Good academic writing brainstorming and tips
with useful vocabulary for talking about academic writing and understanding tasks
What is good academic writing?

Write the words "Good academic writing" *in the middle of a blank piece of A3 paper and draw a circle around those words. Brainstorm all the possible things you could mention when defining that thing onto a mind map on the topic around that circle.*

Arrange your ideas into larger topics, then brainstorm more categories and more examples of all those categories.

Compare your larger categories with those under the fold below.

--*fold, cover or cut*--

Possible suggestions for the main categories on the mind map
- Culture
- Influence
- Interest/ Readability
- Language (grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling, etc)
- Objectivity
- Organisation/ Structure
- Persuasiveness/ Strength of arguments
- Writing process (planning etc)
- Publication
- Readership
- Style
- Time management
- Topic

Look at the next page if you need more help with subcategories etc.

Possible subcategories
- Abbreviations (e.g. acronyms)
- Academic vocabulary (e.g. the Academic Word List)
- Affixes (= prefixes and suffixes)
- Appendices
- Bibliography/ List of references
- Brackets
- British/ American English
- Bullet points/ Numbering
- Chapters/ Sections
- Citations/ Quotations
- Colons/ Semi-colons
- Conclusion/ Summary
- Contractions
- Counterarguments/ Counterexamples
- Dash
- Data/ Figures/ Statistics
- Defining your terms
- Determiners
- Diagram (e.g. line graph, pie chart)
- Drafts
- Editing/ Proofreading
- Evidence/ Supporting arguments
- Exclamation marks
- Fixed phrases/ Idioms
- Footnotes
- Headings
- Introduction
- Jargon
- Latinate vocabulary
- Linking (e.g. linking expressions like "Furthermore")
- Mind map
- Paragraphs
- Paraphrasing
- Passive
- Personal pronouns
- Questions/ Rhetorical questions
- Title
- Topic sentence

Check the meaning of any words above that you aren't sure of, particularly differences between them.

What would your advice be on the topics above? Ask your partner about one you aren't sure about and see what they say, then do the same as a class.

Discuss the advice below and write a tick if you think it is good advice, a cross (X) if you think it is bad advice, or a question mark (?) if you aren't sure or think it depends.

1. Academic papers often have a <u>title</u> with two parts separated by a colon in order to make sure they can catch your attention, give useful information about what is in the paper, and use lots of key words
2. <u>Academic vocabulary</u> tends to consist of longer <u>Latinate words</u>, often with <u>affixes</u>
3. <u>Appendices</u> are generally better than <u>footnotes</u>
4. Avoid <u>abbreviations</u>
5. Avoid <u>colons</u> and, especially, <u>semi-colons</u> where possible, because even native speakers tend to use them badly
6. Avoid jargon
7. Avoid one-sentence <u>paragraphs</u>
8. Avoid repeating words
9. Avoid <u>rhetorical questions</u>
10. Avoid starting sentences with "and" and "but"
11. Being difficult to understand is likely to have the most impact on the score of any marked academic writing
12. <u>Contractions</u> are too informal for much academic writing
13. <u>Dashes</u> are too informal for much academic writing
14. Decide on both the main <u>readership</u> and wider possible readership of a paper before writing it, and particularly before choosing a <u>title</u>
15. <u>Exclamation marks</u> are very informal
16. Explain the <u>organisation</u> of your writing in the <u>introduction</u>
17. <u>Idioms</u> are often informal
18. It can be useful to think of the <u>title</u> of an academic paper as being similar to that of a webpage that is trying to get as many Google hits and readers as possible
19. It can help to keep a list of your own common errors to check your writing against
20. Lots of different <u>support for your arguments</u> is usually better than detailed examination of one kind of support for your argument, particularly in writing with time or word limits
21. Make changes to a second <u>draft</u> in the main text and delete all macros (comment boxes etc) before submitting it again
22. Most non-native English speakers use too few <u>determiners</u> (a, an, the, etc). In English the default is to use something, and you need a special reason to use nothing.
23. Most publications have their own criteria about what written <u>style</u> to use
24. One <u>paragraph</u> is one <u>topic</u>, so a new paragraph means a new topic (in some way)
25. Only <u>sources</u> which are <u>cited</u> in the paper should be included in the <u>list of references</u>
26. <u>Quoting</u> directly is always better than <u>paraphrasing</u>
27. The <u>editing</u> stage is also a good chance to add more complex language, especially if you can get feedback afterwards on how well you used it
28. The first person (= "I") is never acceptable in academic writing
29. The more <u>references</u> the better
30. Tips on using most kinds of <u>punctuation</u> (brackets, commas, <u>semi-colons</u>, etc) varies depending on British or American English, which <u>style</u> guide, publication, which expert's advice you look at, etc.
31. Try to be consistent with use of <u>British and American English</u>
32. Use as many <u>linking expressions</u> as possible
33. Use <u>passives</u> whenever possible, for example lots of phrases like "It is said that…" and "… is considered to be…"

Can you change the bad advice above to make it better?

Add ideas from above to your mind map.

Compare your mind map with another group and then discuss the questions below.

Discussion
- Which of the things on your mind map are most difficult and most important? How could you improve your ability to do those things?
- How can you use brainstorming and mind maps in academic writing? What other ways of coming up with ideas are there?
- Do you think your mind map is a good example? What could be improved about it?
- Your homework will be to write a 300 word essay on the topic of good academic writing. How useful do you think the mind map that you created today will be?
- What else will you need to do before you start to write that essay?
- What should the other stages of producing that piece of academic writing be?

Describing good academic writing homework
For homework, do the next stage or stages of writing a 300-word essay on the topic of "Good academic writing" that your teacher tells you to work on. For example:
- If you don't have a good mind map on the topic, start again and bring the mind map to the next lesson
- If you have done a basic mind map, edit it down until you have the right number of topics and subtopics to write between three and six paragraphs on the topic
- If you have done an edited mind map in class, turn it into a plan for your writing
- If you have done a plan for your writing in class, write a first draft of the essay

Suggested improved bad advice

Avoid abbreviations – **Avoid informal abbreviations such as "asap" and "lol", and explain all other abbreviations the first time you use them**

Avoid jargon – **Jargon is very useful because it usually has a more precise meaning that everyday English terms, but define all jargon the first time you use it.**

Quoting directly is always better than paraphrasing – **Use a mix of quoting and paraphrasing, making it obvious which is which. However, too much direct quoting can lead to copyright concerns and you need to show that you understand and have critically examined any things you quote directly**

The first person (= "I") is never acceptable in academic writing – **It depends on the publication and field, but "I" is becoming more acceptable.**

The more references the better – **Many publications now limit the number of references you can give, and it can be seen as trying too hard to impress without necessarily having original ideas of your own.**

Use as many linking expressions as possible – **Good writing should be understandable without too many linking expressions, and you should avoid repeating the actual expressions you use (which becomes difficult if you use too many)**

Use <u>passives</u> whenever possible, for example lots of phrases like "It is said that…" and "…is considered to be…" – **Use a mix of passive and active voice, using the latter whenever appropriate. The passive can be useful to avoid "I" if that is necessary, but avoid expressions like "It is thought that…" unless you can say who by.**