

Book review: Osmond, A. (2024) *Academic writing and grammar for students*. 3rd edn. London: Sage

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Publishing a book on academic writing in the brave new world of Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI), spell-checks and automated sentence prompts may seem risky. How important is it for students to know how to craft a sentence, or where to place a comma, when such tasks can be outsourced to OpenAI's ChatGPT, Google AI's BERT, and Microsoft's Turing?

Alex Ormond's practical, accessible, and comprehensive guide provides a definitive answer. It is very important. Still. The proliferation of social media platforms may have made it easier than ever before for us all to consume information easier (Friesen and Lowe, 2011; Ohara, 2023), but distinguishing fact from fiction continues to prove a challenge for students at all levels. Doing so ethically – while demonstrating critical thinking, clear argument logic, and evidence-based content – even more so (Alafnan et al., 2023; Imran and Almusharraf, 2023).

In recognition of such challenges, *Academic writing and grammar for students* (Osmond, 2024), already in its third edition, offers a step-by-step guide to meeting academic requirements. The book opens with an overview of what academic writing entails, highlighting key conventions referring to abbreviations, slang, emotive language, and addressing the *first* of two frequently encountered undergraduate questions, namely: 'should I write in the first person?' (see, for example, Lumma and Weger, 2023) and suggesting first person writing has its place but, if in doubt, it should be avoided. In Chapter 2, Ormond provides a clear explanation of 'basic grammatical concepts', providing worked examples of how changing the sentence structure provides nuance in the communicated meaning. Chapter 3 shows how sentences can be crafted to achieve clarity and coherence, and what tenses are most appropriate for different types of academic

writing tasks. The intricacies of creating logical arguments are addressed in Chapter 4, which avoids extended and abstract explanations by providing multiple worked examples of how to keep the golden thread of the argument intact throughout the whole assignment piece. The chapter on critical thinking (Chapter 5) addresses the *second* of frequently asked undergraduate question, namely: 'how many citations do I need?' by suggesting that every paragraph of academic writing should provide at least one citation. The chapter also touches on the advanced topic of rhetoric (Ervas and Mosca, 2024) by introducing the concepts of 'ad hominem' attacks and 'straw man'.

The choice of referencing as the subject matter for Chapter 6 would have appeared out of place as a follow-up to a discussion on rhetoric devices, but Osmond's light prose and experience as an academic skills adviser keeps the reader engaged. As a result, the chapter offers an overview not only of referencing systems (by once again favouring practical examples over abstract descriptions), but also provides a guide to paraphrasing and summarising as critical skills, which underpin effective academic writing.

Having outlined the critical principles of crafting an argument in line with grammatical conventions and critical thinking expectations, the concluding Chapters 7, 8, and 9 deal with preparing student work for submission. Removing redundant and tautological sentences, ensuring each sentence moves the paragraph closer to answering the question and avoiding 'meaningless modifiers' are all covered here. Worked examples are once again put to effective use, encouraging readers to proofread, by entering dialogue with their own author voice, continuously moulding it and shaping it to improve the clarity of the communicated argument.

'To improve your writing, you need to write a lot' is a quotation used at the start of Chapter 2. This is also the take-away message of the book. GenAI can provide quick and convenient solutions, but developing good, critical, and authentic writing skills is a process and takes time. Learning more about the academic conventions which guide it in the context of student learning can allow students (and academics) to write with authority and intent. Yet, there is more. Reading a piece of good writing can also be enjoyable. This is a point Osmond demonstrates, rather than makes. This is another reason why we should all try to do better. Looking for short-cuts may be tempting, but it also short-changes the reader.

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