EFL EDUCATION

Academic Writing 101

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EFL Education
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1. How to structure your term paper

The main goal of a term paper is to show your ability to work scientifically. In other words, you should show that you

- understand and are able to reflect academic literature, facts and approaches;
- make the topic your own, setting your own priorities, focus and guiding questions or hypotheses;
- are able to apply the knowledge gained from the literature and transfer this knowledge to other fields or aspects, including your own examples and analyses;
- demonstrate the ability to criticise your sources (constructively and in proper academic style) and to position yourself in relation to them.

1.1 Coming up with a research question

In EFL Education, your research question functions as the backbone of your paper. When thinking about a research question, try to formulate it as detailed as possible. In most cases, this means that your research question should give information about (1) your group of interest (e.g. type of school and grade of EFL learners), (2) the theoretical framework you will refer to (e.g. Willis' task cycle) as well as (3) the phenomenon/issue you will investigate. Having decided on a research question, make sure that the structure of your paper reflects its key elements.

1.2 Introduction

As a rule of thumb, the introduction should not be longer than 1/10 of the paper. In this part, you introduce the reader to your topic. Explain what the object of your study is and how you will approach it (including the theories and methods applied). What are your main research questions, and why should these questions be asked, or: what knowledge and insights can be gained? Why is this topic relevant to EFL education? You can already hint at the results which you hope to achieve by the end of the paper.

1.3 Main part

The central part of your paper is divided into chapters (if necessary with subsections, see 3.1). In this part, you offer a comprehensive treatment of the topic of your paper and the different aspects related to it. You may include a summary or critical interpretation at the end of each major section. At the very latest, this summary and critical interpretation must be included in the conclusion at the end of the paper, see 1.4.

The exact structure of the main part varies depending on the topic and, thereby, on the kind of paper you deliver. In the field of EFL Education, you can decide between two different kinds of papers:

- an empirical paper comprises a (1) theoretical context, (2) description of the methods used for collecting and analysing data, (3) presentation and discussion of your findings related to your research question.

- a conceptual paper which does not require you to collect data yourself. Instead, it focuses on the proposition and discussion of new relationships amongst (already existing) concepts. Therefore, the structure of the main part follows the logic of your argument.

If you are not sure about the structure or which aspects to include, ask your fellow students for their opinion and, then, discuss the issue with your lecturer.

Even though you should show that you have read and understood the literature available for your topic, use quotations sparingly to enhance your own arguments. If you directly quote passages from a book, or include pieces of literature, it must be clear why you are doing so, i.e. it must be justified by the discussion you are engaged in at that point in your paper. You should not just include quotations for the purpose of filling pages. Do not string them together but integrate them into your writing. After all, this is your text, and the reader (i.e. your lecturer) wants to hear what you have to say in your own words (also see 2). This will show that you have processed the information mentally for yourself.

1.3.1   Theoretical context

The aim of this section is to introduce your reader to those theories and concepts your research is grounded in. If you are going to refer to certain models or theoretical frameworks, make sure that you outline these theories accordingly. The degree of detail of these descriptions varies depending on their importance for your research. In most cases, you won't be the first person to do research on the topic of your choice. Use this section to familiarise your reader with already existing research by summarising the results of other seminal studies in the field of EFL Education. The theoretical context you provide should point out the need for further research as a basis for your research question to evolve.

1.3.2   Research methodology

If you decide to collect data for an empirical paper, the processes of data collection and analysis should be outlined in this section. Apart from merely describing the process of data collection you are planning to follow, make sure to justify your decisions. Explain clearly

- what type of data you aim to collect and why this type of data might be the best choice,
- which method you use to analyse your data appropriately with regard to the type of data,
- and how the anticipated results may contribute to the discussion of your research question.

Do not shy away from being sceptical about your research methodology; instead, point out critical elements so that you can refer to them during the discussion of your results.

1.3.3   Presentation and discussion of your results

This last section of your main part is where you pull all the strings together: based on what you have worked out so far as a theoretical context and research methodology, provide an answer to your research question. In most of the cases, however, such an answer might not be conclusive. Prove to the reader that you adopted a critical stance on the issue in question. Compare and contrast theory-based suggestions with your data or indicate methodological flaws to reflect upon your research in an academic manner.

1.4 Conclusion

In this section you should try to summarise and give a final judgment on your major findings (briefly), drawing together the various findings and threads of arguments developed in the paper. A critical evaluation of the material should be offered to the reader and you should try to express your own views on what you have read and presented in your own words. The conclusion should be at least half a page long. You can also call this section 'Summary'.

You may decide to pick one or more of the following ways to conclude your paper.

▪ Review your initial research question and summarise your results.
▪ Consider the relevance of your results and whether you can make any suggestions on the basis of your findings.
▪ Embed your findings in a wider context of present, past or future research or school-based EFL education.

At the very end of the paper, it is always good to add an outlook. In the outlook you can mention questions which still need to be looked into and any interesting issues related to your topic which you could not cover but which would be worth investigating in the future.

1.5 Bibliography/References

This section must include all references mentioned in the body of the text (not including secondary sources mentioned in quotations from other authors). Do not put books or articles in the references section which you did not quote in the body of the text. References are listed in alphabetical order (by name of author, or by title in case of sources without author). An overview of the most important quotation conventions can be found in the appendix. Please make sure that the reference format is used consistently according to the rules of APA Style (7th edition). For a more detailed description of citation conventions according to the APA Style, please refer to the official pocket style guide from the American Psychological Association which can be found in our university library.

You can use Internet sources in a term paper but must specify them as precisely as possible. In order to pick and choose from the incredible amount of information found online, you must already master your topic, which is why you should first check the sources available in the library before searching for additional material online. Make sure that you only use materials from university departments or reputable sources, such as a publisher or a government department or agency. Be sceptical about anything you read in the internet and try and confirm information you take from it by consulting at least two independent sources.

> **TIP** Depending on the scope of your research, keeping track of quotations and in-text references can sometimes be a tough and demanding challenge. In this case, reference management applications such as Citavi or EndNote might be worth a try.
> Primo, the catalogue of the university library, provides a function to automatically create bibliography entries. To use this function, choose a piece of literature online, click on *Zitierformat* and choose APA Style. This is also a helpful resource to check if you formatted your bibliography correctly.

2. Improving your writing skills

2.1 Style of writing

Present your contents in precise and clear words, avoid too many repetitions and apply the correct terminology. Imagine a reader (not your lecturer) who has a certain background knowledge of EFL education, but who is reading about this particular topic for the first time. Use an argumentative matter-of-fact style; it is great to be enthusiastic about a topic, but your emotions (positive or negative) must not be reflected in the text.

Regarding the contents, every term paper is, of course, different. However, there are some general guidelines, which will help you write a good paper.

- Build your paper around a concise and precise research question (see 1.1); make your main topic clear in the title already, so that the reader knows what the paper is about; in the text, stick to this topic, providing arguments to support or dispute your thesis, or to discuss your topic from different perspectives.

- Do not just report what you have read in the secondary literature, do not simply sum up your sources; a term paper has to include your own research, assessments and critical thinking.

- Do not accept what you read too readily; question your sources; if you do not agree with what you read, state how your views differ from it and criticise constructively.

- Make use of your teaching knowledge; look at everything you read, and your own writing too, through a teacher's lens, and apply the teaching knowledge you have acquired.

> **TIP** When reading literature, try to notice and learn from the academic style used by published authors. How is this style new or different; which traits or formulations could you adopt?

When you are reflecting on what you have read or collected, make sure to ask yourself why something is the case, do not just say that it is so. For instance, you might state that language acquisition is quick and thorough for the first language and slower and less perfect for the second language later in life. Having said this, you must then ask yourself the question: why is this so and to what extent might this be related to your research question? Try then and offer a principled explanation in a fashion acceptable in foreign language education.

If you experience difficulties sticking to an argumentative style of writing, the PIE method might help you to improve your writing skills. PIE is an abbreviation for three necessary steps you should follow whenever you try to make an argument in your paper: point, illustrate, and explain. Start each argument by clarifying your point. Usually, the topic sentence of a paragraph serves this well. Afterwards, illustrate your main idea which can be done in manifold ways – you might want to quote a study, refer to statistics, or provide another piece of evidence. Finally, explain your argument's relevance for answering your research question by elaborating on the connection between your main idea and the evidence presented before.

2.2 Word bank

- Introducing/Concluding: The main goal of this paper is to..., the main question addressed is..., in conclusion...
- To add information: Additionally, in addition, furthermore, moreover, similarly.
- To contrast: However, on the one hand... on the other hand, nevertheless, in contrast.
- To show results: Consequently, in consequence, for this reason, as a result, therefore.
- Time references: Then, at this/that stage, finally.

> **TIP** If you are looking for an extensive list of useful phrases, you might want to have a closer look at this chapter from *English for Writing Research Papers* by Adrian Wallwork.

2.3 Abbreviations

Please make sure to use the abbreviations common in English:

ch., chs.	chapter, chapters
cf.	compare (i.e. Latin *conferre*)
ed.	editor, edition, edited by
e.g.	for example (i.e. Latin *exempli gratia*)
et al.	and others (i.e. Latin *et alii*)
i.e.	that is/that means (i.e. Latin *id est*)
n.d.	no date of publication
n.p.	no place of publication/no publisher
n. pag.	no pagination
vol., vols.	volume, volumes

3. Additional information on more advanced papers

3.1 Table of contents

- The headings in the table of contents must be identical with the headings in the text.
- You can choose to capitalise the content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc.) or not, but whatever your choice, be consistent.
- If you subdivide a chapter into subchapters, you must have at least two subchapters; i.e. if you subdivide chapter 3 into 3.1 you must at least also have 3.2.
- Avoid more than three structural levels (be reader-friendly); for example, 3.2.2 is still ok, but not 3.2.2.1.
- Avoid too many subchapters (the shorter the paper the fewer subchapters), and avoid very short subchapters (each should be more than 0.5 pages long).
- Do not put a dot after the numbers of subchapters: 1. is correct, but 1.1., 1.2.1., etc. is not.

TIP — Using styles (*Formatvorlagen*) in Word can be quite helpful when formatting your table of contents. Make sure that you use them as follows:

- *Standard* for your paragraphs,
- *Überschrift 1* for headlines on level 1, *Überschrift 2* for headlines on level 2, …
- *Zitat* for long quotations.

You can change the format of each style individually according to the guidelines specified above – do not worry, the change will only be saved in the document you are working on. Once in use, you can insert an automatically generated table of contents (*Referenzen > Inhaltsverzeichnis*).

3.2 List of abbreviations, tables or figures

In case you use many specific abbreviations or various tables, figures or even maps in your paper, you might want to include an overview which the reader can turn to. (Do not include standard abbreviations such as 'e.g.'.) Such lists are found in most monographs and edited volumes. Since they precede the first chapter of the paper, they get small Roman numerals as page numbers. If you decide to use abbreviations in the text, make sure that you place it in parentheses after the full version of a term the first time it appears.

3.3 Appendix

The appendix is not part of the running text, i.e. it does not count towards the total number of pages or words that you are expected to write. You do not need to have an appendix but it can be useful if you want to add information that you consider important but too long to show in the running text (e.g. teaching resources, longer tables, additional graphs, maps, or primary data in the form of transcripts, etc). If you need to subdivide your appendix (which will only be the case in longer papers), use the section title 'Appendices' instead, then subdivide into A, B, … If you want to attach audio or video files, you can hand in a CD-ROM, together with your paper.