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VYSOKÉ UČENÍ TECHNICKÉ V BRNĚ

FACULTY OF ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING AND COMMUNICATION
FAKULTA ELEKTROTECHNIKY
A KOMUNIKAČNÍCH TECHNOLOGIÍ

DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES
ÚSTAV JAZYKŮ

ACADEMIC WRITING CHARACTERISTICS: A BRIEF HANDBOOK FOR STUDENTS.
CHARAKTERISTIKA AKADEMICKÉHO PÍSEMNÉHO STYLU: STRUČNÁ PŘÍRUČKA PRO STUDENTY.

BACHELOR'S THESIS
BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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Bachelor's Thesis

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Department of Foreign Languages

Student: Michaela Stránská *ID:* 195251

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TITLE OF THESIS:

Academic writing characteristics: a brief handbook for students.

INSTRUCTION:

On the basis of surveyed sources provide a characteristics and outlining of academic writing features.

RECOMMENDED LITERATURE:

1) Leki,I.(2006).Academic writing. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

2) Parsons,G.(1990).A Comparative Study of the Writing of Scientific Texts Focusing on Cohesion and Coherence.Nottingham:University of Nottingham.

3) Krhutová,M.(2009).Parameters of Professional Discourse/English for Electrical ngineering. Brno:Tribun EU.

4) Jordan,R.R.(1997).English for Academic Purposes.Cambridge:Cambridge University Press.

Date of project specification: 6.2.2020 *Deadline for submission:* 12.6.2020

Supervisor: PaedDr. Alena Baumgartnerová

doc. PhDr. Milena Krhutová, Ph.D.
Subject Council chairman

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VYSOKÉ UČENÍ TECHNICKÉ V BRNĚ
FAKULTA ELEKTROTECHNIKY A KOMUNIKAČNÍCH TECHNOLOGIÍ

Bakalářská práce

bakalářský studijní obor **Angličtina v elektrotechnice a informatice**

Ústav jazyků

Studentka: Michaela Stránská *ID:* 195251
Ročník: 3 *Akademický rok:* 2019/20

NÁZEV TÉMATU:

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POKYNY PRO VYPRACOVÁNÍ:

Na základě prostudovaných zdrojů provedte charakteristiku akademického písemného projevu a vytyčte jeho hlavní rysy.

DOPORUČENÁ LITERATURA:

1) Leki,I.(2006).Academic writing. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

2) Parsons,G.(1990).A Comparative Study of the Writing of Scientific Texts Focusing on Cohesion and Coherence.Nottingham:University of Nottingham.

3) Krhutová,M.(2009).Parameters of Professional Discourse/English for Electrical ngineering. Brno:Tribun EU.

4) Jordan,R.R.(1997).English for Academic Purposes.Cambridge:Cambridge University Press.

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Vedoucí práce: PaedDr. Alena Baumgartnerová

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Abstract

This Bachelor thesis deals with academic writing. Probably all university students encounter academic writing at some point in their studies. However, some of them might have particular difficulties in writing academic texts. Thus, the aim of this thesis is not only to characterize academic writing but also to design a brief handbook for students that would help them to cope with these difficulties and simplify their work by providing useful tips. The concept of academic writing, its definition and thorough characteristics are described in the first part of the thesis. Different types of academic texts that students most commonly encounter during their studies and its brief characteristics are also mentioned in the first part. The second part consists of the brief handbook for students. The character of this handbook is aimed to be as practical as possible. The handbook is divided into several chapters that deal with various aspects of academic writing such as the language and style. Nevertheless, a significant part of the handbook is dedicated to the preparations for writing because it is as important as the writing process itself.

Keywords: Academic writing, academic style, handbook, essay, report, thesis, abstract

Anotace

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá tématem akademického písemného stylu. S akademickým písemným stylem se setkává každý student vysoké školy, pro mnohé z nich však může představovat nemalé potíže. Proto se tato práce zaměřuje nejen na rozbor a charakteristiku akademického stylu, ale také obsahuje stručnou příručku pro studenty, která by jim mohla pomoci usnadnit těžkosti spojené s vytvářením akademických textů. První část práce shrnuje pojem akademický písemný styl, nastiňuje jeho definici a poskytuje jeho podrobnou charakteristiku. Dále jsou zde zmíněny nejčastější typy akademických textů, se kterými by se studenti mohli při studiích setkat a jejich stručný popis. Druhá část se poté věnuje příručce pro studenty. Příručka je rozdělena do několika kapitol, které rozebírají aspekty akademického písemného stylu v praxi. Jejím hlavním cílem je pomoci studentům usnadnit možné problémy, se kterými se mohou při psaní setkat. Příručka není zaměřena jen na jazykovou složku, ale na proces psaní jako takový.

Klíčová slova: Akademický písemný styl, příručka pro studenty, akademické žánry

STRÁNSKÁ, Michaela. *Charakteristika akademického písemného stylu: stručná příručka pro studenty*. [online]. Brno, 2020 [cit. 2020-06-11]. Dostupné z: https://www.vutbr.cz/studenti/zav-prace/detail/127221. Bakalářská práce. Vysoké učení technické v Brně, Fakulta elektrotechniky a komunikačních technologií, Ústav jazyků. Vedoucí práce Alena Baumgartnerová.

Prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že svou bakalářskou práci na téma Charakteristika akademického písemného stylu: stručná příručka pro studenty jsem vypracovala samostatně pod vedením vedoucí bakalářské práce a s použitím odborné literatury a dalších informačních zdrojů, které jsou všechny citovány v práci a uvedeny v seznamu literatury na konci práce.

Jako autorka uvedené práce dále prohlašuji, že v souvislosti s vytvořením této práce jsem neporušila autorská práce třetích osob, zejména jsem nezasáhla nedovoleným způsobem do cizích autorských práv osobnostních a jsem si plně vědoma následků porušení ustanovení § 11 a následujících autorského zákona č. 121/2000 Sb., včetně možných trestněprávních důsledků vyplývajících z ustanovení § 152 trestního zákona č. 140/1961 Sb.

Statement of Authorship

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this bachelor thesis that I am submitting and that I have not used any sources other than those listed in the bibliography and identified as references. I further declare that I am aware of the University's regulations concerning plagiarism, including those regulations concerning disciplinary actions that may result from plagiarism.

Brno …… ……

(Podpis autora)

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1 Introduction

Academic writing can be considered to be an essential skill for university studies. Naturally, every student has to deal with a certain number of essays, articles or theses during their study period. Although it may not be a topic that is popular among students, the use of English for academic purposes is an important tool in higher education.

In this bachelor thesis, I would like to focus on academic writing and its characteristic as well as on designing a brief handbook for students that is meant to help them cope with academic writing. Jordan (1997) implied that academic writing consumes a large amount of students' study time. Furthermore, written work has been regarded as being one of the major difficulties for students. He also referred to a study, which indicated that vocabulary, style and spelling were a main cause of concern, closely followed by grammar (Jordan, 1997). Therefore, I would like to provide an insight into academic writing, which should be helpful mainly to students who are speakers of other languages than English. Even though I will focus on students participating in the programme English in Electrical Engineering and Informatics, other undergraduate or even graduate students might find this handbook beneficial as well. I believe that my work will help them cope with these difficulties mentioned above more easily.

The character of this thesis is both theoretical and practical. Definition of academic writing and its characteristics will be provided in the first part. I will also focus on four academic genres that students most probably encounter during their studies and provide their description. The objective of the second part of this thesis is to design a brief handbook for students that is based on the research from the theoretical part, and which would help them to write their papers with less concern and allow them to be more confident about writing. I would like to design a full-bodied handbook that will serve students of English in Electrical Engineering and Informatics on a daily basis.

2 Academic Writing

Nowadays, English is considered to be the Lingua Franca of academic writing. The aim of English language is to facilitate communication of scientist all around the world (Krhutová, 2009). Krhutová (2009) in her book Parameters of Professional Discourse also described English as Lingua Franca in more detail as follows. *"It is flexible, open to change and easy enough to learn. Moreover, its capturing the positions as a professional language brings no prejudices, as a professional variety is free of cultural and political implications"* (2009, p. 16). Generally speaking, the better understanding of academic English students will obtain the better education or job opportunities can appear.

Alexander, Argent and Spencer have agreed, *"Academic English is currently the lingua franca, and academic writing is the currency required for entry to academic study and for progression through all stages" (2008, p.178).*

2.1 Definition

Academic writing is the most essential skill students need in the academic context, but its definition is rather complicated (Alexander, Argent, & Spencer, 2008). Jordan (1997) described academic writing as a wide umbrella term that can be approached from many different directions. The Article from the website of the University of Leeds has defined academic writing as follows. *"Academic writing is clear, concise, focussed, structured and backed up by evidence. Its purpose is to aid the reader's understanding*" ("Academic Writing." 1970). Alexander et al. argued:

> However, when lecturers were brought together in focus groups, they discovered that each faculty, and even individuals within the same faculty, had different ideas about the meaning of these terms. The differences were often related to the differing goals which lecturers had for the students (2008, p. 186).

And then they concluded: *"However, ... there are general tendencies in most academic texts which can encompass concept such as clear and logical"* (Alexander et al., 2008, p. 186).

As these definitions are relatively complex, they indicate that the academic writing itself is not a skill people are born with. Becoming a confident academic writer depends

upon a long process of developing skills such as fluency in writing or communicating an idea effectively (Alexander et al., 2008, p. 189).

2.2 Use

Academic writing can be encountered within different academic fields such as electrical engineering or sociolinguistic. Different fields naturally anticipate different academic discourse, so the terminology or style varies to some extent; however, the overall concept of clear, structured writing that is backed up by evidence remains unchanged.

Academic writing is not only a matter of university students. Research workers should master the skill of academic writing as well. Although it would be better to call it scientific writing in this case, the concept of clear, objective and concise language remains the same. To be a successful researcher does not only mean to conduct successful research but also to publish the research in a way that attracts attention. However, Lindsay emphasised that "*many researchers, who, in all other respects, are competent scientists, are afraid of writing.*" And added: "*They are wary of the unwritten rules, the unspoken dogma and the inexplicably complex style, all of which seem to pervade conventional thinking about scientific writing.*" (2011, p.1) Which leads back to the beginning – to the idea that academic writing is a crucial skill to acquire for university students and can lead to better education or job opportunities in the future.

3 Characteristics of academic writing

Although the attitudes towards its definition differ to some extent, several features of academic writing are fixed. Academic writing usually is:

- **Impersonal.** Unless reflective writing, where experience and personal attitudes of the author are expected, the author is not encouraged to use the first person *(I).*

  O *I consider English to be the lingua franca of electrical engineering.*

  P *English is considered to be the lingua franca of electrical engineering.*

- **Objective.** Especially in research papers, it is necessary to avoid subjectivity – the influence by personal believes or feelings, as defined by the Cambridge dictionary (n.d.).

  O *In my opinion, this is a perfect idea.*

  P *According to the team of researchers, the concept seems to be beneficial…*

- **Formal** in language and style. It is essential to write in an **appropriate** style. Even successful research would be regarded as non-professional and too simple if using informal language or style (Swales and Feak, 2012).

  O *I want to tell you something about academic writing in this chapter.*

  P *Academic writing will also be described in this chapter.*

- **Supported by evidence.** Every idea or argument that appears in the writing should be supported by evidence and referred to precisely ("Academic Writing." 1970).

  O *Becoming a confident academic writer is not easy.*

  P *Becoming a confident academic writer depends upon a long process of developing skills. (Alexander et al., 2008, p. 189).*

- **Logical.** The paper should be written in a logical order and individual parts should be connected. Swales and Feak (2012) described the logical arrangement of a piece of writing by the term *flow* and indicated that a clear connection of ideas helps the audience to comprehend the author's ideas.

- **Structured.** Academic writing has a given structure that should be followed. The overall structure of all written papers is usually as follows: introduction, main body and conclusion.
- **Concise.** It is often said that more is less and in the case of academic writing, it is true as well. Every word counts in academic text, so it is advisable to omit unnecessary words to ensure clarity of the text.

  O *According to Leki, several interesting ideas are worth mentioning.*

  P *Leki mentions several interesting ideas.*

As these features are closely related to strategy, structure or language, they will be described in more detail in the following chapters.

3.1 Strategy

A strategy is a part of academic writing that is often underestimated by students or completely omitted. Leki compared writing to creating a clay pot:

> When you make a piece of pottery, first you must gather and prepare your materials: select the lund [sic] of clay you want, soften the clay by kneading it, perhaps find a pottery wheel, and so on. Next you need some idea of what you want to make, how the piece of pottery is going to be used, and who is going to use it. Only then can you start working on your piece. As you are working, you may change your mind about what you want it to become; instead of becoming a cup, your piece may start to look as though it would be a better flowerpot. If this happens, you revise your image of the final product and who you are making it for. As you work, you show your piece to others, who give you opinions and advice on how to improve it. … If you finally manage to produce a pot you like, the good qualities of that pot will be the result of good materials, good planning, good advice from critics, and good execution on your part. (1998, p. 18)

She then extended her idea to the writing itself, emphasizing that a high-quality piece of writing is not a one-time issue. Before a good piece of writing is finished, it needs a large amount of time for considering the author's ideas, consulting them with others and redrafting (Leki, 1998).

Swales and Feak agreed that *"academic writing is a product of many considerations"* (2012, p. 3). And they also added that understanding writing strategies is essential for a confident writer (Swales and Feak, 2012).

The point that emerges from these definitions is that the process of creating a paper starts much earlier than the writing itself. The writing process might be also simplified to a considerable extent by recognizing all aspect mentioned above. In simple terms, preparing a good plan often guarantees that the action will be performed smoothly without real trouble.

3.2 Structure

Although the structure of academic papers may differ according to the genre, the overall structure remains constant. The most frequent structure is a division into several parts – introduction, main body and conclusion, as it was stated in chapter 3. The last part of every paper is references that are essential when incorporating someone else's ideas into the paper. As academic discourse maintains its conventions and its nature is rather stereotyped, model sentences that can be adopted in each part will be provided in the following chapters.

3.2.1 Introduction

An introduction is an initial part of every paper. It should provide an insight into the topic of the paper in order to help the reader to understand the main idea, methods that were followed, and the purpose of writing. Although it may seem effortless as the author of the text undoubtedly knows all the mentioned points, the opposite is the truth. Swales and Feak agreed. *"It is widely recognized that writing Introductions can be slow, difficult, and troublesome for many writers. A very long time ago, the Greek philosopher Plato remarked, "The beginning is half of the whole." Indeed, eventually producing a good Introduction section always seems like a battle hard won"* (2012, p. 327).

Thus, it may be a good idea to create only an initial draft of the introduction which would contain the main points and concepts of the paper. Afterwards, when the research is done, and it is clear that methods or main idea will not be changed, the final version of the introduction can be written with more ease.

Some of the most typical phrases that care commonly employed in introductions to state the focus of the paper are following.

- The purpose/aim of this paper is to review/examine…
- The central idea of this thesis is…
- This paper deals with/attempts to/focuses on/provides an overview of…
- In this bachelor thesis, I would like to focus on…

In order to describe the structure of a piece of writing, the following phrases may be employed:

- The essay consists of 4 chapters / is divided into 5 chapters.
- The state of the art is described in the first chapter.
- The second chapter comprises / deals with / analyses…
- The rest of the paper is concerned with…
- Findings of the research are presented in the last chapter.

3.2.2 Main body

The main body carries the main idea of writing. It should be neatly arranged into chapters and subchapters (if required). Chapters and subchapters are further divided into paragraphs. The main idea should be logically explained, following the features of academic writing mentioned in chapter 3.

The logical arrangement of the paper is ensured, besides other means, by the use of transition words which indicate the relationship between individual ideas or sentences and phrases to the reader. Different transition words have a different purpose in writing. Some of them may be adopted when writing academic text.

- To introduce an example: *For example, especially, such as, to illustrate, particularly…*
- To point out a conflict: *On the other hand, in contrast to, however, but, whereas, while…*
- To emphasise: *In addition, moreover, even more, besides, more importantly…*
- To provide reasons: *Therefore, thus, consequently, as a result, so…*

Another important aspect of the structure of the main body is cohesion – or connecting paragraphs together. Every paragraph should include one idea, and it is crucial to link these ideas together in a logical manner. A few practical phrases to ensure linking paragraphs together follow.

- Using numerals: *Firstly, secondly, first of all, to begin with…*
- To develop an idea: *Next, subsequently, afterwards, then*
- To summarize: *Consequently, given these points, hence, altogether…*
- To add information: *Also, in fact, additionally, alternatively, further…*

3.2.3 Conclusion

The conclusion is an important part of writing that provides a summary of objectives that were set in the very beginning. It usually consists of an evaluation of the methods involved in the research, comments on the key results, or recommendations for future implications (Swales and Feak, 2012). In more complex types of writing such as a dissertation, the conclusion also comprises the significance of the paper for the field or contribution to the field. Some of the most frequent concluding phrases are as follows:

- *The paper has shown/identified/determined…*
- *Taking all aspects into consideration, this paper has provided an insight into…*
- *To summarize the arguments, the research has confirmed…*
- *The paper contributes in several ways to the understanding of…*

3.2.4 References

Referencing is an essential part of academic writing. It is crucial to acknowledge other writers' thoughts and ideas incorporated in the paper. A list of references should always be attached at the end of the paper, and each citation has to be highlighted in the text itself. The citation is not only needed to avoid plagiarism, but it also shows the author's awareness in a particular field and enables the reader to observe employed ideas in more detail. Many citation styles determine not only the format of citation but also the information needed for citation. Some of the English citation styles that are commonly adopted are APA (American Psychological Association), MLA (Modern Language

Association) or CMS (Chicago Manual of Style). In order to provide a brief characteristic of each style and identify the differences between the styles, there is an example of direct in-text quotation of a book and following record of the book in the references (see Table 1).

Style	**APA**
In-text citation	Swales and Feak agreed that "academic writing is a product of many considerations" (2012, p. 3).
References	Swales, J. M., & Feak, C. B. (2012). *Academic writing for graduate students,*. Michigan, USA: Michigan ELT.
Style	**MLA**
In-text citation	Swales and Feak agreed that "academic writing is a product of many considerations" (3).
References	Swales, John M., and Christine B. Feak. *Academic Writing for Graduate Students*. Michigan ELT, 2012.
Style	**CMS**
In-text citation	Swales and Feak agreed that "academic writing is a product of many considerations" (2012, 3).
References	Swales, John M. & Feak, Christine B. 2012. *Academic writing for graduate students*. Michigan, USA: Michigan ELT.

Table 1 Citation styles

As emerges from the table, the styles are similar to some extent but still preserve their specificity. For instance, all of them specify the page in the in-text citation, but MLA does not include the date of publishing. In-text citations of Chicago style may be implemented in two ways, so-called author-date system, which was used in the example, or note-bibliography system, which uses footnotes or endnotes that are added to the end of a page or a document. Therefore, it is crucial to select an appropriate style, follow its standards and maintain it throughout the whole paper.

3.3 Language

Language of academic writing tends to be very formal. In contrast to a spoken academic variety of language, which is considered to be more casual than written medium, there is no place for informal expressions such as *a bunch of, stuff*, or *a lot of* (Swales and Feak, 2012). Since this thesis is focused on writing, the spoken language will not be further mentioned here.

Swales and Feak (2012) in their book Academic Writing for Graduate Students also indicated that language in academic writing can differ according to the genre of writing or the field of study. For example, the use of *I* is more frequent in Philosophy than in Computer Sciences. Thus, it is sometimes rather difficult to specify what academic language is. As the second part of this thesis deals with a handbook for students of **the technical** programme, the focus will be placed on technical fields only.

The grammar that is most frequently employed in academic papers corresponds with features of academic writing from chapter 3. In technical fields specifically, there is a common occurrence of passive voice that meets the requirements of impersonality and objectiveness.

O *We should always attach a list of references at the end of the paper.*

P *A list of references should always be attached at the end of the paper.*

Considering academic vocabulary, many formal expressions and technical terms appear. Moreover, many words from everyday vocabulary may obtain slightly different meaning when used in academic texts. In order to provide an example of altered meaning, please consider the phrase "get excited". It obtains dissimilar meaning when used in physics or everyday life.

- *I get excited every time I think about the holidays.*
- *Electrons get excited when absorbing sufficient energy.*

More examples of grammar and vocabulary that are typically employed in academic writing will be introduced later in the Brief handbook for students in chapter 5.3.

Another important linguistic component of written text is cohesion. In a simplified way, cohesion can be understood as references within a text which ensure that the text

is logically interconnected and easy to follow. Cohesion can be established by grammatical means such as reference, substitution and conjunction; or by lexical means, which comprises repetition, reference, or using general words (Krhutová, 2009). The following text is an analysis of cohesion within a single paragraph, words in bold are those grammatical or lexical means mentioned above. The most prevailing tool is substitution (styles ~ them), followed by repetition or using general words (styles ~ MLA).

> As emerges from the table, **the styles** are similar to some extent but still preserve **their** specificity. For instance, all of **them** specify the page in the in-text citation, but **MLA** does not include the date of publishing. In-text citations of **Chicago style** may be implemented in two ways, so-called author-date system, which was used in the example, or note-bibliography system, which uses footnotes or endnotes that are added to the end of a page or a document. **Therefore**, it is crucial to select appropriate **style**, follow **its** standards and maintain **it** throughout the whole paper.

And the last phenomenon that is frequent in academic text and will be mentioned here is hedging. Yule defined hedging as *"words or phrases used to indicate that we're not really sure that what we're saying is sufficiently correct or complete"* (2002, p. 148). That is a perfectly understandable and basic definition of conveying the uncertainty, which can be also classified as an instance of the Modesty Maxim. Modesty Maxim indicates minimizing the praise of self, and it can be used to soften statements or to express subjective ideas without imposing them on others (Krhutová, 2009).

O *A list of references **must** always be attached at the end of the paper.*

P *A list of references **should** always be attached at the end of the paper.*

3.4 Academic writing genres and their characteristics

In academic writing, several genres can be distinguished depending on the purpose of writing or the audience. As the audience for undergraduate students is most commonly their lecturer, the division according to the audience will not be mentioned in this thesis.

Four types of academic writing that undergraduate students of English in Electrical Engineering and Informatics most frequently encounter (i.e. essay, project report, bachelor's thesis, and abstract) will be characterized below.

3.4.1 Essay

An essay is probably the most frequent piece of writing students are asked to write. However, an essay is a relatively wide term that does not truly tell much about itself. There is a large number of essays, the most common types can, for example, be of descriptive, persuasive, or comparative character. The key to a successfully written essay is to read the instructions provided by the teacher carefully. Instructional verbs that appear in the instructions can genuinely help students to handle the essay successfully.

Style and language that is used in essays also depend on the type of essay. To be exact, if the essay is only of descriptive character, the style will be rather impersonal and objective. On the other hand, the persuasive essay requires stating of student's point of view, therefore the use of personal and subjective language is necessary (Gillet, 1999).

The structure of essay reflects the common structure that is stated in chapter 3.2 (i.e. introduction, main part, conclusion) and it is often framed by a title page and references (Gillet,1999). Every section is also divided into paragraphs. The text should be arranged in a logical order. As for the extent of essays, there is no rule that would regulate the length of this paper, although it should not be more than several standard pages.

Opening	Title page
Main part	Introduction Main body Conclusion
End matters	References

Table 2 Structure of Essay[1]

[1] Adapted from http://www.uefap.com/writing/writfram.htm

3.4.2 Project Report

As its name indicates, a project report is a piece of writing that provides an insight into a project that has been conducted. The reader should not only obtain information about the outcomes but also gain knowledge about the implications of these results or the methodology.

Language of this paper should adhere to the clear academic language as it was described in chapter 3.3. The project report is expected to be completely objective, therefore there is no place for personal statements or opinions.

The structure of the report is slightly complicated than that of an essay. Along with the length, the structure resembles more a thesis than an essay. The overall structure of a project report is finely depicted in the following table.

Opening	Title page Abstract Content
Main part	Introduction Methodology Findings/Results Discussion Conclusion
End matters	References Appendix

Table 3 Structure of Project report[2]

[2] Adapted from http://www.uefap.com/writing/genre/genrefram_litrev.htm

3.4.3 Bachelor's Thesis

Bachelor's thesis is an extensive piece of work that is carried out by undergraduate students in order to prove their knowledge in a particular field, thereby obtaining their degree. Theses ordinarily follow a strict format which is depicted in Table 4.

The language of the bachelor's thesis, similarly to the project report, is a pure academic language. All the features of academic language have been stated in chapter 3.3. The length of a bachelor's thesis varies approximately from 54,000 to 76,000 characters (including space), which means 30–40 standard pages. However, the length may differ from this norm depending on the field of study or the requirements of different universities.

Opening	Title page Assignment of the thesis Abstract, keywords Bibliographic citation of the thesis Author's declaration Acknowledgements List of Contents
Main part	Introduction Theory/Literature review Methodology/Research Design Findings/Results Discussion Conclusions/Implications Future Work/Recommendations
End matters	References Appendix

Table 4 Structure of bachelor's thesis[3]

[3] Adapted from http://www.uefap.com/writing/genre/genrefram_litrev.htm

3.4.4 Abstract

An abstract is a summary or a shortened version of a paper. It is an initial part of a paper, which purpose is to describe the whole paper and attract the attention of readers. Andrade in his article indicated that most readers do not pay attention to the paper itself. *"If a title interests them, they glance through the abstract of that paper. Only a dedicated reader will peruse the contents of the paper, and then, most often only the introduction and discussion sections"* (2011, p. 1). Thus, the abstract must adequately represent its paper and contain as much information about the paper as possible within the word limit (Andrade, 2011).

Although the recommended length of abstract differs, the majority of abstracts contain approximately 150–300 words. An abstract is not divided into paragraphs. The overall structure of the abstract is presented in Table 5.

Introduction
Describe the context, importance of the subject.
↓
Purpose
Describe the purpose of the study.
↓
Methods
Report how the study was undertaken.
↓
Results
Report the results that were found.
↓
Evaluation
Briefly evaluate the results.
↓
Conclusion
Explain what is important and why; conclude briefly.

Table 5 Structure of Abstract [4]

[4] Adapted from http://www.uefap.com/writing/genre/abstract.htm

4 Theoretical introduction to the handbook

The brief handbook for students is primarily designated for all undergraduate students participating in the programme English in Electrical Engineering and Informatics. However, other Czech, as well as international students, might also profit from this handbook as long as they are engaged in writing their papers in English. Additionally, the skill of academic writing is considered to be problematic to acquire even for native speakers (Alexander et al., 2008). Thus, this handbook could be beneficial to them as well.

The handbook is divided into 5 main chapters: Before you start, Language, Style, Structure and What to avoid. Each chapter is then segmented into subchapters that deal with the discussed phenomenon in a more detailed manner.

In the first chapter, I would like to provide students with a few ideas that could help them to prepare for writing. Planning the writing process is one of the most important steps in academic writing; however, students often forget about it or omit it completely. Swales and Feak in their Academic Writing for Graduate Students placed a great emphasis on planning as well: "*academic writing is a product of many considerations: audience, purpose, organization, style, flow, and presentation*" (2012, p. 3).

Finding purpose and motivation to write is also a significant component of the whole process, therefore it is discussed as a part of the planning stage. A subchapter containing a brief overview of procrastination is also a part of the first chapter. It explains why students postpone writing of their papers until the last possible moment, and how this habit can be overcome. It might help students to find their motivation for writing and write at an unhurried pace.

The second chapter outlines the variety of language that should be used in academic writing. The chapter is divided into several subchapters explaining academic vocabulary and grammar. All subchapters also contain various examples in order to support the theoretical information and guarantee that students can take advantage of this handbook in practice.

A subchapter dedicated to language resources (specifically monolingual dictionaries, corpora or thesaurus) is also incorporated in the handbook in order to provide students with useful resources that could possibly improve their vocabulary. The

employment of dictionaries or corpora can enhance student's writing with minimal effort by providing an endless source of set phrases, verb patterns or collocations, and more importantly, their use in sentences. Thesaurus, on the other hand, can generously contribute by presenting a large number of synonyms that are a great tool against word repetition.

The next chapter deals with style. Phenomena such as contractions, length of sentences, rhetorical questions or hedging are discussed in this chapter to provide students with enough information they need to enhance their academic writing skills.

Structure of a paper, which is described in chapter three, is one of the most important aspects of academic writing. If compared to describing people, it is probably a better idea to start from the top to the bottom, or from the whole to the tiny details than to jump from hairs to nails. In academic writing, it is also necessary to stick to a logical pattern and suppress an incoherent flight of ideas. Logical division of the paper to chapters as well as paragraphs is also discussed in this chapter.

The last chapter consists of several tips on what should not occur in the paper. Sometimes it may not be enough to only say what to do, but it is necessary to specify what to avoid as well.

As the name of the book indicates, it does not cover the whole topic of academic writing. On the contrary, I selected only those aspects of academic writing which I consider to be the most important based on the research I made for the theoretical part of this thesis.

As the book is intended to truly serve students and help them on a daily basis, it was necessary to design it in a style that reads easily and is not difficult to understand. Therefore, it is written in the "you" approach to ensure that it is attractive to students. More relaxed writing style with occasional informal vocabulary was employed as well. The main resources that I used to gain background knowledge are listed at the end of the book in bibliography.

I also created a proposal of a graphical transformation of the booklet, which can be found in the appendix. The format was changed to an A5 format and several creative elements were added.

5 Brief handbook for students

5.1 Introduction

If you are reading this handbook, it probably means that you want to work on your academic writing skills. Good decision! This handbook will help you throughout the whole process of writing a paper – from reading the instructions to the final proofreading. So, let's start!

A word on academic writing

Academic writing comprises all the essays, reports, theses and other papers you are asked to write during your studies. It is crucial to acquire the skill of academic writing during your studies because writing papers is an inseparable part of university education. I will not help you with the content – that's your job, but I will try to provide you with useful tips that will take your academic language and style to the next level.

Even though the attitudes towards the definition of academic writing differ to some extent, several features of academic writing are fixed.

Academic writing is:

- formal in language and style,
- objective,
- impersonal,
- structured,
- concise
- backed-up by evidence.

Your paper should possess these qualities as well. As they are closely related to strategy, structure and language, they will be separately described in more detail in the following chapters. So, the most important question that has arisen…

How to start?

It is absolutely normal if you are not certain how to start writing. When I am supposed to write something, the first thoughts that are in my mind are often doubts. So, if you have the same problem, don't worry! I hope that you will find what you are looking

for on these pages. If you have a lot on your mind, flip through the book. If you came with a certain problem, have a look at the ideas below and you can directly continue to the page you need to consult.

I don't know:

how to start. ..... go to page 29

how to read the instructions..... go to page 30

what to write about. ..... go to page 32

why I should even write it. ..... go to page 35

when it is the right time to start. ..... go to page 36

if the grammar I used is correct. ..... go to page 38

if the vocabulary is formal enough. ..... go to page 44

which language resources I can use..... go to page 46

if my paper makes sense. ..... go to page 51

OK. This list of problems is slightly terrifying. But I promise that you will feel better after reading a few chapters. So, roll up your sleeves and let's get down to it!

5.2 Before you start

Academic writing does not only include writing itself, it is much more complex. The paper you will have written is just the last fragment of the whole work. Writing a paper does not start by writing, it starts with making a strategy. A good strategy plays a crucial role in academic writing. In the following subchapters, I would like to explain the basic steps that you should consider before starting your work.

5.2.1 Strategy

One of the most important steps in academic writing is **to plan**. Swales and Feak stated in their book (which is definitely worth reading) that "a*cademic writing is a product of many considerations: audience, purpose, organization, style, flow, and presentation"* (2012, p. 3). And I cannot do more than agree. Therefore, I would like to provide you with a few ideas that could help you to prepare for writing in this chapter. Some of the points include:

- **Consider the instructions.** Reserve time for considering what type of writing you are supposed to produce. You simply need to read the instructions carefully. Carefully means on your own, slowly and three times! So-called instructional verbs (summarize, discuss, verify, compare etc.) that are incorporated in the instructions indicate how you might approach the writing. The next chapter (5.2.1.1) deals with the instructional verbs in more detail and is worth reading.
- **Brainstorm.** Think about the task before you start writing the paper. Brainstorming can help you to discover new thoughts and ideas that you can later incorporate into your work. If you spend 10 minutes brainstorming before you start writing, you can come across many different and more useful ideas than when you think and write simultaneously.
- **Make notes.** Every idea that comes across your mind (while brainstorming or when you're having tea with your grandma) can be valuable in your writing. So, jot down everything you think of – and if you are too lazy to journal (because I am!), just use your smartphone. Or, if you want to be creative, try the tool I present in chapter 5.2.1.2.

- **Schedule.** Creating a schedule for writing is certainly not a weird idea. It may help you to cope with the stress of a deadline more effectively. You can, for example, write one chapter a day; or, if you have enough time left, write a paragraph every day. Writing one paragraph a day is a piece of cake. But in the end, you have written the whole paper – that's a win-win!
- **Create a table of contents.** Division of the paper into chapters and subchapters can help you to make sure that every part of your work has a clear idea and each chapter follow the previous in a logical order. So, once you know the central idea of your work and a few subsequent topics; create a draft of the table of contents, which will help you when you have got off the track.

5.2.1.1 Instructional verbs

It is essential to adjust the content as well as the style and structure of your paper in accordance with the instructions provided. You need to stick to the instructions and write exactly what your teacher wants you to write.

Instructional verbs are those verbs that appear in the instructions provided by your teacher. They should help you to understand what you are supposed to write and in what style, but we all know it is not always the case. You will find a list of instructional verbs that you can encounter in the instructions below. It is crucial that you can interpret them correctly and adjust the language, structure and style of writing in compliance with them.

Analyse

If you are asked to analyse a topic, it basically means to examine the topic in detail. Break it down to smaller parts and look thoroughly at all of them. Explain the basic of each part clearly and state how and why they are connected. Do not forget to support all ideas with evidence.

Argue

This definitely does not mean to have an argument. You are supposed to gather various views on the topic by different authors and support their ideas or theories with evidence to determine the most suitable/practical theory for your application.

Criticise

If you are supposed to criticise a theory, you are asked to identify its weaknesses as well as strengths. However, your judgement needs to be absolutely objective, which means that it is based on logical reasoning and supported by evidence.

Compare

When you compare something, you define the differences and similarities. You access the problems or arguments and support them with evidence. You can also assess the advantages and disadvantages and determine which theory is more suitable for your application.

Define

Define basically means to provide a precise definition of something. However, this is not always easy as different authors have different views on the same topic. You, therefore, need to collect these ideas and put them together to create a suitable definition.

Discuss

When you discuss, you investigate a certain theory or topic and provide the arguments of both sides and give reasons and evidence for and against both of them. Even though you probably do not agree with one of them, you should always remain open-minded and objective.

Explain

Explain does not only mean to describe something, but you also have to make the problem clear and easy to understand. Provide information on its cause and implications. You can also provide a definition and examine it thoroughly or include different views on the topic.

Justify

If you are asked to justify something, you need to provide evidence and support it with arguments in a way that convinces the reader about the correctness of your point of view.

Summarise

To summarise means to state briefly the main points of the issue. You should not go into details or provide complex evidence and examples. Try to remain concise and stick to the overall principle only.

5.2.1.2 Mind maps

It is probably not necessary to introduce mind maps, but I will do it anyway – just in case someone has never heard about them. In simple terms, mind maps are diagrams that depict your ideas in a creative, playful way. They map your ideas naturally, exactly as they come out of your brain. Surprisingly, minds maps have been around for ages. The great minds such as Leonardo da Vinci, Issacs Newton or Richard Feynman used them regularly. Feynman even pushed it to the next level and created his own model for learning. You can google "Feynman technique" if you want to learn more.

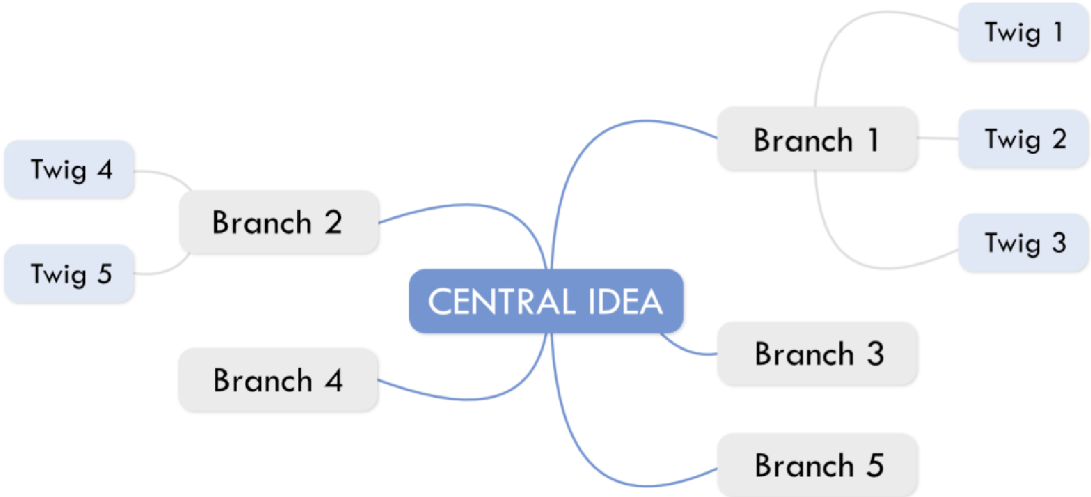


Figure 1 How to create a mind map

You can imagine the mind map as a tree (see fig. 1). The main idea (which is the concept you need to extend) is the trunk – the most important part of the tree that support the other parts (= subsequent ideas). Then you draw the main branches which represent the subsequent ideas and other minor twigs which grow from the branches.

In figure 2 there is a mind map that I created for myself to outline the content of this chapter, and now it comes handy to illustrate the process of creating the maps. To see the map, turn to the next page.

First, I decided to brainstorm how this chapter should look like. I am not an artist and I do not like my drawings, so I simply typed “mind map tool” in my browser and opened an online tool to make my work easier.

Secondly, I wrote the central idea in the centre, the phrase “mind map” is therefore the *trunk* of my mind map. Next, I just brainstormed, and it resulted in 5 branches which I further developed in the order in which the ideas occurred in my mind. But I did not create this mind map at one go. I came back to it three times and each time added new ideas or removed those ideas that I did not consider important anymore.

If you properly examine the mind map (it is on the next page), you will see that I did not use all ideas that are written there. And you also do not need to. It is a bank of ideas that can serve you to create a table of content for your paper.

And why you should try the mind maps too? They can be very helpful in terms of gathering ideas for writing. It is simply a different way of noting down your ideas and to be honest, it is sometimes nice to do the work differently. Also, every idea that comes across your mind can be traced back. Imagine you only made a list of words, which you forgot about. When you remembered it a week later, you probably would not recall why you write this word or phrase. Now, imagine you made a mind map. When you look at it a week later, you know exactly how the ideas are connected. Great! And what is even better, you can add a new idea right away – just draw a new branch and you can continue just where you ended.

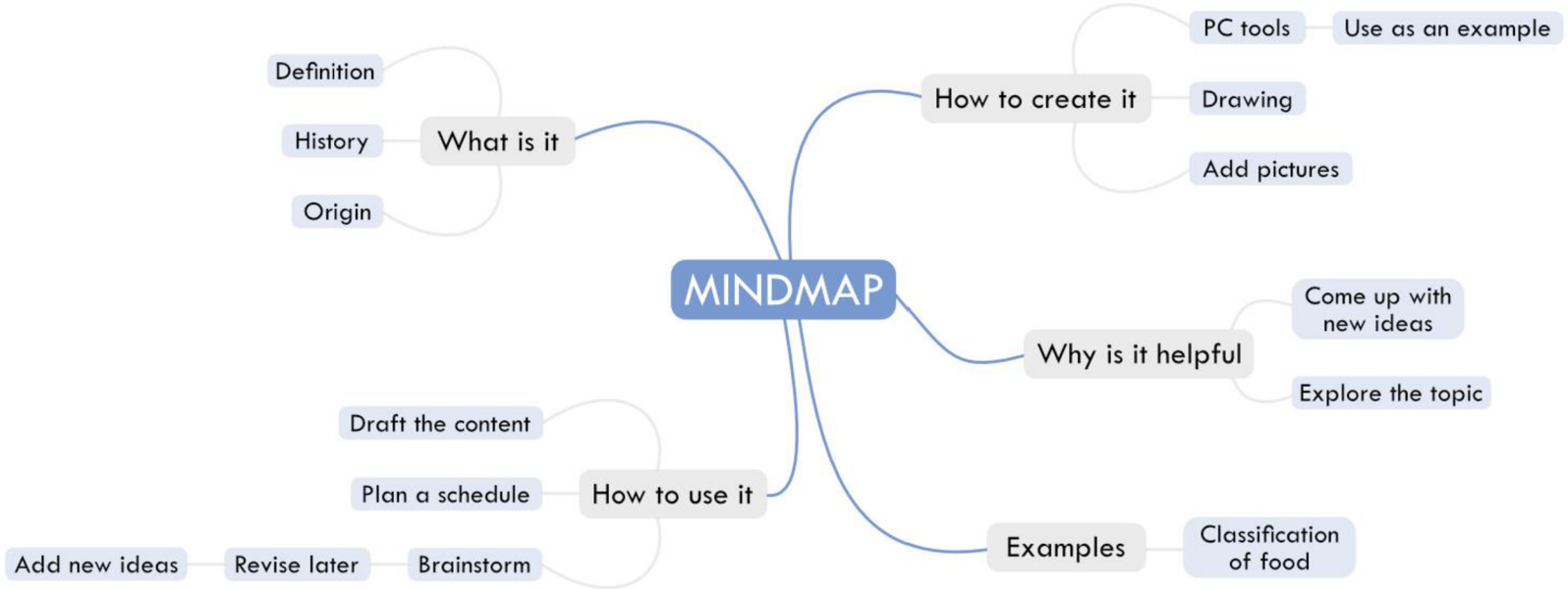


Figure 2 Example of a mind map

5.2.2 Audience

As it may influence the content of your paper and the language that is used, a crucial point in planning is to know the audience, which means those, who might read your paper. I know, I know, your audience is always the teacher, you would say. But I will give you another point of view. As your teacher is a professional, someone who is skilled and experienced in the field, you need to prove that you understand the topic well enough. Therefore, you also need to adapt the style and language to it. You should remain formal and avoid subjectivity. Even if your task is to evaluate, you should always back your arguments up with evidence. Do you see what I mean? Your audience influences the whole style of your paper.

To illustrate the idea, compare these two tasks:

- Write an open letter to a city council because you are not satisfied with their last decision on drinking on public.
- Write a letter to your old friend who lives abroad and tell them about your recent experiences.

So, in both cases, you are supposed to write a letter. But as you can probably see, it is a completely different letter every time. Why? You know the answer – the audience is different. Whereas in the first task you need to be formal, objective, impersonal and structured, in the second task you are actually required to be the exact opposite – informal, subjective and personal. However, you should also maintain some logical structure to ensure that your friend will understand what you are talking about.

5.2.3 Purpose

The purpose of writing is closely connected to the audience. As your audience is most commonly your tutor, the main purpose is to show that you are familiar with the topic (Swales & Feak, 2012). Easy to say, but what does it mean to you?

The purpose of writing usually determines how motivated we are and how much we enjoy the process. I said that because I literally hear you saying this: "*Why am I supposed to write this?! It is absolutely useless! I'll just copy the work of others, anyway.*" And I completely understand because I was saying something similar not a long time ago. But now I want to give you another point of view. You write it for yourself. Really. Forget

about the fact that you are supposed to demonstrate your competence for a moment and think about the possible advantages of writing a paper. No, don't say there are none. Think about what you can gain from writing a particular paper.

Maybe you learn to employ various resources in your paper or to classify the sources according to their relevance. Or, if you are writing a lab report, you can revise the whole lecture, and therefore you strengthen the knowledge you gained during that lesson.

Even if you think of only one positive thing, it is enough. Stick with it and you'll see that the writing gets easier.

5.2.4 Motivation vs. procrastination

We all know what it means to procrastinate. We all of a sudden need to watch the new series, play that computer game, check the social media every 15 minutes and not to forget that our rooms are cleaner than ever before. Generally speaking, we suddenly have a lot of different "important" tasks to do and we postpone writing or studying to the last possible moment. But there is one unpleasant aspect of this behaviour, we usually feel embarrassed or even frustrated, because we had not done enough or even nothing that we needed that day. Does it sound familiar to you? I hope it is not your problem, but I will give you some tools to cope procrastination anyway.

Time-management

So, we are back at the beginning. Plan your writing process. If you are supposed to write a 20 pages long paper, you are probably terrified. But what if you write one page at a time? If you divide the task into smaller portions, you basically set several goals. You can also make a to-do list. Every time you write something and complete the goal, you can cross it out from the list. To cross out the completed tasks is satisfying, am I right? Consequently, the task is much easier and as a bonus, you are satisfied every time you cross out the task. In other words, if you look at the job not as a whole but as several smaller tasks, it seems to be much easier.

Take breaks

Taking breaks is vital. When we postpone the tasks to the latest moment, we need to squeeze a lot of work into a small amount of time. However, then there is no time for breaks and at the end, we end up exhausted. So, take breaks instead of procrastinating. If

you schedule a short, ten-minute break after every 50 minutes of working, you will manage to do a lot more. So, make yourself a cup of tea, go for a walk around your room, have a look out the window, eat some fruits or check the messages. Then you can continue at ease.

Motivate yourself

Your motivation to write is most probably given by the fact that you want to obtain a grade, and therefore you must fulfil the criteria. This is something called extrinsic motivation. Extrinsic means *coming from outside*. In other words, you are forced to write papers even though you personally do not want to. Nevertheless, writing papers is an inseparable part of education. Therefore, it is mainly your task to transform the extrinsic motivation into intrinsic. Which basically means to find a personal purpose of writing (see chapter 5.2.3).

If you want to find more information about this topic, I wholeheartedly recommend that you read a book *End of Procrastination* (original name Konec prokrastinace) from a Czech author Petr Ludwig. It is full of great tools that you can employ to cope with procrastination and gain self-discipline. This chapter is based on the book as well.

5.3 Language

Language of academic writing is definitely not a black and white situation. If you expect a fast and easy language guide, I will disappoint you here. The variety of language that is used in academic writing is unexpectedly wide. It is more a series of choices that you have to make to ensure your writing is clear and comprehensible, but at the same time, you are comfortable writing it. Therefore, this chapter is more a job for you to find what is the most appropriate choice for you, and then apply it in your text. However, there are some features of academic writing that should be always kept in mind.

- **Formality.** Your writing has to be formal in language and style. There is no place for colloquial vocabulary, contractions or phrasal verbs.
- **Impersonality and objectiveness.** In the technical branch, you are usually not required to provide your opinion. On the other hand, your arguments should always be backed up by evidence. The use of passive voice is recommended in this case.

- **Clarity and conciseness.** Keep in mind that less is more – even when writing academic text. Your paper should not be too wordy, because it only deteriorates the comprehensibility. The logical structure is also crucial to ensure that the reader of your paper can follow your flow of ideas.

This was just a small overview of the main features. Individual aspects of grammar and vocabulary will be discussed in the following chapters. I will also give you tips on several resources that you can use to meet these features of academic writing and enhance the level of your writing. If language and style is your weak spot, don't worry about it when you're writing. Write the essay soon enough to be sure that you have enough time left to proofread and rewrite it if necessary. It's much better to focus on the content first and work on the language later.

5.3.1 Grammar

Grammar is basically a collection of rules and conventions that we obey to create sentences. I will not explain you the basics of grammar, of course. But there are specific parts of grammar that are frequently employed in academic writing. It comprises a passive voice that is used to emphasize impersonality, punctuation that tends to be more complicated in academic writing or nominalisation.

5.3.1.1 Passive voice

Passive voice is what makes the paper sound objective and impersonal because the agent of the action described in the sentence is not what we are interested in and can be completely omitted. In the technical field especially, the author or writer is often not that important as the device, invention or mechanism being discussed, and therefore it is better to use the passive. Let's explain it in more detail using the following examples.

A: *The* first *light-emitting diode was produced in 1962 by Nick Holonyak Jr.*

B: *Nick Holonyak Jr. produced the first light-emitting diode in 1962.*

The information provided by those sentences is exactly the same. However, we perceive the information differently in each sentence. In A, the diode is the main object of interest, whereas in B it is more likely Nick Holonyak, the invertor.

C: *I will summarize the findings in the next chapter.*

D: *The findings will be summarized in the next chapter.*

This example illustrates the impersonal style. It's probably no use in asking you which sentence is more impersonal; it is of course sentence D that sounds more impersonal as well as more objective and formal, and that's exactly what is required in academic writing. However, the passive should not be overused in the paper, otherwise, it would seem forced. It is good to find a balance, which would result in a mixture of passive and active voice.

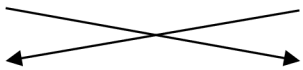
5.3.1.2 Nominalisation

To put it simply, nominalisation is the use of noun phrases. It is one of the common features of academic writing. The noun used in the phrase is often converted from a verb (see the examples). Nominalisation is a great tool to make your text concise, because thanks to nominalisation, you can compress more information into fewer words. In example A, two noun phrases are connected by a verb. Thanks to these noun phrases the sentence sounds smart and formal.

A: *In technical fields specifically, there is a common occurrence of passive voice that meets the requirements of impersonality and objectiveness.*

When you proofread your paper, you can analyse the sentences in which nominalisation would be possible and rewrite them. To do this, you need to find the verb that you then transform into a noun. See examples B.

B1*:* Electrons *get excited when they rapidly absorb energy.*



B2: *The rapid absorption of energy results in excitation of electrons.*

The nominalisation, however, is not always needed. The following example shows that nominalisation can sometimes also sound forced and it is better to omit it. See examples C.

C1: *The failure of students to plan their writing process results in the worsened evaluation.*

C2: Students *fail to plan their writing process, which results in the worsened evaluation.*

5.3.1.3 Punctuation

Punctuation is the usage of symbols that are incorporated in the text in order to make it more comprehensible. It is for instance used to separate phrases and sentences or to indicate which type of sentence it is. The most common punctuation marks are full stops, commas, semicolons, colons, dashes, hyphens, question marks, exclamation points, parentheses or brackets.

We undoubtedly all know how to use a full stop or brackets. However, the right usage of commas and semicolons is maybe not that clear, and yet so important especially in academic text. So, let's go through the most common examples, which you should not confuse in your papers. Spoiler: you need to know what dependent (DC) and independent (IC) clauses are to understand what I am talking about. Google it in case you are not sure.

Commas

There are several different scenarios when you should use a comma:

- **After an introductory phrase.**

An introductory phrase can comprise a single word or a longer phrase, but both of them require a comma. *Needless to say, the introductory phrase always needs to be separated by a comma. Yes, this is also an introductory word.*

- **If DC precedes IC in the sentence.**

Dependent clauses often start with *after, although, as, because, if, since, when, while, before, whereas, whether, even if, even though, in order to.*

If the first clause of the sentence is DC, there has to be a coma after it. There is no comma when IC goes first.

- **To separate items in a list.**

It does not matter if you are writing an essay, letter, complaint or bachelor's thesis; always make sure the punctuation is correct.

- **Around** words, phrases or clauses that are **not** an **essential** piece of **information** in the sentence.

The correct usage of punctuation, such as commas or semicolons, is a crucial skill of an academic writer. If you are not sure about the usage, which happens to be a problem for many people, you can always consult an online dictionary.

- **With FANBOYS.**

***F**or, **A**nd, **N**or, **B**ut, **O**r, **Y**et* and ***S**o* are so-called coordinating conjunctions connecting independent clauses, and they require a comma. *I advise you to learn the acronym by heart, so you can recall it more easily.*

There also are some cases when **no commas** are used. Do not use them before *that* or in sentences which contain a clause comprising essential information. Commas are not used in sentences where the independent clause goes first, and the dependent clause follows. The comma is also not used if the second part of the sentence does not contain a subject. For example sentence *He came home and went out again.* does not require any comma. Also, the fact that a sentence is long does not necessarily mean it needs commas; the usage of commas always depends on the sentence structure

Semicolons

In contradiction to the Czech language, English uses semicolons very often. They have to be used when:

- **Connecting two IC without coordinating conjunction.**

If you want to connect two independent clauses, you need either a comma + FANBOYS or a semicolon. The connection by a comma only would be "too weak" in this case, and therefore it is a mistake.

A: *The meeting has been going on for more than three hours; no important decision has yet been made.*

B: *The meeting has been going on for more than three hours, but no important decision has been made.*

The example A requires a semicolon because there is no linking word between the independent clauses. In example B, the clauses are connected with a FANBOY, which requires a comma.

- **Connecting two independent clauses with a conjunctive adverb.**

You can also use so-called conjunctive adverbs to connect two IC. They require a semicolon that precedes the adverb and a comma following the adverb.

These adverbs are for example: *also, still, however, consequently, besides, moreover, otherwise, as a result, in addition, on the other hand, therefore* etc.

It would be probably better to read this chapter several times; otherwise, you can't be sure that you remember everything.

The sentence in example C also requires both a semicolon and a comma, because there is a conjunctive adverb – however.

C: *The meeting has been going on for more than three hours; however, no important decision has yet been made.*

Examples A, B and C are the same sentences that are made up of two independent clauses and is written in three different ways requiring different punctuation. Therefore, if you are not sure about the correct punctuation, you can try to modify the sentence in order to handle the punctuation correctly.

5.3.1.4 Subject-verb agreement

It can seem silly that I want to talk about the subject-verb agreement here. Everyone knows that subject and verb need to "agree" in number (which means they both need to be either plural or singular). However, there are some cases that may be tricky, so you should always make sure what the subject of the sentence is and whether the verb agrees. In short sentences, the verb usually follows the subject, but it can be more complicated in longer sentences. See the examples A, which show that in longer sentences the subject and verb are far apart, and other nouns can easily confuse you. The subject-verb agreement is in bolt and the possibly confusing noun is underlined to keep it clear.

A1: *Several leading* ***members*** *of the party* ***have*** *criticised the improvement proposal.*

A2: *The only* ***explanation*** *that he was able to deliver for his shameful actions* ***was*** *that he was tired.*

Several other cases might be problematic:

A and B is plural if the subject is seen as two different units.

Commas and semicolons are tricky.

And singular if the subject is seen as a single unit.

Romeo and Juliet is a well-known play.

A or B / Neither A nor B / Either A or B take a singular verb if the items are singular and plural verb if the items are plural.

Neither the restaurants nor the shops are open today.

Either the manager or the accountant is at work.

If one part of the subject is singular and the other plural, it is stylistically more appropriate to place the plural part second and use a plural verb:

Neither the manager nor the employees are at work.

(Only) one of … who/which/that

One is a singular pronoun and goes with a singular verb, but a phrase "one of … that" can be problematic (see the examples below).

One *of the students really* ***enjoys*** *writing theses.*

He is definitely not one of the ***students*** *who really* ***enjoy*** *writing essays.* (Students enjoy)

She *is the only one of the students who really* ***enjoys*** *writing essays.* (Only she enjoys)

Singular subject – Plural complement – Singular verb

This is probably the trickiest part for Czech speakers because in the Czech language it is exactly the opposite.

A common ***problem*** *for the students* ***is*** *commas.*

The subject is a clause.

If the subject is a clause it takes a singular verb.

Writing academic *papers is not a skill you're born with.*

In "What clause", however, use a singular verb if the following noun is singular and plural verb if the following noun is plural:

What worries us are diminishing resources.

What worries us is the indifference of the government.

You should also be aware of uncountable nouns that usually take a singular verb. Especially in academic discourse, abstract words are frequently employed, and they are often uncountable. You can commonly encounter words such as data, information, evidence, progress, research, knowledge, equipment and many others.

5.3.2 Vocabulary

Vocabulary also has to meet the criteria of formal language. Thus, you should not employ colloquial language such as slang, idioms, phrasal verbs or vague expressions in your papers. Repetition is also a trait of poor style, and thus you should avoid it.

Every-day words can change their meaning when used in a specific context. *Bit*, for example, can be a computing unit or a little piece of something. Colloquial words may also have their substitutions in academic variety (e.g. show → illustrate, outside → exterior, a lot of → many).

5.3.2.1 Nouns

We have already spoken about nominalisation, which commonly occurs in academic text. In order to be able to incorporate nominalisation in your paper, you need to be familiar with the "general academic nouns" – formal and usually quite abstract nouns that you often encounter in the papers no matter which field you are concern with.

There is also vocabulary that is specific to particular areas. In electrical engineering, for example, you have to know terms such as *shaft, bolt, transducer, switch* or *relay*. In informatics, it is then for instance *cache, driver, bit, port* or *router*. You will learn this vocabulary naturally, as you will deepen your knowledge in the field.

5.3.2.2 Modifiers

Modifiers usually comprise adjectives and adverbs. They are called modifiers because they modify the word – they provide details, emphasis or specific information. The text is more detailed thanks to them. But it can easily become wordy, so don't overuse them. Sometimes it is better to leave the text plain.

There are some examples of modifiers:

Adverbs: *relatively, apparently, rather, fairly, particularly, primarily, generally, specifically, approximately, precisely, highly.*

Adjectives: *appropriate, accurate, relative, characteristic, relevant, significant, precise, potential, complex, specific, traditional.*

Number of	→	*Relatively high number of*
Summary	→	*Fairly accurate summary*
Small sample	→	*Rather small sample*
Feature	→	*Characteristic feature*

5.3.2.3 Verbs

There are 3 points that you should be aware of when writing academic text:

- **No phrasal verbs.** If it is possible, use their one-word synonyms. There are examples of several phrasal verbs and their synonym which are more appropriate for academic texts.

Carry out	→	*Conduct*
Come up with	→	*Develop*
Look into	→	*Examine*
Put into practice	→	*Implement*
Get rid of	→	*Eliminate*
Make easy	→	*Facilitate*

- Verb patterns matter. Make sure that you know how to use the verbs when you link more of them together. You can find verb patterns in monolingual dictionaries.
- Subject-verb agreement. This phenomenon is discussed in chapter 5.3.1.4.

5.3.3 Language resources

This chapter is incorporated in the handbook in order to provide you with useful resources that could improve your style or vocabulary. These resources are namely monolingual and collocation dictionaries, thesaurus and corpus. All of them can help you to enhance your papers with minimal effort by providing an endless source of set phrases, verb patterns or collocations, and more importantly their use in sentences.

5.3.3.1 Monolingual dictionary

Online monolingual dictionaries such as Oxford or Cambridge dictionaries can help you when you are not sure about:

- The right meaning of the word,
- spelling,
- verb patterns,
- whether the noun is countable,
- usage in sentences,
- collocations.

It is better to look at the issue immediately while writing because you could forget about it and that would result in unnecessary mistakes. I always open a dictionary in my browser as soon as I start writing to save some time later when I need to look for something.

5.3.3.2 Collocation dictionary

Collocations are super useful when you want to extend your sentences and add some specific information. I personally like the Online OXFORD Collocation Dictionary. But you can simply google the word you need to modify together with "collocations" (e.g. "results collocations"), and then you can explore the hits to find what will suit you the most. If we will stick to the word *results*, there are some examples of collocations that might be useful:

Adjectives: *logical, good, positive, desired, disastrous, unfortunate, inevitable, impressive, dramatic, spectacular, surprising, lasting*

Verbs: *have, get, obtain, achieve, produce*

As for adjectives, I would be careful with the word *good*, because that basically does not say anything about the results. Always try to be as specific as possible.

The verbs *get* and *have* are not the most formal, so rather select from the last three depending on what you want to say.

So, from a sentence: *The study has good results*.

You can make: *Impressive results were achieved in the study.*

In 3 easy steps:

- Adding specific information by using collocation dictionary,
- exchanging the verb for a more formal version,
- and converting the active voice to passive.

5.3.3.3 Thesaurus

Thesaurus can generously contribute by presenting a large number of synonyms that are a great tool against word repetition. Let explore the synonyms of the word *thing*. You may won't believe me, but according to Thesaurus.com there are more than 100 words that could be possibly used instead of a *thing*. There is a list of my favourites.

Aspect	Concept	Concern	Detail
Event	Fact	Feature	Idea
Information	Item	Object	Phenomenon
Point	Situation	Subject	Quality

Table 6 Thing – synonyms

All of them sounds better than the infamous *thing*. You only need to consider what meaning “your thing” has to manage to select the best synonym.

5.3.3.4 Corpus

Corpus is a collection of text – written or spoken, academic, professional or colloquial. You can, for example, verify how frequently used the collocation you selected is or the usage of a particular word in a sentence. You can, for example, try Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) or British National Corpus (BNC).

Tips for corpus search

- you can select academic text only under the search window,
- [n*] can be used to represent any noun,
- [v*] = verb,
- [r*] = adverb,
- [j*] = adjective,
- [p*] = pronoun,
- [d*] = determiner,
- [c*] = conjunction,
- [i*] = preposition,
- a question mark can be used to replace any single letter,
- square brackets extend the search to any form of a word, (when you type [have], it searches for have, has, had).

When you filter academic text only, you can also verify whether the word you want to use is commonly employed in academic writing or not. The number of hits will indicate how often it is incorporated in the papers. But do not only follow the number, you should also read a bit of the text in order to decide if the meaning stays the same and if the text is truly academic. You know it well: trust, but verify!

All these sources are similar to a certain extent. It rather depends on you, what resource will suit you the most. If you get used to employing these sources in your writing process, your papers will become more sophisticated without expending a great deal of effort.

5.4 Style

It has been said many times that academic style is formal, objective and impersonal. There are some tips that can help you to create a formal piece of writing.

5.4.1 Sentence length

The length of sentences naturally varies, and it is not possible to determine the right number of words that should form a sentence. Even though there is no correct length of a sentence, you should avoid writing either too short or too long sentences. You do not need to count the exact number of words in each sentence in order to determine whether the sentence is of appropriate length. It is enough to read the text as a whole, and I guarantee that you will notice if the length is not suitable. You can read the following examples:

Extremely short sentences are bad. They sound choppy. It is not good for the essay. I'll give you a piece of advice. Try to make them longer. You will see the result immediately.

Extremely long sentences are also bad for your essay because they make the essay sound wordy even if it is not, which is not appropriate, as the reader will easily get tired of reading such long sentences; and that is the main reason, why you should try to divide them into a higher number of shorter sentences to increase comprehensibility of the text as a whole.

The first example is many short sentences and the second is only one sentence that is way too long. None of it is appropriate. The best outcome is a variable length of sentences that flows naturally and is easy to read.

5.4.2 Contractions

Even though contractions are widely used in spoken academic discourse, they should not be employed in writing. They are simply not formal. You probably noticed that I often use them in this book. That's because I wanted to keep the text easy to read, and therefore I chose such a style of writing that is definitely not academic, but rather neutral or even informal sometimes.

I randomly selected 10 common contractions and wrote their full versions in the following table.

It's	→	It is / It has
Isn't	→	Is not
There's	→	There is / There has

That's	→	That is / That has
Wouldn't	→	Would not
Can't	→	Can not
Shouldn't	→	Should not
Let's	→	Let us

5.4.3 Rhetorical questions

Purely and simply, just don't use them. But keep reading if you want to know why. Rhetorical questions are those which are not expected to be answered. Writers use them to make their writing more creative and to make an impression on the readers as well. Even though you may think that using rhetorical questions could be beneficial for your paper, the opposite is the truth. Rhetorical questions engage the reader by leaving open space for them to fill with their own thoughts and ideas. In academic style, however, there should be no room left for the imagination. The information provided needs to be clear and straightforward. In addition to this, you are supposed to provide answers, not questions. Does it make sense?

5.4.4 Hedging

Hedging means avoiding definite statements. You should make sure that you are not imposing your ideas on others when writing academic texts because that would deny the requirement of objectivity, and therefore deteriorate your paper. In other words, you should simply indicate that you are "not sure" about the accuracy of the idea even though it is absolutely accurate and correct – it has to be, you shouldn't present statements you are not sure about. Hedging is only a matter of politeness. So, let's go through the list of words that you can employ in the sentence to make it less straightforward.

Verbs: *seem, tend, appear, believe, assume, suggest, indicate, propose, consider*

Modal verbs: *could, should, would, might, can, may*

Adverbs*: fairly, likely, possibly, probably, sometimes, often, usually, relatively*

Adjectives: *probable, possible, relative, evident*

Nouns*: probability, possibility, suggestion, assumption, belief, proposal*

Phrases*: to certain/considerable extent, it is widely agreed, according to the study, in the view of many researchers.*

Climate change is caused by humans.
Climate change might be caused by humans.

It has been widely agreed that climate change is caused by humans.
In the view of many researchers, climate change might be caused by humans.

The previous study results are wrong.
The previous study results appear to be wrong.

At the same time, however, you should avoid vague expressions. In every-day life, we usually use vague expressions when we don't know something, or we don't want to speak about it. There is no place for such a strategy in academic papers. To suppress vagueness, you can try to use modifiers (see chapter 5.3.2.2).

5.5 Structure

The structure of a paper is one of the most important aspects of academic writing. If compared to describing people, it is probably a better idea to start from the top to the bottom, or from the whole to the tiny details than to jump from hairs to nails. In academic writing, it is also necessary to stick to a pattern and suppress often an incoherent flight of ideas.

Present old information before new. The old information that is familiar to the reader creates a basis for the newly presented ideas. You can then easily create a link between the old and new ideas, and therefore maintain a clear arrangement of the text.

The connection of sentences and paragraphs in the paper is known as cohesion, and it is an important aspect of the structure. Linking words are a great tool to ensure the logical arrangement of the paper. They indicate the relationship between individual sentences (or ideas). Different linking words have a different purpose in writing. There are some of them that you might adopt in your paper:

- To point out a conflict: *On the other hand, in contrast to, however, but, whereas, while.*

- To emphasize: *In addition, moreover, even more, besides, more importantly.*
- To provide reasons: *Therefore, thus, consequently, as a result, so.*
- To introduce an example: *For example, especially, such as, to illustrate, particularly.*

Paragraphs should be also interconnected. Every paragraph should include one idea, and it is crucial to link these ideas together in a logical manner. A few practical phrases to ensure linking paragraphs together follow.

- Using numerals: *Firstly, secondly, first of all, to begin with.*
- To develop an idea: *Next, subsequently, afterwards, then.*
- To summarize: *Consequently, given these points, hence, altogether.*
- To add information: *Also, in fact, additionally, alternatively, further.*

Cohesion is also guaranteed by repetition. If you repeat old information and specify how it is connected to the new information, you establish a relationship and therefore maintain the link between the ideas.

5.6 What to avoid

This chapter summarizes 8 points that you should avoid when writing academic papers. Some of them already appeared in previous chapters but practice makes perfect, so let's revise them and add some extra points.

1. Do not exaggerate. Present the real information you have, and do not try to improve your paper by exaggerating. It does not work.
2. No personal comments. If you are asked to add your personal attitude, it is perfectly ok. Otherwise, try to stay objective whether you like it or not.
3. Do not digress from the topic. Make sure that the whole paper stays within the limits of your topic. Digression from the topic is usually "awarded" by reduction of points in your assessment.
4. Suppress word repetition. Try to use some of the resources; they will definitely help you overcome word repetition. If you are not sure whether it is your problem, you can search the document for several words that might repeat and then substitute them.

5. Be careful with run-on expressions (etc., and so on). The run-on expression can add vagueness to your text and that is not desirable. You can, therefore, replace them with *such as* or *including* and list only two or three items.
6. No sentence fragments. Make sure that your sentences always contain both the subject and the verb, otherwise, the sentence can't make sense.
7. No grammar and spelling errors. If the content is outstanding, the teacher may overlook some of the minor mistakes. However, you should always proofread your paper or give it to someone else to do it for you.
8. Avoid incoherent flow of ideas. Keep in mind that the reader has to be able to follow your thoughts. Present old information before new in order to build a basis for connecting the information which comes next.

5.7 Conclusion

So, this is it! I hope that you did find what you were searching for on these pages. If you still have doubts, go to search online. The internet is an infinite source of information, but please be careful to consult only reliable webpages. You can find a lot of information on academic writing e.g. from teachers of various universities in English speaking countries. And the last thing: good luck with your papers!

6 Conclusion

It is slightly difficult to arrive at a conclusion with regard to the theoretical character of this paper. The aim of this bachelor's thesis was to gather relevant information on academic writing in order to design a brief handbook for students. Given these points, I believe that the objective of the thesis was accomplished.

It was already said before that academic writing is a crucial skill for university education. In addition to this, the acquisition of writing skills during the studies could help students to deliver satisfactory performance in their professional career. The aspects of academic writing penetrate the professional sphere as well, and therefore the skill of creating fine academic text is transferable to the future career of the students.

Unfortunately, academic writing can be problematic for many students and its difficultness is sometimes underestimated by students which results in poor essays. Supposing that students have sufficient amount of study materials that provide relevant and accurate information, give them the right support during the writing process and make their struggling with writing academic text easier, their attitude towards writing could become more positive.

I believe that the brief handbook for students that was created as a part of this thesis satisfies these criteria and could be a powerful learning tool that would help students not only with the writing process but also to change their perception of academic writing.

Rozšířený abstrakt v českém jazyce

Tato bakalářská práce psaná v anglickém jazyce s názvem *Academic writing characteristic: A brief handbook for students* se zabývá tématem akademického písemného stylu. S akademickým písemným stylem se setkává každý student vysoké školy, pro mnohé z nich však může představovat nemalé potíže. Proto se tato práce zaměřuje nejen na akademický styl jako takový, ale také obsahuje stručnou příručku pro studenty, která by jim mohla pomoci usnadnit těžkosti spojené s vytvářením akademických textů v angličtině.

První část práce je částí teoretickou, shrnuje pojem akademický písemný styl, nastiňuje jeho definici a poskytuje jeho podrobnou charakteristiku. Anglický jazyk se v dnešní době pyšní titulem Lingua franca, a především ve vědě a technice je hojně využíván nad rámec rodilých mluvčí. I z tohoto důvodu je téměř nutné, aby dnešní studenti technických oborů a potenciálně budoucí vědci byli seznámeni s problematikou psaní akademických textů v anglickém jazyce. Akademické texty totiž nejsou jen záležitostí vysokých škol, jak by se mohlo na první pohled zdát, ale také výzkumných pracovníků a expertů nejen technických oborů. Výborné výsledky studie totiž ještě neznamenají povedený výzkum, je také potřeba umět studii okomentovat a podat výsledky takovým způsobem, který upoutá pozornost okolí.

Stanovit definici akademického písemného stylu není úplně jednoduchá záležitost, protože jak lingvisté, tak i vysokoškolští profesoři mají na tento styl odlišné pohledy. I přes to ale akademický písemný styl má několik vlastností, které se dají považovat za stěžejní. Texty by vždy měly být psané formálním jazykem, zůstat objektivní, a hlavně logicky strukturované. Je důležité, aby jazyk i styl odpovídaly požadavkům odborného stylu. Autor by si také měl udržet odstup a vyhnout se subjektivním závěrům. Práce by vždy měla být podpořena dostatkem důkazů a čerpat z ověřených zdrojů. V neposlední řadě text také musí být terminologicky přesný a obsahově jasný.

Vyhovět požadavkům odborného stylu lze také pomocí jazykových prostředků jako je například trpný rod, nominalizace neboli využívání jmenných struktur, tzv. *hedges*, které oslabují výpovědní sílu výpovědi a také pomocí slovní zásoby, především formálních ustálených výrazů, které se v akademických textech hojně využívají.

Tvorba akademických textů však nezačíná psaním jako takovým, ale už před tím přípravou a vytvořením strategie. K vytvoření solidního textu je zapotřebí i přesný plán.

Konec teoretické části tvoří nejčastější typy akademických textů, se kterými by se studenti mohli při studiích setkat, jejich stručný popis a struktura. Je to například esej, která je pravděpodobně nejčastěji zadávaným útvarem, dále zpráva o projektu, abstrakt a bakalářská práce, která je nedílnou součástí vzdělání, a bez jejího úspěšného odevzdání by nebylo možné vzdělání završit.

Druhá část práce, tedy část praktická, se věnuje stručné příručce pro studenty. Příručka je primárně navržena pro studenty oboru Angličtina v elektrotechnice a informatice na VUT v Brně, ale věřím tomu, že ji využití i ostatní studenti, kteří potřebují psát akademické texty anglicky. Příručka je rozdělena do pěti kapitol, které rozebírají aspekty akademického písemného stylu v praxi a dalších podkapitol, které rozvádějí daná témata. Jejím hlavním cílem je pomoci studentům usnadnit možné problémy, se kterými se mohou při psaní akademických textů v angličtině setkat. Příručka není zaměřena jen na jazykovou složku, ale na proces psaní jako takový a téměř polovina z ní je věnována strategii a přípravě.

První kapitola příručky je věnována strategii a plánování. Psaní textu není jednorázová záležitost a je potřeba ji dobře promyslet. Studenti však často odkládají psaní na poslední chvíli a už jim nezbývá čas si před psaním připravit plán. Tato kapitola by jim měla poskytnout dostatečné množství tipů, jak se na psaní dobře připravit. Je to například důkladné čtení instrukcí, protože instrukce udávají, jak má text vypadat a správné pochopení instrukcí je tedy klíčové k napsání vhodného textu. Dále je to vytvoření rozvrhu psaní. Pokud má student napsat dvaceti stránkovou esej, není to snadný úkol. Ale pokud esej dopředu důkladně promyslí, připraví si obsah jednotlivých kapitol a rozvrhne si psaní do několika týdnů, nejeví se tento úkol tak složitý. I proto se v této kapitole věnuji motivaci k psaní a prokrastinaci.

Druhá kapitola se věnuje jazykové stránce, tedy gramatice a slovní zásobě. Jak již bylo zmíněno, jazykové prostředky použité v textu určují jeho styl. Akademické texty by měly být formální, objektivní, bez citových zabarvení, přesné a také kultivované. A psaní takových textů není schopnost, se kterou se rodíme. V příručce tedy studenti najdou

příklady a praktické ukázky, které jim pomohou cestu k takovému textu usnadnit. Součástí této kapitoly jsou také tipy na zdroje, které studenti mohou volně využívat, aby svoje práce obohatili a vylepšili svůj jazykový projev. Jedná se o výkladové slovníky, které nabízejí užitečné informace o významu slov, ale i jejich použití ve větě, slovníky synonym, které jsou výborným nástrojem proti opakování slov, nebo korpus, který poskytuje nepřeberné množství ukázek použití slov a frází ve větách a dají se v něm tak najít užitečné obraty.

Další kapitola se zabývá stylistickými prostředky akademických textů. Zamýšlí se nad jevy jako je délka vět, použití řečnických otázek nebo zkrácených forem. Protože nelze jednoznačně určit správnost těchto jevů, jsou tyto kapitoly spíše doporučením pro studenty, aby si mohli sami zvolit, zda dané prostředky využívat či nikoli. Také je zde podrobněji vysvětleno používání takzvaných *hedges,* které zjemňují sílu výpovědi a dodávají textu zdvořilostní charakter.

Předposlední kapitola je věnována struktuře textu. Jedná se jak o členění textu na kapitoly, podkapitoly a odstavce, tak i na jednotlivé členění informací. Propaguji v příručce postup *old-to-new*, tedy nejprve v textu prezentovat známé informace a na jejich základě text rozšiřovat a postupně se dopracovat k novým poznatkům a závěrům. Logické členění informací je klíčové pro správné pochopení čtenářem a pro studenty důležité i z hlediska hodnocení.

Poslední kapitola je závěrečným shrnutím příručky a obsahuje osm bodů, které zdůrazňují, čeho se při psaní akademických textů vyhnout. Dosud příručka obsahovala rady typu „co dělat“, ale myslím, že je dobré i z druhého pohledu naznačit „co nedělat“ a tak vytvořit mantinely ve kterých by se studenti mohli pohybovat.

Příručka je založena na teoretické části této práce a její kapitoly byly stanoveny na základě analýzy doporučených zdrojů. Jak již bylo zmíněno, je to pouze *stručná* příručka, a tudíž není možné, aby svým omezeným rozsahem pokryla takto obsáhlé téma, kterým je psaní akademických textů. I tak ale věřím, že v ní studenti najdou užitečné informace a posunou se v tvorbě akademických textů zase o kousek dál.

Klíčová slova: Akademický písemný styl, příručka pro studenty, akademické žánry

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8 Appendix