Characteristics Of An ‘Academic’ Essay And The Reasons For Requiring Writing In This Style

The American novelist and essayist, Flannery O’Connor, wrote: 'I write to discover what I know” (O'Connor, no date). This document is going to discuss distinguishing features of academic essay writing required for BSc Occupational Therapy Course and why qualities and skills of academic writing are important for Occupational Therapy students. It will explain the complexity of an academic essay and its structure. It will give some ideas on how academic writing can help Occupational Therapy Students become effective communicators and how the skills they learn by practising academic writing can be used in their future practice.

Academic writing plays a crucial role in all aspects of higher education. Shields (2010) argues that understanding the importance of writing at University can help students to write with more clarity and express their ideas in a way that is direct, appropriate and communicative. Academic writing presents an intelligent, well-structured interpretation of ideas and promotes a deeper understanding of the subject. It also helps to develop student’s critical thinking skills that they will require when fully qualified.

Shields (2010) states that any academic essay needs to follow an organised structure.

However, Harvard College Writing Center (2000) argues that each essay will have distinct structural challenges and is often guided by its subject and argument, therefore there is no set pattern. Although there are guidelines on how different types of essay should be constructed and there is a consensus that an academic essay should contain three parts of introduction, body and conclusion (The University of Sheffield, 2019). Paragraphs help to organise your ideas into a logical structure and usually introduce a new idea which is developed through thought and supported by evidence from the literature. (The University of Newcastle Library guides, 2020)

Academic writing uses an objective position to present ideas, thoughts, or opinions. This position can be based on personal opinions and feelings but must always be supported by research and critical reasoning (The University of Melbourne, 2020).

Samigullina (2018) mentions a little need for self-referring and the importance of objectivity, as a way of avoiding personal bias, which can be achieved by presenting literature-based facts and evidence in writing. He writes about the importance of formality and registering the language free from any slang and colloquialism.

Academic writing needs to be clear, comprehensible, accurate and with precision. Poor spelling, grammar and punctuation will affect the quality and result of this communication (University of Kent, 2020). Recording information accurately and legibly is expected from Occupational Therapy students, and when qualified, alongside the responsibility of meeting requirements regarding confidentiality in any form of communication (Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct, 2015).

When using any confidential information, it is important to obtain permission from anyone who

may be identified and only in some cases can this information be anonymised, and guidance on how to reference confidential information needs to be followed thoroughly. This is done to protect the clients in question (Pears and Shield, 2019). When an extract has been included in the body of an academic essay, quotation marks need to be used. The quotation should be a piece of evidence relevant to your argument, present understanding, and not be overused in the text (The Open University, 2020). Research shows the best way of communicating with a reader is by the writer using their thoughts and ideas based on evidence from the existing literature. In academic essay writing, an effective argument can be applied to show writers logical thinking, and critical engagement with the topic discussed (The University of Leeds, 2020). Paraphrasing an author's ideas or arguments can present greater clarity and demonstrate an understanding of the original meaning. The Source of information always needs to be indicated (Pears and Shield, 2019). Referencing someone else's work or ideas without consent or giving credit to an author, presenting their idea as their own is defined as plagiarism. (University of Oxford, 2020)

The American Occupational Therapy Association (2019) describes avoiding plagiarism as a Professional Responsibility. "This professionalism requires occupational therapists, occupational therapy assistants, and students of occupational therapy at all levels to respect the works of others, as an extension of respect for the author." As Piers and Shield (2019) point out that referencing gives the credit to the author of the original work. It demonstrates that students have read around the subject, supports arguments and ideas presented in their work and provides a link between pieces of evidence. Referencing enable the reader to follow up on the original source.

Hence it is necessary that referencing is clear, unmistakable, and consistent.

As Piers and Shield (2019) point out that referencing demonstrates student's wide reading and broad research, providing a link between pieces of evidence, ideas and arguments presented in their work. Referencing acknowledges other people's work and allows others to identify the sources. Hence it is necessary that referencing is precise, unmistakable, and consistent every time someone else's work is used.

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Levin (2009) describes an argument as a "logical sequence of steps, a chain of reasoning" which needs to be supported by wide-ranging research, different types of publications and which should lead to a summative conclusion. A lack of critical thinking in health professions can lead to a low standard of care and support. (Royal College of Occupational Therapists, 2015). Professional reasoning in occupational therapy refers to the processes which have used critical thinking, planning, and deciding on the best intervention on appropriate care for a client.

Consequently, occupational therapy students are required to base their practice on evidence from the literature (Developing critical thinking skills in OT, 2019).

Academic writing is very important for Occupational therapy students. It helps do develop skill needs for a practitioner to decide which is always evidence base regarding the client's interventions. Research and decision-making support student's development of critical thinking required to work in challenging environments. Learning academic writing help to develop researching skills, identifying relevel information, thinking clearly, decision-making. It supports student communication skills needed during the course and future practise.