

# Academic writing as an academic discipline: problematic issues

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**Abstract.** The paper studies peculiarities of introducing the course of “Fundamentals of Academic Writing,” into the Ukrainian education and scientific process. The integration of the Ukrainian science into the European space caused the necessity of including “Academic Writing” into the Ukrainian curricula. Fundamentals of a new academic discipline are represented through the prism of world and national achievements, which determine such concepts as “academic communication”, “academic etiquette”, “academic integrity”, “the quality of academic text”. This research focuses on the following major issues: What is the essence of “Academic Writing”? Is it a brand new course? How does it affect the ranking of higher education institutions? How should intertextual tools be used to keep the academic integrity? How does the level of English proficiency affect the quality of the Ukrainian scientific products? Is the course of “Academic Writing” a tribute to fashion or a vital necessity? It also investigates the peculiarities of academic fundamentals required for development of certain knowledge, skills and abilities of the Ukrainian language academic writing. The latter aims not only to promote academic integrity by following ethical principles and statutory rules that should guide the participants of the education process while studying, training and conducting research activities, but also to represent the concepts, strategies and tactics of organizing the processes of academic text creation, analysis and editing.

## 1 Introduction

Structural reforming in the national system of higher education started after signing the Bologna Declaration and integrating Ukraine to the Bologna Process, and to the European scientific and educational space. Nowadays this reforming is at an active stage, as it involves all the participants of scientific and education activities. The process of state certifying higher education institutions directly depends on the level of qualification of the scientific and education process participants, lecturers in particular, whose original research achievements are recognized and highly appreciated by the international scientific community due to the high citation index. The presence of eminent researchers is the “stock-in-trade” of any education institution, and simultaneously it confirms favorable conditions necessary for preparing competitive graduates.

Unfortunately, recently the vast number of national higher education institutions makes attempts “to shop” themselves not by means of quality but quantity indicators. This is explained both by subjective and objective factors. Among the variety of reasons the following should be distinguished: the lack of knowledge, skills and abilities to create an academic text and an insufficient level of English.

In this regard, the ideas of introducing certain academic disciplines (“The Principles of Academic Writing”, “Academic Writing”, “Academic Writing in

English” or “English Academic Writing”, in particular) into the national education process gain their popularity [1-3].

## 2 Presentation of the main research material

The implementation of the above mentioned courses and consolidation and systematization of world and national research achievements have led to the emergence of modified theoretical ideas and new (or updated) terms such as *scientific / academic genre*, *scientific / academic information*, *scientific / academic communication*. These concepts are considered in the ratio of common / partial. Cf.: 1) *scientific information* includes reports on certain known and studied issues of objective reality in any genre of academic (learning) communication; *academic information* is related to reports on certain known and studied issues of objective reality in the academic genres of scientific (academic) communication; 2) *scientific communication* is the process of exchanging scientific, scientific and education, scientific and popular information between the representatives of certain fields of study, industry, education, using both verbal and non-verbal means, well as oral or written forms; *academic communication* is the process of exchanging particularly academic (scientific) information between the representatives of certain fields of study, industry, education, using both verbal and non-verbal means, oral or written forms [4]. Some papers represent synonymic

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identification of attributive components *scientific / academic* within these terms. This inconsistency of scientific approaches causes some confusion in the scientific and academic environment. Sample tasks with the following instructions “*Write a Scientific (Academic, Scientific-Academic) Essay*” loosens both current theoretical principles of the *scientific language style* and at the same time complicates understanding of the term “*Academic Writing*”.

## 2.1 Analysis of recent research and publications

Over the last decade *academic writing* has become the subject of interest among the Ukrainian scientists (O. Asadykh, L. Kozolup, L. Matsko, I. Mishchynska, M. Rogozha, L. Sazanovych, O. Semenog, etc.), who focus on the formation of academic literacy, observance of the academic integrity, constructing both English and native language academic texts, etc. It should be noted that such research is usually carried out through the prism of different foreign practices [5-10], based on modern approaches to the interpretation of *the academic style* primarily (“a functional sub-genre of literary language that provides academic communication, mechanisms and processes of exchanging scientific information within state scientific and education institutions, focused on the development and dissemination of scientific ideas”) and *academic writing* (“the result of an independent research activity embodied in written form using a graphic symbol system of a particular language that manifests new ways of problem studying and solving” [4]). Cf.: *the scientific language style* is “a functional type of literary language that serves different fields of science, industry, education, represents the relevant results of research activities of individual scientists and scientific teams, manifests and promotes their scientific ideas in specialized texts of different genres” [4]. In any case, it does not raise any objection that the result of academic communication, its structural and linguistic component, and at the same time its representation should be *an academic text*, which is considered as a structurally integral, logically complete communication block.

Despite certain scientific contribution in the relevant field, there are many problematic issues which are worth being the matter of further scientific consideration.

At present the striking fact is that the basis of theoretical determination and interpretation of *academic writing* derives from not the primary sources of certain Western European approaches, but the results of research activities already tested in the Russian-speaking scientific space (Ye. Bakin, Ye. Barbashina, I. Korotkina, G. Makovich, F. Nasybullina, I. Nuzha, A. Syrazeyeva, N. Smirnov, A. Suslov, I. Shchemeleva, L. Valyeyeva, etc.). These studies outline the following statements: the essence of the term *academic writing*, the aspects of developing skills of English and native language academic writing, the formation of certain methodological approaches in this field, the development of the academic writing competences as a tool for the implementation of the state program for improving the competitiveness of national science and education [11], the ways of achieving successful results [7, 8].

It is obvious that world universities are focused on raising their final rating, which is based on the most main activity indicators. Among them there are the following: academic reputation; positive feedback; percentage ratio. The latter includes such aspects as: a) academic teaching staff; b) the number of foreign lecturers and the total number of higher education teaching staff; c) the number of foreign students and the total number of students; d) citations of teaching staff scientific publications, etc. [12]. These criteria are to ensure the investment attractiveness of higher education institutions. These observations draw to the idea that the citation, which is directly related to the academic text and the academic writing, gains high importance.

According to I. Korotkina, applying the new academic discipline is one of possible positive steps. The other way is creating university centers of academic writing, since it is necessary primarily to train those who will teach further. The relevant project has been successfully maintained in Russian Federation [13, 14].

Over last two or three years, the Ukrainian academic community investigates the problems of academic communication and academic integrity within numerous forums held by both national and international higher education institutions. Roundtables, workshops, scientific conferences such as “Academic Integrity: Compliance Issues and Spreading Priorities for Young Scientists” [15], “Researcher Academic Culture in Education: European and National Experience” [16], “Academic Honesty as the Basis of Sustainable University Development” [17], “The School of Academic Writing: From Theory to Practice”, etc. encourage their participants to search effective mechanisms to ensure the implementation of the ethical aspects of academic communication.

Recently, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine has approved the Integration Guide of Ukraine into the European Research Area (ERA-UA). It updates six key priorities for developing effective national research systems and efficient international cooperation and competition, opening labor market, providing research gender equality and valuable exchange of scientific knowledge [18]. It is stated that “integration will give access to new markets and new knowledge, giving additional opportunities for the development of the national research system” [18]. It is clear that successful joining the ERA (European Research Area) requires the demonstration of our scientific and creative potential, involvement into the discussion of current world problems, offering probable solutions, etc. This integration is usually fulfilled due to the implementation of various scientific activities such as participation in conferences, seminars, workshops etc., or in the way of scientific publications. Therefore, it brings to the necessity of “the development of competencies required for text writing in accordance with international rhetorical conventions and training independent researchers who may become active participants of global academic discourse” [8].

Theoretically everything seems to be clear, but in practically there are some problems that we aim to study within the proposed research.

## 2.2 Representation of disputable points

### 2.2.1 The first problem

The first problem is connected with the issues whether “Academic Writing” is a completely new course, or simply a modified term of an officially accepted course, such as “Scientific Prose Style” or “Culture of Scientific Prose Style”, which is approved not only in the Ukrainian education system but also abroad.

Current studies show that the term of “academic writing” has received several definitions: on the one hand, it is interpreted as the result of independent scientific or scientific and education activity, embodied in writing. It uses the system of graphic signs of a certain language which reveals new cognition and problem solving ways [4]. On the other hand, it is a “scientific and methodological branch of knowledge, the field of scientific and pedagogical research”. Some researchers determine this term as an academic discipline, “studying the methods and tools of constructing an academic (scholastic) and scientific text” [8]. However, it should be mentioned that “the methods and technologies of constructing an academic (scholastic) and scientific text” have recently been represented within other courses [19]. Moreover, certain studies demonstrate simply the replacement of an “old-fashioned” term with the “modern” one. As a result, we observe so-called term updating: *fundamentals of research studies* → *the fundamentals of academic writing* [20], *constructing an academic (scientific) text* → *constructing an academic text* [6, 21] etc.

In addition, the list of knowledge, skills and competences that students should acquire while studying these old and new courses (for instance, to distinguish scientific prose style from journalistic or literary one; logically arrange the text and organize its elements; construct the text starting from hypothesis suggestion, abstract formation to conclusion drawing; critically evaluate, select, summarize and use information from various sources, etc. [7]) may be enriched by adding the peculiarities of “international norms and requirements of the academic text creation”.

It should be noted that many scientists use the terms “a scientific text” and “an academic text” as synonyms (sometimes even within the same paper), or consider them in total / partial interrelation (cf.: “basic principles of nonlinear constructing a scientific (academic) text as a coherent system” [7]). In terms of an academic discipline, I. Korotkina defines the term *academic* through the word *scholastic* and counters it as a scientific one. Such interpretation is probably related to the traditional differentiation of the *academic (scientific)* as the subtype of the scientific language style (partial → general). In this case, it is not appropriate to equate academic style and education (learning) one, because the education and scientific subtype is another functional sub-genre that serves the field of education, science, industry and technology [19]. On the contrary, the word “*academic*” in the national usage has consolidated with the meaning “*school*” (cf.: “an academic year”). However, it should be emphasized that the corresponding meaning is the derivative, and the original

definition is interpreted in the relation to the academy (“the name of state higher education institutions aimed at the development of sciences or arts”). Hence, *academic* is “related to education and scientific activities in higher education institutions”. Taking into account these ideas the issue of the academic literacy, based on academic writing of university students, and even comprehensive school students seems to be ambiguous.

Another issue that should be pointed at is that the word “*writing*” in the Ukrainian language has clearly fixed meanings, among which is out-of-date “written or printed work”. Moreover, none of these connotations actualizes the meaning “oral”. For that reason it is probably not entirely correct to use it in terms of academic writing, since an academic text as a unit of academic writing functions in both written and oral forms. Furthermore, by means of the latter it becomes possible to train a person to generate his / her own ideas, prove or negate certain statements, logically arrange the scientific facts and data, etc. Therefore, the course of “Academic Writing” is sometimes represented as “Academic Writing and Rhetoric”. Consequently, it is obvious that the corresponding name is an attempt of tracing the English language term and adapting it to our conditions in order to affirm the integration of Ukraine into the European educational space. As a result, we face to another problem.

### 2.2.2 The second problem

The second problem reveals whether “Academic Writing” influences on the promotion processes of higher education institutions.

This statement sounds rather peremptory. In such a case, it is necessary to differentiate the comprehension of the native language “Academic writing” and the English language “Academic writing”. Unfortunately the Ukrainian language as many other languages, does not take the leading place in the global information space, since it has been totally conquered by English.

Millions of students graduate from national universities (especially today, when higher education is no longer considered to be elitist), but only a small number of them dedicates themselves to professional research (academic) activities. A student, who has poor knowledge of his / her mother tongue and, perhaps obtains even worse English language skills, can hardly show outstanding results. The assessment of their mother tongue “Academic writing” is usually marked with “satisfactory” level and the review of a “created” English language academic text receives the following comments of “Poor English”. It is fair to say that to get a perfect English text you need to create a good native language text. It is well known that a bad national product, even if it is wrapped in the attractive English language cover, is not suitable for export to the world market.

To change the situation for the better means to improve the quality of Ukrainian academic products. It becomes the priority requirement for those who plan to study at higher education institutions. Therefore, they are obliged to join the English-speaking scientific community, foremost to ensure the citation index, which is supposed to allow the objective evaluation of scientist

qualification. However, neither good knowledge of the native language, nor a high level of English language skills and the best training results in studying “Academic Writing” can guarantee unconditional success in academic text creation. The latter depends on the scientific field and the level of problem significance. It is obvious that world humanity field faces certain difficulties (the Ukrainian language in particular). For instance, it is quite complicated for Humanities such as the Ukrainian language Philology, to compete on the world market. The point is not only that some of the Ukrainians consider this language “for home use only”, but also in the peculiarities of its formal structure and the specificity of linguistic units.

In addition, the presence of the English language works, their publishing in editions registered in the scientometric databases, etc., does not mean worldwide recognition of their authors due to various reasons. Among them there are the following: it is much easier to publish the paper in the national scientometric publications than in the foreign ones. On the one hand, it is good as it uncovers the rating of both the scientist and the higher education institution. On the other hand, this raises the issues of scientific significance of the national English language academic products in solving global scientific problems. Furthermore, a high citation index can hardly indicate the worldwide recognition of a scientist.

### **2.2.3 The third problem**

In fact, the third problem is related to the citation and references that influence on scientist ratings. To paraphrase a well-known saying, we refer, and we are referred. It is especially important to choose among the variety of scientific information which is the most useful for creating your own academic product. Moreover, it is necessary to use this information in such a way so that the author is not accused of violating academic integrity, quote verbatim or plagiarism.

Considering above mentioned facts the course of “Academic Writing” is a rescuing solution. Nowadays the problems of applying other people’s scientific ideas, peculiarities of their citation and reference methods, the interaction of the newly created texts and source texts [22], are widely discussed by the researchers all over the world. At first, it seems to be fairly simple: you should not give out other people’s ideas as your own ones, and practice an excessive citation. While putting certain quotations you should fill in the proper reference marks, paraphrase the texts, etc. Though following all these requirements does not guarantee 100% originality of this newly created academic product. Consequently, the more quotations you have, the lower the indicators of originality. Intertextuality is also one of the category features of any academic text, and, (cf. intertextuality is a category feature of an academic text based on its interaction with semiotic cultural environment, which brings the traces of one academic text in the other [4]). If penetrating deep into the essence of this term, we are able to verify the statement that “all words have already belonged to someone” (L. Kostenko). Framework and situational language clichés (pattern phrases) reflect the

specifics of a large academic text, and therefore they often reduplicated in different samples. Corresponding clichés are required when creating both native language and English academic texts.

In addition, the analyzed course and its “prototypes” successfully use concepts of reference (the fragment of an academic text where the author appeals to another scientific source to dispute, add or illustrate his / her own position with facts from other academic works, confirm or negate someone’s opinion, compare different scientific approaches to problem analyzing); quotations (the fragment of an academic text, which is appropriately designed and literally transmits the ideas of other people on a certain problem; it is usually used for confirmation of author’s opinion or disputing with the cited author); recitation (the fragment of an academic text in which the author appeals to another scientific source indirectly, through mentioning the third one); invocation (using other people’s statements in the structure of one’s own academic text with a slightly modified form and content); rendering (retelling the results of one’s research activities scientific ideas, scientific concepts, scientific concepts, etc. in other words), paraphrasing (using one’s statements in the structure of one’s own academic text with a slightly modified form or content) [4]. It is impossible to “build your own house” without the use of “additional” building materials. The same situation is observed in academic writing. One can not build his / her own text without applying other people’s thoughts, ideas, or so called quoting, paraphrasing, etc. Creating a high quality academic text encourages researchers to analyze the requirements of using foreign texts established by foreign higher education institutions and scientific publications, which are guided primarily by “logics of scientific communication”, “respect for the reader and other authors” [22].

### **2.2.4 The fourth problem**

The fourth problem is connected with the fact that the native scientific community often applies English usage as the medium language to join the global information space.

Consequently, the level of the English language skills becomes of high importance. The Ukrainian researcher, who attempts to integrate into the European scientific space, should obtain major foreign language knowledge and skills, which can be used in terms of academic communication or academic text creation. The situation is considerably complicated under the conditions of poor language skills which do not allow the researcher to demonstrate his / her significant academic potential. Moreover, when constructing an academic text, alternative ways of transmitting information are unacceptable. The level of the English language skills used for the academic text creation should correspond to high English proficiency. Beginner, Elementary (A1), Pre-Intermediate (A2) or even Intermediate (B1-B2) English are considered unsatisfactory. Unfortunately, not many Ukrainian researchers and senior students demonstrate Advanced (C1) or Proficiency (C2) English skills, necessary for perception, comprehension, and thought verbalization in English, conveying the most

significant shades of meaning, using peculiar grammar structures while creating a proper academic English text. Otherwise, it turns out to be a forgery, which, in fact, we still have.

The basis of intellectual development, the cognition of the definite objective reality concepts, their comprehension, awareness and understanding, of course, is accomplished by means of the mother tongue. In turn, this draws the following conclusion: an English language academic text is a secondary result, built on the primary Ukrainian one. In other words, English language academic writing is basically a formal English translation of the Ukrainian language academic text. Obviously, one should consider the specific structural and grammatical organization of each language, to transmit the accurate original content and avoid the distortion of scientific facts.

In this case, the native language and the English language “Academic Writing” should not be contrasted and studied as two separate courses. They can function as different content blocks of one training course, where the English language academic writing, specifies the knowledge acquired during the study of the native language academic text construction (for instance, for PhD students). Alternatively they can be manifested as separate cycles illustrating the following hierarchical system (from the simple to the more complex): “Essentials of Academic Writing” (for Bachelor training) → “Academic Writing” (for Master training) → “English Academic Writing” (for PhD training). This approach also presents new requirements for lecturers, who should be fully aware of their purpose, obtain good knowledge of both languages in order to teach properly, and show their own samples of high quality native language and English language texts. Furthermore, it does not exclude the possibility of making the co-work of two different lecturers.

### 2.2.5 The fifth problem

The fifth problem encourages reconsidering the statement, whether the course of “Academic Writing” is a tribute to fashion or a vital necessity.

Nowadays the idea of “Academic Writing”, as well as academic integrity, becomes essential, gradually affirmed according to the present-day reality and highly demanded while carrying out education and scientific activities.

Higher education institutions should concern their reputation as “one of the mechanisms of internal self-regulation in the professional community”, since the sphere of higher education serves to form “future social and professional elites”, and is responsible for the interpretation, dissemination and use of new knowledge [23]. Academic etiquette, academic ethical priorities, academic values are widely disputed nowadays in terms of societal demands. It is worth noting that all these concepts are not new, as the relationships in each academic community have long traditions based on certain principles and rules and they are hardly related to academic corruption. This phenomenon depends equally on each participant of academic research activity and the object of academic communication. Academic

dishonesty, including academic corruption, is a negative phenomenon and needs to be excluded. However, today the question is how quickly the elimination of such “immoral standards” will affect the quality of academic writing and an academic text. It is also not clear whether all current results of “global academic culture” should be considered as a model.

Analyzing present day situation we observe the following: counteracting the “excessive commercialization of national higher education institutions”, their “intense bureaucracy”, we commercialize scientometric publications of foreign countries by sponsoring their economies. No one can be completely be sure about the validity of these publications, as the cases of so-called scientific fraud are quite frequent.

Still, there are some risks associated with the overload of the academic market with low-quality scientific products, so-called “Chinese fakes”. The emergence of a new subject of discussion, like anything new, arouses the interest, promotes the creation of certain products and increases their demand, consequently determining their supply. A large number of academic publications, which study modern issues of academic communication, academic integrity, academic literacy, academic writing, etc., is partially considered as a tribute to fashion. Unfortunately the quality of some of academic achievements is unconvincing [2].

The study does not enumerate all the problematic issues as the national theory of academic writing is now at its initial stage and requires applying effective mechanisms for its development not only at the level of higher education institutions.

### 2.3 The Ukrainian language academic writing

Within the proposed research we plan to dwell on the peculiarities of the course which is aimed at build primary basis for the development of knowledge, skills and abilities of the Ukrainian language academic writing.

Firstly, this course focuses on the promotion of academic integrity appealing to ethical principles and rules defined by law, which should be followed by participants of the education process while studying, teaching and conducting scientific (creative) activities to ensure the validity of learning and scientific (creative) outcomes. Secondly, it represents the concepts, strategies and tactics of academic writing, the technology of organizing the process of academic text creation, its analyzing and editing.

Therefore, the concepts of *academic etiquette*, *academic literacy*, *academic text originality*, *plagiarism*, *compilation of other people's thoughts* are naturally updated. Proficient understanding of the laws, principles, ethical rules of academic communication in the scientific and education community, observance of academic integrity, support of academic standards, prevention of fraud, fabrication plagiarism is a duty of each participant, who should generate his / her own scientific (creative) ideas, carry out new competitive research projects that would meet contemporary scientific requirements bringing theoretical and practical significance.

This course provides a number of specific tasks that contribute to the above mentioned goal, such as: 1) to provide basic information about academic writing as one of the scientific (academic) communication sub-genres, its theoretical and methodological fundamentals; 2) to develop practical skills of communicatively justified language usage in creating appropriate samples of academic writing; 3) to train to create different kinds of academic texts depending on the form of communication and the way of presenting information; 4) to update information in terms of the academic text interpretation (content, intertextual connections, composition and architectonics, etc.), and psychological, logical and linguistic principles of its editing; 5) to represent peculiarities of academic essay writing as one of the genres of academic writing.

At the end of the course, students should acquire the following knowledge: the traditions of academic communication and international experience; the interpretation of academic writing, its category features, content and methods of information presentation; genres of academic writing; rules of academic integrity and ways of plagiarism detecting and preventing; types of academic texts according to the forms of communication and methods of material presentation; peculiarities of academic text content and composition; typical errors common to the process of creating an academic text; psychological, logical and linguistic principles of academic text editing.

The knowledge, obtained through practical experience, allows gaining such results as: to operate the concepts “scientific style”, “scientific text”, “academic communication”, “academic writing” and identify their integral and differential characteristics; to generate scientific ideas, model scientific knowledge and organize the process of academic writing; to use presentation and argumentative forms of academic communication; to create fragments of texts-stories, texts-descriptions, texts-arguments, texts-proofs, texts-definitions, and take into account the peculiarities of their construction; to conduct scientific debate, validate or negate updated statements; compress foreign texts, group sources, systematize information, refer to reputable scholars, cite their positions; to analyze an academic text through the prism of content and structuring by means of pre-textual and textual units; to provide relevant arguments on the topic, to represent the state of the problem, to formulate the object, subject, purpose and tasks of made research; to accomplish the semantic analysis of composite academic text fragments; to apply different types of academic text correction; to follow the psychological, logical, linguistic and stylistic principles of academic text editing; to write an academic essay with its subsequent analysis and linguistic editing.

### 3 Conclusions

This course aims to form the responsibility to follow academic integrity and academic literacy among the national educational and scientific researchers while creating different samples of academic texts. It should gain the compulsory status of in all education levels: from Bachelor to Ph.D.

Despite its recent and selective functioning in the modern education and scientific circulation, we conclude that it does not emerge as an entirely new course, but absorbs the most advanced and future-oriented achievements of the theory of scientific language (scientific language style), providing not only written but also oral forms of verbalization various scientific ideas, knowledge keeping in mind “there is never a new fashion but it is old” (Geoffrey Chaucer).

Theoretical information on organizing academic writing, mechanisms of academic text creating, etc. should be gradually represented (from simple to more complex; from the creation of a high quality academic language text to the publication of the same quality English language version). It is obvious that the knowledge, skills and qualifications of higher education applicants are different and depend on both their level and system of values.

Academic integrity and related issues should be permanently integrated into the theory and training practice in higher education institutions and the course “Academic Writing” is focused on understanding the basic concepts of academic communication, improving the latter and developing personal unique way of academic writing in order not to assent to such negative phenomena as academic copying or imitation, since even high quality copies are fakes, and usually not in demand.

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