Academic Writing needs analysis and defining your terms

Academic Writing needs analysis

Interview each other in pairs, making notes about your partner in this table, using the useful vocabulary to help. Take turns being the first to ask question about each box.

Name:		
Job		
Present	Past	Future
Research and studies		
Present	Past	Future
Studies of and use of English		
Present	Past	Future
Academic writing and reading (in English and your own language)		
Present	Past	Future
Other writing in English		
Present	Past	Future
Views on academic writing in English (ways of learning, difficulties, differences, etc)		

Useful vocabulary

Lecturer/ Professor
Researcher
Academic
TA
(Private) tutor/ Cram school teacher
Tenure

Higher education
Four-year degree – BA/ BSc/ B Ed
Postgraduate – Diploma/ MA/ MSc/ MBA/ (Research-based) Master's/ PhD/ Post-doc
Scholarship/ Academic funding

Language school
Self-study
IELTS/ TOEFL/ GRE/ GMAT

Essay
(Academic) paper
Dissertation/ Thesis
Textbook
Academic journal/ Magazine
Transcript
Abstract

Email/ SMS
Editing/ Proofreading
Application form/ Personal statement
CV

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When your teacher stops you, ask about any words in the Useful Vocabulary box above which you don't understand, adding it to the interview form if you can.

First of all without looking at the previous page, try to fill the gaps below with words on the topics above which fit those definitions. When one bullet point has two or more gaps, they need the same word.

- _____ is the British equivalent of elementary school.
- _____ is more or less equivalent to junior high school.
- _____ is an American expression for an undergraduate degree, used to contrast it with a two-year junior college degree.
- There are two related meanings to _____, one of which is a lecturer in your university who has special responsibility for checking on your studies. The other is a private teacher, often one who comes to your house to help you catch up on subjects you are behind on at school or to prepare for an exam.
- In British English, "_____" is a more general term than "professor".
- B Ed stands for _____.
- The expected standard of a _____ degree is exemplified by the following definition:

  A _____ thesis must form a distinct contribution to the knowledge of the subject and afford evidence of originality, shown by the discovery of new facts, or by the exercise of critical power. Additionally, a _____ thesis must show work which, if written in a suitable form, would be publishable.

  (modified from Cryer 2000: 186)
- _____s are not students, nor are they faculty members. […] The NSF and NIH define a _____ as a temporary period of advanced training in preparation for an independent research career (Bravo & Olsen, 2007). […] In the literature there are hints that the _____ is a muddled concept, though I know of no study that explicitly problematizes the definition of what it is to be a _____. (Cantwell, 2009)
- Webster's definition of a _____ is helpful:

  A _____ is a substantial paper that is submitted to faculty of a university by a candidate for an advanced degree that is typically based on independent research […] (Webster, 1961. p. 656).
- An _____ can be defined as a 'peer-reviewed periodical containing scholarly articles in a particular field of study'.

Look at the previous page to help.

Check as a class

Underline useful language for defining your terms above. There should be at least one useful phrase per bullet point.

Compare the underlined parts as a class or with the suggested answers.

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Suggested answers

- Primary school is the British equivalent of elementary school.
- Secondary school is more or less equivalent to junior high school.
- Four-year degree is an American expression for an undergraduate degree, used to contrast it with a two-year junior college degree.
- There are two related meanings to tutor, one of which is a lecturer in your university who has special responsibility for checking on your studies. The other is a private teacher, often one who comes to your house to help you catch up on subjects you are behind on at school or to prepare for an exam.
- In British English, "lecturer" is a more general term than "professor".
- B Ed stands for Bachelor of Education.
- The expected standard of a PhD degree is exemplified by the following definition:

  A PhD thesis must form a distinct contribution to the knowledge of the subject and afford evidence of originality, shown by the discovery of new facts, or by the exercise of critical power. Additionally, a PhD thesis must show work which, if written in a suitable form, would be publishable.

  (modified from Cryer 2000: 186)
- Postdocs are not students, nor are they faculty members. […] The NSF and NIH define a postdoctorate as a temporary period of advanced training in preparation for an independent research career (Bravo & Olsen, 2007). […] In the literature there are hints that the postdoc is a muddled concept, though I know of no study that explicitly problematizes the definition of what it is to be a postdoc. (Cantwell, 2009)
- Webster's definition of a dissertation is helpful:

  A dissertation is a substantial paper that is submitted to faculty of a university by a candidate for an advanced degree that is typically based on independent research […] (Webster, 1961. p. 656).
- An academic journal can be defined as a 'peer-reviewed periodical containing scholarly articles in a particular field of study'.

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Without looking above, complete the exercises below.

From memory or with your own ideas, improve the definitions below.

- Secondary school is the same as junior high school.
- A four-year degree is not a two-year junior college degree.
- Tutor means a lecturer in your university who has special responsibility for checking on your studies and a private teacher, often one who comes to your house to help you catch up on subjects you are behind on at school or to prepare for an exam.
- "Lecturer" is a more general term than "professor".
- B Ed means Bachelor of Education.
- The expected standard of a PhD degree is:
  A PhD thesis must form a distinct contribution to the knowledge of the subject and afford evidence of originality, shown by the discovery of new facts, or by the exercise of critical power. Additionally, a PhD thesis must show work which, if written in a suitable form, would be publishable.
- Postdocs are not students, nor are they faculty members. […] A postdoctorate is defined as a temporary period of advanced training in preparation for an independent research career
- The dictionary definition of a dissertation is helpful:
  A dissertation is a substantial paper that is submitted to faculty of a university by a candidate for an advanced degree that is typically based on independent research […].
- An academic journal is defined as a 'peer-reviewed periodical containing scholarly articles in a particular field of study'.

What is wrong with each of the definitions?

Before or after checking your corrections, match the definitions above to the problems below:

- Sentence too long
- Suggests there is only one possible definition
- Doesn't give enough information about the source(s)
- Too much certainty about the definition
- Defining phrase has the wrong meaning
- Doesn't give enough information to be an accurate definition

Compare with the originals on the previous page. Other answers might be possible, so please check your own versions with your teacher.

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Do the same thing with the less than perfect defining phrases below.

- The definition of… is…
- Everyone defines… as…/ Everyone uses… to mean…
- Everybody uses…'s definition of this, which is…
- The term… is only used in…, where it means

- There are loads of definitions of…
- According to… this definition is wrong, and it should be…
- Basically, it means…
- But that definition is impossible to understand, so…
- But that's not all it covers
- But that's not really a definition, because it covers all kinds of things.
- I'm going to take… to mean…
- It's impossible to define…, but…
- My favourite definition of this is…
- No one agrees on what… means
- Sorry, I forgot to explain what… and… mean
- The common use of… is wrong, as it actually means…
- The dictionary definition of… is…, but nobody uses it that way
- The use of… to mean… is old fashioned/ out of date

The phrases above are divided by what kind of mistake the person using the original definitions phrases was making. Try to label each section.

Check as a class or with the suggested answers.

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Suggested answers

Too general

- The definition of… is… – The (Oxford English) dictionary definition of… is…/… defines… as…/ One possible definition of… is…
- Everyone defines… as…/ Everyone uses… to mean… – Most people in this field take this to mean…/ What… mean by… is…
- Everybody uses…'s definition of this, which is… – The acknowledged authority on… is…, who defines it as…/ A commonly quoted definition is this is by…, who explains it as…/ The most common source for a definition of this term is…
- The term… is only used in…, where it means – ... is a specialised term within the field of..., used to mean…

Too informal

- There are loads of definitions of… – There are a number of possible definitions of..., of which the most useful/ relevant here is.../ There are several/ many meanings to the term…, but…
- According to… this definition is wrong, and it should be… – ... contested this definition of... as..., preferring instead…/ … seeks to redefine… as…/ An alternative definition is… given by…, who says…/ An alternative view of what... means is suggested by...
- Basically, it means… – The core mean of… is…/ The fundamental meaning of… is…/ A somewhat simplistic definition of… is…
- But that definition is impossible to understand, so… – A more easily understood definition is…/ A simpler definition is…/ A more accessible definition is…
- But that's not all it covers. – A more inclusive definition is…/ You can extend this definition to…/ This concept can also be said to cover...
- But that's not really a definition, because it covers all kinds of things. – A fuller definition is…/ A more accurate definition is…/ A more precise definition is…/ We can improve on that somewhat vague definition by…
- I'm going to take… to mean… – I'm going to follow… in taking… to mean…/ This paper will follow… in taking… to mean…/ The arguments in this paper rely on a definition of… as…/ In this paper, the term… is used to mean…
- It's impossible to define…, but… – … is a somewhat ambiguous/ problematic term, but we can…
- My favourite definition of this is… – Perhaps the clearest definition of this is…/ Perhaps the best definition of… is provided by… in…
- No one agrees on what… means – Debates over the precise definition of… have yet to be resolved, but…/ There is disagreement about the most useful definition of…/ There is no consensus about what the term... covers, although most studies in the area have traditionally focused on the area of…/ … and … define… in different ways. The former…/ For... ... means..., whereas according to.../ The debate about the meaning of… can perhaps be resolved by…

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- Sorry, I forgot to explain what… and… mean – Before moving on, it is worth defining the fundamental terms involved in this field./ It is worth taking some time to define those two important terms./ It is impossible to really comprehend… without first understanding…, which can be defined as…/ Understanding of the concept depends upon a clear definition of…
- The common use of… is wrong, as it actually means… – Although in common parlance this term is used to mean…, in this field it rather means…./ .. has a specialised meaning in this context, being.../ … is used in this field with the more restricted meaning of…/ In the field of...,…/ Unlike the everyday English use, the technical meaning of… is…/ …. is used in this field with the more restricted meaning of…
- The dictionary definition of… is…, but nobody uses it that way – The dictionary/ Oxford English Dictionary definition of… is… [1], but it could be argued that its actual use is…/ The (Oxford) dictionary definition of… is… (but its actual use is more like…)
- The use of… to mean… is old fashioned/ out of date – …. was first used by to mean…/ … originally meant… but nowadays…/ More recent definitions emphasize…/ More recently, the definition has been extended to cover…/ The use of the term… has drifted away from its origins, and…/ … was formerly/ originally defined as ... but more recently.../ The origins of the term lie in… but…/ … was first used by… to mean… However,…

Homework
Task 1
Write definitions of five of the words and expressions below, ***using sources*** *and/ or contrasting with similar things whenever possible.*

Task 2
Write an essay of over 200 words (probably four or five paragraphs) with the title **"Key terms in my area(s) of research interest"***. Decide on the topic of each paragraph and write the essay plan above the essay before you start writing.*

Task 3
Write an essay defining academic writing, including both several sources and your own ideas, of at least 200 words. Decide on the topic of each paragraph and write the essay plan above the essay before you start writing.

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Other academic vocabulary to define

- a diagram/ a figure
- academic conventions
- academic sources
- academic writing/ semi-academic writing
- APA
- appendix
- bibliography/ citations/ references/ suggested reading
- brainstorming/ mind map
- bullet point
- caption
- chart/ diagram/ graph
- coherence
- comma/ semi colon/ colon
- conclusion/ summary
- critical reading
- department/ faculty
- discussion forum
- e.g./ i.e.
- Ed.
- et al.
- extended definition
- heading/ title
- ibid.
- Ivy League/ Oxbridge
- lecture/ seminar/ tutorial/ workshop
- mailing list
- main body
- N.B.
- note taking
- op. cit.
- original research
- paragraph/ section
- paraphrase
- plagiarism
- portfolio
- poster presentation
- pp.
- process writing
- qualitative research/ quantitative research
- quotation marks/ speech marks
- redbrick universities
- refute
- shared knowledge
- synthesising
- thesis statement
- vol.

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