

AN EXAMINATION OF ACADEMIC WRITING PROFICIENCY: IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSION

G.-F. NICOARĂ, C. GHERASIE

Gabriela-Florina Nicoară¹, Cosmin Gherasie²

¹ University of Bucharest, Romania

E-mail: nicoaragabriela2024@icloud.com

² Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania,

E-mail: gherasie_cosmin@yahoo.com

Abstract: *The acquisition of academic writing competence represents the culmination of a structured learning process that is tailored to the educational environment and is facilitated through direct instruction or specialized procedures. This paper aims to explore academic writing within the context of the military profession to illuminate the multifaceted aspects involved in developing academic writing proficiency within a military academic framework. Furthermore, the primary objectives were to elucidate the key components of academic writing competence in military tertiary education, determine the fundamental aspects of the academic writing-learning process, and emphasize how the cultivation of academic writing proficiency enhances future professional endeavors. To fulfill the established objectives, not only descriptive research but also a literature review was conducted. The observation, analysis, description, and documentation helped to investigate the multifaceted aspects of developing proficiency in academic writing within the context of advanced military educational institutions. The results of the study highlight the strong connection between military professional requirements and academic writing competence, and the importance of adapting the learning process in accordance with future career requirements. Moreover, this investigation underscores the intricate relationship between professional requisites and academic writing aptitude, emphasizing the critical need to align educational processes with future career expectations. The study advances our comprehension of academic writing skill development within military educational field and provides valuable perspectives for subsequent research endeavors within the domain of military education.*

Keywords: *academic writing, military, higher education, learning process.*

Introduction

Academic writing competence is the result of a learning process. Despite appearances to the contrary, we are not born with this ability to write a structured, documented message using elevated language so that the product of our thinking and actions is clear, reasoned, rigorous and based on evidence or scientific argument. However, many of the demands of the professional environment require us to debate, argue, document or communicate, in writing, in a clear, coherent and structured form.

Thus, in order to gain knowledge about academic writing, to acquire it and to develop the ability to use it in practice, it is necessary to go through a learning process. This learning process needs to be structured and should be approached with specialist guidance. Motivating the learner by arguing the need for learning academic writing skills, explaining its importance and directly linking its benefits to the professional environment are prerequisites for positive learning outcomes.

As a result of the evolution of society and the changes in the requirements of the professional environment, university education has understood the need to develop, within

AN EXAMINATION OF ACADEMIC WRITING PROFICIENCY: IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSION

the curricula, content that directly addresses the academic scientific text in order to train, develop or strengthen academic writing competence. Thus, the acquisition of academic competence can be addressed in a number of different ways at the level of educational programs at undergraduate level. Starting from the first level of undergraduate studies (bachelor studies), most higher education institutions have understood this requirement to support students with content specifically oriented towards academic writing, so that they are able to draft scientific communications, studies or scientific articles and, at the graduation stage, to be able to draft bachelor's / dissertation thesis. Graduation from a higher education institution is nowadays conditional on the writing of this type of scientific work which, in addition to being proof of in-depth knowledge of the subject matter, also validates the academic writing skills acquired throughout the study program.

Academic scientific writing has become increasingly important as the results of scientific endeavors are being digitized and uploaded into internationally available databases. In addition, by imposing writing and formatting requirements for texts to be published in journals indexed in international databases, the establishment of such publication rigour is aimed at standardizing writing standards worldwide. These guidelines for the writing of an academic scientific text are based on general principles in terms of content, as well as from a formal and deontological perspective.

The new human resource currently going through the period of professional integration is made up of young people belonging to the **Z generation**. The basic characteristics that define these new members of the professional environment are centered on their tendency to use technology without significant discontinuities. Digital natives, accustomed to using elements of technology in their learning, work and socializing, have significantly reduced their ability to stay focused or the time they have to spend on certain aspects. Due to the tendency to engage in multiple tasks in a complementary or even simultaneous way, the potential to give meaning, structure, conciseness and fulfill the goals set at the beginning of the endeavor (be it learning or professional) has diminished. The intermingling of individual and technology-mediated learning, the immersion of artificial intelligence in the approaches to solving learning tasks throughout the educational journey, the tendency to give credence to all types of information conveyed online and the loss of interest in the study of primary and secondary scientific sources lead to vulnerabilities in relation to human personality development.

In the past, those who engaged in higher education were much more restricted in terms of numbers. Also, undertaking such an endeavor meant devoting one's entire personal time to it, which for the most part ruled out the idea of taking on professional activities while studying. Thus, the time available was significantly different from what young people today can identify. In this respect, we often encounter the tendency of new generations to turn to "semi-finished" scientific products. The transformation of such a product into a final product in accordance with the teacher's requirements becomes less time-consuming. Identifying a balance between the resources of young contemporary students and the workloads required to acquire the targeted competences is another challenge of the present.

The previous formal educational pathway completed by those entering university degree programs is different. The elimination of specific requirements that harmonize the student's previous education with the intended specialization (or at least with the field of study program chosen) leads to the need to prepare students of significantly different levels simultaneously. Thus, **the learning of academic writing may be perceived differently in terms of difficulty by a fine arts graduate compared to a philology or economics graduate**. There are not a few cases where students, prior to their undergraduate studies, have not consulted specialized works and have resorted to public libraries or those available in electronic format.

Personal experience in teaching activities with students has led to the following observation: students feel helpless to organize their thoughts and ideas. With great difficulty they manage to organize a material according to minimum requirements such as: structure, meaning, focus on essential content elements. Another difficulty observed repeatedly over the last three years has been the difficulty in expressing themselves freely in writing. The lack of free-thinking exercises and the limitation of vocabulary to a brief vocabulary, as well as the failure to pay adequate attention to the formation of specialized language in relation to the subject area, leads to uncertainty of expression, ambiguity in the transmission of information and, implicitly, a lack of meaning in the written text.

These challenges are only a segment of those encountered in the educational and professional environment today. However, by giving meaning and providing motivation to students in learning academic writing, its **practical-applied dimension** will allow capitalizing on the potential of the new generation. Moreover, academic writing is understood as a fulcrum on which other aspects of science depend (Murray, Moore, 2006: IX). Occupying such a position and having a determining role for the students' performance and success in their academic and further academic path, it is necessary to find ways adapted to the new generation's requirements to initiate them in the steps of successful writing of a specialized text.

In the above-mentioned sense, the formation of academic writing competence in the contemporary context is dependent on the requirements of the professional environment for which the educable is prepared, the characteristics of the educated generation, the specifics of the educational environment and the ability of the specialist to capitalize on the practical-applicative dimension of the theoretical notions related to academic writing.

Starting from these aspects, the present research endeavor explores academic writing associated with the military university educational environment with the aim of translating the requirements of the military professional environment into representative inputs throughout the process of formation of military students' academic writing competence.

Research Problem

A review of the specialized literature reveals a prevalent trend towards generalizing the academic writing learning process. While most approaches recognize the importance of guided instruction, they often overlook the unique characteristics of the specific scientific discipline in which learning occurs, as well as the professional field for which the educational program is tailored. In light of this, **the current research initiative seeks to shed light on the various aspects associated with acquiring academic writing skills within the context of a military academic setting**

Research Aim and Research Questions

This study aims to examine the unique aspects of academic writing instruction within the military university context. The research focuses on addressing three key questions:

1. What are the distinctive characteristics of academic writing education in military higher education institutions?
2. Which elements constitute the core of the academic writing learning process in the military university setting?
3. In what ways does the acquisition of academic writing skills contribute to future professional activities?

This study aims to address the current lacuna in research concerning academic writing within a specific professional context, while simultaneously exploring the correlation between the professional domain and academic writing proficiency.

AN EXAMINATION OF ACADEMIC WRITING PROFICIENCY: IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSION

Research Methodology

This investigation falls within the domain of qualitative research, with a specific emphasis on academic writing proficiency. This study, grounded in the descriptive research design paradigm (Dulock, 1993), aims to elucidate the principal attributes of academic writing competence acquisition within the realm of military higher education. Through observation, description, and documentation, this paper investigate the multifaceted aspects of developing proficiency in academic writing within the context of advanced military educational institutions. Additionally, the literature review contributes to a comprehensive understanding of the conceptualization and distinctive features of academic writing.

Literature review

First, the literature foregrounds academic competence from the angle of a requirement for career and academic success for scholars, researchers, and post-graduate students (Flowerdew, 2015). Later, it is seen as a learning process (Orfanò & Wingate, 2024) that enables the realization of numerous benefits. Other authors understand its approach through the lens of its specific characteristics (Maamuujav et al., 2021). Last but not least, academic writing takes the form of a necessary skill in both formal educational and professional environments. Its acquisition is the result of going through a stepwise learning process. The knowledge, skills and values acquired through learning provide the prerequisites for the successful performance of diverse and complex professional tasks.

Academic writing has taken on different definitions over time, but the main elements of content have been preserved in most definitions. According to Bocoş, academic writing is *"a way of constructing, expressing and transmitting in writing ideas, opinions, information, data, products of thought and action, results, solutions, etc., in a direct and intelligible manner, clearly, rigorously, argumentatively, based on evidence, scientific arguments, in a critical spirit, in an objective, rational, logical and impersonal manner"* (Bocoş et al 2021:137). Boc's view presents academic writing as *a text-writing activity carried out in compliance with a set of specific rules, techniques and methods of writing, with a high degree of standardization, and which is necessarily carried out within the scientific research process, instantiating the scientific finality in the creation of textual meaning*" (Boc 2022:57).

Authors such as Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein, who have leaned their endeavors, towards concretely supporting students in acquiring academic writing skills by providing thematic textbooks in which they have developed useful writing templates, are of the opinion that academic writing has *"one basic feature: it is strongly grounded, in one way or another, in the views of others (...) a process of saying true or intelligent things in a vacuum"*. (Graff, Birkenstein 2015:21).

Another local professor who has devoted works to this topic, Ilie Rad, admits that *"writing a literary, scientific, administrative or publicistic text is a complex process that requires a range of knowledge and skills"* (Rad 2023:53). Another approach to academic writing understands by this endeavor balanced writing about a certain investigated topic in relation to a certain audience (Plakhotnik, Rocco, 2000).

Based on the above-mentioned definitions and analyzing the way academic writing is understood by specialists in the field, it can be stated that academic writing is a rule-guided process by which a person constructs a scientifically grounded message and conveys it publicly in written form, aiming at the principles of clarity, honesty, objectivity and impersonality. There are some **defining elements** of this type of writing, namely:

- the presence of a previous documentation approach;
- the construction of the message/text in accordance with the imposed rules;
- observance of basic writing principles;
- the need to have a minimum competence in academic writing.

Thus, without knowing what a documentation process involves, without identifying the principles and rules to be followed, and without having specialized skills in this area, the generation of an academic text cannot be achieved. It must be admitted that academic writing is not only about knowing the previously systematized aspects, the complexity of the process and the variety of fields in which it can be applied significantly amplify the issues related to this field. However, given the context of the present research endeavor, the relevance of the four aspects mentioned as fundamental to academic writing is significant.

The documentation endeavor involves, in fact, two essential steps: planning the endeavor and actually carrying it out (implementing what has been previously planned). The setting of stages and their completion does not mean that the initial plan is to be followed uncritically, but the absence of a plan containing a logical sequence of activities directed towards a consciously established goal will not provide the necessary prerequisites for academic writing. The dynamics of documentation processes are contextually determined and the postponement of certain activities or the resumption of some of them is a natural part of them. However, the presence of the documentation approach is mandatory for any intention to write an academic text.

Among the activities that can be part of the documentation plan and, subsequently, of the documentation itself, we mention the following:

- a panoramic exploration of the bibliography centered on the subject chosen for documentation;
- identification of the main established authors who have studied the issue and of the main directions already addressed;
- establishing a possible orientation of the documentation direction;
- formulating a first variant of a title that will allow the most precise delimitation of the subject;
- bibliographical documentation;
- selecting the bibliography;
- going through the selected references;
- designing the plan of the future academic text;
- organizing the actual writing mode;
- writing the academic text.

The construction of the message consists in the actual conception of the text taking into account the required principles, rules and coordinates. In the construction of the message, the author will take into account the reader, so that the synthesis of information provided is clear, structured and coherent and the language used is in accordance with the particular requirements of the field addressed. The use of newly introduced concepts involves translating them into a language accessible to the reader.

Also, the construction of the message has two sides: one centered on the content and a second one that focuses on the final form of the academic text. Harmonization of the two will lead to a significant increase in the quality of the future academic text.

Adherence to the basic principles in academic writing starts from the need to prove similar research behavior in an international environment. Ethics, objectivism, rigor, conciseness or anchoring the text in verifiable data are some of the attitudes that researchers pursue in writing academic texts. In this way, the solutions, the results of the approaches undertaken or the proposals offered by these through publicly presented materials become relevant, the credibility offered by the public increasing significantly. Even if we encounter different rules that impose certain particularities on the texts we wish to publish in different journals, the fundamental principles are constantly invoked.

Research Results

AN EXAMINATION OF ACADEMIC WRITING PROFICIENCY: IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSION

The usefulness of academic writing through the lens of military professional activity

By analyzing the requirements of the military professional environment reflected in the current activities of military personnel and, in particular, of those pursuing undergraduate studies, we have identified a number of aspects that require that the person who carries out those activities possess at least minimally developed academic writing skills. Thus, below, we have systematized, without claiming an exhaustive approach, some of the relevant activities:

Table 1. Activities that require academic writing skills

The general context of the activity	The activity	Additional remarks
- challenging geopolitical situation generated by an unstable security environment	- substantiation of concept documents - the design of plans	- irrespective of the rank, military specialty of the military staff or the operational level at which they work
- establishing or maintaining links with national or international structures	- drawing up administrative documents - drafting and conducting professional correspondence	
- peacetime administrative responsibilities	- the design of plans and other similar documents which underpin the day-to-day running of the activity	All these are the result of previous content analysis, longitudinal monitoring of situations, systematization and analysis of information, formulation of solutions involving concepts or constructs from several fields
- administrative responsibilities in crisis situations	- designing plans and other similar documents underpinning the conduct of day-to-day activity	
- administrative responsibilities in conflict situations	- developing plans and similar documents underpinning day-to-day operations	
- belonging to hierarchical organizational structures organized on different decision levels	- drafting managerial documents	
	- involvement in decision-making processes	These require clarity of thinking, critical analysis skills and knowledge of mechanisms for using the known content to optimize the decision-making process.

It is also necessary to mention the generic objectives that can be met (in varying degrees of depth) by going through a structured process of learning to write academically:

- Human personality development;
- academic writing is a specific cultural activity;
- the practical-applicative dimension of academic writing
- academic writing at both content and formal level involves the acquisition of techniques, models and requirements (behavioral modeling, clarity)
- the correct use of information syntheses
- international standardization of academic writing (common norms)
- fitting into norms - correctness (writing rules, editorial rules)
- support the development of an objective attitude to drafting documents
- developing an ethical attitude towards the use of bibliographical sources.

Discussion

From the point of view of the benefits that the learning process of academic writing and the competences acquired as a result of it can offer to a future officer of the Romanian Army, they can be structured in two directions: skills related to the planning of an activity and skills related to the effective conception of solutions for different professional tasks.

The first category may include the following:

- Awareness of the need to plan any kind of activity. Lack of a coherent plan will lead to failure to achieve the set objectives.
- Identification of the main categories of resources and resource estimates underlying the design of the plan (time, space, information resources, etc.);
- Allocation of sufficient time in relation to the activity foreseen in the plan;
- prioritization of tasks according to the criteria identified;
- potential for optimization of activities following analysis of results.

With regard to the benefits reflected in relation to the actual realization of a professional activity, the following can be highlighted:

- The ability to identify documents relevant to a given issue;
- the ability to browse the content of specialized documents and to synthesize documents relevant to a given approach;
- use the information identified in concept documents;
- building up a documentation base useful for similar tasks;
- concision in the design of specialized documents;
- rigor in the appropriate use of specific rules;
- consistency of ideas in devising solutions to professional tasks;
- ability to structure the information provided.

The skills profile required by the military profession follows the dynamics of society and adapts to the requirements of the security environment, reconfiguring itself in the light of current challenges as well as those that may be foreshadowed as part of the future. In spite of historical and social determinations, the Romanian officer's model is repeatedly taking shape and imposing requirements on the military university education system.

If until recently, the attributes of the officer were directly dependent on validations of the current professional activity, today, the focus shifts to the understanding of the knowledge needs of the officer in relation to the requirements of the current security environment (Nicoară, 2023). This aspect can be translated into the types of specific tasks implied by the particularities of the military professional environment, in relation to the requirements imposed by the security environment.

Conclusions and implications

As can be observed, the need to acquire academic writing proficiency is being felt in more and more contexts of contemporary society and professional environments. If in the past, the formation of the skills to give meaning and expressiveness to words was associated with professions such as journalism or activities specific to the educational or, more specifically, the academic environment, academic writing skills are an increasingly common requirement in today's society. The first level of undergraduate studies validates, through the requirements formulated for the assessment of graduates at the end of their studies, the skills acquired in relation to this type of writing (Pavlenko, Bojan, 2014).

In order to assess the formation of academic writing competence, a number of instruments have been included in the literature, such as the didactic task of writing a fragment of an academic text, scientific article, scientific study, scientific communication, bachelor's and dissertation thesis, doctoral thesis, degree thesis, etc. At the same time, as can be seen, the performance of current work in the professional military environment at the required performance standards can also be a form of assessment.

AN EXAMINATION OF ACADEMIC WRITING PROFICIENCY: IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSION

While, in the short term, knowledge of academic writing serves the fulfillment of educational and research goals, in the medium and long term, academic writing proficiency is reflected in the professional work of individuals, many of the tasks and responsibilities in the military professional environment involve the use of minimal academic writing proficiency.

REFERENCES

1. Boc, Oana. (2022), *Scrierea academică în domeniul științelor umaniste. Tehnici și norme*. Editura Presa Universitară Clujeană.
2. Bocoș, Mușata-Dacia, Stan Cornelia, Crișan Claudia-Alina. (2021), *Cercetarea educațională. Coordonate generale ale activităților de cercetare*, volumul I, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Presa Universitară Clujeană.
3. Bocoș, Mușata-Dacia, Stan Cornelia, Crișan Claudia-Alina. (2021), *Cercetarea educațională. Repere metodologice și instrumentale*, volumul II, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Presa Universitară Clujeană.
4. Dulock, H. L. (1993). Research Design: Descriptive Research. *Journal of Pediatric Oncology Nursing*, 10(4), 154–157. <https://doi.org/10.1177/104345429301000406>
5. Flowerdew, J. (2015). Some thoughts on English for Research Publication Purposes (ERPP) and related issues. *Language Teaching*, 48(2), 250–262. Cambridge Core. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444812000523>
6. Graff, Gerald, Birkenstein, Cathy. (2015). *Manual pentru scrierea academică. Ei spun/eu spun*, Colecția Compact, Pitești, Editura Paralela 45
7. Maamujav, U., Olson, C. B., & Chung, H. (2021). Syntactic and lexical features of adolescent L2 students' academic writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 53, 100822. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2021.100822>
8. Murray, R., & Moore, S. (2006). *The Handbook of Academic Writing: A Fresh Approach*. <https://saidnazulfiqar.files.wordpress.com/2008/04/academic-writing-handbook.pdf>
9. Orfanò, B., & Wingate, U. (2024). TEACHING ACADEMIC WRITING TO NURSING STUDENTS: DEVELOPING CRITICALITY THROUGH A GENRE-BASED APPROACH. *ESP TODAY-JOURNAL OF ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES AT TERTIARY LEVEL*, 12(1), 118–135. <https://doi.org/10.18485/esptoday.2024.12.1.6>
10. Pavlenko, Bojan. (2014). EIGHT REASONS TO ATTEND AN ACADEMIC WRITING COURSE. THE IMPACT OF ACADEMIC WRITING COURSES ON PARTICIPANTS. *Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai - Philologia* 3:209-223., 3, 209–223.
11. Rad, Ilie. (2023). *Cum se scrie un text științific. Disciplinele umaniste*. Ediția a treia, Editura Polirom, Iași