

ACADEMIC WRITING I

One-page writing workshop #1

Sample sentences from student writing (essay #1)

1. I am a big fan of Perfume.
2. Perfume is a Japanese techno-pop girls' group.
3. I've studied English for about 7 years.
4. I like English the best of all subjects.
5. I'd like to tell why I am studying English.
6. I'm studying American, British, and German culture, and English language.
7. I have been learning poem recitation since I was in junior high school.
8. I'm studying English literature in university.
9. How I got interested in tennis.
10. What influenced me most was the track-and-field club.
11. I don't remember exactly *when* I got interested in art.
12. I love Pokemon.
13. My school days were enjoyable.
14. I wasn't born in Japan so I don't know the city all that well.
15. My major is American Literature. As you might know, even though the United States was established only about 250 years ago, they have written so many novels.
16. I like exercise.
17. I'm interested in folktales and myths.

Of the above sentences, which are suitable to be used in an academic essay? Why?

An academic essay is written to increase the pool of factual, objective (i.e. scientific) knowledge. It is not written for social purposes. In Europe, academic writing started as letters written by scientists (called "natural philosophers" in those days) to other scientists. These scientists wanted factual, objective information. They wanted to increase their accurate knowledge about the world and how it works. They were not interested in each other personally. In many cases they did not know each other personally.

When you write an academic essay, remember that you are writing for an academic community. These people are interested in the special, expert knowledge that you can

give them. They are not interested in you personally. You should be able to give them accurate, truthful and objective information

In the above sentences, #2 would be suitable for an academic essay. Sentence 5 could become an academic essay, if the writer writes about why Japanese people in general study English. This is more interesting from a scientific point of view. Remember, other academic readers are not interested in you personally, but rather in the expert knowledge you can give them, in how you can add to the world's accurate knowledge about the world.

How could sentences #6-17 be improved to make them more academic?

Remember: academic writing uses

- a) deductive reasoning
- b) semi-formal voice
- c) third-person point-of-view (i.e. it avoids the personal and the subjective).

The following are my suggestions:

1. Delete this. Start with sentence #2.
2. This is acceptable: semi-formal voice and use of third-person.
3. This essay is actually about reasons for students in general to study English. Therefore, how long the writer has studied English is irrelevant. *“There are many advantages to studying English.”*
4. See #3.
5. See #3.
6. Does this add to the world's academic/scientific knowledge? Only if the essay reveals some general principles, for example, what Japanese students like to study, or why Japanese students choose American literature. Delete.
7. Delete. *Chinese poem recitation is an ancient art that takes many years to learn. Here, I will describe the process of study.*
8. See #3 and #6.
9. See #3 and #6. The writer describes how she was inspired to take up tennis by seeing Kei Nishikori. So, how about *“Kei Nishikori, a young Japanese tennis-player who has recently risen to the top ranks, has inspired many young Japanese to take up tennis.”*
10. An academic reader is interested in objective facts and principles, not in you personally. Delete. *Although Track and Field are not native sports but imported from the West, nevertheless, they are very popular among school students in Japan. Let*

me give you an example of how Track and Field has inspired a young Japanese person – myself.

11. This could be the start of an interesting essay, but be careful: the reader is not interested in you personally; only if you tell an interesting story, or if your experience adds to the academic knowledge of human beings.
12. Who cares?! Start with a more general statement, perhaps introducing Pokemon, then write about objective facts. E.g., *Pokemon is a Japanese manga or comic that has gained a huge following in many other countries besides Japan. Why is it so popular?*
13. See #12 and #3.
14. See #3. Academic writing is a contribution to scientific knowledge, so you should write about things you know well. It is best to avoid such sentences as this.
15. The second sentence is academic: using analysis, semi-formal voice and third-person point-of-view. However, the first sentence breaks all these rules. Delete it.
16. See #12 and #3. Better would be, *Why is exercise so important for human health? Or Many people do not appreciate the importance of regular exercise.*
17. See #12 and #3. *Did you know that many different cultures around the world share similar myths? Dragons, for example, appear not only in Asian myths but also in European myths.*

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One-page writing workshop #2 – use of “we”

Sample sentences from student writing (essay #1)

1. Why do we love eating rice?
2. First, we can communicate with many more people if we can speak English.
3. In Japan, people celebrate New Year. For example, we clean our house, decorate our gate and send New Year’s cards to our friends.

Academic writers like scientific, true information. They try to be as accurate as possible.

The main problem with using “we” is that it is not defined. Who is “we”, exactly? People who live in Japan? People with Japanese nationality? What about non-Japanese who live in Japan? What about Japanese people who do not like rice? Many people in the world love eating rice, not only the Japanese people.

Does “we” include the reader? It should, but what if the reader is not from a rice-eating culture? The writer seems not to have thought about this. It gives an impression of carelessness.

How could these three sentences be improved?

First, the writer should think exactly who he or she means by “we”.

E.g. a) Why do people living in Japan love eating rice?

b) Why do Japanese speakers love eating rice?

c) Why do Asians love eating rice?

d) Why do people from rice-eating countries love eating rice?

Sentence#2:

a) First, you can communicate with many more people if you can speak English.

b) First, people who can speak English can communicate with many more people.

c) First, English speakers can communicate with many more people.

Sentence #3:

a) For example, they clean their house, decorate their gate and send New Year’s cards to their friends.

b) It is common for people to clean their house, decorate their gate and send New Year’s cards to their friends.

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One-page writing workshop #3 – focus on ideas

Sample sentences from student writing (essay #1)

1. Mr. Yasutaka Nakata is a DJ who is a member of the music group, CAPSULE.
2. I am a big fan of Perfume. Perfume is a Japanese techno-pop girls' group.

Academic writing is based on analysis - the process of breaking down ideas - to increase one's understanding. The focus of an academic essay, therefore, should be on ideas. Ideas tend to be general, or involve general principles, rather than specific details. E.g. *Water boils at 100 degrees C at sea-level.* This is the key idea, the general principle. It does not matter whether the water comes from Japan, or Australia. It does not matter what time of day the water is boiled, or what the weather is like, or what clothes the person boiling the water is wearing, or what his or her name is. These are irrelevant details.

The writer of sentence #1 above should ask herself, what is the main idea of my essay? The main idea will be a general principle, e.g. *People who good deeds without attraction attention are admirable.* Or, *It is better to do good deeds without attracting much attention.* If this is the main idea of the essay, the person's name is not of crucial importance, nor is the group he plays for or the company he works for, or the kind of music he plays. These are superficial details which do not affect the main idea.

Below, I have re-written sentence #1 so that the emphasis is on the general idea instead of on the unique and local details.

a) *A person I admire very much is a Japanese DJ.*

b) *There is a DJ in Japan who is a very unusual and inspirational person, although his face is not well known.*

Sentence #2: Reverse the order of the two sentences and maybe combine them into one.

a) *"Perfume" is a Japanese girls' pop group and I am a huge fan.*

Is the exact type of pop music Perfume sings important to the essay? Is it of interest to readers who may not live in Japan or be interested in Japanese pop music?

Here are two more examples. Which sentence expresses a general idea and should come first?

3. These days, Japanese hip-hop is becoming increasingly popular. Specifically, rap battle has become increasingly popular. Rap battle is a competition between two rappers.
4. I like English the best of all subjects. English is an international language now, spoken all over the world.