Effective ENGLISH Communication

For Tertiary Institutions

EDITED BY

Anthony E. Ogu | **Obiajulu A. Emejulu**
Richard C. Ihejirika | **Dan Chima Amadi**

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to all our English teachers at all levels of education, who lit the light in us that is now a source of illumination to many.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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CHAPTER SIX

ACADEMIC RESEARCH REPORT

Obiajulu A. Emejulu, Kenneth Chukwu, and Ugomma Agwuocha

6.1   INTRODUCTION

Writing research reports is one of the major activities that every student engages in. This is outside the other forms of academic writings such as essays and letters which a student also ought to master their rudiments. Writing is a serious enterprise, often regarded as more formal than speech. Each form of writing is characterized by conventions which must be followed conscientiously. For instance, the conventions of writing a letter are different from those of writing an essay; an article is different from a letter. Similarly, a research report is different from these other forms of academic writing mentioned. Essays, letters and articles usually involve topics that are limited in scope, depth and structure, and which do not require extensive research. Even where such pieces of writing account for events, their depth of discussion of issues is usually limited by their usual length. The research report, on the other hand, is usually more in depth, broader in scope and more formal and complex in structure.

The academic research report is a continuous writing of considerable length. From its name, it bears the qualities of a research and a report. As a research, it involves careful investigation. To search is to investigate, to explore, and to look for. To research is to search in a focused, determined and controlled manner. The search for knowledge and the

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need for new discoveries are endless, ever increasing with time and human wants, needs and challenges. This search is usually painstaking, not a haphazard one. It requires extensive reading and consultation of sources and authorities. It follows laid down tools, procedures and strategies to achieve a generally acceptable and verifiable result. As a report, it involves a systematic capturing on paper, or any other medium, of the findings of an investigation or research that is systematically presented. The manner of presentation is as important as the manner of the investigation. Each requires being systematic, meticulous and thorough. Brilliant findings from brilliant investigations would have little value unless brilliantly communicated. The purpose of any research is defeated if the findings are not made known to others.

6.2 QUALITIES OF A GOOD ACADEMIC RESEARCH REPORT

A good academic research report should have the following qualities:

a. It contains factual, verifiable, and dependable information.

b. The research is objective, free from the sentiment and personal biases of the researcher. The report must present the findings of the research objectively even where they conflict with the personal interests of the researcher.

c. The presentation is systematic and orderly. The format of the report (term paper, thesis, seminar, book chapter etc.) should be followed. Note that a carefully carried out research could be marred by careless presentation.

d. A good academic research report is logical in the presentation of its ideas. The writer is always guided by the rules of logic in the arrangement and presentation of his ideas. He ensures that the ideas are logically linked, one flowing into or giving rise to the other.

e. The language is simple, factual and clear. Know that the language of academic writing is expressive and not impressive. Avoid flowery expressions like idioms and figures of speech as is required in literature. Be specific and precise and do not allow your report to be unnecessarily wordy. Abstract terminologies and jargons are not expressive when used in wrong contexts, so avoid them as much as possible. Let your research report convey its subject as simply as possibly. Above all, your report must be free from grammatical mistakes.

f. Use illustrations like tables and figures (graphs, maps, charts, pictures, excerpts, etc.) where they are needed. They are usually very specific and precise modes of presenting data. They graphically or visually summarize the information for easy appreciation by the reader. They are usually numbered sequentially according to their kinds, that is, weather tables or figures, from the first chapter or section to the last one. They are introduced with captions indicating what information they contain. Direct reference is usually made to a table or figure in the section of the work where the information summarized in them are discussed in detail and, sometimes, and interpretative comment is made right after the table or figure is shown.

g. Use formal language. A research report is strictly a formal writing and this must reflect in your language choice. The

tone is formal, impersonal and expository. The writer usually refrains from mentioning himself by name and in the first person pronoun (as in "I observed the experiment for a day". Instead say: The researcher observed the experiment for a day").

h. A research report is used to provide authentic and convincing answers to a problem to a reader who was not there when the research was conducted. So it is essential to clearly explain the process involved and ensure that the end (the results or findings) justifies the means (the research process).

i. A good academic research report aims at resolving a problem. Note that an academic research report does not engage in mere fiction and narrative. A research is usually motivated by the existence of a problem. This is often captured in the topic of the research. It is this problem that the investigation resolves at the end. Therefore, always have your research problem in focus. Always ask yourself, "What am I expected to discover or solve?" "what is the purpose of this research?" "Are my data and ideas relevant and connected to this purpose?".

j. Always choose a topic that is relevant to a contemporary societal problem. The essence of a research is not to recycle knowledge but to advance knowledge. Do not waste your time on issues that have been overtaken by time. In other words, do not attempt to re-invent the wheel. Always search for topics that are relevant to current issues in your discipline or others. However, it is encouraged to try to replicate research done in a different location to an entirely new one to see if the same results would be obtained. Or, you may wish to

change the focus of a previous study to get a new perspective. Put in other words, you may wish to apply the wheel inventing technics to new tasks, or re-invent the wheel in a different, more efficient manner!

6.3 VARIETIES OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH REPORT

Academic research report exists in different forms. Some of them include:

- ➢ Term paper: This is written from time to time in the different courses offered by students. It is used to groom students on the rudiments of research and equip them for the more challenging tasks of doing more large-scale research reports.
- ➢ Seminar paper: Like the term paper, a seminar paper is not a terminal research paper but used intermittently during a course of studies to prepare students for the major research work at the end. Often, while 'term paper' is used for undergraduates, 'seminar papers' are used for postgraduate students. So seminar papers may be more advanced than term papers, depending on the usage. In some settings, several seminar papers are used within the term or semester, while the term paper is a one-off paper written at the end of the term or semester for a given course.
- ➢ Long essay: This is an academic research report written at the end of undergraduate programmes. It is usually informally called 'project' by students. The long essay is a more advanced research in length and complexity than the term paper. Some schools also use the word 'dissertation' to refer to such work.

- Thesis and Dissertation: These are major research reports written at the end of postgraduate programmes. While some institutions use the two terms interchangeably, most do not. Dissertation is often used for masters' degree programmes while thesis is used for doctoral degree programmes. There is some justification in this practice, which is that a successful doctoral candidate has earned herself or himself the bragging rights to make and propagate 'thesis statements' based on their profound research work.
- Conference papers: This is a researched paper on a topic that is presented at a conference organized by academic and professional bodies. Conference papers are usually shorter, with fewer sections, than term papers, long essays, dissertations and theses.
- (Journal) Articles are academic reports and writings published in professional journals after careful assessment, peer reviews and editing. It usually has the same format as a conference paper. In fact, it is often a conference paper that has been assessed and further edited by skilled and qualified hands. Journal publishers and editors sometimes send out calls for contributions of articles by researchers, in which case they specify the format, house styles, areas of interest, and other guidelines to be met by prospective authors for the inclusion of their articles in the journal. Such articles, on arrival, are sent to independent assessors or editors for possible improvement before being published. Journal articles are valued more than conference papers and newspaper articles because they are often more rigorously scrutinized before release.

➤ Book chapter: This is a researched paper to be published as a chapter on a topic in a book of determined theme or subject matter. Such books have editors who determine the topics of various chapters and who edit and compile the chapters submitted by various authors.

Each of these varieties of writing is characterized by recognizable formats and features. However, the discussions in this chapter have been limited to term paper writing.

CLASS ACTIVITY: Do Exercises 1 to 3 of Chapter Six in the workbook to assess your knowledge of academic research.

6.4 WRITING AN ABSTRACT

Writing an abstract is seen by many students as one of the tedious aspects of a research report. This is because many do not understand the procedure for doing this. An abstract could be described as an introductory summary of a research. This expression is an oxymoron (using two contrasting terms together to achieve a desired effect, *introductory summary*). An abstract is introductory only by virtue of its position at the beginning part of a research report. In long essays, dissertations and theses, it forms part of the preliminary pages of the report. The essence of its position at the beginning is to guide the reader to understand, *ab initio*, what the entire report is all about. However, by its nature, an abstract is a condensed summary of what has been done in a research and how. Thus, it is usually the last aspect of a report to be written. You cannot summarize what you have done and how it was done unless when all the activities of the research have been concluded.

There is a difference between a *tentative* or *interim* abstract and an abstract. A tentative abstract is never the real abstract. Anything tentative is not the real or the final thing; it is still subject to modification and correction. One may write a tentative abstract before embarking on a research as a guide to his research activities. As the research progresses, changes are made according to the realities on ground. Method of data collection may change or expand; method of data analysis may also be replaced with another that is found to be more appropriate and relevant to the exigencies of the research, etc. The susceptibility of such abstract to modifications makes it tentative.

An abstract sums up the presentations in a research report. It captures what necessitated the research (the background to the study and the research problem); states what the research set out to achieve (the purpose of the study); how the research sets out achieving this (methodology adopted in collection and analysis of data); the findings of the research and what the research concludes based on the findings. All these are presented in a sentence or two for each section. Remember that there is no segmentation in summary. We have only taken your attention to the sections or the report from where you extract information with which to build a complete abstract.

FEATURES OF AN ABSTRACT

- An abstract is a summary of the activities of a research. It is therefore not supposed to be lengthy. A good abstract is between 120 and 300 words. Do not tell stories in your

abstract, it is only meant to introduce your reader into the activities in the report.

- It is written in block. Do not indent or paragraph your abstract. Some organizations specify the length of abstract required from subscribers.
- The language is in the simple past since the activities being reported would all have been completed. However, where statements of fact are involved, the present tense is preferred. For instance:

Cultism and poor performance of students in examinations form part of the major sources of worry to parents, teachers and government in the recent time. The possibility of establishing a relationship of cause and effect between these two sources of worry has motivated this research...

- Use impersonal expressions. For instance, it is better to say "This research was motivated by..." than "I was motivated to carry out this research to..."; "data were collected through secondary sources" instead of "I collected data through secondary sources"
- An abstract is focused, ignoring irrelevances and unnecessary details.

CLASS ACTIVITY: Do Exercises 4 and 5 of Chapter Six in the workbook to practice writing of abstract.

6.5 *Term Paper Writing*
A term paper is a short academic research of between five to fifteen pages, or as required by the demanding authority, written on a subject. It is written in almost every course of

study in tertiary education to prepare students on the discipline and rudiments associated with academic research. It is also meant to encourage the students to read broadly in their disciplines, to sharpen their analytical mindsets, as well as develop their ability to critically examine concepts and issues. It is therefore unfortunate that, these days, students do not take their term paper assignments seriously. A student who starts from his or her first year in the tertiary school to write term papers would never find subsequent academic research exercises difficult. He would not have to resort to farming out his long essay to someone else for a fee, like some unscrupulous persons do. Like other research exercises, writing a term paper requires some technical procedures. The procedures include:

- **Selection of topic:** Although students are usually given specific topics to write on by their lecturers and instructors, sometimes, a student may be required to choose a topic. In the latter, a student is advised to choose a topic that is not too broad. Limit yourself to a specific area that could be exhaustively discussed within the short time and length of the term paper. For instance, a topic like "Technology Education in Nigeria" is rather broad for a term paper. It could be narrowed to "Importance of Technology Education in Nigeria Secondary School System".
- **Brainstorming ideas:** One of the first things to do when you have a term paper or similar assignments to embark on is to brainstorm. This involves a deliberate mental effort to unravel every possible idea connected to the topic. You allow your mind a free range of questions on the topic and its implications: What does this topic

require me to do? What are the important ideas or variables contained in the topic that must be explored? With a note pad in hand, pose and answer the many open-ended questions about the topic, including sources of information and strategies for executing it. Having explored your own prior knowledge bank, consult one or two friends and pose questions at them on aspects of the topic or its execution that challenge you. Then draw up a plan of action on how to carry out your investigation and gradually proceed.

- **Drawing a tentative outline for the term paper:** An outline is a sketch of the structure of the term paper. A tentative outline presents a term paper writer with a plan as to the layout and the basic parts of the paper. It guides the attention of the writer on the nature of the information to be sought and how to arrange them sequentially for maximum effect.

- **Searching for information or data:** Term paper writing requires intelligent and thorough reading. The following are some of the sources of information and ideas with which to write a term paper: books, journals, dictionaries both special and general knowledge dictionaries, encyclopedia, magazines and newspapers depending on the topic of the term paper. Always make use of these resources in the school library and e-library on your smart phones and computers.

- **Taking and making notes from written sources:** Remember the different note taking and note making techniques that you were taught and apply them appropriately. Know when you are lifting an idea *word for word* and remember to put such in quotation marks.

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Quotation marks are not needed in summary writing which requires borrowing the ideas and the words of an author. However, in each case, always write down the bibliographic information of the source against every idea borrowed before taking up another source. Such information include: title of the book or journal etc; the name of the author or editor, the year of publication, place of publication, publisher's name and the page(s) referred to. These will help you prepare your final references.

- **The Internet as Vital Research Resource**: The Internet has made research more interesting and fulfilling today for everyone, even primary school children! Given that the Internet is more easily assessable today through smart phones and cheap computers (including second hand ones), students are encouraged to explore the web for information. To do so, they must be conversant with various search engines, the use of the browsers, and the creative and honest use of templates. They should work hard to develop their typing and computer-aided design skills so they can enrich the content of their work.

- **Pose Your Research Questions**: After a careful reading of the topic, pose three to five pointed research questions guided by the topic that would guide your study. Your major focus in executing your research is to find answers to those questions, thereby fully addressing the topic of the paper. In bigger research work, the posing of research questions may lead to the framing of a few hypotheses to be tested.

- **Use of Interviews and Questionnaires**: Besides the use of ideas from books, magazines and journals, you may

need to interview people or administer a questionnaire on them to get information that can answer the main questions of the research. When using interview, imagine you are a journalist and construct some useful interview questions on paper beforehand so you can pose meaningful questions. You may pose a couple of follow-up questions as your respondent or interviewee responds. Use a tape recorder to capture what is said, while you take some notes as well. You will later transcribe the information on the tape to paper for effective use. Where you have numerous people or samples to obtain information from, use a questionnaire instead. It is a long list of questions or statements typed out on paper that you expect the respondent to provide answers to in the spaces provided below each question.

- *Arranging the information (Use of Graphic Organiser):* After gathering data/information with which to write the paper, you sit down to arrange them according to where they fit-in in the general structure of the paper: the introduction, the review of literature, the methodology, the results and findings, and the conclusion. You may use a graphic organizer to help you arrange your work better. It is usually in the form of a chart with spaces for headings and bigger spaces for details. The research questions could be turned into statements to provide the headings, while the details would be taken from the findings from the various sources, especially the interviews, questionnaires and the Internet search.
- *Writing the initial draft of the paper:* Attempt to write purposely, focusing on the main ideas of each section.

Always write as the ideas flow, guided by your outline, progressing from the introductory parts through the main body to the concluding parts.

- **Statistical tools, Tables, Graphs, Charts and other Illustrations:** These can be very helpful in making your work organized, readable and presentable. For termpapers, only simple percentages, means and averages may be required, along with tables and graphs. The student should learn more sophisticated statistical tools as he progresses.

- **Editing the initial draft:** A good writer does not edit while writing. After you have written, sit down to read your work critically, expunging irrelevances, re-writing not-well written sentences and re-presenting not-well-presented ideas. In other words, sharpen your ideas and how they are presented, while crossing your't's and dotting your 'i's!

- **Writing the final draft for submission:** Go through your work for the last time before submission, ensuring that you have complied with the requirements of the editors, or the style of the department in which you are studying, as given to you. You may still find need to fine-tune some sections and tweak some constructions and switch some sentences. The section below should generally guide the organization and presentation of your work.

6.6 *Structure of a Term Paper*

Organization, presentation and error-free technical skill are central to effective research writing. This is because the structure of a research contributes to its scholarliness. A critical eye seldom loses sight of this aspect. As stated under

the procedures for writing a term paper, to maintain a good structure for a paper, the writer needs to initially outline. It is the outline that guides the writer in knowing the various parts that the paper should have and how to structure them. The basic parts of the structure of a term paper include: the preliminary pages (title page, table of contents and abstract), introduction, body, summary and conclusion, references, appendices (where it is necessary).

Title Page: This page is designed to give the following information: name of university and department, title/topic of the term paper, course title and code, name of the student writing the term paper, name of the lecturer in-charge of the course, month the paper is written.

FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY OWERRI
DEPARTMENT OF BUILDING TECHNOLOGY
"THE IMPORTANCE OF LIBRARY IN THE LIFE OF A STUDENT"
A TERM PAPER
PRESENTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE COURSE,
GST 101: USE OF ENGLISH
BY

FELIX UDOKA AMADIOHA
REG. NO. 2016/027/BT
TO
DR. A.E. IBEZIMAKO
MAY, 2016

Table of Contents: This section contains a list of all headings and sub-headings of the different sections/chapters of a term paper, with their corresponding page numbers. It also includes the preliminary pages, the reference page(s) and appendices. The purpose of this page is to guide the reader on how to locate every chapter and sub-chapter easily.

Abstract: Refer to what has been said earlier in this chapter about abstract.

Body of the Paper: This contains the main text of the term paper. It has three internally related divisions: introduction, body and conclusion. The introduction intimates the reader with what the writer intends to accomplish in the term paper. An introduction is expected to be brief and clear, revealing the following: a brief definition and explanation of the concept of the paper; the goal of the paper; the questions that border on the subject matter; and how the writer wishes to address the issues. This is followed by section that contains the major ideas discussed in the paper, the main body.

Ideas in the main body of a term paper are usually presented systematically in headings and sub-headings or chapters and sub-chapters. The major chapters or headings are usually centralized while the sub-headings are not centralized. The segmentations are intended to order the presentation of the details of the paper. Each sub-heading is exhaustively treated as though the reader is not an expert on the topic. The logical organization of this section depends on the objective of the paper. Where there is need for the views of other

scholars, it must be lucidly documented. This is called in-text documentation, and it will be discussed in detail under the section entitled documentation. After this, the writer should also present his or her own position and the reasons for holding the opinion or position. Always ensure that any idea you borrow from another academic writing is relevant to the understanding of your own paper.

Conclusion: As there is an introduction to your paper, a critical reader would always desire to know what your conclusion would be. Sometimes, the section is given the title, *Summary and Conclusion*. This is because the section summarizes what the writer has achieved in his work and stresses the evidence that supports his analyses. The conclusion briefly takes the reader back to the problems and questions raised in the introduction and then states the conclusions that have been drawn on them.

Reference: This section lists all the reference materials (textbooks, journals etc.) cited in the term paper. These materials are arranged alphabetically using the surname of their authors. This is done technically according to the rules of the documentation style sheet adopted. There are two major documentation styles that are common in research: APA (American Psychological Association) and MLA (Modern Language Association).

Appendices: This is a list of all the items that aided the discussions in the paper, which were not introduced in the body of the paper. Some examples include: questionnaires, photographs, maps etc. They are included as samples or

attachments hence the term appendices. Note that it is not every research that has appendices.

CLASS ACTIVITY: Do Exercises 6 and 7 of Chapter Six in the workbook to practice writing of term paper.

6.7 *Documentation*

Documentation refers to the compilation of the sources or materials consulted in the course of a research. In research, people are permitted to borrow the views and ideas of previous writers. Such borrowing is never haphazard. There are procedures for doing this, which require that the sources of the borrowed must be adequately documented.

Documentation begins from the body of the paper. This is called in-text documentation. Then at the end of the entire paper, the final documentation is done in the form of a reference, bibliography or works cited. The style for doing these vary according to the style sheet adopted; APA or MLA.

APA Documentation Style

This style is normally used in the social science, science and engineering disciplines. It uses the technical term reference. Thus, it has in-text and final references. The in-text reference adopts the triple reference form involving the surname of the author the year of publication and the page. Examples:

1. According to Umunnakwe (2012), "a prose is a narrative piece of considerable length and structure intended to teach or entertain" (p.15).

2. Adekunle (2014) is of the view that "language is not only used to communicate but also as a means of cultural identity" (p.55).

Note that the ideas have been presented in quotation marks because they are outright quotations. Where they are summary or paraphrase, the quotation marks are not needed e.g.

3. According to Ajah (2014), flowers are used to beautify compounds and to ensure adequate oxygen flow.
   Number 3 example goes without the page since it is not a direct quotation.

If you refer to a publication with no author given, include the first 1-2 key words from the title instead of a name. If no date is supplied, then write n.d. Also, some digital full texts do not have page numbers. In these cases, page numbers may be omitted from the in-text citation. Example:

It is necessary to verify every information before making reference to them ("Guide to Peace," n.d)

If you refer to a source that is cited in another source, name the original source in your signal phrase and put the secondary source in parenthesis. Example:

Literature according to Nwala is a major source of entertainment (as cited in Egudu, 2011, p.13)

For reference list at the end of the paper, the essence is to provide the reader with information necessary to easily locate and retrieve any source you cited in the body of the paper. Each source you cited in the paper must therefore

appear in the reference list. This page is labeled "References". The pattern is as follows:

Surname of the author, other name(s), year of publication, title of the book, place of publication, publisher. Example: Asogu, Paul. C .(2012). *Anatomy of Science*.Owerri: Divine Publishers.

When a book has two to six authors, use the surname of the first author in the alphabetical arrangement and the names of the other authors appear in first name order. Example:

Asogu, Paul. C, Peter U. Ibe, Rita Anu and James S. Oriaku (2011).*Mathematical Equations*.

Enugu: Zelon Press.

Note that the second line of the last example is indented to under the fifth letter of the first line.

For books with more than seven authors, list the first six authors, followed by ellipses after the sixth author's name.

For multiple articles by the same author, enter the author's name in the first entry and use ellipses to represent the name in the subsequent entries, then, list the entries in chronological order, from the earliest to the most recent. E.g.

Achebe, Chinua (1964) *Things Fall Apart*. London: Heinemann Publishers.
.........................(1969) *Arrow of God*. London: Heinemann Publishers.

When referring to books, chapters, articles, or web pages, capitalize only the first letter of the first word of a title and subtitle, the first word after a colon or a dash in the title, and proper nouns. Do not capitalize the first letter of the second word in a hyphenated compound word. E.g.

Amadi, N.C. (2012) Understanding society through language. Retrieved September 15, 2015.

http//www.sociology of language.edu

For articles published in journals or chapters in published books, follow the example below:

Opera, S.O. The strength and weaknesses of woman. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*

vol.4, No 5 28-37

Emenike, A.C. (2014) Techniques of writing academic research. Nnodim, P.A Ed. *Guides to Essay*

and Other Academic Writings. Owerri: FIB Publishers.

SAMPLE REFERENCES LIST IN APA STYLE:

REFERENCES

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CLASS ACTIVITY: Do Exercises 8 and 9 of Chapter Six in the workbook to practice documentation.