

Academic writing

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General points

- When you refer to a complete volume (novel, play, monograph) use *italics*. E.g. *The Remains of the Day*. When you refer to a complete short text (poem, article, short story) use quotation marks without italics. E.g. “Stanzas written in Dejection near Naples”.
- Quoting from other sources:
 - a) Always use quotations marks to identify text copied/quoted from other texts.
 - b) When you quote from a book, provide the page number.
 - c) When you quote from a poem provide the line number.
 - d) When you quote from a play, provide the act and scene numbers (and line numbers if the play is in verse).
- Include a bibliography or footnotes if you quote from other sources.
- Always re-read your work before you submit it.
- Always use the spell check in your text processor. There is NO EXCUSE for submitting written work which contains spelling errors.

1. Expressing your opinion

The following phrases will help you to express your opinion in the Debates (CA1, CA5), the Forum (CA4) and the other written exercises (CA2, CA3, CA6).

1.1. Personal Point of View

These words and phrases are used to express a **personal** point of view:

- in my view
- in my opinion
- from my point of view

Less formal equivalents, which are more common in spoken English, include:

- I feel
- Personally, I think that...
- I'd say that...
- in my experience, ...
- to my mind (to emphasise that this is your opinion)
- as far as I'm concerned (to express an opinion that may be different from others')
- I reckon (usually to express an opinion about what is likely to happen)
- if you ask me (to express an opinion that may be critical)
- to be honest [with you] (to express a critical opinion without seeming rude)
- speaking for myself, ...
- what I mean is that...
- the way I see it, ...

In academic essays (see below) you are advised to use the following:

- in my view
- in my opinion
- from my point of view
- I think that...
- I believe that...
- I do not believe that...
- It seems to me that...
- I would argue that...
- I'd suggest that...
- I'd like to point out that...
- I am unconvinced that...
- I do not agree that...

Reference

Adapted from
<http://www.vocabulary.cl/Lists/Opinions.htm>
 and
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/youmeus/learnit/learnitv281.shtml>

'According to' is never used in the first person ('According to me...' is incorrect). It is always used to express the opinion of another person. For example: 'According to Virginia Woolf, women writers should have a room of their own.' 'According to the Prime Minister, taxes will not be raised...'

In academic essays you should take care not to use these phrases too frequently, as it is assumed that the whole essay reflects your own point of view.

1.2. General Point of View

These words and phrases are used to express a point of view that is generally accepted or believed by others:

- It is thought that...
- Some people say that...
- It is considered...
- It is generally accepted that...
- It is widely agreed that...

1.3. Agreeing with an opinion

These words and phrases are used to agree with someone else's point of view:

- Of course
- You're right / You're absolutely right
- Yes, I agree (with you) / Yes, I very much agree (with you)*
- That's true
- I think so, too
- That's a good point
- I share your opinion on
- I agree with you entirely
- I couldn't agree more
- Exactly
- That's just what I was thinking
- Absolutely
- So do I/ So have I/ So am I etc
- I don't think so, either
- Neither do I

* 'I'm agree with you'
is incorrect.

1.4. Disagreeing with an opinion

These words and phrases are used to disagree with someone else's point of view:

- I don't agree with you.*
- I'm sorry to disagree with you, but...
- I'm afraid I have to disagree.
- Yes, but don't you think that...?
- That's not entirely true
- On the contrary, ...
- However, ...
- I don't accept that...
- That's not the same thing at all.
- I'm not so sure about that.
- I must take issue with you on that.
- It's unjustifiable to say that...

* 'I'm not agree with you'
is incorrect.

1.5. Making concessions

To participate in a debate or achieve balance in any essay, you need to incorporate opinions which are different from your own. Useful linking words and expressions include:

- While many / some people argue..... others consider that.....
- On one hand....., but on the other.....
- To some extent it may be true that..... but we need to remember that
- It is sometimes argued...
- Admittedly...

1.6. Clarifying an opinion

It may sometimes be necessary to explain a point in greater detail. Useful linking expressions for doing this include:

- Here I'm referring to...
- Let me clarify that...
- By this I mean that...
- To be more precise, ...
- That is to say, ...

2. Debate and Forum contributions

- The language used in Debate and Forum contributions is generally more formal than in spoken English but less formal than the kind of written English you should use for the questions (CA2, CA6), the review (CA6) and the essay (CA3).
- In the Debates, make sure you refer to other students' opinions but avoid making contributions that simply agree or disagree. Before writing, think what new points you can introduce to the ongoing discussion.
- One of the main objectives of the Debates is to learn how to develop an argument collectively, not just to reach a definitive conclusion. It is interesting to note that the least successful Debates are those in which all the participants agree with each other from the start.
- It is fine to add links to interesting websites or quote from other sources in your contributions to the Debates and in the Forum, but remember that your opinions should be your own. If you do include other sources or quotations, you should always comment on these in your contribution.

3. Expressing your opinion: CA2, CA6

- The questions in CA2, CA6 (and the essay in CA3) are intended to help you develop your own capacity for critical argument. This is why there are no correct answers to these exercises.
- Assessment will be based on how *convincing* your arguments are. The teacher may, therefore, disagree with your opinion but still give you high marks.
- Although no opinion will be regarded as incorrect, in certain cases a specific interpretation of the texts may indeed be incorrect, resulting in the mark for this exercise being 'fail'.
- **For example:** Question 1 of CA2 asks you to select a passage from *The Remains of the Day* by Kazuo Ishiguro "*which, in your opinion, proves that this novel criticises the role of England in 20th century history.*" A student would fail this exercise if s/he argued that the author praises Lord Darlington's complicity with the Nazis, as this is an incorrect interpretation of the novel (a misreading): throughout the book he is, in fact, criticising Lord Darlington for this complicity.

3.1. Answering questions based on text commentary CA2, CA6

In CA2 and CA6 students are asked to select passages from the literary texts being studied and answer questions commenting on these passages.

Preliminary instructions:

- Before reading the texts, look at some of the recommended websites to find background information on the author and about the texts themselves.
- Read the questions in the exercises. Make sure you understand what the questions require. Ask the teacher if still in doubt.
- Consider highlighting or underlining those passages which would help you answer the questions.
- Read the texts, selecting possible passages for the exercises.
- Use the dictionary only occasionally, if you can not understand the meaning of a whole paragraph or page.

- Consult a translation of the text, particularly for *Romeo and Juliet*, if this is necessary.
- Copy the passages selected in the exercises and identify them by page (in the case of *The Remains of the Day*) or by act, scene and lines (in the case of the play *Romeo and Juliet*). Use parentheses: (p. 236), (II.iii 10-13).
- For CA2 and CA6, it is not obligatory to quote from secondary sources (i.e. bibliography), but if you do so, remember to identify these using footnotes.
- Refer to other sections of this document for guidance on expressing your opinion (section 1) and using connectors (section 4.2).

4. Writing a critical essay CA3

- In Literature courses students are generally asked to write **critical essays**.
- A critical essay proposes a **thesis** in the introduction (first paragraph), which is then developed via 2 or 3 sound arguments (2 or 3 paragraphs) leading to the conclusion (final paragraph).
- A critical essay should try to convince the reader that the writer's ideas about a text/author/aspect of the text are interesting and well argued. This is why it is important to express the main point of view at the beginning. The conclusion should summarise the arguments and should not add new ideas.
- The essay **must include quotations** from the original primary source (i.e. the novel in English) to support the arguments presented.
- You must give your essay a title, which announces to the reader the point of view (or thesis) you are going to defend (e.g.: The Invisible Narrator: The Narrator as Secret Protagonist in Graham Greene's "The Invisible Japanese Gentlemen.").
- You should not introduce extra biographical or bibliographical information about your subject.

4.1. Sample essay

Read the *sample essay* before you write your own essay. The comments are intended to help you understand how the essay is structured.

Name: Clara Pérez

Topic: Comment on the narrator's powers of observation in Graham Greene's short story "*The Invisible Japanese Gentlemen*."

Title: The Invisible Narrator: The Narrator as Secret Protagonist in "The Invisible Japanese Gentlemen." By Graham Greene.

Greene's short story "The Invisible Japanese Gentlemen" is narrated by an anonymous witness who reports a private conversation between a new writer –a young girl– and her sceptical fiancé. The story deals apparently with her limited powers of observation but when we learn that the narrator is also a writer, we realise that his powers of observation are actually Greene's main theme. The narrator, in short, is the story's secret protagonist.

The title chosen by the student presents the thesis argued in the essay: the apparently invisible narrator is actually the protagonist of the text. The title of the essay plays with the word 'invisible' in the original title of the story and is intended to catch the attention of the reader.

The introduction refers to the topic of the essay, and presents a thesis in relation to it.

Greene suggests that, ironically, both the narrator and the girl's fiancé have greater powers of observation than her, though she has been praised by her editor for them. Her powers are questioned since she, but not the narrator or her fiancé, fails to notice the colourful group of Japanese businessmen having dinner next to her table. No doubt, she is too engrossed by her dream of future success and by the discussion of her boyfriend's professional prospects to notice them. We should wonder, though, whether a writer must be alert to his or her surroundings even in private moments. Perhaps, the fiancé notes the Japanese after all, because, as she complains, "Sometimes you are so evasive I don't think you want to marry me at all." (64)

This paragraph presents the first important argument in the essay, which is expressed in the first sentence, or 'topic sentence.' The rest of the paragraph is devoted to explaining this idea with the support of a quotation from the story.

The narrator punctuates the story with observations about what the Japanese are doing, activities he follows without missing the couple's conversation. He seems to feel a certain professional fellowship with the girl and mentally asks her if she is "prepared for the years of effort" (63) and to accept the fact that "those 'powers of observation' will become enfeebled." (63) We deduce that the narrator was, like the girl, admired as a young writer but, in his forties now, he is judged by "performance and not by promise." (63) From this point of view, the story could be read as a declaration that this performance is still good and so are his powers of observation.

This paragraph presents the second important argument in the essay; the 'topic sentence' insists on the thesis. The rest of the paragraph contains a series of quotations leading to a provisional conclusion.

In conclusion, Greene's narrator is the actual protagonist of this short story. By showing that he can simultaneously follow the couple's conversation and the Japanese gentlemen's business celebration, he proves that he is a good writer, presumably unlike the girl.

This paragraph sums up the arguments presented in the previous three paragraphs, emphasising the thesis. It does not contain any new ideas.

4.2. Using connectors

- The syntax of English academic writing is relatively simple in comparison to Spanish or Catalan, in which long paragraphs, with many embedded clauses and few full stops, are common. Clear, logical sequencing of the arguments is very important for the overall structure of a critical essay written in English. Correct use of vocabulary also contributes towards establishing the difference between informal and formal writing.
- The words that are used to indicate the development of your arguments are called '**connectors**' or '**text connectives**' and these should be included in a critical essay. Note that, for instance, 'To begin with/Firstly...', 'Secondly/In addition' and 'In conclusion' are useful for constructing a sequence of points in your essay.
- Take care, however, not to overuse these in your writing. Spanish students frequently overuse connectors, believing that this gives their writing a more sophisticated or intellectual tone. ('Moreover' is the connector which is most frequently misused).

Reference

See also *Connectors/Text Connectives*
<http://laproff.wordpress.com/category/all-connector-text-connectives/>

- The following is a list of connectors in Spanish-English translation:

A pesar de (que): In spite of (the fact that), Despite (the fact that)
 A propósito, por cierto: By the way
 Además: Besides, Furthermore, In addition, Moreover, Similarly, Else
 Además de: In addition to
 Ambos: Both
 Ante todo: First of all
 Antes: Before
 Así como: As well as
 Así pues: Thus
 Así que: And so
 Así y todo, aún así: Even so
 Aunque: Although, Even Though, Though
 Bastante: Quite, rather
 Como resultado: As a result
 Como si: As if, As though
 Como (al dar un ejemplo): Such as, Like, Including
 Con respecto a / En relación con: Regarding
 Con tal de que: So that, As long as
 De ahora en adelante: From now on
 De este modo: In this way
 De la misma manera / Del mismo modo: Likewise
 De hecho: In fact, actually
 De todos modos: In any case, At any rate, Nevertheless, Nonetheless
 De un modo u otro: One way or another
 Debido a: Because of, Due to, Since, As
 Después (de): After
 En breve: In brief
 En cambio: In contrast
 En cierto modo: In some way
 En conclusion: In conclusion
 En cuanto: As soon as
 En el principio: At the beginning
 En general: In general

En lugar de: Instead
 En otras palabras: In other words
 En primer lugar / En segundo lugar: Firstly / Secondly
 En resumen, a resumidas cuentas: In short
 Entonces: Then, Next
 Eventualmente: Eventually
 Finalmente: In the end, Finally, At last
 Habitualmente / Normalmente: Usually
 Hasta: Until, Till
 Incluso si: Even if
 Más específicamente: More specifically
 Mientras: When, As, While, Whereas, Just as
 Mientras tanto: Meanwhile
 No sólo...sino también: Not only.. but also
 Para empezar: To begin with
 Para que: So that
 Para: To, In order (not) to, So as (not) to, For
 Para empezar: To begin with
 Para resumir: To sum up
 Por ejemplo: For example, For instance
 Por el contrario: On the contrary
 Por eso: That's why, This is why
 Por lo tanto: Therefore
 Por último: Finally
 Primero: First
 Pronto: Soon
 Si no: Otherwise
 Si (pregunta indirecta): Whether
 Sin embargo: However, Yet
 Sobre todo: Above all
 También: Also
 Tampoco: Either/ Neither
 Tan...que: So...that, Such... that
 Una vez: Once

4.3. Paragraph layout

In a critical essay, a paragraph generally consists of approximately 4-8 lines.

Note the correct and incorrect layout of the following passage:

Correct

Romeo and Juliet belongs to a tradition of tragic romances stretching back to Ancient Greece. Its plot is based on an Italian tale, translated into verse as *The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet* by Arthur Brooke in 1562, and retold in prose in *Palace of Pleasure* by William Painter in 1582. Shakespeare borrowed heavily from both, but developed supporting characters, particularly Mercutio and Paris, in order to expand the plot. Believed to be written between 1591 and 1595, the play was first published in a quarto version in 1597. This text was of poor quality, and later editions corrected it, bringing it more in line with Shakespeare's original text.

Incorrect

Romeo and Juliet belongs to a tradition of tragic romances stretching back to Ancient Greece.

Its plot is based on an Italian tale, translated into verse as *The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet* by Arthur Brooke in 1562, and retold in prose in *Palace of Pleasure* by William Painter in 1582.

Shakespeare borrowed heavily from both, but developed supporting characters, particularly Mercutio and Paris, in order to expand the plot.

Believed to be written between 1591 and 1595, the play was first published in a quarto version in 1597. This text was of poor quality, and later editions corrected it, bringing it more in line with Shakespeare's original text.

5. Commenting on a poem CA4

- In CA4 you are required to select one poem from the list provided in the document 'Poetry' and to write your opinion on it in approximately 150 words.
- This is NOT a text commentary exercise: you will be asked to use your personal criteria to select the poem and comment on it.
- Read the following points carefully to help you do this.

5.1. Reading poetry/ Judging poetry

Consider the following comments from a blog, on how to appreciate poetry:

One thing a lot of people say when talking about (...) poetry in general, is that they 'don't know how to read poetry' or 'don't know how to judge poetry', or 'don't know what's good poetry'.

People worry about metre, rhyme, scansion, references, form, so many technicalities. They worry about not knowing much about them, or not knowing what they actually are, what they 'mean', or how they're defined.

There's some kind of instinct with poetry, I think. And it's okay to leave the technicalities, just as much as it is to know a lot about them, to appreciate them, to be learned about them. Only it's not always needed, not if you're reading poetry in bed, a couple of poems a night, before you switch off the light. Why not concentrate on the poem, the sounds, the pleasure you can derive from it? (...)

My 'is-it-a-good-poem-or-some-naff-stuff-meter':

- (...) Does it linger in my mind, even when I try to push it to the back because it's making me uneasy, because it's taking up my concentration, making me lousy company? Does it take up even more space, demanding thought, demanding mental space when I try to ignore it? Does it refuse to be ignored?
- Do the sounds echo in my mind; the patterns, the variations allowing it to cement easily?
- Are the words, the punctuation, the language, exciting? Is the poem as a whole exciting?
- Am I compelled to return to it?

Reference

From <http://katy-murr.blogspot.com/2007/08/reading-poetry-judging-poetry.html> . See also *How to Rate and Judge Poetry* at <http://allpoetry.com/column/446864>

5.2. Points to consider when selecting a poem

Bearing the comments from the blog in mind, you are recommended to take the following points into account when selecting a poem to comment on:

- **Title:** Is it appropriate to the subject, tone and genre? Does it generate interest and hint at the theme the poem is exploring?
- **Subject:** What is the basic situation? Who is talking, and under what circumstances? Try writing a paraphrase to identify any gaps or confusions.
- **Structure:** What kind of structure(s) has been used in the poem: comparisons, analogies, bald assertions, etc.? Are these aspects satisfyingly integrated? Does the structure support the content?
- **Tone:** What is the poet's attitude to the subject? Is it appropriate to content and audience: assured, flexible, sensitive, etc.?
- **Word choice:** Is the language used appropriate and uncontrived, economical, varied, inspiring etc? Do you understand each word properly, its common uses and associations? Are words repeated? How do they create mood, emotional rapport, distance?
- **Style:** Metaphor and simile: are they used in a fresh and convincing manner? Rhythm and metre: are they well integrated in the structure of the poem? Rhyme: is it fresh, pleasurable, unassuming but supportive?
- **Appeal:** Which does the poem appeal to: the intellect or the emotions of the reader?
- **Overall impression:** is the poem original, honest, coherent, moving etc.? How is the overall effect achieved?

Reference

Adapted from Poetry Magic at <http://www.poetrymagic.co.uk/critiquing.html>

5.3. Linguistic register/tone

In this type of exercise it is important to find an appropriate linguistic register to express what you want to say. The following comments from a student on the poem "I know why the caged bird sings" by Maya Angelou, would be considered too informal for CA4:

This poem is deep indeed!!! It was the most true-to-life, touching and all at the same time slap-you-in-the-face poem I have EVER read. These things combined make it powerful. After reading the comments and then

reading it again I believe that it not only speaks to those of us that are black, but even Christians. This poem is deep. I would love to meet with Ms. Angelou and find out what she was thinking and her heart-felt thoughts on it.

Your commentary should be similar to this one:

“Digging” by Seamus Heaney

I really enjoyed “Digging” by the Irish poet Seamus Heaney. In the poem, he recalls how his younger, stronger father used to dig in the potato fields when Heaney was a child and how his grandfather, before that, was an expert turf digger. Since he is a writer, not a farmer, Heaney will dig with his pen, which he feels “snug as a gun”(line 2). This image shows how perfectly the pen fits his hand and, accordingly, how well suited Heaney is to write.

The gun image also suggests the strength of the pen: it is a weapon for writing. Heaney’s description of his father and grandfather is very loving. He values his sense of connection with them, and he is clearly very proud of the work they did. I personally appreciate this sense of continuity through generations and this is why I have chosen this poem.

(147 words)

This commentary includes the following:

- a brief **summary** of the poem’s content
- some remarks on **style** (the image of the gun)
- a **quotation** (line 2)
- why the student particularly **values** this poem.

5.4. Technical terms in English poetry

If you are interested in the technicalities of English poetry, which are very different from those in Spanish or Catalan, look at ‘About Poetry: English Prosody’ <http://homepage.ntu.edu.tw/~karchung/prosody.htm>

Reference

Adapted from
http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/english_literature/poetheaney/diggingrev1.shtml

6. Writing a review of a film CA6

- In CA6 students are required to write a review of the film *Shakespeare in Love* which considers whether it is a good adaptation of the play *Romeo and Juliet*.
- Check the Internet Movie Database and you will see on the left-hand side column a label for 'external reviews' and another for 'user comments.'
- Read some of the reviews and some of the comments to check which aspects of this film are praised or criticised.
- It is important to note that the function of a review is, primarily, to express the writer's opinion on a film, book, play etc for an audience who might be interested in watching or reading it. Your opinion must, therefore, try to sound less personal and more authoritative, or 'objective', than the contributions to the Debate and Forum, or the comments you made for CA4.

Reference

Internet Movie Database:
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0138097/>

6.1. Sample review

Before you read the following sample of a review, note these points:

- The reviewer avoids phrases such as 'In my view,' 'In my opinion', etc., because even though we know this is his **personal opinion**, he wants to make the review sound as objective as possible.
- You are asked to write a review which focuses on the film *Shakespeare in Love* as an **adaptation** or **rewriting** of the play *Romeo and Juliet*. Note that in this sample review, the fact that the film is an adaptation is not especially relevant.

Reference

http://www.bbc.co.uk/films/2001/05/01/shakespeare_in_love_1998_review.shtml
Shakespeare in Love (1998),
 Reviewed by William Gallagher, 01 May 2001.

Shakespeare in Love (1998), Reviewed by William Gallagher, 01 May 2001.

Young Will Shakespeare loses all inspiration until he falls for Lady Viola, an actress. But women aren't allowed to act in Elizabethan times so she's posing as a boy. Also, the theatres have been closed for fear of the plague, and above all else, the play's the thing –but the thing is, there's no play.

The reviewer begins by summarising the film for prospective audiences.

This is a joyous and quite brilliant comedy. It's a career best for Joseph Fiennes as Shakespeare and if Gwyneth Paltrow isn't as good, it's not by much, and the entire cast are superb. Perhaps it's because most of them are playing actors and there are

This paragraph explains one of the reasons why the reviewer thinks that this is a good film: the quality of the actors.

barbs in here that would sting present-day Hollywood. For once, an all-star cast is a help to the story as well as to the box office.

Yet great as they and director John Madden are, what makes this is the story and the script. Every word feels natural and unforced yet when you look back you realise that not a syllable was there that didn't give you a joke or a shock at that moment and also set you up for something dramatic later. It's a tremendous weaving of gags and drama that soars, especially in how Shakespeare's and Viola's romance informs and simultaneously mirrors the new "Romeo and Juliet" play we see him creating.

"Shakespeare in Love" is a romp and a breathless race that manages to make you laugh aloud, combined with an extreme poignancy that the jokes somehow only make better.

(246 words)

This paragraph deals with the second reason why the reviewer enjoyed the film: the script.

The conclusion insists on the high values of the film as a comedy.

Useful webs

Advice on academic writing (University of Toronto):

<http://www.utoronto.ca/writing/advise.html>

Using English for Academic Purposes:

<http://www.uefap.com/writing/writfram.htm>

Waylink English: Introduction to Academic Writing:

<http://www.waylink.co.uk/?page=6101>