

Basics of Academic Writing

Finding and Critically Evaluating Appropriate Resources

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**Undergraduate Diploma in Business
Administration**



What shall we be addressing in this 2nd session:

- Identify the most appropriate types of texts for academic work
- Utilise effective strategies for locating relevant material in the library
- Navigate and employ electronic resources for academic research efficiently
- Apply effective reading methods to enhance comprehension of written texts
- Recognize and interpret standard text features, including abstracts
- Conduct and practice critical analysis of texts by challenging their reliability and assessing their value

2.1 What is relevant and reliable for my research task?

- examine the most suitable text types for academic work
- explore ways of locating relevant materials in the library
- be aware of different reading methods
- take a critical approach to potential sources



Common written resources used by academic students

TEXT TYPE

ADVANTAGE

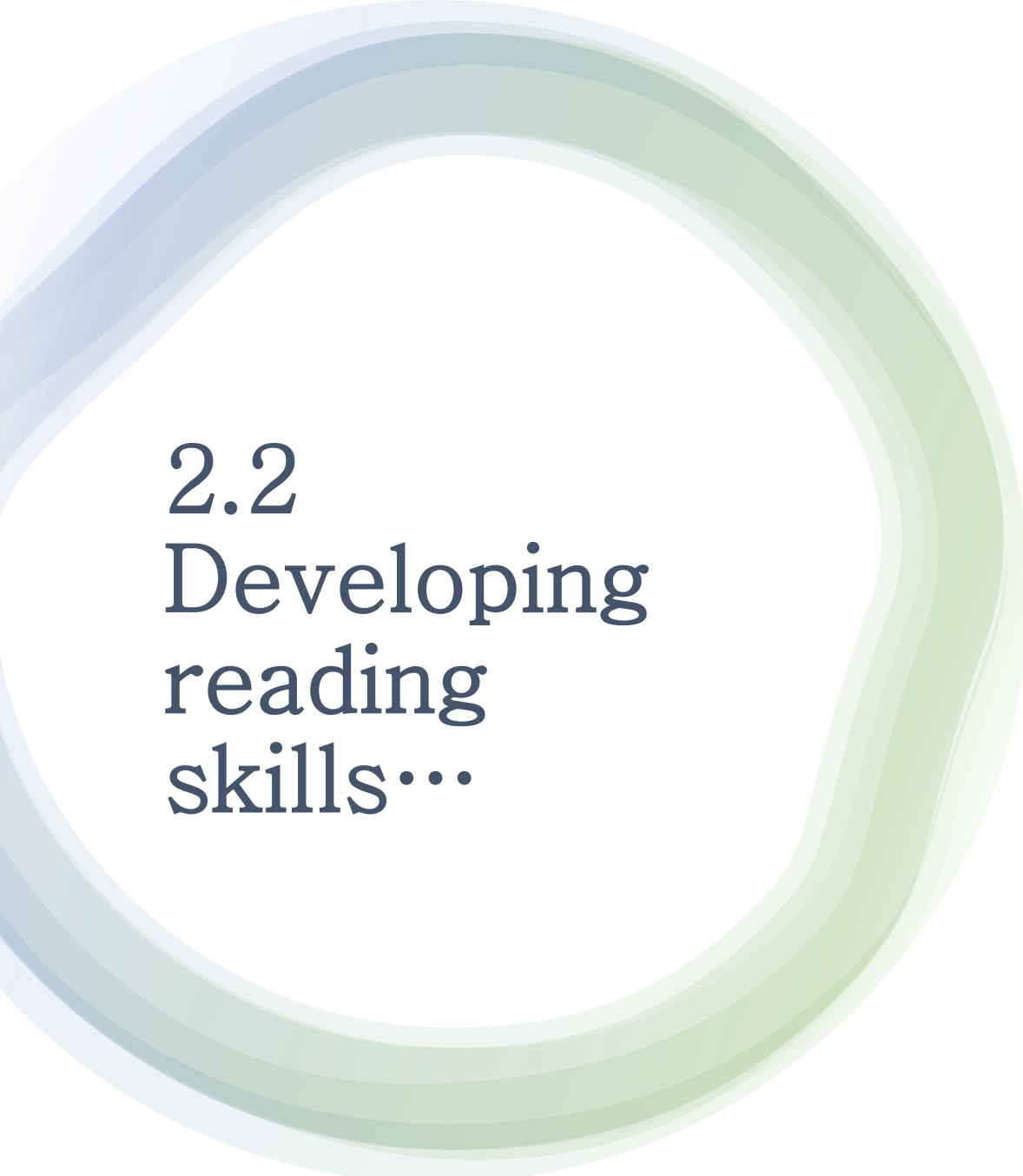
DISADVANTAGE

Textbook	Written for students	May be too general or outdated
Website	Usually up to date	Possibly unreliable and unedited
Journal article	Often focused on a special area	May be too specialised or complex
Official report (e.g., from government)	Contains a lot of detail	May not be objective
Newspaper or magazine article	Easy to read and up-to-date	May not be objective and may not give the sources
E-book	Easily accessible	Needs to be read on the screen

Finding
online
sources....

Finding online sources

How to find background papers for your research paper



2.2 Developing reading skills...

- Reading academic texts is a demanding task
- The texts often contain new vocabulary and phrases and may be written in a rather formal style
- We do not have time to read every word published on the topic you are studying
- You must adopt to cope with the volume of reading required (especially when you are reading in another language)
- The following chart on the next slide chart shows an approach to finding and dealing with texts

How to choose suitable texts.....

Read title and sub-title
carefully

Survey text features
(e.g., abstract,
contents, index)

Skim text for gist-is it
relevant?

Scan the text for information you need e.g. terms,
phrases..

Read extensively when
useful sections are
found

Read intensively to make notes on key points.....



Reading Journals

- **Journals are:**

- Specialised academic publications produced on a regular basis, containing recent research
- Usually available in paper or electronic formats (e-journals)
- Most library websites have a separate portal or gateway for searching electronic resources
- Entering a term such as ‘international business law’, the database may offer the following titles:
 - European Business Law Review
 - European Business Organisation Law Review
 - International Trade and Business Law Review
 - Law and Business Review of the Americas

2.3 Titles, subtitles and text features.....

Checking the following text features before starting to read:

- **Author:** Is the writer well known in his/her field? What else has he/she published?
- **Publication date and edition:** Do not use a first edition if there is a (revised) second edition available.
- **Abstract:** All journal articles have an abstract, which is a paragraph summarising the purpose and conclusions of the article.
- **Contents:** A list of the main chapters or sections.
- **Introduction:** This is where the author often explains the aim or purpose of the paper, and how the text is organised.
- **References:** This list shows all the sources used by the author and referred to in the text. It may give you some suggestions for further reading. (In the USA, this is usually called the bibliography.)
- **Index:** An alphabetical list of all the topics and names mentioned in a book. If, for example, you are looking for information about a person, the index will tell you if that person is mentioned, and how often.

Many books and articles have both a Title and a Subtitle:

Much Ado about Nothing?
Do domestic firms really benefit from foreign direct investment?

The title is usually shorter; the subtitle often gives more information about the focus.

2.4 Reading abstracts

- Normally found in peer-reviewed journal articles
- A kind of summary which will help the reader decide whether to read the whole article
- Normally not written by undergraduate students
- It is important we able to read them effectively
- Let's practise...task 1, 2 & 3



Task 1: Let's study this abstract together.....

- CITIZENSHIP NORMS AND THE EXPANSION OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION.
Russell J. Dalton
- A growing chorus of scholars laments the decline of political participation in America, and the negative implications of this trend for American democracy. This article questions this position – arguing that previous studies misdiagnosed the sources of political change and the consequences of changing norms of citizenship for Americans' political engagement. Citizenship norms are shifting from a pattern of duty-based citizenship to engaged citizenship. Using data from the 2005 'Citizenship, Involvement, Democracy' survey of the Center for Democracy and Civil Society (CDACS) I describe these two faces of citizenship and trace their impact on political participation. Rather than the erosion of participation, this norm shift is altering and expanding the patterns of political participation in America.
- (Dalton, R.J. (2008) Political Studies 56 (1) 76–98.)

Abstracts normally have a standard structure

1. **Indicate the main components of the abstract above**
Title–author–summary
2. **Background position**
The decline of political participation in America, and the negative implications of this trend for American Democracy
3. **Aim and thesis of article**
This research questions the laments of scholars about the decline of political participation in America, and the negative implications of this trend for American democracy
4. **Method of research**
Analysed data from the 2005 ‘Citizenship, Involvement, Democracy’ survey of the Center for Democracy and Civil Society (CDACS)
5. **Results of the research**
Rather than the erosion of participation, this norm shift is altering and expanding the patterns of political participation in America



2.5 Developing a critical attitude.....

Critical thinking means not just passively accepting what you hear or read, but instead actively questioning and assessing it.

As you read, you should ask yourself the following questions:

- (a) What are the key ideas in this?
- (b) Does the thesis of the writer develop logically, step by step?
- (c) Are the examples given helpful? Would other examples be better?
- (d) Does the author have any bias (leaning to one side or the other)?
- (e) Does the evidence presented seem reliable, in my experience?
- (f) Do I agree with the writer's views?
- Let's practise..



Written Task 2

Assessing texts critically

1. Probably unreliable. The adjectives used (easily, quickly) and the lack of concrete information suggest that this text is not to be trusted.
2. Probably reliable. The advice the writer is giving appears common sense, although not everyone might agree with all of it (e.g., cooking is fun).
3. Probably reliable. The facts given can be confirmed by students' own experience



Written Task 3

Developing a critical attitude ...

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List any statements from the articles that you find unreliable and add comments to explain your doubts in the table below. Then decide which article you find more reliable overall.

A. Statements

nearly half of Harvard's history professors
were on sabbatical leave

they (students) currently study for 14 hours
per week

A. Comments

This seems to be the writer's feeling rather than a
fact

Who says so? Which study?

(Most of the facts given probably were taken from
the AEI report or from the book by Hacker and
Dreifus, published in 2010)

B. Statements

The average UK university graduate will earn
£400,000 (\$600,000) more over his or her
lifetime compared to a non-graduate

B. Comments

How can one tell? How is this being predicted?
Are there any reliable studies that came to this
conclusion?

2.6 Discussion vocabulary used ..

Essay titles commonly ask students to ‘discuss’ a topic

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e.g. Working from home can be positive for many companies and their employees – discuss.

This requires an evaluation of both the **benefits** and **disadvantages** of the topic, with a section of the essay, sometimes headed ‘Discussion’, in which a summary of these is made.



Discussion vocabulary..

+	-
benefit	drawback
advantage	disadvantage
a positive aspect	a negative aspect
pro (informal)	con (informal)
plus (informal)	minus (informal)
one major advantage	a serious drawback
A significant benefit of working from home is the saving of time by not commuting.	One negative aspect of homeworking can be the loss of regular contact with colleagues.

2.7 Organisation..

The discussion section can be organised in two ways:

- i. grouping the benefits and disadvantages together
- ii. examining the subject from different viewpoints

e.g.: 'Environmental considerations have no place in a company's strategy – discuss.'

- (a) Grouping all the drawbacks together in one or more paragraphs, then treating the benefits in the same way
(drawbacks, benefits, discussion)
- (b) Examining the subject from different viewpoints
(economic, ethical or social)

Example...



‘Environmental considerations have no place in a company’s strategy – discuss.’

Drawbacks: May increase costs (e.g., ‘green’ electricity)/delay projects/extra work for managers	Economic: Initial investment in energy-saving measures may increase costs but long-term benefits should follow
Benefits: May save money (e.g., reduced packaging)/good PR = increased sales/employee job satisfaction may also be increased	Ethical: Responsible companies should play a part in combating climate change
Discussion: Depends on nature of business/some costs will rise, others fall/important long-term benefits as consumers place more weight on ‘green’ considerations	Social: Consumer-facing companies benefit from ‘green’ credentials = increased sales/employee job satisfaction may also be increased

2.8 Language of discussion

Avoid personal phrases such as in my opinion or personally, I think . . .

Use impersonal phrases instead such as:

- It is generally accepted that
- It is widely agreed that
- Most people appear
- It is probable that
- The evidence suggests that
- It can be argued that
- Some people believe that
- According to Emerson (2011)



2.9 Counter arguments..

I am right

Me too

In a discussion essay one must

- show that one is familiar with both sides of the argument
- provide reasons to support your position

i.e. it is usual to deal with the counterarguments first, before giving your view.....

let's practise

Give your position to the counter argument...

- Counter argument
- Your position
- Some people think that homeworkers can become isolated.
- It is widely believed that some people are better at self-management when they work from home.



Thank you for today!

Next lesson we will be focusing on further skills in organizing and structuring your project!

- What is plagiarism?
- How to acknowledge sources
 - How to summarise and paraphrase
- How to develop good study habits
 - The importance of planning
 - Analysing essay titles
 - Brainstorming
 - Essay length



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