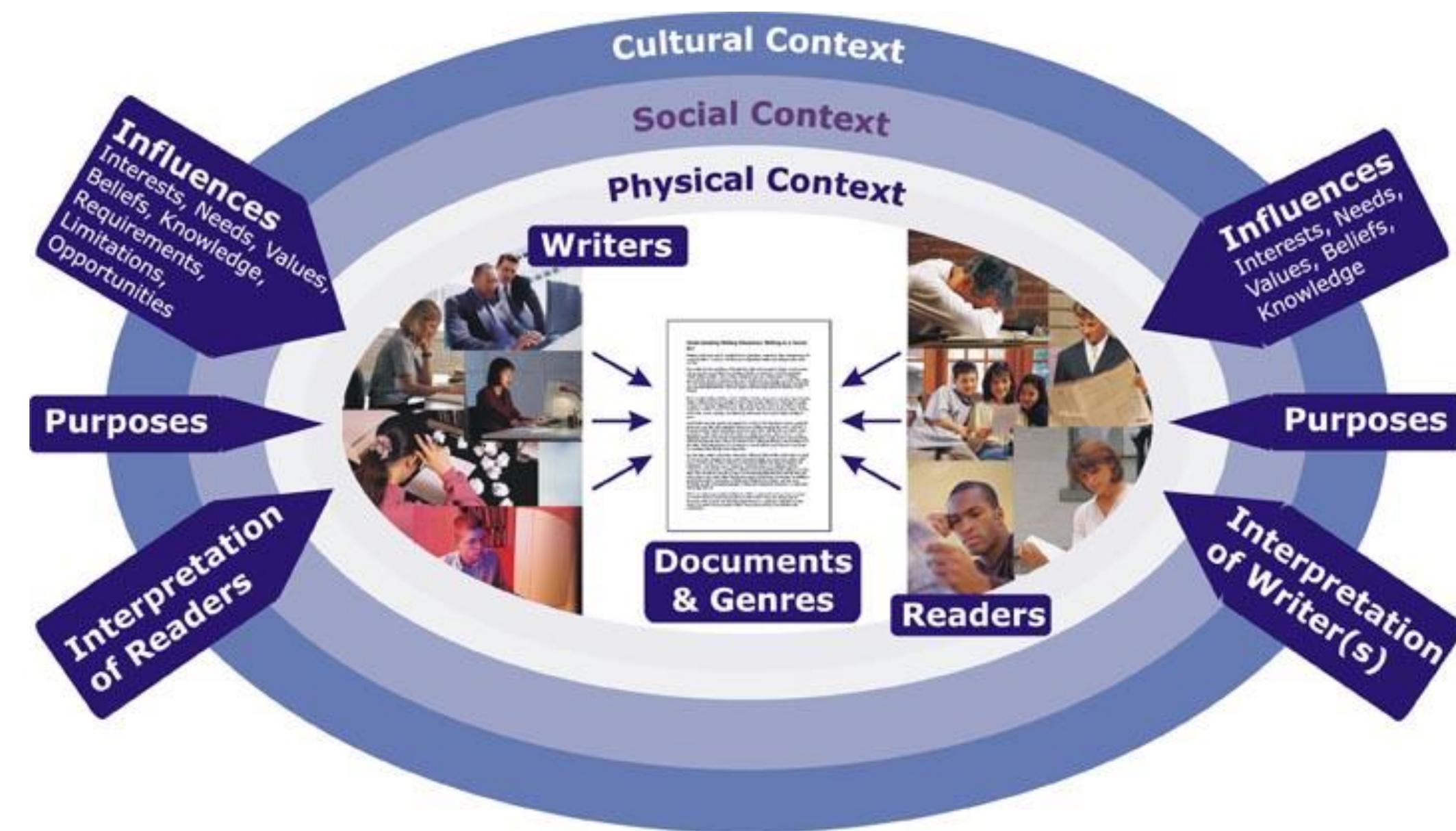
https://wilson.fas.harvard.edu/files/jeffreywilson/files/jeffrey_r._wilson_academic_writing.pdf



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL & BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES
Writing Program

Reader Awareness in Academic Writing

- You are always writing something for the intended audience, such as your instructor and friend. Not surprisingly, their needs and expectations will differ from your own.



(Source: Mangialetti & Palmquist, 2022)

Mangialetti, T., & Palmquist, M. (2022). *Understanding Writing Situations*. Writing@CSU.
<https://writing.colostate.edu/guides/guide.cfm?guideid=3>



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL & BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES
Writing Program

Reader Awareness in Academic Writing (cont'd)

- ❑ However, you most of the time are unable to meet your audience. In this sense, what should you do when writing?
- ❑ **“Rather than focusing on all that you *know*, you can focus on what you imagine that reader needs to *learn*.” (Cayley, 2023, p. 13)**
- ❑ Remember, **it’s your responsibility to write with clear and straightforward language**. You will be criticized if your readers cannot understand what you mean in your writing.



“We are what we write.”

(Hyland, 2013, p. 53)

Author-representation in Academic Writing: Voice and Identity

Hyland, K. (2013). Writing in the university: education, knowledge, and reputation. *Language Teaching*, 46(1), 53–70.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S002382211000036>



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL & BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES
Writing Program

Writing Comparison: Which one is written by a junior scholar? Why?

Excerpt #1

“Essentially, I want to challenge the widespread view that writing is somehow peripheral to the more serious aspects of university life – doing research and teaching students. Instead, I want to argue that universities are ABOUT writing and that specialist forms of academic literacy are at the heart of everything we do.”

Excerpt #2

“Given the above mentioned, this paper, drawing on major learning-oriented assessment models, explores the possibility of using standardized writing tests for learning-oriented purposes and attempts to provide guidance for writing teachers on how to use such tests to facilitate students’ development of writing ability.”



Established Scholar vs. Junior Scholar

Excerpt #1

“Essentially, I want to challenge the widespread view that writing is somehow peripheral to the more serious aspects of university life – doing research and teaching students. Instead, I want to argue that universities are ABOUT writing and that specialist forms of academic literacy are at the heart of everything we do.”

(Hyland, 2013, p. 53)

Excerpt #2

“Given the above mentioned, this paper, drawing on major learning-oriented assessment models, explores the possibility of using standardized writing tests for learning-oriented purposes and attempts to provide guidance for writing teachers on how to use such tests to facilitate students’ development of writing ability.”

(Yu, 2023, p. 58)

- Hyland, K. (2013). Writing in the university: education, knowledge, and reputation. *Language Teaching*, 46(1), 53–70.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S026144811000036>
- Yu, C. (2023). Testing issues in writing. In H. Mohebbi & Y. Wang (Eds.), *Insights into teaching and learning writing: A practical guide for early-career teachers* (pp. 56–70). Castledown.



- We are what we write! We learn to write, we write to learn, and we shape and communicate meaning through writing.**
- Treat the Foundations Writing course seriously.** If you receive an F from this course, you will be required to retake this course with the next cohort in Year 3.
- The Foundations Writing course is perhaps one of the only classes in your entire undergraduate education where you will focus on learning to write and growing as a writer.**





See you next Thursday!

N8801, 9:50 AM – 12:10 PM

Questions: ajliu@arizona.edu



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL & BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES
Writing Program