

# Post-IELTS Writing: helping students to meet academic expectations

Els Van Geyte

Being able to write a good essay is essential:

Most assessment in Higher Education in Britain is based on written assignments, with the essay being the ‘default in the humanities and in many of the arts and social sciences’ (Andrews 2010:93).

## Many differences:

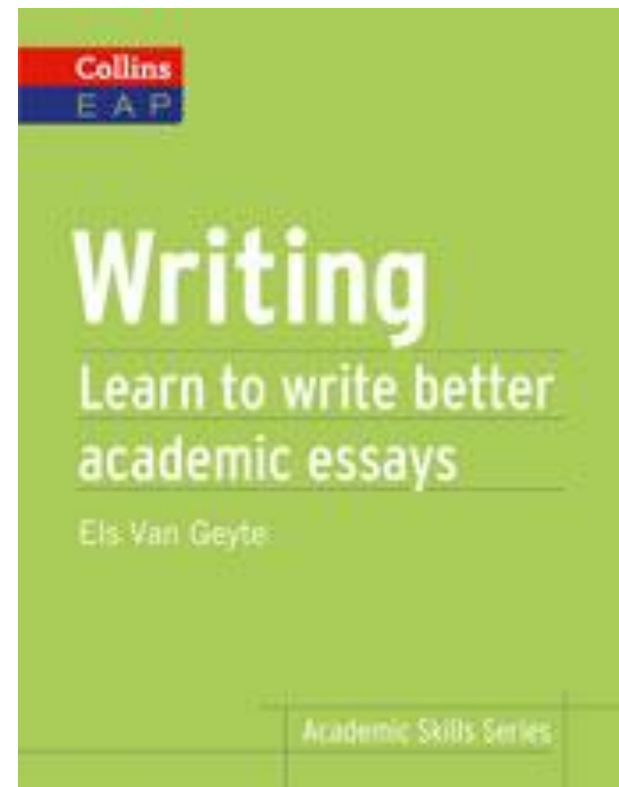
IELTS essay	Post-IELTS academic essay
250 words	1,000 + words
3-4 ideas are enough	Many complex points
Simple organisation	More intricate organisation
'Brainstorming'	Research
No other sources	Quoting/ paraphrasing
No reference list	Requires references
...	...

## Perceived difficulty:

- There are many more skills to learn.
- International students worry about their use of English.

Teachers can help by focusing on **WHY**, instead of WHAT

= link with reader expectation



WHAT	WHY
<p>Don't use rhetorical questions Don't use 'you' Don't use words such as 'lots', 'big', 'nice' Use one-word verbs instead of two (<i>'investigate' instead of 'look into'</i>)</p>	<p><b>Formality</b> = writing is different from speaking: you should not address the audience or use informal words</p>
<p><i>= a lot to remember ...</i></p>	<p><i>= a useful guideline when you are not sure if an expression you are using is appropriate</i></p>

WHAT	WHY
	<b>Formality</b>
e.g. don't repeat yourself	<b>Efficiency</b>
e.g. check spelling	<b>Accuracy</b>
e.g. use cautious language	<b>Modesty</b>
e.g. quote appropriately	<b>Integrity</b>
e.g. don't use vague words	<b>Clarity</b>
<b><i>= a lot to remember ...</i></b>	<b><i>= a useful guideline</i></b>
	<u><i>Linked to:</i></u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><i>the communicative purpose of essays</i></li><li><i>academic expectations</i></li></ul>

## Integrity: Paraphrasing ...

### WHAT =

A paraphrase of something written or spoken is **the same thing** expressed in a different way

*[Collins COBUILD Advanced Dictionary]*

### HOW =

“Techniques for paraphrasing:

- (a) Changing vocabulary by using synonyms
- (b) changing word class
- (c) changing word order”

*[Bailey, S., Academic Writing for International Students of Business, Routledge, 2013: 46 ]*



## Examples from students

The main concern was believed to be taking action on accommodation trouble.

It may be true that grammar, vocabulary and discourse differences appear logically as English is obtained.

But the exactness and effectiveness of the learning procedures can be ameliorated by making students alert to the options by assessing how beginner and good writers use options such as studying replica dissertations with small tasks on personal documents.

## Student paraphrase

The main concern was believed to be taking action on accommodation trouble.

## Original

Dealing with **housing problems** was **considered** the **greatest priority**.

## Student paraphrase

The **main concern** was **believed** to be taking action on **accommodation trouble**.

### Changes:

- *Synonyms*: considered/believed, greatest priority/main concern, housing problems – accommodation trouble, dealing with/ taking action on
- *Order of information*

## Student paraphrase

It may be true that grammar, vocabulary and discourse differences appear logically as English is obtained.

## Original

It is possible that such rhetorical, lexical, and syntactic **variation** (or sophistication) emerges **naturally** as the writer **acquires** more of the L2.

### Changes:

- *Synonyms:* is possible/ may be true, rhetorical/ discourse, lexical/ vocabulary, syntactic, grammar, emerges/ appear, ...
- *Word order*
- *Word class: lexical (adj)/ vocabulary (n.), acquires/ is obtained (different verb forms)*

## Student paraphrase

It may be true that grammar, vocabulary and discourse **differences** appear **logically** as English is **obtained**.

## Student paraphrase

But the exactness and effectiveness of the learning procedures can be ameliorated by making students alert to the options by assessing how beginner and good writers use options such as studying replica dissertations with small tasks on personal documents.

## Original

*Ferris, D. R. (1994). Lexical and Syntactic Features of ESL Writing by Students at Different Levels of L2 Proficiency, p.419*

**However**, the **efficiency and precision** of the students' **acquisition processes** may be **improved** by **encouraging** increased class and/or individual **awareness** of lexical, syntactic and pragmatic **choices** (...) utilized by **successful and novice** writers (e.g., through in-class analysis of **model essays**), together with **microlevel work** on **individual papers** (through teacher-student conferences, written teacher commentary, or peer or self-evaluation) is suggested.

## Student paraphrase

**But** the **exactness** and **effectiveness** of the **learning procedures** can be **ameliorated** by making students **alert** to the options by assessing how **beginner and good** writers use options such as studying **replica dissertations** with **small tasks on personal documents**.

## WHAT =

A paraphrase of something written or spoken is

**the same thing** expressed in a different way

*[Collins COBUILD Advanced Dictionary]*

Focus not in HOW (language exercise), but WHY (academic skill):

**Paraphrasing is done to demonstrate understanding of a source text:**

- You can explain an idea yourself
- You can make the idea part of your own ideas
- You indicate what you say and what others say

***Clarity, Integrity***



## *Paraphrasing:*

**Not a language skill, but the result of engaging with the literature, understanding it, explaining it...**

**→ FRANCIS**

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**→ FRANCIS**



# FRANCIS

- 1 Decide how the ideas from the original text **fit** into your essay (you do not need to use all the details from the section of the text that you are looking at, only the relevant ones).
- 2 **Read** the original piece of text **repeatedly**, until you really understand its meaning.
- 3 Put the original text **away**.
- 4 Write down in **note** form, and in your own words, what the text says.
- 5 **Compare** your notes with the original:
  - a have you expressed the same meaning?
  - b have you used your own words?
- 6 **Integrate** the information into your text so that your essay clarifies it and builds on it; use grammatical **sentences** that link the information to the text around it.

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## FRANCIS in practice: (F)RANC(IS)

	The student has found this source text:
<b>Read/Repeat Away Notes Compare</b>	Dealing with housing problems was considered the greatest priority.

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Notes Compare	Dealing with housing problems was considered the greatest priority.

## FRANCIS in practice: (F)RANC(IS)

	The student has found this source text:
Notes	housing problems: do first

## FRANCIS in practice: (F)RANC(IS)

	The student has found this source text:
Compare	<p>Dealing with housing problems was considered the greatest priority.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• ‘housing problems’: exactly the same</li><li>• need to use past tense</li></ul> <p>→ The housing situation needed to be improved first.</p>

## FRANCIS in practice:

The student has written:

*Some scientists have suggested that dolphins are so intelligent that they should be treated as a person, but a non-human one.*

The student has found this source text:

*It has long been known that chimpanzees are bright animals, and with their human-like appearance and their ability to learn, they have been considered similar to people. Now scientists are saying that dolphins communicate in ways that are similar to human communication and that they are brighter than chimpanzees, which are considered by some to be as intelligent as three-year-old children. Researchers have taken brain scans that show that anatomically, dolphins have relatively large brains, similar in some aspects to those of highly intelligent beings such as humans. They can learn, and pass their newly-learnt skills on to others.*

F ?	<del><i>It has long been known that chimpanzees are bright animals, and with their human-like appearance and their ability to learn, they have been considered similar to people.</i></del>
R	...
A	...
N	<u><i>Similarities with humans:</i></u> <i>Communication, brighter &gt; 3 year old person, brain anatomy, very large brains, learn and teach</i>
C	<del><i>very</i></del> <i>large brains</i> → <i>relatively (wrong) / brighter (replace)</i>
I S	<i>Some scientists have suggested that dolphins are so intelligent that they should be treated as a person, but a non-human one. For example, Burns (2010) points out that there are physical similarities between the dolphin brain and the human brain, that dolphins may have more intelligence than a three year old child, and that they can learn and teach.</i>

## Conclusions:

- **Remind students of the ‘why’**
- **Link activities to reader expectation and the purpose of the writing**
- **Put academic skill before linguistic exercises – the language will follow**
- **For paraphrasing: reassure them that simple language is good enough:**  
*clarity*

## REFERENCES

Andrews, R. (2010) *Argumentation in Higher Education: Improving Practice Through Theory and Research*. New York: Routledge.

Van Geyte, E. (2013) *Collins Academic Skills Series: Writing. Learn to write better academic essays*. London: Collins.



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Thanks for listening!

***Els***

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