Academic Language Activities for Students

Dr. Tazanfal Tehseem

Defining Academic Language

- Academic language is:
  - Language used in academic settings and for academic purposes to help students acquire and use knowledge (Anstrom, et al., 2010)
  - Words and syntactic structures that students are likely to encounter in textbooks and tests, but not in everyday, spoken English (Strategic Education Research Partnership, 2010)
  - "The language used in the learning of academic subject matter in a formal schooling context; aspects of language strongly associated with literacy and academic achievement, including specific academic terms or technical language and speech registers related to each field of study." (TESOL, 2003)

Defining Academic Language

- Academic language is:
  - The language of academic disciplines, of texts and literature, and of extended, reasoned discourse
  - Language that students must comprehend to access the concepts associated with a particular discipline (e.g., mathematics, science, social science) and use to demonstrate their understanding of those concepts (Anstrom, et al., 2010)

Defining Academic Language

- Academic language:
  - Cannot be defined dichotomously (i.e., a student has mastered it or has not) but exists on a continuum, with informal, casual conversation at one extreme and the formal, technical presentation of ideas at the other extreme

Casual, Informal   Formal

…and the lions they, um, live in the deserts of Africa and have to walk long ways to find food. There's not much water either. They're hot a lot.

Lions, also known as "kings of the jungle" inhabit the large, arid, deserts of Africa. Due to the sweltering temperatures and minimal water supply they often have to traverse long distances to find prey to hunt and water to drink

Defining Academic Language

- Academic language
  - Features vary as a function of the discipline (e.g., social science vs. mathematics), topic, and mode of communication (e.g., written vs. oral)
  - Common features include:
    - Conciseness
    - High density of information-bearing words
    - Complex grammatical and syntactic structures

Different Types of Knowledge Needed to Foster Academic Language

- Academic language extends beyond the use of specific academic vocabulary to require knowledge in the following areas:
  - Understanding of the phonological features of English
  - Lexical knowledge (e.g., vocabulary, word formation rules)
  - Grammatical competence

Phonological Features

- To use academic English, students must:
  - Knowledge of graphemes and sound-symbol correspondences
  - Understand and be able to apply stress, intonation and sound patterns
    - CAnada / caNAdian
    - inCIte / INsight
    - REcord / reCOrd

Lexical Features

- Academic language requires knowledge of:
  - Forms and meanings of words that are used across academic disciplines
    - *describe, explain, analyze*
  - How academic words are formed with prefixes, roots, and suffixes
    - *investigate, hypothesize*
  - Parts of speech of academic words
  - Grammatical constraints governing academic words

Academic Vocabulary

- Academic Vocabulary: Words students must understand to access the concepts associated with a specific discipline and be able to use to demonstrate their understanding of these concepts

- Typically conceptualized as being composed of three tiers of words:
  - Tier 1: High frequency, non-academic words used across a variety of contexts
  - Tier 2: Non-specialized academic words that are used across content areas (e.g., *illustrate, however, assert*)

- Necessary but insufficient for building strong academic language skills – more skills are needed!

Academic Vocabulary

- Academic language can also be conceptualized as being composed of different types of language:
  - Language of Instruction
    - Words to teach and learn the lesson content (*strategies, pre-writing, context clues)*
  - Language of Text
    - Words related to the content-area, theme, unit, or selection (*habitats, camouflage, prey*)
  - Multi-syllabic words with prefixes, suffixes, and Greek and Latin roots
    - Examples: *informational, hopelessness, psychology*
    - Word families: *rely, reliance, reliable*

Grammatical Competence

- Understanding and the ability to appropriately apply rules of English is required at two levels:
  - When using everyday/informal English students must be able to:
    - Form grammatically correct, simple sentences
    - Form complex sentences with subordinate clauses
    - Apply knowledge of the noun system (application of plural endings, irregular plurals, definite/indefinite articles and demonstratives)
    - Apply knowledge of the verb system to form sentences using all verb tenses (present, past, present perfect, present continuous, future, modal, etc. for regular and irregular verbs)

Grammatical Competence

- Understanding and the ability to appropriately apply rules of English is required at two levels:
  - When using academic English students must be able to:
    - Apply knowledge of more complex syntactic structures
      - Passive: *The book was written by Tomie de Paola.*
      - Ergative: *The rock shattered the window*.
    - Apply knowledge of more complex clause structures
      - Parallel
      - Conditional: *If you were to add yeast, the bread would rise.*
      - Complex: *My friend Sarah likes chocolate ice cream and I like vanilla.*
      - Compound: *Ella's mom read her a story each night because it helped her relax.*
      - Complex-Compound: *My sister likes dogs but I don't because they slobber.*
    - Learn grammatical features for new nouns
      - Subject-verb agreement: *The criterion is (singular)*
      - Irregular plurals: *The criteria are (plural)*
      - Nouns followed by prepositional phrases: *Discrimination against someone*
      - Nominalization: *Discrimination, employment, judgment*

Informal English

- Jack Springer thinks that the government should allow people the right to own a gun. But I don't agree with him. People like him sort of think that the government limits our rights when it restricts gun stuff. They kind of think that most people who own guns are responsible guys who keep the guns for sport and recreation. They also think that the police are unable to stop violent crime and we need guns to protect ourselves. But I think he is wrong. I agree with Josephine Bluff who thinks that guns increase the amount of violent crime in the community. I also think that human life is worth more than giving shooters the right to go shooting on the weekend.   And I also think that many of the guns that are kept around the house would of ended up being used in violent domestic disputes or teenage suicides.

Academic English

Jack Springer maintains that the government should allow people the right to own a gun. This position asserts that the government is infringing on our democratic rights when it restricts gun ownership. Most people who own guns, so the argument goes, are responsible citizens who keep the guns for sport and recreation. It is further contended that the police are unable to stop violent crime and we need guns to protect ourselves. However, as Josephine Bluff states, guns increase the amount of violent crime in the community. Moreover, human life is worth more than giving shooters the right to go shooting on the weekend.   In addition, many of the guns that are kept around the house are used in violent domestic disputes or teenage suicides.

Adapted from: Bill Daley, 1997

Converting Informal English into Academic English

Jack Springer maintains that the government should allow people the right to own a gun. **This position asserts that** the government is infringing on our democratic rights when it restricts gun ownership. Most people who own guns, **so the argument goes**, are responsible citizens who keep the guns for sport and recreation. **It is further contended that** the police are unable to stop violent crime and we need guns to protect ourselves. **However, as Josephine Bluff states**, guns increase the amount of violent crime in the community. **Moreover**, human life is worth more than giving shooters the right to go shooting on the weekend.   In addition, many of the guns that are kept around the house are used in violent domestic disputes or teenage suicides.

Adapted from: Bill Daley, 1997

Characteristics of Language Types

| Informal English	Academic English
Uses hedges (*kind of, sort of*)	Does not use hedges
Uses personal pronouns (I)	Avoids personal pronouns
Uses simple connectors (*but, also, and*)	Uses sophisticated transition words (*moreover*)
Uses slang (*stuff, guys*)	Uses academic words

Types of Text

Two types of written text:

Narrative text tells a story and usually follows a familiar structure. Narrative text may be the invention of an author, the reporting of factual events, or the retelling of a tale from oral tradition. It is often written in informal, everyday English.

Expository text provides an explanation of facts and concepts. Its main purpose is to inform, persuade, or explain. It is usually written in academic English.

Academic Writing Activities for Students

What is Academic Writing?
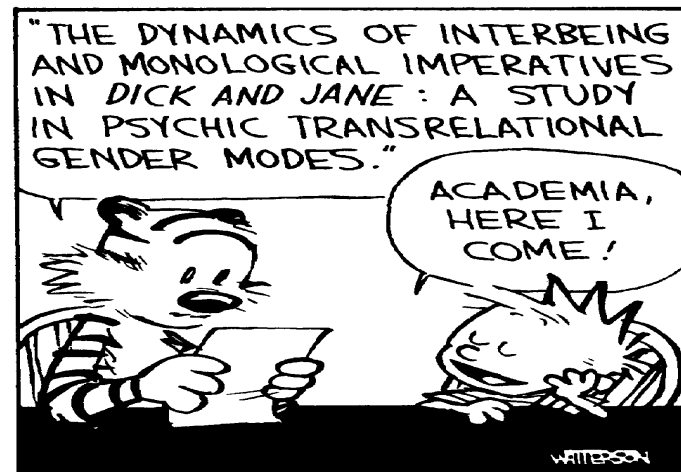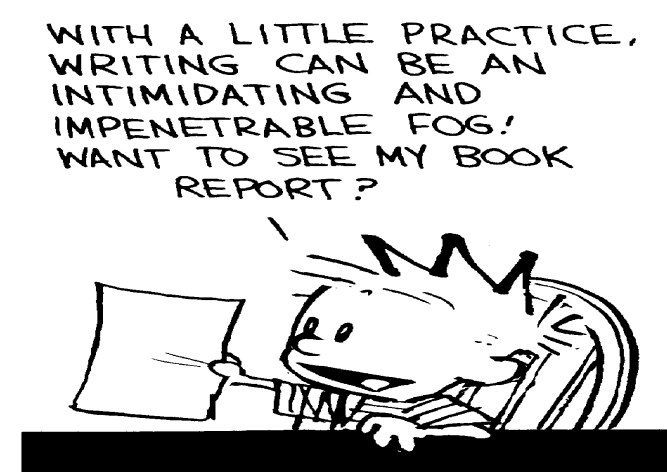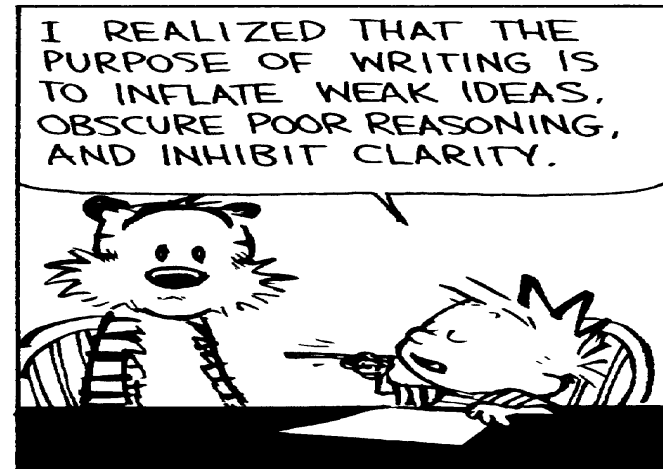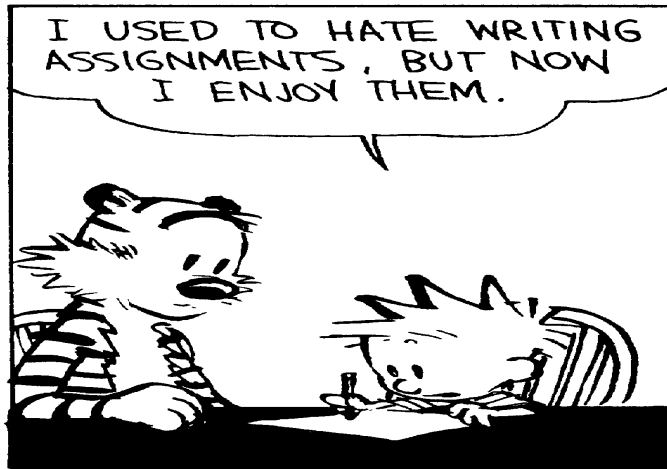
Academic Writing

Basic terms

Basic terms

- When do we use academic writing?
- Books and book reports
- Essays
- Research papers
- Conference papers
- Academic journals
- Dissertation and thesis
- ...

Basic terms

- **Main Characteristics of academic writing**

- **General purpose** - to present information which depicts a clear understanding of a subject and topic

- **Specific purpose** - depending on the type of assignment

- **Argument and Persuasion** - To persuade the audience to accept the writer's opinion and attitude

- **Exposition** - To explain something

- **Description** - To describe something

- **Narration** - To tell or retell a story

The structure of academic writing

- Introduction:

- draws the reader's attention

- defines the focus, or thesis, that is developed in the main part (body) of the essay

- Body :

- Consists of paragraphs which should support the thesis and should be arranged appropriately

- conclusion: the summary paragraph

Purpose

Academic Writing

Entertain
Persuade
inform

No Definite purpose

- **Poem**
- **Story**

Definite purpose

- **Article**
- **Book**
- **Assignment**

Technical Writing

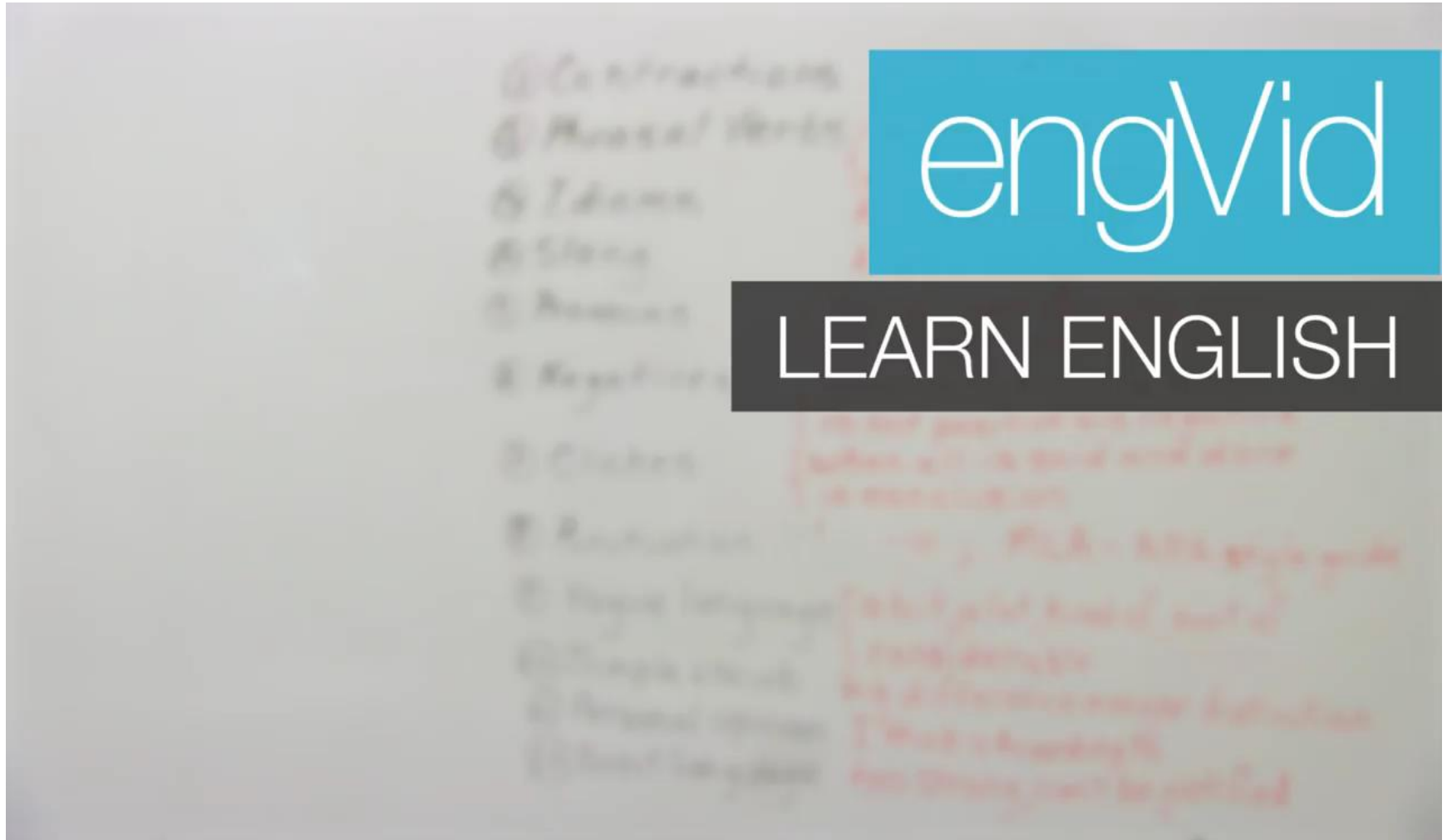**Inform**
Persuade

- **Research**

Definite Purpose

Supervisor: Order a report

Employee: Write a report

- **Needed**

➢ **Read for Information**

Common Errors in Academic Writing

Format

Academic Writing

Paragraphs
- Topic Sentences

Pictures

Technical Writing

Major Headings
Sub Headers
Markers
- Bullets
- Underlings
- Bold type
White Space.

Illustrations
- Graphs
- Tables
- Pictures
- Drawings

Language

Academic Writing

Words
- Elaborate
- Transitions
- Subjective
- Cogitative
- Multiple meaning

Sentence Structure
- Complex
- Embellishment
- Excessive words
- Synonyms
- Passive voice

Technical Writing

Words
- Active vocabulary
- ➢ Plain
- ➢ Easily understood
- Objective
- Non-sexist
- Avoid pronouns

Sentence Structure
- Uncomplicated
- Repetition
- Active voice

Developing writing

Students benefit from being given opportunities to:

- Practise writing in the discipline
- Reflect on their writing and other aspects of their learning
- Reflect on feedback from their teachers

Freewriting

- Peter Elbow (1998) argues that free-writing encourages students to write at length without fear of censorship. Benefits include:

- Freedom to explore a topic

- Demonstrates knowledge

- Encourages understanding

Academic freewriting

Use for:
- Writing at length
- Writing in discipline
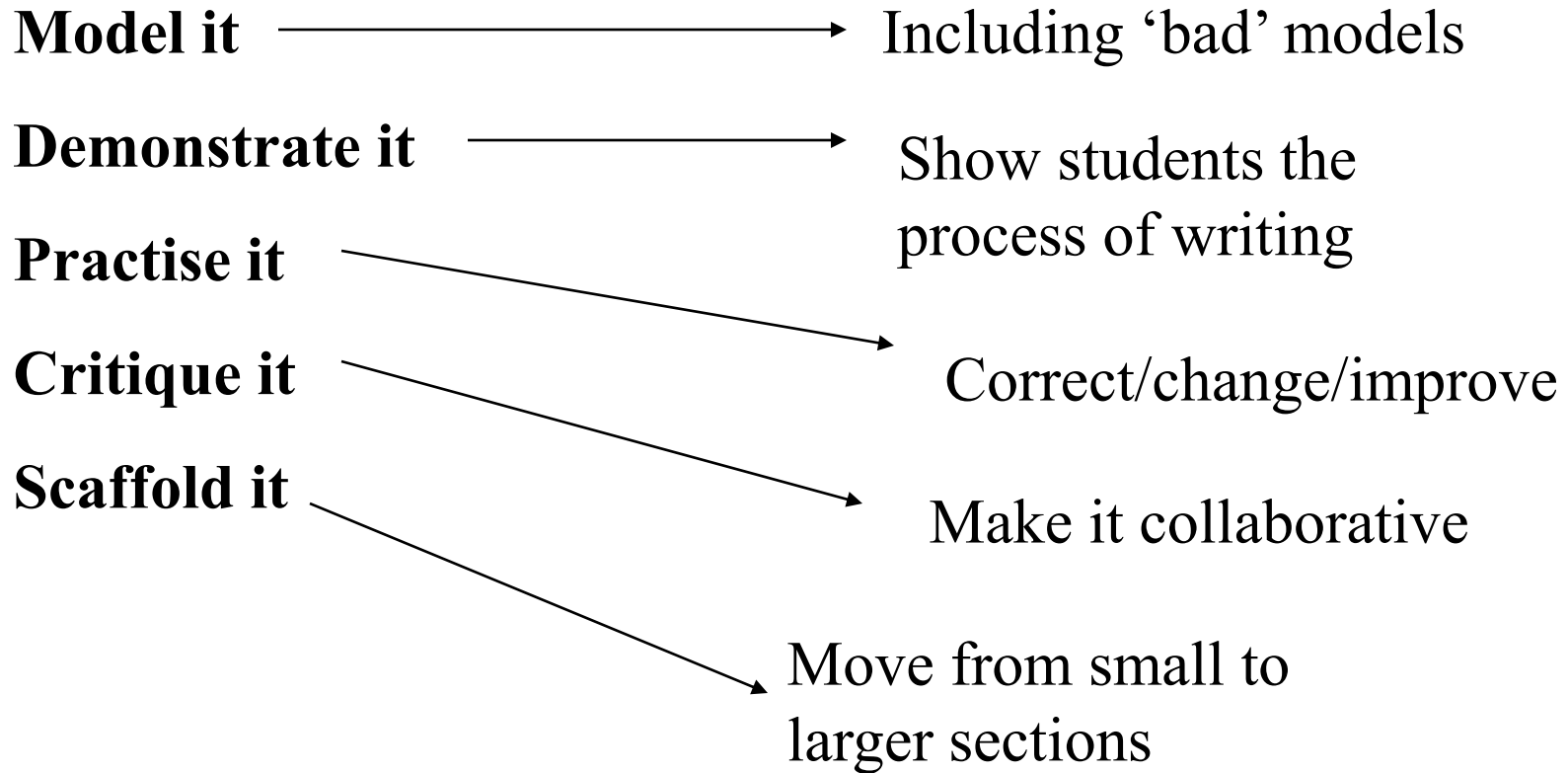- Structure
- Proof-reading
- Editing
- Reflecting

What will you do with this information?
How will it effect you as a student?
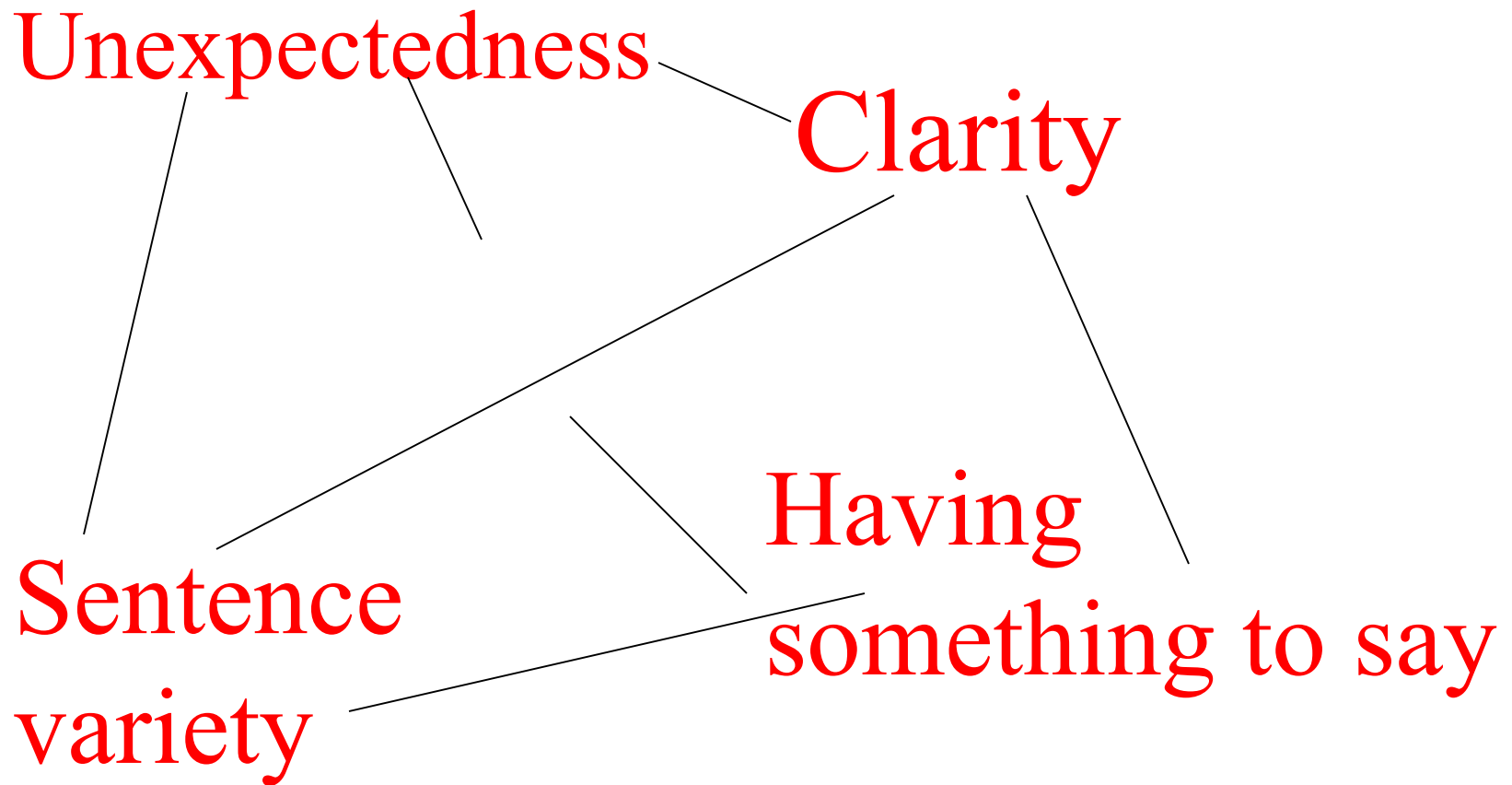**Can you use this in your work setting? How?**

TEACHING WRITING

Model it   ⟶ Including 'bad' models

Demonstrate it   ⟶ Show students the
process of writing

Practise it

Critique it   Correct/change/improve

Scaffold it   Make it collaborative

Move from small to
larger sections

TEACHING WRITING

Unexpectedness

Clarity

Sentence variety

Having something to say

TEACHING WRITING

Jonathan Raban

The road to Multan is long, straight, dusty, littered with wrecked cars and punctuated only by the odd windswept gas station. There are no villages, no oases, and the Gulf is hidden behind sand-dunes which look as if they are suffering from some sort of desert scurf or mange. It is the kind of road on which car crashes look like philanthropic gestures; they at any rate do something to provide a momentary relief in that monotony of sand and rusted oil drums. Skeetering Cola cans, blowing across the highway, make an ersatz wildlife; half-close your eyes, and you can imagine them as rabbits, surprised in a hedgerow on an English lane. On second thoughts, don't: they are just Cola cans, tumbling in the wind across the Arabian desert, their paint stripped, sandblasted down to bare metal.

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What is Academic Writing

Conclusion

- This presentation included an extended definition of Writing, expressing the need for easy access to information,

- Think about the significance of a writer communicating in clear straightforward vocabulary and sentence structure to convey information.

- Remember; if the intended reader is not able to quickly understand the message the writer failed;.