

# WRITING FOR SUCCESS: STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE WRITING SKILLS AMONG UNDERGRADUATES

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## ABSTRACT

*Communication, academic success and professional success are basic in writing skills. To undergraduates in India who study in a multi-lingual and multi-cultural environment, the process of acquisition of writing skills is critical in determining academic performance and career opportunities to come. This paper discusses the importance of writing skills among the undergraduate students, the importance of good writing in academic success, self growth and employability. It explains and talks about difficulties encountered by students in mastering the writing skills, and how writing skills can be improved and how the writing skills affect the overall education experience of students. Another point raised in the article is that specific interventions should be used in institutions of higher learning to promote writing skills in the students.*

**Keywords:** *writing skills; multi-lingual and multi-cultural environment; academic growth; employability skills; higher education*

## INTRODUCTION

Writing skills are used to denote the capacity to convey thoughts, ideas and information in a written context in a clear and coherent manner. The described skills are fundamental to effective communication of the message in a range of circumstances, both in an academic task and in work related email. Skills in writing require a number of parts, which include grammar, punctuations, vocabulary, sentence structure and structure. Good writing presupposes also critical thinking, presenting ideas in the logical form, and the possibility to interest and convince the reader. The writing skills span into several types: academic writing, including report writing, essays, and dissertations; creative writing, poems, and fiction; professional writing, i.e. reports, e-mails and business proposals, and technical writing, i.e. manuals, instructions and guides. All these forms involve various methods but one common thing is that they all demand clarity and coherence (Langan, 2008).

To undergraduates, writing is crucial towards achieving academic, personal gains and career prospects. Almost all in the scholastic world has writing as its core to the assessments and exams, to which the students have to convey their comprehension of a topic in clear and organized form. Good writing will improve the ability of the students to organize themselves, create, and state ideas in a way that meets the standard of academic writing. Besides, writing makes one think critically. The textual and other information presented in different sources should be analyzed, evaluated and synthesized as required to write effectively, and this skill increases the ability to

think critically and resolve problems. This is done to stimulate more perception of the content and help in its memorizing (Bartholomae and Petrosky, 2005).

In addition to academics, the personal development also is reinforced through writing skills. Writing gives students the avenue to express themselves and students can come out and express themselves through writing. This instills confidence but also fosters creativity, making the students realize their voices and discover the new outlooks. Additionally, writing is also a necessary skill in the professional world. Employers usually favor the applicants who could effectively communicate in writing be it in the form of reports, emails, or presentation. In India, this is particularly crucial to undergraduates because most of the industries like business, journalism, education and marketing require expertise in written communication. Good writing ability leads to better employment, career development and access to a wide range of career. Students who have writing skills are also able to have an international dialogue, have outlook at the international worldview and compete in the global job market due to these writing skills in a globalized economy (Hyland, 2009).

## THE ACADEMIC SUCCESS OF WRITING SKILLS

Composing skills are of vital importance in education performance because they are the basis of the ability to convey the concepts and show the level of mastering of the topics in the student. Quality writing in a coherent, logical, and clear manner is a requirement of all students in different fields. Properly developed writing skills are valuable in not only enabling a student to perform better in his and her course work but also participate in critical analysis, enter into a discussion and come up with high quality academic work. Due to the changing nature of the system of education, especially in nations such as India, it is becoming more common to appreciate the concept of writing not only as a technical skill but rather as a component of the development process of a student as a whole (Sharma, 2009).

Academic performance is a direct correlation to writing, where the student is often tested in the form of writing tasks, research report and essays. Through such assignments, students will be able to express complex concepts, to conduct self research and demonstrate properly structured arguments. Students who have good writing skills are better at it since they are able to sort out their thoughts better and explain their knowledge about the topics more comprehensively. It has been shown that more competent students in writing usually obtain better grades and express a more profound involvement with the matter (Hyland, 2009). Where education system is usually focused on rote learning, it is even more important to have the skill of expressing the acquired knowledge in writing to be considered by students who want to succeed in the sphere of critical thinking and higher order tasks gaining (Patel, 2010).

## RESEARCH AND THINKING IMPACT AND ASSESSMENTS

Writing is seen also to be a part of research and also development in critical thinking ability. Research writing demands that students have abilities of synthesizing information which they have gathered, critically analyze these information, and be able to present their results in orderly way.

The process promotes higher-order thinking such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation which is vital in academic and professional achievement. By writing research papers, the students get to know how to establish links between various concepts, question assumptions and contribute to the existing academic discourse (Bartholomae and Petrosky, 2005). In addition, the skill of coming up with soundly supported arguments in research studies or dissertations is essential in ensuring that students are recognized in their fields of study. This is more so significant in India since several undergraduate programs at present demand their students to complete an independent research project which they must write a lot (Kumar, 2010).

Assessments and tests are the inseparable elements of the academic evaluation system, and writing skills are the major aspect that determines the performance of a student. The writing skills enable a student to articulate the content in the best way possible in exams. Answers that are well structured and they provide answers to the question in a systematic way normally attract better marks. Another example is that assignments, which ask students to come up with in-depth learning, need quality writing. Good writing skills enable students prepare properly structured essays, reports and case studies that reflect critical thinking and extensive knowledge of the subject of writing (Sharma, 2009). Students, who are good at writing, are likely to perform better in the academic environments in India, where examinations are considered as an important part of evaluation, since they are capable of expressing their answers better and more efficiently (Kumar, 2010).

## WRITING SKILLS AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Academic success is not the only reason why writing skills are needed not to become a dead end in the personal development. The writing stimulates self-expression, creativity, and critical thinking and communications. The skills help a person to grow and equip students to face the requirements of the career world. Effective writing skills enable people to be able to express themselves well, to articulate their views, and to interact well with other people. The effect of writing does not just limit to the classroom but also affects the growth of the individual including creativity, critical thinking, and communication.

Writing gives people a strong outlet of self expression. It is in writing, be it academic essays, creative writing, or personal journals, that individuals are able to delve into and express their thoughts, ideas, and emotions. It is a writing process that helps in introspection and fosters creativity. Regarding the academic writing, the students are also advised to form their own opinions and voice that allows them to enhance personal identity and become more creative. In several countries, where the academic system is more inclined towards formalized learning, creative writing offers an extremely welcome vehicle to allow the students to think beyond the box, experimenting with different notions and expressing themselves without inhibition (Sharma, 2009). Creative writing assists in improving imagination, which is a necessary personal and professional development skill (Kumar, 2010). Writing also is a tool of confidence building. This is because when they can communicate using writing, they are enabled to structure their ideas and convey their ideas in a clear and logical way. Such articulation fosters confidence particularly in the environment where communication is highly regarded. In many regions, language barriers and

the differing educational backgrounds are frequent problems that students have to deal with, and writing skills enables the individuals to overcome the barriers and be able to express their ideas in the most efficient way, which would enhance their self-esteem. Also, writing practice and feedback allow students to learn their skill and build confidence in their skills to communicate (Patel, 2010).

Proper writing means that one needs to think logically and be able to express thoughts in an orderly and logical manner. Writing also encourages critical thought because the students need to assess, compile and synthesize the information and then put it down in writing. Writing helps a person to be critical and to think rationally and therefore improving the general problem-solving skills. Furthermore, effective communication of ideas and persuasion is very essential in not only in writing but also in any other means of communication. Writing also contributes to the fact that the students become more effective at communicating with each other whether at work or in personal life. This is especially important where the employers are becoming very keen on effective communication (Hyland, 2009).

The ability to write is essential in the work place. Today, the good writing skills are required by the employers as a core competency because it is an important part of the communication in virtually any professional environment. The skillful writer can cover a wide range of tasks, such as writing reports, writing emails, and writing project proposals, which is why the skill of writing is an important asset in the workplace. Writing skills can significantly increase the job opportunities and career advancements of people in India because it is the place where a wide variety of industries such as business, journalism, education, and technology all demand the skills of writing (Sharma, 2009). Effective writing does not simply involve passing information, but it involves influencing, persuading, and the interaction of the reader, which are important skills in the workplace.

## **WRITING SKILLS AS AN IMPORTANT COMPETENCE IN THE LABOUR MARKET**

Writing skills are a great premium in the international employment sector. The writing skills are essential to the job performance be it in drafting emails, writing business reports or presenting project plans. The writing skills play a crucial role in those candidates who are applying in the area like marketing, law, publishing, research and even technology. Various countries have a very tough job market where the competition is very high, having the ability to write effectively can make a difference between a candidate and the rest. Employees are not just seeking individuals with technical knowledge but also those that are able to communicate complicated concepts, solve issues, and clearly give information out in a written form (Patel, 2010).

Employers require their workers to communicate in clear and effective way. Communication in the workplace is usually written, either it is via emails, reports, and even proposals. Professionalism and attention to detail is seen in the way one writes. Employers want employees to work on well structured documents which present information in a concise and accurate form. This is especially needed in the areas like business, law, education and healthcare where the capability of expressing complicated concepts clearly can contribute greatly to the effectiveness

of the projects and operations (Hyland, 2009). The increase of the significance of written communication in the global and local markets everywhere has rendered writing a vital competence to the development of a career. The importance of writing skills is inevitable in different setups in professional advancement especially in employment. Resumes, cover letter and personal statements are critical documents that are based on clear and convincing writing. A good resume is also a document that does not only show the skills and qualification of an individual but it will also show his or her ability to communicate. In the same way during interviews, the candidates are usually asked to provide written reports or presentations during the selection process. During their tests on communication skills, employers examine the writing skills of candidates. In addition to that, within the work environment, writing is critical in the development of reports, preparation of project proposals, and communication preparation to clients and colleagues. This is the case in various countries where job seekers are most of the times competing to be given employment opportunities in industries that are in high motion and thus, good writing abilities can place a job seeker in a better position to be successful (Kumar, 2010).

## DIFFICULTIES UNDERGRADUATES IN INDIA FACE

The undergraduates encounter a number of problems in their quest to acquire effective writing skills. These issues are related to language barrier, poor writing training and the lack of constant practice and feedback. This is essential in managing the barriers that can be used to enhance academic performance and experience of students. The multilingual feature is one of the main problems of the undergraduates in the country. Having more than 22 official languages and hundreds of regional dialects, the majority of students speak a regional language. Nevertheless, English is being used as a medium of instruction in most institutions of higher learning and this poses a big challenge. Although students might have studied English at school, it is not always their native language, which causes them to struggle to describe their thoughts and present them correctly and properly in writing. The necessity to alternate languages, even in one assignment, may be confusing and make a student unable to write effectively and coherently in English. This issue is mostly pronounced where students find it difficult to communicate complicated academic ideas with similar comfort as they would in their native language (Kumar, 2010).

The absence of enough instruction in writing in school and in colleges is also a serious issue that contributes to the writing problems experienced by undergraduates across the globe. Grammar and vocabulary are largely taught in most institutions, writing skills particularly academic writing are never given any attention. Indian colleges and schools are more prone to the learning of the rote and memorization as opposed to acquisition of critical thinking, writing and research skills that would help them to achieve academic success. Consequently, they tend to be unprepared to work on those tasks as research paper, essay, or report because they have not been taught how to write them, how to provide logical arguments, how to use sources correctly. Lack of systematic and dedicated teaching in writing skills renders the students incapable of delivering in the standards of higher education as well as incapable of conveying their thoughts in the most appropriate manner (Sharma, 2009).



The next obstacle is the fact that students do not have much time to write regularly and have constructive feedback. Most Indian learning institutions issue students with limited writing tasks each semester and there is a general lack of feedback to assist learners in developing. Lack of constant practising, students do not have the opportunity to polish their writing skills and fail to learn their mistakes. Moreover, in cases where feedback is given, it is not usually elaborate to enable the students know their areas of weaknesses or to help them to improve. This does not give focused feedback to the students and therefore, students might be left to repeat the same errors preventing their academic growth and development as writers (Hyland, 2009). In response to such difficulties, there is need to have strategies that will cater to the unique needs of undergraduates in enhancing their writing abilities. These measures are dedicated to the inclusion of writing in the curriculum, the encouragement of the regular writing practice, and the establishment of efficient feedback systems.

## THE INCLUSION OF WRITING INTO THE CURRICULUM

Incorporating writing into the curriculum in all fields is one of the best approaches toward enhancement of writing skills. The process of writing should not be restricted to language or literature classes, though it should be an important part of any learning process. The writing tasks that should be incorporated in the different subjects like essays, research papers, reports, and case studies will provide the students with consistent experiences to grow and practice writing. This methodology would guarantee that students are continuously practicing writing in a variety of situations and this would assist them to advance their writing fluency as well as their communication of complex concepts in writing. When writing is taught through the curriculum, it further brings out the importance of writing skills to the future careers of students regardless of their subject of study (Sharma, 2009).

Writing skills just like any other skills are developed with practice. Students should have continued chances to write, formally and informally, so as to grow their writing skills. To promote habitual writing, colleges can provide more opportunities to write, which may be reflection journals, opinion essays, or reading summaries. The activities are not only engaging the students in practicing, but also allow them to experience the material in a deeper way. Regular writing enables students to feel more at ease in brainstorming their ideas, developing their vocabulary and perfecting their writing style. In addition, regular writing activities will overcome the fear of writing and instill confidence required to face more complicated writing (Kumar, 2010).

Besides the frequent practice of writing, peer review and positive feedback systems are instrumental in enhancing writing. Peer review gives the students an opportunity to review one another which gives them a new outlook on the style of writing, the organization and the clarity. Peer feedback is good since it helps students to read critically and think of how they could do better with their own writing by assessing the writing of others. Moreover, the teachers are expected to offer constructive feedback to the writing of the pupils in a detailed manner. Feedback must include strengths, areas to improve and propose improvement strategies. The peer review and the instructor feedback combined create a collaborative learning situation and assist students to learn with peers and instructors (Patel, 2010).

Many colleges and universities were providing writing workshops to assist students to develop their writing abilities before the multiple resources became widely available on the internet. These workshops would be conducted either in special writing centers or as part of the curriculum and they aimed at equipping students with the instruments and insights they would require in order to write better in their academics. Workshops were generally aimed to include such basic issues as the structure of the essay, the thesis creation, how to cite it correctly, and the techniques of editing. Through such workshops, institutions provide more opportunities of students perfecting their writing beyond the classroom environment. The workshops have particularly been useful to students who might be grappling with the language level or academic writing rules (Hyland, 2009).

Most of the universities across the world have introduced writing improvement programs in an effort to address the difficulties and equip students with the required writing skills. Indian institutions have realized the value of writing as an academic and professional skill in pursuit of academic and professional success. As an example, the University of Delhi provides multiple writing support programs, such as writing clubs, writing workshops, and inter-college competitions as a means of promoting creativity and academic performance. Such programs will not only strive to enhance the technical writing skills but also cultivate the interest in writing to enable the students to write more clear arguments and sounder essays. Likewise, Banaras Hindu University (BHU) in Varanasi has introduced an interdisciplinary writing program, which focuses on writing in different disciplines, such as those in humanities as well as natural sciences. This program enables the students to take part in academic, research, and critical writing, which leads to the growth of skills in conveying complicated concepts and academic achievement.

Besides these programs, writing centers are also instituted by institutions like Jamia Millia Islamia in New Delhi that concentrate on giving personalized attention to the students. Such facilities provide academic writing classes, writing research papers classes, and one-on-one tutor consultation, assisting students with certain writing-related issues. These efforts have really influenced the capacity of students to organize their writing and deliver their thoughts in a more efficient way resulting in better academic performance and increased self-efficacy. On the same note, interdisciplinary writing programs have been incorporated in the University of Pune curriculum, allowing students across all fields of study, which include economics, engineering, literature, etc., to engage in frequent writing practice and to receive constructive feedback. The ability of students to be equipped with writing activities that they incorporate in their academic lives provides them with skill to address the writing requirements of the various fields that they may be engaged in especially in the research and report writing.

Across the world, there have been successful cases of universities such as the University of California, Berkeley, and the University of Sydney, which have used writing improvement program that involves critical thinking, research writing and clear expression. The programs are set in such a way that the students do not just get skills on how to write better academic work; but they also get skills on how to analyze and present ideas in a logical way. As a case illustration, the UC Berkeley offers student learning center, where workshops and one-on-one tutoring sessions are offered, which are of great help to students who want to polish their writing skills, particularly

in their organization and presentation of their ideas. University of Sydney, in its writing workshops conducted by its Learning Centre has had the same experience as they teach students how to create well-structured and coherent essays.

Educators are also incorporating writing in the curriculum development as it is seen in the University of Oxford where writing excellence is promoted by writing support within the college and university-wide programs. Oxford has a writing support centre, known as Writing Support Centre which provides writing workshops, peer review and personal consultations to students with different disciplines in order to enhance their writing aptitude. The University of Cape Town in South Africa has established a Writing Centre which offers workshops and one-on-one consultation and is centred on the process of writing as well as, the training of critical thinking skills. These international programs in addition to the efforts still going on in Indian educational institutions, depict how writing programs are becoming an indispensable component of academic development in students, as they not only are involved in their studies, but also in their future lives. It can be seen that the emphasis on writing as a very important academic and career-related skill is evident in all these institutions, both in India and beyond. Interdisciplinary programs, writing centers, and peer review processes are some of the ways that universities are enabling students to gain confidence about their writing and record significant gains in their academic writing. Such activities help the students to be better prepared to take up the hurdles of higher education and professional world where good clear communication is the order of the day.

The interdisciplinary writing programs will have an equally positive effect with students in the humanities and social sciences being especially the beneficiaries of improved writing skills. These program provide writing assistance based on their major subject areas enabling the students to better express their research concepts depending on the stronger papers and presentation. This skill of reporting research in a clear way is specifically vital in graduate and professional practice, and therefore the writing program is a vital component of the maturation of the students. In addition to academics, writing skills enhance the employability of the students. Literacy in writing is also a great asset in the work environment, especially in business, journalism, marketing and legal fields. Writing improvement programs enable the students to acquire skills of writing professional reports, emails and proposals which are required in most careers. Indeed, the students who have undergone such programs usually feel more confident over the job interviews because they have the knowledge that they can effectively represent themselves with the help of written communication.

## CONCLUSION

Acquisition of writing skills is a critical element of undergraduate learning especially in India where writing skills influence not only academic performance but also chances of securing a job later. This paper has addressed the problem that the Indian undergraduates encounter when acquiring effective writing skills, including language barrier, poor teaching and little practice and feedback. Nevertheless, the experience of various institutions demonstrate that specific programs may be used to achieve a substantial positive impact on the writing skills of students. Such



programs have resulted in a quantifiable academic performance, critical thinking, and employability suggesting the value of encouraging writing excellence in higher education.

Although some of the universities have adopted good steps, writing still constitutes one of the neglected areas of higher learning in India. It is necessary to have a more widespread and coherent approach to writing in all academic disciplines. Not only writing but it should be regarded as an essential element of the general education of a student. The most important aspect that has to be prioritized by institutions is writing proficiency which can be achieved through incorporating writing into the curriculum and giving students ongoing and systematic practice and feedback.

In the future, writing skills should be regarded as a part of academic and professional achievement of undergraduates. Further efforts are needed to include writing more deeply in all fields, propose cross-disciplinary work in teaching writing, and provide regular feedback opportunities. The faculty members ought to be trained to offer positive and practical feedback and writing centers and workshops ought to be an inseparable part of any university. Universities can accommodate the needs of higher learning and the world of employment by investing and developing writing programs that are able to equip the students with the challenges of higher education. Universities need to offer institutionalized and stable support to writing development in order to enhance writing skills. This also involves the provision of writing centers, workshops, and resources to the faculty to help students in their writing. Universities must also make it a consistent element of the academic process as opposed to a one-off course that is the instruction in writing. The faculty members are playing a very important role in mentoring students and helping them to go through the writing process. They are supposed to be trained in giving close feedback on assignments and should be active in assisting the students in improving their writing. Writing is also a group process that can be facilitated by faculty by encouraging group writing projects, peer reviewing and encouraging students to cooperate in learning a shared set of practices.

Universities are urged to promote the culture of writing and self expression in the university through institution of writing competition, writing publications and reading. These programs provide students with an avenue to publish their work and also get an opportunity to be appreciated. Universities can foster students to think more about writing and regard it as a valuable part of their academic and personal growth by establishing a positive writing community.

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