

DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS` WRITING SKILLS: FOCUS ON ACADEMIC ESSAY

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The article deals with the importance of development the academic writing skills of technical university students. The focus has been made on essay-type written work as the most common type of writing which is considered to be a good basis for the further, more fundamental academic writings like diploma work or dissertation. Furthermore, students have to be aware of writing an essay when taking exams, especially language proficiency tests of international level. Thus, most students feel the strong motivation and readiness to master academic writing skills. The article reveals the concept of academic writing, its main features and types of academic written works. Also, this article displays the notion of the essay as a genre of academic writing and in details examines the structure of the essay, highlighting the peculiarities. More specifically there have been described the core parts of an essay, namely, introduction, body and conclusion. The significance of well-formulated thesis statement also has been underlined. In addition, there has been proposed a list of useful words and phrases to make an essay easy to read. For students the comprehension of academic writing skills along with speaking, reading and listening is very substantial for making up an image of a highly-skilled and prosperous specialist.

Keywords: academic writing; technical students; academic essay; formal language; essay structure; practical exercises.

Introduction. In partnership with European universities, Ukraine managed to establish and maintain academic mobility integration process in education which gives students the opportunity to participate in numerous educational and research programs. A good example of such cooperation is the European Union`s Erasmus Mundus programs for undergraduate and master`s and doctoral students, in particular.

It is quite predictable that trying to take advantage of the opportunity provided by these programs, students have to take exams of international standard (Academic IELTS, Pearson PTE Academic, TOEFL iBT), participate in students` scientific and research activities (Students R&D conferences and projects etc.) and may face with the need of mastering the academic writing skills.

Review and analysis of recent publications and scientific literature on the subject reveal that Ukrainian and foreign methodologists and expert educators constantly carry our researches in the field of foreign language communicative competence. The issue of written skills advancement has been a matter of investigation of such native scientists as V. V. Bebych, O. V. Jachontova, O. V. Tarnopolskyi, S. Yu. Nikolayeva. Among the foreign researchers who paid considerable attention to the subject of academic writing are C. Boardman, C. Coffin, J. Harmer, L. Heffernan, C. Tribble and others.

Objectives. In this article, we discuss the development of writing skills of engineering students. The main objectives are twofold. First, we examine the concept "academic writing", its main principles and features, prove the importance of its integration into education process, then we focus on the essay as the most common genre of academic writing, describe its structure and peculiarities.

In the process of scientific, business and professional contact establishment the ability of a specialist to conduct written communication in a foreign language plays a significant role. Consequently, one of the main targets of technical students` training is to develop and reinforce writing skills, which nowadays along with reading, auditing and speaking form a comprehension of a communication competence of a future engineer. On the other hand, undergraduates need to be able

to produce various types of written works of different genres, i. e. reports, conference papers, abstracts, essays as a kind of training before developing a diploma work or dissertation.

By joining to the EU Bologna Process, Ukrainian higher educational institutions have taken a course on implementation of the educational processes in compliance with European language proficiency standards (CEFR). According to these documents and with the typical curriculum of the discipline “English for Professional Purposes” and “English for Professional Purposes (advanced)”, the students` level of language proficiency should not be less than B2. If to mention writing skills, the students are considered to be able to create clear, detailed, coherent discourse, namely, make up reports, projects, and other texts on personal, professional and academic areas. It is impossible to underestimate the situation around writing skills of a student as a written product, produced by this student in the best way displays his / her knowledge and outcomes in foreign language. Although the evidence suggests that the writing competence is developed worse than for instance, speaking and listening. Moreover, students of technical faculties are unaware of the demands and features of academic writing.

Definition of academic writing. First, let us consider the concept “academic writing”. Most scientists indicate academic writing as any writing done to fulfill the requirements of a college or university in compliance with academic standards, (specific grammatical patterns, organization and argument) aimed at academic audience. It means that the texts written by a student are produced for educational purposes and to enhance their written communication skills. Academic writing teaching in a technical university, as it was mentioned, suggests students with B2 – B2+ language proficiency levels to master writing essays, summaries, reports, conference papers etc [3]. However, practice shows that technical students often do not take an issue of thoroughness of academic style seriously that is why it is appropriate to pay their attention to the characteristics of academic style, namely, the use of formal words, impersonality, objectiveness, logical structure, supporting with evidence, need for referencing, using the full sentences and diverse language. In combination with practical exercises, for example, “translation” from social to a formal language, finding synonyms, relevant words, drills with transition words etc.

Essay writing. In this article we are going to focus on essay – typewritten work, following the principle that those who have learnt to write an essay are able to write anything [10, p.25]. An essay may be defined as a piece of writing that methodically examines and estimates a topic or issue. Basically, an essay is produced to get writer`s academic opinion on a particular subject. This kind of written work is a powerful pedagogical tool to judge the comprehension of the material.

Speaking about types of essay, encountered in most written tasks of tests (including those of international standard) and in course books written assignments, the following models may be highlighted: Exposition, Description, Narration and Argumentation. And depending on the discipline profile (Introduction to English for General Engineering, English for General Engineering, English for Professional Purposes, and so on), a definite type of essay is considered to be mastered. The process of mastering starts with narrative writing in which students have to describe a personal experience, then it leads to expository writing in which students learn to build a thesis statement, to support this idea in the body of their written work. The most advanced type of writing is persuasive or analytic essay because students must be trained to state and defend their position using adequate evidence [7].

It is important to mention that the process of creating an essay (as most of other academic papers) consists of the following stages: comprehension of information from the source text, reproduction of this information into secondary text and development of a personal, authorial text.

As to academic essay, in the world theory and practice, there have been already worked out the methodological aspects of its composing. Let us examine a typical essay structure.

An essay structure must be carefully examined with students. Nicola Rolls and Peter Wignell, for example, consider the following pattern [11, p55]:

1. Introductory paragraph (general statement, thesis statement, outline of main ideas to be discussed);
2. Body paragraph 1, 2. ... (topic sentence, supporting sentences, concluding sentence);
3. Concluding paragraph: (restated thesis, summary of main ideas, final thought).

As it is seen, each essay is divided into paragraphs and includes introduction, main part or body and conclusion and each of the above blocks includes, in its turn, from one to three subparagraphs. It is essential to work out the composition of each paragraph, supporting it with exercises.

A paragraph is an interlinked group of sentences that develops one main idea. Paragraphs form the building blocks of an essay-type work. Basically, in academic essays, a paragraph is to introduce the main idea and provide it with supporting evidence. The paragraphs should be ordered in a logical way and definite evidence is to be followed by relevant fact to avoid confusion and misunderstanding [8].

Students have to learn that the introduction starts with general or introductory sentences which form General Statement. The aim of this subparagraph is to introduce the theme and give background information to a reader. Encourage the students to use sentence starters and other useful words, for example: “This essay discusses”, “The issue is focused on”, “The key aspect is”; “is explored”, “is defined”, “is briefly outlined” etc.

The next and the most important part of the introductory paragraph is Thesis Statement. This statement is a consideration that is made with confidence and conviction and which reflects the message of the essay, reports the way, the following information is organized. Thesis statement outlines the main idea to be revealed and is used to restrict the scope of the essay and shows the writer’s position. The example may be the following: This essay will discuss the effects of building the bridge across the Tonka river in Carpathian biosphere reserve (the idea of the text) and show that it will cause permanent damage to the environment (author’s position on this topic).

Certainly, a teacher should also discuss the following items about a well-developed thesis statement, namely:

1. it is a completed sentence;
2. it is tailored accordingly to the length of a given essay;
3. it summarizes the position of a writer and determines the objectives of a given work;
4. it governs the author from the beginning of his work to the final word;
5. the best variant is when thesis statement challenges the target reader to think;
6. thesis statement needs to be revised and corrected if the topic of an essay changes in the process of writing.

The next step is the main part of the essay which is called the Body. In this part, the author expresses and explains his personal point of view on the subject. It consists of a number of paragraphs each of which contains a Topic sentence that states the key idea and the Supporting sentences. The best scenario is when supporting sentences of the body reveal thesis statement. Students should be informed about the importance of examples, facts and arguments to confirm supporting sentences. They may be proposed the following pattern: “Welding is a career choice that does not require a college degree (topic sentence). Welders can get a certificate in as little as nine months to start earning a good living. Welders are judged by their skill level and most jobs require passing a hands-on welding test (supporting sentences with evidence)”.

An essay should be easy to read. Students must learn transition words and phrases to link the paragraphs. The most commonly used are: to begin, to conclude, in addition, in the same way, in this case, for this/that reason, in other words, in particular, another possibility is, in contrast, however, etc.

Getting down to conclusion the following valuable tips would help students to deal with this part of an essay successfully. At first, the final part should be indicated with the help of some linking phrase, for example, to summarize, in conclusion, to sum up, from the information given, and so on. Then, it should be highlighted that the final part should not contain any new information to avoid incomplete facts confusion. The conclusion must be clear, thoroughly elaborated, unambiguous, leaving the reader no doubt. It is also a good practice to restate the thesis statement or the introduction as a whole. As a rule, the conclusion is to be no more than 10% of the whole essay [6, p.60].

Students often struggle with the idea of referencing, however, in the academic essay it is an obligatory condition not only direct quotes, but also ideas that have been paraphrased, must be referenced. The students should be proposed to use such words to refer: state(s), argue(s), discuss(es), examine(s), consider(es) etc.

It is very important to implement regularly various drills for enhancing an essay writing skills. Practice shows the effectiveness of the following activities: brainstorming the proposed topic with class (to improve students' terminological vocabulary); word transformation exercises (to practice paraphrasing); paragraph sequencing exercises (for better comprehension of the semantic structure of the text); peer review sessions (to develop editing and proofreading skills); transition words exercises (to drill linking the sentences and ideas); academic grammar exercises.

Conclusion. In conclusion, we would like to highlight that academic essay writing is a powerful tool for mastering student's foreign language communicative competence. The teaching strategy has been revealed for elaboration the academic essay writing skills. It is important to remember that the advancement of the following skills, mentioned above, successfully develop the student's academic potential and facilitate the education of highly – skilled specialist able to communicate the foreign language, having wide prospects and opportunities which allow the future engineer to further studies overseas and find a good job.

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Л. Г. Свирідова, О. С. Амерідзе. Розвиток навичок письма студентів: академічне есе. У статті висвітлено та доведено важливість розвитку у студентів немовних спеціальностей навичок академічного письма, зазначено його основні характеристики та окремо виділено жанр академічного есе. Вибір саме цього жанру зумовлений тим, що академічне або навчальне есе - один з найпоширеніших видів письмових робіт у вітчизняних та зарубіжних вищих учбових закладах. Академічне есе входить до складу письмової частини міжнародних іспитів з іноземної мови, наприклад, IELTS, що набирають популярності через активізацію програм академічної мобільності студентів. Практика доводить, що опанування особливостями написання есе є дуже корисним для студентів, оскільки є базовою основою при створенні більш об'ємних видів письмових робіт, таких, як дипломна робота та дисертація. Також було визначено основні типи академічного есе та в деталях проаналізовано структуру його написання. Зазначено, що есе складається зі вступу, основної частини та висновку, при цьому було підкреслено важливість правильного складання речення-тези як найважливішого елементу вступу. Також вказано необхідність дотримання логічного порядку абзаців та логічного зв'язку між ними за допомогою спеціальних слів та виразів. До навчання навичок академічного письма краще підходить інтегровано з навчанням інших видів мовленнєвої діяльності, опанувавши які, разом з отриманими знаннями зі спеціальності, студента технічного вишу позиціонується як висококваліфікований спеціаліст з кар'єрними перспективами.

Ключові слова: академічне письмо; навчальне есе; студенти немовних спеціальностей; формальна мова; структура есе; практичні вправи.

Л. Г. Свирідова, О. С. Амерідзе. Развитие навыков письма студентов: академическое эссе. В статье показана и обоснована важность развития у студентов неязыковых специальностей навыков академического письма, рассмотрены основные характеристики и жанры этого вида письменных работ и для более детального анализа выбран жанр эссе. Выбор обусловлен популярностью обучающего или академического эссе как в зарубежной, так и отечественной практике преподавания. Огромное значение также имеет тот факт, что эссе является базовой основой для написания более объёмных работ – дипломной работы или диссертации. Были обозначены основные типы обучающего эссе, детально описана структура его написания. Также предложен список транзитных слов и словосочетаний для поддержания логического изложения смысла. Вышеупомянутые навыки академического письма вместе с закреплением остальных видов языковой деятельности, а также владение специальностью позиционируют выпускника вуза как высококвалифицированного и перспективного специалиста.

Ключевые слова: академическое письмо; обучающее эссе; студенты неязыковых специальностей; формальный язык; структура эссе; практические .