

# Improving Your Writing

@Morling w/Wendy

# Going Deeper

*Theology is faith seeking understanding - Anselm*



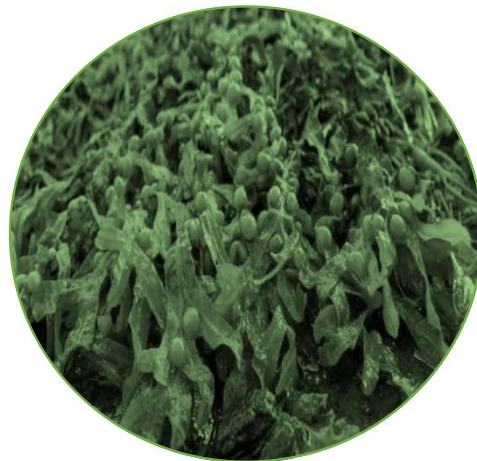
# Order out of Chaos

amazing morling students



## define key terms

Display knowledge,  
categorise, general  
to specific pattern.



## information ordering

Create flow with  
old and new  
information



## academic register

Formal or informal?  
What difference  
does it make?



## concise writing

Word count,  
padding, being lean

# Organising information



Identifying common patterns of organisation in academic text will help you in understanding your readings, and structuring your writing.

1. Problem - Solution
2. Comparison - Contrast
3. Cause - Effect
4. Classification [\(we focus here\)](#)

(From Swales and Feak, 2012: 14)

# define key terms

The order and classification of ideas



Definition comes from the Latin *definio*, meaning to limit or bound (Swales and Feak, 2012: 65).

Definitions are important because:

- **Students are asked to give definitions of key terms to display clear understanding.**  
Key terms may be briefly defined in an introduction, then later discussed more fully, particularly if scholars disagree. An important step towards joining the ‘academic conversation’ in your discipline is to learn to use discipline specific terminology well.
- **In academic writing, definitions play an important role in establishing the topic to be discussed.**  
Definitions of key terms help to explain your topic and limit the boundaries of your essay. A common pattern in academic writing is to move from general to specific ideas. Definitions are often a good place to start.

# Types of Definitions



## Gloss Definitions

Short definitions where two phrases are positioned side by side where one explains the other.

**The synoptic gospels**, the words and deeds of Jesus, relate heavily to his announcement of the kingdom of God.

Hawthorne et al. define **the church** as a local assembly or gathering of Christians.

Scazzero referred to this as “**achievement addiction**,” with no amount of work or success ever feeling like it was enough to satisfy the desires of others.<sup>5</sup>

## Sentence Definitions

“This definition contains the *class* to which this term belongs, so it enlarges the reader’s view to classify it, then narrows this view with *details* which distinguishes it within this class” (Giltrow, 2002).

**The zone of proximal development** is a stage of *growth* where children are incapable of completing tasks on their own, however, with the active assistance of parents they can do so.

**The apostles** were *pioneering messengers of the gospel* who bore divine authority and were eye-witnesses of the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ.

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# The Pattern of Definitions

The order and classification of ideas



Common Structure of a Sentence Definition

**TERM** + **Verb** + **CLASS word** + that/which + **Distinguishing DETAIL**

**An election** + **is** + **a decision-making process** + **that** + **selects someone for a public office by voting.**

**NB: Class words** are a category **one level** of generality higher than the defined term. Common class words are: *device, process, system, technique and method*, although there are many other possibilities.

The **distinguishing detail** section is often written as a relative clause using *that* or *which*. In some cases these can be deleted.



# The Pattern of Definitions

The order and classification of ideas



**Choosing CLASS Words - Find an appropriate class word for each sentence below.**

Term	Verb	Class	(that/which) Detail
<b>A particle</b>	is		(which is) at a single point in space.
<b>A partnership</b>	is known as		owned by two or more individuals for personal profit.
<b>Libertarianism</b>	is defined as		that the role of the state should be minimal.
<b>Adrenaline</b>	may be defined as		(that is) produced within the adrenal gland.
<b>Inerrancy</b>	refers to		that the Scripture is completely truthful, without any mixture of error, in all its teachings.

# The Pattern of Definitions

The order and classification of ideas



**Choosing CLASS Words - Find an appropriate class word for each sentence below.**

<b>Term</b>	<b>Verb</b>	<b>Class</b>	<b>(that/which) Detail</b>
<b>A particle</b>	is	<b>a mass</b>	(which is) at a single point in space.
<b>A partnership</b>	is known as	<b>a business</b>	owned by two or more individuals for personal profit.
<b>Libertarianism</b>	is defined as	<b>a belief</b>	that the role of the state should be minimal.
<b>Adrenaline</b>	may be defined as	<b>a stress hormone</b>	(that is) produced within the adrenal gland.
<b>Inerrancy</b>	refers to	<b>the belief</b>	that the Scripture is completely truthful, without any mixture of error, in all its teachings.

# Information Ordering

Create flow with old and new information



## Old to New Summary

In Academic English, **old information** comes at the beginning of a clause before the main verb thereby helping to link to what we already know. **New information** is usually introduced after the main verb in a clause.

Old → Main Verb → New

Observe Old and New placement at work in a well written journal article in your field. Check a few paragraphs in your own writing.

# Information Ordering

Create flow with old and new information



## Old to New

Most sentences in English have two parts:

The **old** part is what you are writing about. It is **shared information** your reader is familiar with.

The **new** part is what you are saying about the **old**. It is the **new information** that you want to tell your reader.

In English the **old** part usually comes at the beginning of the sentence and the **new** part at the end.

Several patterns are common in academic writing. Let's look at two of them.

# Old to New Information Structure



OLD	NEW
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Given or known element</li><li>• Point of departure</li><li>• What the sentence is about?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• New element</li><li>• Core message</li><li>• What is focal?</li></ul>
The government	has managed forests without a clearly defined framework.
The church	is engaged actively in God's mission and make the spreading of gospel effective.

# Old to New Pattern 1



The completed electrical behaviour of any valve or transistor can be described by stating the interrelation of the currents and the voltages between all the electrodes. These relationships can conveniently be displayed graphically, and all the various curves are known as the 'characteristics' of the device. In principle, all the characteristics should be available to the designer proposing to use the device in a circuit (Jolly 1972:61).

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# Old to New Pattern 1

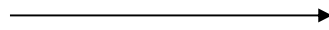


Old

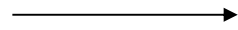
Behaviour



Interrelation



Characteristics



New

Interrelation

Characteristics

Available to designer

## Old to New Pattern 2



Anthropology is the study of humankind, especially of *Homo sapiens*, the biological species to which we humans belong. It is the study of how our species evolved from more primitive organisms; it is also the study of how our species developed a mode of communication known as language and a mode of social life known as culture. It is the study of how culture evolved and diversified. Finally, it is the study of how culture, people, and nature interact wherever human beings are found (Harris 1975: 1)

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# Old to New Pattern 2



- Anthropology → study of humankind
- Anthropology → how our species evolved
- Anthropology → developed language & culture
- Anthropology → how culture evolved
- Anthropology → how they interact

# Information Ordering

Create flow with old and new information



Which pattern is used here?

The church is Christ's body and Christ is the head (Ephesians 5:23). Hawthorne *et al.* defined the church as a local assembly or gathering of Christians. The formation of the church is God's act facilitated through Jesus Christ and his gospel<sup>4</sup>. Twelftree aptly described that the church was born as a community of Jesus' followers during his earthly ministry. The church is never separated from Jesus and it is called to continue Jesus' ministry after his ascension<sup>5</sup>. Acts 2:42- 47 displays what an early church is like. Christians devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer, contributing their possession and praising God all day. The function of a church is to strengthen the believers and prepare them for full maturity until Jesus' return (Ephesians 4:12). The church provides an opportunity to believers so that they can encounter God and foretaste the life of heaven in a vertical dimension. At the same time, it provides a horizontal dimension that believers can have fellowship with one another. The church is engaged actively in God's mission and makes spreading the gospel effective.

# Information Ordering

Create flow with old and new information



Which pattern is used here? **Old marked**

**The church** is Christ's body and Christ is the head (Ephesians 5:23). Hawthorne *et al.* defined **the church** as a local assembly or gathering of Christians. The formation of **the church** is God's act facilitated through Jesus Christ and his gospel<sup>4</sup>. Twelftree aptly described that **the church** was born as a community of Jesus' followers during his earthly ministry. **The church** is never separated from Jesus and **it** is called to continue Jesus' ministry after his ascension<sup>5</sup>. Acts 2:42- 47 displays what an early church is like. Christians devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer, contributing their possession and praising God all day. The function of **a church** is to strengthen the believers and prepare them for full maturity until Jesus' return (Ephesians 4:12). **The church** provides an opportunity to believers so that they can encounter God and foretaste the life of heaven in a vertical dimension. At the same time, **it** provides a horizontal dimension that believers can have fellowship with one another. **The church** is engaged actively in God's mission and makes spreading the gospel effective.

# Information Ordering

Create flow with old and new information



Which pattern is used here? **Old** and **New** marked

The church is **Christ's body** and Christ is the head (Ephesians 5:23). Hawthorne *et al.* defined **the church** as a **local assembly or gathering of Christians**. The formation of **the church** is **God's act** facilitated through Jesus Christ and his gospel<sup>4</sup>. Twelftree aptly described that **the church** was born as a **community of Jesus' followers** during his earthly ministry. **The church** is never separated from Jesus and **it** is called to **continue Jesus' ministry after his ascensions**. Acts 2:42- 47 displays what an early church is like. Christians devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer, contributing their possession and praising God all day. The function of **a church** is to **strengthen the believers** and prepare them for full maturity until Jesus' return (Ephesians 4:12). **The church** provides **an opportunity to believers** so that they can encounter God and foretaste the life of heaven in a vertical dimension. At the same time, **it** provides **a horizontal dimension** that believers can have fellowship with one another. **The church** is **engaged actively in God's mission** and makes spreading the gospel effective.



# Information Ordering

Create flow with old and new information



Which pattern is used here?

Christian leaders are special people who are appointed and guided by God, empowered by the Holy Spirit to witness Jesus' redemptive work to ultimately accomplish God's world-wide mission. God's mission is to bring salvation to every human, first to the Jews and ultimately to all nations. God established the church and appointed different types of leaders including apostles, elders, deacons, prophets and evangelists to accomplish his mission until Jesus' second coming. These Christian leaders have distinctive roles and play important roles at different times in history for God's work. The book of Acts and the Pastoral Epistles demonstrated a biblical model of Christian leadership. Based on these books, this essay will firstly introduce the goal and scope of God's mission, and subsequently discuss the function and importance of each type of Christian leader, and its implication for the contemporary church in relation to God's mission.

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Create flow with old and new information



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Observe Old and New placement at work in a well written journal article in your field. Check a few paragraphs in your own writing.

# Academic Formality

What difference does it make?



## Version A

Overuse of water resources is a major problem all over the world. The crisis is particularly acute in relation to groundwater reserves which lie deep under the surface in aquifers. One third of the world's population depends on these aquifers, which have taken thousands of years to develop. (48)

From Jean Brick et al, 2019, *Academic Success*

## Version B

People use too much water all over the world, but the real problem is groundwater. Groundwater is underground water which is stored in aquifers, and they are usually very deep down under the surface. About a third of the people in the world use water from aquifers, but they take thousands of years to develop. (56)

# Academic Formality

What difference does it make?



## Writing

- Uses nouns to talk about actions (e.g. overuse of water resources)
- Uses fewer pronouns (e.g. focus on abstract ideas)
- Less dependent on context (e.g. have to fill in the gaps; explain fully)
- Distance between writer and reader is far (e.g. cannot assume shared knowledge)
- Builds complexity; is specific, detailed, and more formal (use of passive voice: *The interviews were conducted...*)

## Speech

- Uses verbs to talk about actions
- Uses more pronouns (e.g. focus on people)
- More dependent on context (e.g. gestures, body language)
- Speaker and listener are close (e.g. can gauge shared knowledge)
- Is simpler, longer, less precise and informal (*I, we, won't, but, stuff, thing, etc.*).

# concise writing

Word count, padding, being lean



## How to write concisely

Academic writing should be concise; that is, you should use no more words than necessary to convey your meaning clearly. Most of us **use far more words than necessary in a first draft**; concise writing usually requires **several revisions**:

**Stay on topic:** Is the content of each sentence both relevant and necessary? Ask yourself, 'How does this information contribute to the development of the paragraph as expressed in the topic sentence?' If it does not serve a useful purpose, or adds unnecessary detail, remove it.

### Avoid

- **Tautologies:** A tautology repeats the same thing using different words. '*This is a ~~new~~-innovation*'
- **There is', 'It is':** There were two key tasks in the first part of the project.

*The first part of the project comprised two key tasks:....* (Revised)

- **Low value phrases:** 'in ~~the area of~~ preaching.'
- **Wordiness:** In regards to the trend in interest rates, it is likely to continue to be upward

Interest rates are likely to continue to rise. (Revised)

(From: [www.monash.edu](http://www.monash.edu) › rlo › writing › clear-communication; [https://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0018/3101355/BeingConcisePowerful.pdf](https://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/3101355/BeingConcisePowerful.pdf))

# The End

Photo by Marco Assmann, Cassidy Mills, Kazend, Wolfgang Hasselmann on [Unsplash](#)

**Thank you** to the kind students who have allowed their essays to be used in the making of this session.

## References

Brick, J. 2019 *Academic Success: a student's guide to studying at university*, London: Red Globe Press

Swales, F. and C. Feak 2012, *Academic Writing for Graduate Students*, Michigan, University of Michigan