

# 1

# Introduction to the Skills of Extended Writing and Research

This unit will help students:

- learn more about extended writing and what it involves;
- find out about writing a paper.

## Introduction

This unit introduces students to extended writing and informs them about the projects they will work on in this book. Introduce the course by explaining that it will help students to develop practical skills for extended writing. They will also learn to carry out research in the library and online, so that they have the necessary information to tackle extended essays.

The term “project” is used throughout the course because the main focus of the course is to work on either one or two projects, completing a piece of extended writing, or paper, for each. Refer students to the Contents and Book Map pages of the Course Book (pages 3–5) for the area of focus of each unit, and to the Introduction (pages 7–8) for the aims of the Course Book and the skills it will help them to develop.

Briefly talk through the steps at the bottom of page 12 of the Course Book, and point out that students will get the opportunity to practice each of the steps in this book.

## Task 1: Critical thinking

### Possible answers:

- assessing the writer’s argument critically
- comparing and evaluating issues
- evaluating the credibility of the writer’s sources
- detecting bias
- differentiating between main and supporting ideas
- justifying ideas, comments, and analyses used by the writer

## Task 2: What do students in higher education write?

- 2.1** Tell students to write for no more than five minutes. Quickly ask around the class for suggestions about the type of writing they might have to do at university.

### Possible answers:

The following types of writing are suggested on page 12 of the Course Book.

- essays for exams
- non-exam essays
- reports
- dissertations
- theses
- case studies
- notes
- annotations (e.g., on handouts or photocopied originals)

If students mention any of these types of writing, or anything else that seems relevant, write them on the board.

- 2.2** Get students to read the boxed text on page 11 in order to compare their ideas with what is written there. Elicit any other types of writing that are mentioned in the Course Book and add them to the list on the board.

**Note:** The terms *thesis* and *dissertation* are used differently in different countries and even in different universities in the same country. In most universities in the UK, Hong Kong, and Australia, a thesis is written for the research degree of PhD or MPhil, while a much shorter dissertation is one of the final requirements for a taught Master's degree. In many American universities, the terms are reversed, with theses written at Master's level and a doctoral dissertation at PhD level. For our purposes, the American terms for a PhD dissertation and a taught Master's thesis are used.

### Task 3: Types of writing

This task is meant simply to enhance students' understanding of the types and length of writing they may have to do. It also clarifies the level of study at which the various types of writing are practiced. The sample answers below are repeated as a photocopyable handout on page 23.

#### Possible answers:

Type of writing	Type of student	Explanation
essay for an exam	undergraduate/graduate	traditional 600–1,000-word text written during an exam
non-exam essay	undergraduate/graduate	written work submitted as part of the course requirement—typically 600–6,000 words
report	undergraduate/graduate	describes research
dissertation	graduate	doctorate level: this will be longer than a thesis
thesis	undergraduate/graduate	Bachelor's level: around 10,000–12,000 words Master's level: around 15,000–20,000 words
case study	undergraduate/graduate	an account that gives detailed information about a person, group, or thing, and its development over a period of time
notes	undergraduate/graduate	information recorded from written sources, lectures, or seminars, for later reference
annotations	undergraduate/graduate	comments, explanations or highlighting added to written sources or lecture handouts

#### Types of assessment

Explain to students that they can find out what type of assessment is used in their individual departments by checking the appropriate handbook. The Meteorology Department at the University of Reading, for example, provides an online handbook that contains information on assessment. An alternative may be to check in the relevant class syllabus. However, information on assessment is not consistent and is not always present.

The best way to find out about written assessment expectations is for the student to visit her/his particular university department and ask for samples of assessed written work. Emphasize that all three forms of assessment mentioned on page 13 of the Course Book are equally important—continuous, written, and oral.

Explain that continuous assessment is based on how students carry out their research and organize their time and work, and on how they cooperate with fellow students and professors, as well as on attendance and participation in class activities. Emphasize the link between written and spoken language components of any course. Explain that students are expected to put the lessons of other classes into practice when working on projects or written tasks. You may choose to hold a conference at the end of the course, where all students are expected to give an oral presentation (of about 10 minutes) or a poster presentation. Advice on how to prepare for a poster presentation is given in Unit 8 of the Course Book.

### Task 4: Getting help with writing

#### Possible answers:

- the thesis statement
- the logical organization of ideas
- the appropriate use of academic conventions and style
- the introduction and conclusion
- the appropriate use of sources, e.g., where from, how many, currency, authority

#### Guided Projects 1 and 2

Go through the information on page 14 of the Course Book with students, as well as the information under the heading *Writing papers* on page 13, and answer any questions they may have. Explain that students will be able to practice one-on-one meetings in Unit 4, but will also be having such meetings with you at regular intervals during the course.

For students using this book for a longer 8-week or 11-week course, the first project should be regarded as practice for a second assignment. Students on a shorter, five-week course will only complete one mandatory project.

### Task 5: Analyzing the task

#### Answers:

- a) The title is framed as a question: *To what extent ...?* Ask students what they understand by this.
- b) Remind students that a question requires an answer. Elicit a range of answers that the question *To what extent* might produce, e.g., *a great deal, quite a lot, not much, not at all*. Explain to students that they must decide "*To what extent*" through their research and then they must explain their answer in their paper, using the evidence in the sources they are given to support their argument.

### Task 6: The stages of writing a paper

The aim of this task is for students to discuss and cooperate in the decision-making process. Establish that writing a paper is a process. Explain that there are three distinct phases involved in the process: planning, researching, and writing up. Within each phase, there are also a number of stages. Task 6 involves deciding which stages occur during which phases of the process. Make sure students appreciate that certain stages can occur in more than one phase.

Before you set this task, check/explain the key terms below:

- *rough outline*;
- *establishing a clear focus*;
- *working title*;
- *sources*.

**6.1** Remind students to write out the steps in full; *not* to simply write down the letter for each step, as this provides a better reference for future use. An alternative procedure suggested by a colleague at CALS, Jonathan Smith, is to put the students in groups and give them slips of paper with the different stages of the writing process on them. They should also be given some blank pieces of paper to add any stages they may wish, an A3 sheet of paper and a gluestick. Students can then make a poster with arrows, linking lines, etc., to help visualize the writing process. Make it clear that students will probably have different views.

**Possible answers:**

**Planning**

- 1 j) Decide on a topic.
- 2 p) Check that sources are available/accessable.
- 3 c) Think of a working title for the paper.
- 4 o) Make a rough outline plan of your ideas.
- 5 n) Work on establishing a clear focus.
- 6 m) Plan the contents in detail.

**Researching**

- 1 d) Search for relevant journals/ books/information in the library and on the Internet.
- 2 e) Write down the details of your sources.
- 3 l) Highlight/take notes of relevant information.
- 4 i) Do some reading.
- 5 f) Decide if you need to do more reading.

**Writing**

- 1 k) Write the first complete draft.
- 2 a) Read the first draft.
- 3 b) Edit the draft—decide objectively whether your ideas have been expressed clearly.
- 4 h) Arrange to meet with your professor.
- 5 g) Write the contents page, bibliography, title page, and abstract.

The answer key above is open to discussion, and it should be presented to students in this way.

**6.2** Arrange the class in pairs or groups to discuss the possible phases and stages in the answer key. Ask students if there are any stages that they think are missing from the phases. Finally, ask how the *writing* phase would continue, i.e., *write second draft*; *read draft*; *edit*, etc. (the process should be repeated as necessary).

**Student independence: Appendix 2**

The aims of the self-evaluation task in Appendix 2, Course Book pages 119–120, are:

- to raise students' awareness of the skills necessary for extended writing and oral presentations;
- to get students to consider which aspects of these skills they need to develop further.

An important aim of this course is to encourage student independence. One aspect of this independence is students' ability to assess themselves realistically, in order to recognize the particular skills they need to develop. Appendix 2 has a checklist of the skills students will work on during this