

**MGIMO University**  
**School of Government and International Affairs**

Dean, The MGIMO School of Government and International Affairs  
*Syllabus approved*  
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**Academic Writing**  
Undergraduate Course Syllabus

Instructor  
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This syllabus is designed in accordance with the MGIMO Educational Standard for the Bachelor Program in International Affairs.

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# ACADEMIC WRITING

## *Syllabus*

**Autumn 2020**

### **Purpose of the Course**

This course has been specifically designed as a distant learning course for year 2 students of the BA in International Affairs. The course is designed to help students acquire and improve on skills they will need to complete their studies, such as academic reading, public speaking, group work, research, critical thinking and essay writing.

The class has for three main goals:

- To provide students with an understanding of what is expected from them in higher education in Russia and the UK
- To allow students to develop key writing and presentation skills they will need during the studies and professional life
- To initiate students to the requirements of academic research, critical thinking and group work

The seminars are interactive and allow students to practice their new skills and explore different topics.

### **Requirements and Grading**

There are four graded elements in this course. The elements, and their percentage weightings in the final grade, follow:

- Essays (30%),
- Presentation (25%),
- Final examination essay (25%),
- Grade for class discussion (20%).

The numerical scale for each graded element of the course is listed below. The letter grades will be calculated on the basis of the weighted average score across the four elements of the course. Please note that the weighted average score will not be rounded up.

90-100 A  
82-89 B

75-81	C
67-74	D
60-66	E
<60	F

Final Examination Essay. The final examination will be closed-book. Students will write an essay on a topic chosen amongst a list provided by the lecturer, respecting the rules relating to academic essay writing.

*Assessment criteria for final exam and paper:*

Strength and clarity of argument: the exam answers should present an argument in an organized and coherent manner and follow it through. Summarizing someone else's ideas or reiteration of primary material is insufficient. The answer must address the question asked.

Conceptual clarity: the exam answers should demonstrate a clear understanding of concepts used. The concepts should be used consistently throughout the answers.

Relevance: the exam answers should only present material that is relevant to the question asked. Failure to answer the question will lead to a lower mark.

Critical analysis: the exam answers should be based on analysis, rather than reproduction of the relevant literature.

Quality of content: the quality and the relevance of the ideas presented by students are assessed together with the structure.

Presentation. Students will make an oral presentation with Powerpoint on a topic provided by the lecturer and reflecting their having acquired the skills practiced in class.

Class discussion. This grade takes into account attendance, participation in class discussions and preparation for lectures.

## **Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is considered a severe violation and an indication of incompetence in the course. Plagiarism is understood as the making of one's text using compilation method for other people's publications, even when they are connected with their own phrases and sentences. Collective performance of individual tasks is unacceptable. Proven plagiarism will receive an F-mark regardless of the fulfillment of all other requirements.

## **Required and Recommended Readings**

### Compulsory Readings:

They will be uploaded onto Google classroom on a weekly basis or links are provided in this syllabus

### Additional Readings:

*Academic Listening Strategies: A Guide to Understanding Lectures*, J. Salehzadeh, 2005, University of Michigan Press.

*Academic writing for graduate students, Essential tasks and skills*, J.M. Swalles, C. B. Feak, 2012, University of Michigan Press ELT.

*Better presentations: A guide for scholars, researchers and wonks*, J. Schwabish, 2016, Columbia University Press

*Essential writing skills for college and beyond*, C.M. Gill, Writer's digest books, 2014

*International Media Communication in a Global Age* (Routledge Communication Series) 1st Edition, G. Golan, T.Johnson, W. Wanta, 2009, Routledge.

*Statistics, a very short introduction*, D.J.Hand, 2008, Oxford University Press

*Writing for Scholars: A Practical Guide to Making Sense and Being Heard*. Second edition. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2015; Silvia, Paul J.

## **Learning outcomes**

Upon completion of the course, students should be able to:

- Understand the requirements of higher education and the University's expectations
- Communicate with other students and get effectively involved in group projects
- Understand the difference between academic writing and other types of writing
- Identify the structure of an academic text and explain how the structure contributes to the argumentation
- Read large volumes of academic texts and articles using different techniques such as skimming or deep reading and extract information
- Research a topic using academic sources
- Identify different sources and the reliability of each one of them
- Communicate their opinion in a structured and convincing way, respond intelligently to criticism
- Know how to work with basic databases, statistics and form graphical representations
- Create and deliver convincing presentations in a relevant format
- Use creative writing skills (brain storming) and be able to write and structure an academic essay
- Comment on international news referring to different sources and exercise critical thinking regarding current events
- Use the appropriate forms of referencing in essays

## **Course content**

### Topic 1- Introducing Academic Writing

#### *Seminars 1&2*

- Course presentation: tasks and expectations

- Academic writing quiz: how much do you know about academic writing?
- Recognizing academic writing
- Purpose, strategy and organization of academic writing
- The format of long and short writing tasks

Compulsory readings:

- <https://www.scribbr.com/category/academic-writing/>
- “Essay writing skills”

### *Seminars 3&4*

- Understanding an academic article in your field of study: “The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy” by S. Walt and J. Mearsheimer.
- What makes the text an academic article?
- Identifying its strong and weak features
- Exercises on grammar for academic writing (sheet 1)

Compulsory reading:

- “The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy” by S. Walt and J. Mearsheimer.

### Topic 2- The Creative Essay

#### *Seminars 5&6*

- Learning how to write an essay based on personal experience
- Brainstorming: how to generate ideas in different contexts
- Study of three Ivy Leagues application essays
- Mistakes to avoid in creative writing
- Short personal essay in class (45 minutes, 300 words)

Compulsory readings:

- <https://www.bths.edu/ourpages/auto/2017/11/13/58858886/50%20Successful%20Ivy%20League%20App%20Essays%20PART%201.pdf> Read “Bacon” and two other essays of your choice from this book

### Topic 3- The Descriptive Essay

#### *Seminars 7&8*

- Descriptive essays: uses in academic writing
- Unpacking essay subjects
- Critical study of 4 descriptive essays
- Making deductions regarding best practices in descriptive essays

Compulsory Readings:

- “The beach, the Railway station and other descriptive essays”
- “Essay prompts”

### *Seminars 9&10*

- Language focus: exercises on descriptive vocabulary and grammar (sheet 2)
- How to write a descriptive essay introduction
- What a hook is and how to find an engaging one
- In class introduction writing practice (30 minutes, 200 words)

### Compulsory Reading:

- “The Silk Road” by A. Andrea.

### Topic 4- Oral presentations

#### *Seminars 11&12*

- Types of academic oral presentations
- Improving your presentation skills
- Supports for oral presentations
- Powerpoint dos and don'ts
- Short in-class presentations of academic articles (10 minutes for each student)

### Compulsory Readings:

- Tips for conducting an oral presentation  
[https://www.unh.edu/sites/www.unh.edu/files/departments/undergraduate\\_research\\_conference/pdf/tips\\_oral\\_presentation\\_final.pdf](https://www.unh.edu/sites/www.unh.edu/files/departments/undergraduate_research_conference/pdf/tips_oral_presentation_final.pdf)
- “Oratory: The power of speech”
- An academic article of your choice related to your sphere of study

### Topic 5- The Argumentative Essay

#### *Seminars 13&14*

- Recognizing an argumentative essay/ telling it apart from an analytical essay
- Thesis statements: finding the right way to present your position
- Essay structure: how your structure can support your argumentation
- Analysis of the structure of “why migration policies fail”
- In class exercise in two breakout groups: creating a detailed outline for the topics “Can the use of torture be justified?” and “Should human cloning be allowed?”

### Compulsory Readings:

- <https://depts.washington.edu/owrc/Handouts/Argumentative%20Paper%20Format.pdf>  
<https://news.mit.edu/2012/why-nations-fail-0323>
- “Why migration policies fail” by S. Castles

### *Seminars 15&16*

- How to write a conclusion
- Grammar and vocabulary for academic writing (sheet 3)
- Finding the concealed arguments in an academic article

#### Compulsory Readings:

- <https://writersperhour.com/blog/how-to-write-strong-conclusion-paragraph-argumentative-essay>
- <https://www.piie.com/blogs/trade-investment-policy-watch/local-content-requirements-backdoor-protectionism-spreading>

### *Seminars 17&18*

- Making transitions: linking the different parts of your essay together
- Practice exercise for writing transitions with terms from your worksheet
- Discussing a foundational academic article “The Real New World Order” and determining why it was impactful

#### Compulsory Readings:

- <https://uwc.cah.ucf.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/2015/04/Transitions.pdf>
- <https://www.strose.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Transition-Sentences-Handout-2012B.pdf>
- “The Real New World Order” by A.M Slaughter  
<https://scholar.princeton.edu/sites/default/files/slaughter/files/realnewworldorder.pdf>

### Topic 6- Summarizing

#### *Seminars 19&20*

- What makes a good summary?
- Types of summaries
- Stages of summarizing
- Learning how to summarize at different scales (from one line to 50% of original text length)
- Finding key points and note taking
- In class summarizing of short newspaper articles

#### Compulsory Readings:

- [https://writingcenter.uconn.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/593/2014/06/How\\_to\\_Summarize\\_a\\_Research\\_Article1.pdf](https://writingcenter.uconn.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/593/2014/06/How_to_Summarize_a_Research_Article1.pdf)
- <https://www.ndu.edu.lb/Library/Assets/Files/WritingCenter/WritingHandouts/3.12.pdf>

#### *Seminars 21&22*

- Academic tools: Scholarcy smart summaries
- Grammar and vocabulary for academic writing (sheet 4)
- Note-taking from academic articles: overcoming language challenges
- In class: summarizing an article (30 minutes)

#### Compulsory Reading:

- “International norm dynamics and political change” by M. Finnemore and K. Sikkink [https://home.gwu.edu/~finnemor/articles/1998\\_norms\\_io.pdf](https://home.gwu.edu/~finnemor/articles/1998_norms_io.pdf)

#### Topic 7- Academic language focus

##### *Seminars 23&24*

- Vocabulary, flow, linking words
- Focus on punctuation and what to capitalize in English
- Grammar: using the passive form
- In class task: identifying informal and academic style text markers
- Practice turning one of your previous essays into academic writing

#### Compulsory Readings:

- Bring to class one of your essays from last year
- [https://www.kau.edu.sa/files/0013287/subjects/academic-writing-handbook-international-students-3rd-ed%20\(2\).pdf](https://www.kau.edu.sa/files/0013287/subjects/academic-writing-handbook-international-students-3rd-ed%20(2).pdf) Read p150-158 and p179-184

##### *Seminars 25&26*

- Study and discussion of an academic essay
- Mixed-style essays or how authors conceal their positions
- In class examination essay (1h30)

#### Compulsory Reading:

- “Requiem for a River”

#### Topic 8- Finding sources

##### *Seminars 27&28*

- Feedback on marked in class essay
- Identifying the most relevant literature for your topic
- How to use Google Scholar
- Selecting reliable, reputable sources (and avoiding junk journals)
- Exercise: selecting most appropriate academic abstracts for the topic: “Should states negotiate with terrorists? ”

#### Compulsory Readings:

- [https://www.kau.edu.sa/files/0013287/subjects/academic-writing-handbook-international-students-3rd-ed%20\(2\).pdf](https://www.kau.edu.sa/files/0013287/subjects/academic-writing-handbook-international-students-3rd-ed%20(2).pdf) Read pages 11-19

## Topic 9- Referencing

### *Seminars 29&30*

- APA, MLA, Chicago referencing guidelines
- How to use citation tools and generators
- Identifying plagiarism
- Exercise: Create your APA reference list
- Academic grammar and vocabulary (sheet 5)

### Compulsory readings:

- [https://www.kau.edu.sa/files/0013287/subjects/academic-writing-handbook-international-students-3rd-ed%20\(2\).pdf](https://www.kau.edu.sa/files/0013287/subjects/academic-writing-handbook-international-students-3rd-ed%20(2).pdf) pages 30-36
- <https://www.reading.ac.uk/exa-misconduct.aspx>
- “Integrating quotes” (Google classroom)

## Topic 10- Proofreading

### *Seminars 31&32*

- Why proofreading is important in academic writing and why you should keep a portion of your time for it
- Proofreading techniques: finding the best for you
- Stages of proofreading
- Exercise: Proofreading and correcting a sample student essay

### Compulsory Readings:

- “Proofreading strategies”
- <https://academicguides.waldenu.edu/writingcenter/writingprocess/proofreading>

## Topic 11- Problem shooting and Consolidation

### *Seminars 33&34*

- Writer’s block: how to overcome it?
- Managing your workload as a student
- Time management during in-class examinations
- Preparation for final essay

### Compulsory Readings:

- [https://wp.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/UWC\\_handouts\\_writersblock.pdf](https://wp.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/UWC_handouts_writersblock.pdf)
- <https://www.ed.ac.uk/students/academic-life/study-support/supporting-taught-postgraduates/starting-out/time-management>
- <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2016/07/25/how-manage-your-time-better-academic-essay>
- “Breaking the silence: The hidden injuries of neo-liberal academia”. Gill, R.

### *Seminars 35&36*

- Academic grammar and vocabulary (sheet 6)
- Last questions from students
- Final in class examination

### Compulsory Reading:

- <https://www.mentalup.co/blog/what-to-do-for-exam-success>