Academic Toolbox

It is time to prepare for studying in an academic context. Even if you have done so before, it might be a bit different than what you are used to from your previous studies. Therefore, we have put together an academic toolbox for you to work through before you start your studies, and perhaps also come back to once in a while. Here you find some of the key tools to succeed in your studies.

It includes four different sections:

1. Critical Thinking
2. Academic Writing
3. Academic Integrity
4. Language & Style in your Academic Work

At the University library, we are also happy to help you when it comes to information search, making a reference list and much more. Check out [our web site](#) or come by the library once you are on Campus.

Critical Thinking

Throughout your studies at Jönköping University, you will be asked to write different academic texts in the form of for example reports or research papers. This is both a form of learning and a way of showing your teachers that you have understood and can apply the course content and the course literature. Thus, it is not enough to just learn by heart what research says about a certain topic, but rather you must use the information you acquire to make your own reasoning reliable and trustworthy. It also enables you to position yourself within the research; to agree with it, to question it, or add on new perspectives to it. In conclusion, your work should not just be a summary of other people's work, but you can use your choice of references and how you relate to them, to make your point clear.

Critical thinking is a key skill that should be applied to all aspects of your studies. As a university student, you need to be able to think critically about the resources and information you use in your work. You need to ask the right questions when reading the work of others; your writing needs to show you have the ability to weigh up different arguments and perspectives and use evidence to help you form your own opinions, arguments, theories and ideas. Critical thinking is about questioning and learning with an open mind. (Source: University of Leeds)

Watch the video: Critical Thinking

Watch the video A Critical Thinking Model from University of Leeds, or if you'd rather read about this you can do that at their web page: Critical Thinking: A model for Critical Thinking

Evaluation of sources

When you evaluate your material, make sure to pay attention to:

Author

Who is the author? Is the author well-known within the discipline? Can you find any information about the author's affiliation (research institution, organization, etc.)? Is the author mentioned in other publications?

Publisher

Who has published the document? Is it an academic publisher or a publishing company that is well-known within the discipline? If it is a web document you are about to evaluate, try to analyze the URL or web address. The web address includes, among other things, a domain name and geographical code, which may give information about where the author works.

Purpose and intended audience

For what purpose is the text written? Try to figure out if the author is writing with the purpose of informing, influencing or provoking the reader. For whom is the text written? Is it adjusted to a specific target group and is it in accordance with your own information needs? Keep in mind that the same researcher may write about findings in a language that is either of a more academic or popular science style.

Currency

When was the text written and does this have any importance for the purposes of your work? See if there are any newer editions of the book, or if the author has written a more recent article about the same subject. The publishing date of web documents may sometimes be a bit more difficult to locate, but in many cases, there will be information about when the page was last updated. However, it can still be difficult to see what and how much of an online text has been updated.

References

The references cited in the text indicate what research the author has considered. References can include both research the author is critical about as well as research used to support the author's own arguments.

Contents

Is the document published in its original form, or is it a revision of material published earlier? Is the problem you are searching information about the central focus of the text? Does the content of the text correlate with other documents within the subject field or does the author hold a different standpoint?

Is the data used in the document correct? For example, check if the statistical data is reliable, and that any comparisons made in the text are based on the same statistical data.

Academic Writing

In this part, we focus on how to tackle a writing assignment. The foundation is the same, regardless of if it is a shorter piece of text, a term paper, or your final thesis. The following videos deal with different aspects of the writing process.

Watch the following videos from Lund University on academic writing:

[What is academic writing](#)

[Interpreting the task](#)

[The writing process and process writing](#)

[Research questions and thesis statement](#)

[Structuring the text around the three-part essay](#)

There are a lot of books available at the University Library to guide you through your academic writing and thesis work. Come by the library and you'll get help to find them!

Academic Integrity

Using and referencing sources in your own work

A text written in an academic context needs to be trustworthy. Your reasoning needs to be logical and based on your sources and/or the result of your own research. Through your writing, you should aim to show that you know how to handle a scientific problem. Your reasoning cannot be taken out of context, it needs to be motivated. The reader should be able to trust your research and one crucial factor for this is how you have handled your sources. In this section, we will focus on how to use sources in your writing.

Watch the following videos from Lund University on referencing:

[Why references](#)

[The parts of a reference](#)

At Jönköping University, the most common way to cite is using the APA style. If you have not used it before you can familiarise yourself with it through [The University Library APA-guide](#) The four basic building blocks are the same regardless of what type of publication you are using:

Who created the source? This is either one or several authors, or an organization.	When was the source created? In most cases this is the year the source was published, but in some cases, for example newspaper articles, you also include the month and day as well. When no year can be identified in the source, you can instead write n.d. (= no date) in its place.

Surname, A. (year). *Title.* Source.

What is the name of the source? This is the title of a book, an article, a book chapter, a website, a report, a piece of music or a blog post.	Where can you find the source? This part should answer the question "Where", and that means different things depending on what kind of source we are dealing with. If it is a book, it would be the publisher, if it is something on a website, it is a web link, if it is journal article, it is the journal, and if it is a book chapter, it is the book in which you can find the chapter.

Avoiding Plagiarism

Using sources in the correct way can be tricky even for the experienced essay writer. It takes practice. As seen in the videos above, there is a lot to think about when it comes to references. However, one of the biggest challenges might be to avoid plagiarism, which means copying sources into your text without telling the reader that it is a quote from your source. There are different ways to avoid plagiarism in your essay writing:

- Make notes while you read and then use your notes in your writing rather than copying off your source.

- Try to summarise, in your own words, the core content of a paragraph you want to include in your essay.

- Be very restrictive when it comes to using direct quotations. Quotes are only used when it is absolutely necessary to use the exact same words as the author used in the source and it is usually only used when you want to highlight a specific word or phrase. Most often it is more appropriate to summarize the general idea in your own words.

If you want more tips on how to incorporate sources in your writing and also avoid plagiarism, you can dig deeper on this web page from Purdue University: [Best Practices to Avoid Plagiarism](#).

Language & Style in your Academic work

When it comes to language and style, you should always strive towards being…

Precise - Do not use vague phrases, the reader should not need to interpret what you write.

Coherent – Your text needs to be carefully structured with clear sentences, paragraphs, and layout according to the instructions given. You will need to help the reader with comments that guide the reader through the text. It could be comments regarding how the text is structured or using transition words such as firstly, secondly, furthermore, consequently or in conclusion.

Focused – Everything you write, every sentence, every word should have a function. Remove unnecessary words or comments which do not add meaning or context to the reader. In a larger perspective, it can be difficult to make decisions on what information to include and what you can leave out. On the one hand, you will need to be very detailed in some remarks, for example making a specific account for the research you have done. On the other hand, you must discern what is unnecessary information that can be omitted. (Source: Translated from Studieverkstaden JU University).

Watch the following videos from Lund University on language and style:

[Structuring paragraphs](#)

[The need to edit and revise one's text](#)

[Editing for register and tone](#)

[Editing for style](#)

[First person pronouns and choosing between active and passive voice](#)

Additional material

Link to all the videos Lund University has published in the series Writing in English:
[Writing in English at University (All videos, Lund University)](#)

Harvard university's guide for essay writing:
[Harvard University: strategies for essay writing](#)

Sources used in the toolbox:

Lund University Libraries. (2018, December 10). *Writing in English at University* [video].
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLeVxAnFsasIqIc8b03kHA3tw-xfIwgO2M

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