

Graduate Seminar on Scientific Writing
Fall Semester, 2012
National Taiwan University, Psychology Department

Instructors:

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English language editor: Byerly Woodward

Class Time: 9:10 –to 12:10 Wednesday; One three-hour meeting per week

Class location: N 301 (computer lab)

Teaching Assistants:

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Criteria for admission: Current and former psychology graduate students can enroll in the course, as well as advanced undergraduate psychology majors with permission of Professor Woodward. Enrollment is limited to 30 students

Introduction

Learning to write well involves acquiring procedural knowledge. Therefore, a class intended to improve writing is best approached as training -- of the sort used in music or sports. Good training programs involve a lot of repetition and domain-specific practice with non threatening feedback, so that procedural knowledge is acquired gradually in a supportive environment.

The seminar has seven specific goals:

- (1) To increase fluency of writing, while at the same time reducing the effort required;
- (2) To increase the conciseness, cohesion, and coherence of what is written;
- (3) To increase taking the perspective of the audience;
- (4) To use coherent paragraph structure;
- (5) To develop the habit of writing in stages, attending to each stage separately,
- (6) To teach participants to follow a checklist of writing tips during the writing process.
- (7) To create a strong motivation to take additional writing courses.

Organization of the seminar

- (1) In each three-hour lesson, participants will write an essay on an assigned topic using the computers in the computer lab. Topics will vary: some from introductory psychology material; others will have more advanced content. Students will upload the essays using FTP to their folders on the server. All writing will take place in the lab during class and students are asked not to work on the assignments after class.

- (2) The writing samples will be edited by a professional editor (BW), using “track changes” and transferred back to participants’ folders before the next class;
- (3) Participants will revise their essay based upon the suggestions of the editor, or modify otherwise to produce second, third and final drafts as assigned in class.
- (4) In-class exercises will be used to practice different components of writing, including: increasing fluency; increasing conciseness, cohesion, and coherence, structure and paragraph writing.
- (5) In small groups, participants will work together using computer-graphic tools that allow interactive display of the concepts that will appear in a paragraph. Students’ works will be projected on the large screen to facilitate discussion of examples.

In-class activities

In addition to writing and receiving feedback, some of the following topics related to scientific writing will be introduced and discussed.

- 1) Some psychological principles of scientific writing: the process and content of writing; including the effective use of working memory, and gaining cognitive control during writing so the student can structure their writing and practice taking the readers’ perspective during composition.
- 2) In-class practice: sentence combining and summarizing;
- 3) Endnote: NTU’s online tutorials on Endnote (in Chinese);
- 4) Plagiarism: Persons who write in a second language are more vulnerable to accidental plagiarism than first-language writers, not only for scientific writing, but for all assignments written in English as a second language;