Academic writing in a nutshell: language support for university students

Nina Rasmussen
Centre for Internationalisation and Parallel
Language Use (CIP)

UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN

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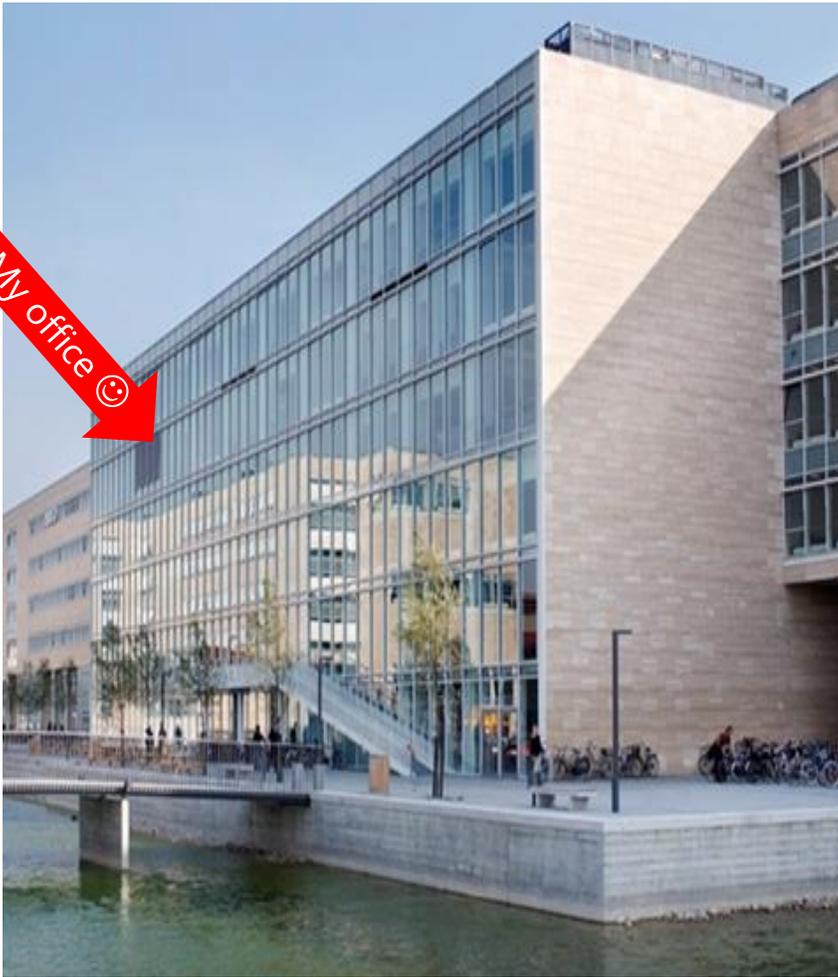
- Established in 2008 in response to a growing need for language support among students and staff

- Research and resource centre: tailormade language courses for staff and students

- Academic writing courses and workshops for students

Outline

1) Development of the language support

2) The language support

- Academic writing workshop
- Written feedback
- Oral feedback workshop
- Online resources

3) The focus-group interview

4) The future

1) Development of the language support

Autumn 2022

- Contacted by the Department of Political Science re language support for 4th semester bachelor students

- The medium of instruction and exam language changed from Danish to English in the spring of 2022

The product

2) The language support

Spring 2023

- 2-hour writing workshop
- Written feedback on 1-page mock exam

Spring 2024

- 2-hour writing workshop
- Written feedback on 1-page mock exam
- Oral feedback workshop
- Online resources

Academic writing workshop

➢Literally, academic writing in a⋯

The workshop covered:

- How to unpack the assignment
- The writing process
- Assignment structure and organisation
- Paragraph structure
- Referencing
- Academic language and style
- 2022 exam question + your practice task

Direction words, e.g., discuss

Process writing

Topic sentences, unity and logical development

Clarity and readability: cohesion, conciseness, precision, formality → editing checklist

Written feedback

2023:
- 1-page mock exam
- **39 group submissions**

2024:
- 1-page mock exam
- **107 <u>individual</u> submissions**

Feedback very detailed:

➢ Error correction code
➢ Comments in margin
➢ Occasional direct corrections
➢ Global comment at the end

Error correction code

Symbol	Explanation	Examples
SP	Spelling mistake	*The Economic crisis that hit Indonesia in 1998 has coursed… → caused
WF	Wrong form of the word	*Others develop tightly or loosely ties with the local officials. → tight and loose
VT	Verb tense wrong	*In the past few decades, there was a contentious debate about… → has been
P	Error in punctuation	*Comma splices should be avoided, they are very distracting. → Comma splices should be avoided; they are very distracting.
S/V	Subject-verb agreement problems	*Those laws and regulations has created complexities in terms of… → have created *If the researcher meet these criteria,… → meets
S/PL	Problem with number	*In the 20th centuries, … → century *These approaches are connected in different way. → ways
R	Redundant word or information	*Concerning about the data related to the phelloderm cells,… → concerning the data
?	Confusion	I have no idea what you mean! 😊

Examples of feedback

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Apostrophe missing

Nina Nellemann Rasmussen   ··· ✎ 👍

P for punctuation. This is a comma splice. You need more than a comma to separate two independent sentences

Waltz's neorealistic theory predicts states behaviour in an international anarchic system (Waltz, 1979, p. 90). There are two key assumptions. Firstly, international systems are decentralised and anarchic. There is no hierarchical structure nor international body to protect states, therefor states most important goal is to ensure their survival (Waltz, 1979, p. 91). Secondly, the distribution of capabilities. This assumption defines the system of polarity. Capabilities becomes the only vital commodity for

Nina Nellemann Rasmussen   ··· ✎ 👍

You need to turn this into a complete sentence, for example: Secondly, the distribution of capabilities + verb. Defines the system of polarity?

Nina Nellemann Rasmussen   ··· ✎ 👍

SP for spelling

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Apostrophe missing

Examples of feedback: global comment

Decent draft. Your text is well structured and also generally well written, but as you can see, there are quite a few comments and corrections for you to digest. You should make better use of comparative words and phrases. It must be clear whether the theories agree or disagree on the various issues covered. You should also make it crystal clear whose voice or theory you're referring to when summarising their views. I've provided examples in a comment in the margin. There are also some consistent language issues for you to attend to. You should pay attention to the following:

1) Apostrophes. They serve an important function.
2) Subject-verb agreement (S/V). A verb must agree in number with its subject.
3) Punctuation. You may want to read my guide to punctuation uploaded on Absalon.
4) Spelling (SP). Make sure you have time to proofread your exam paper before submitting it.

Do let me know if you have any questions.

Good work 👍

Room for improvement

Areas to pay attention to

Questions always welcome ☺

Oral feedback workshop

Spring 2024

- Oral feedback workshop

Presentation covering:

- Paragraph structure revisited
- Unclear referencing revisited
- Confusing linking words
- Distracting errors
- Useful vocabulary links

Oral feedback on the mock exam

Online resources

Spring 2024

- **Online resources** (available on the UCPH learnin

- The workshop slides
- A 25-page compendium
- A PowerPoint on verb tense in academic texts
- A guide to punctuation in English

Examples from a published paper: present simple

Present tense because author is referring to general facts, current meanings and implications, and future applications.

3) The focus-group interview
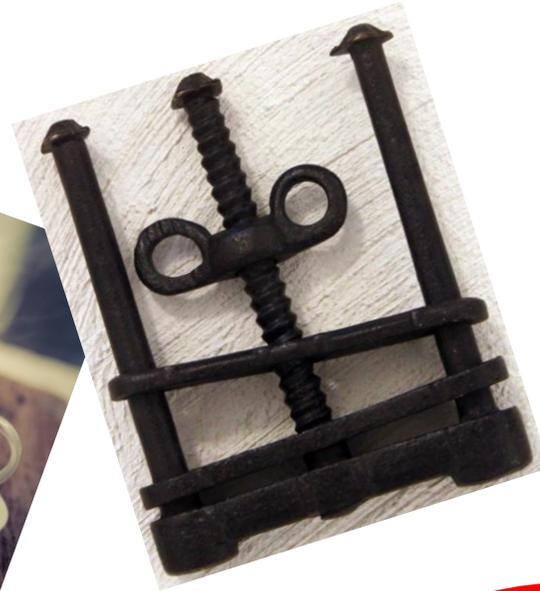
4 students

Written feedback very detailed and useful

Oral feedback appreciated. Nice to be able to ask questions

Content of writing workshop appropriate, except perhaps referencing

Checklist+ student and published texts particularly useful

Exam question too complex and difficult to understand

Mock exam should be completed under time pressure

The editing checklist

Checklist particularly

1. Remember that writing is a process: focus more on content and structure first and then attend to language later.

2. When you are ready to edit/proofread your paper, pay special attention to:

   a) Structure and organisation (overall + sections & paragraphs)
   b) Cohesion (does the text flow?)
   c) Style (clear, concise and appropriately academic)
   d) Sentence length and structure (are sentences relatively short and simple?)
   e) Vocabulary (formality and precision)
   f) Punctuation (avoid comma splices + never comma before "that"!)
   g) Subject-verb agreement (3rd person singular 's')
   h) Spelling (e.g., *then* vs *than*, *effect* vs *affect*, *loose* vs *lose*, *choose* vs *chose*)

The exam question

Exam question too

Exam question 2022

> **Compare** Kenneth Waltz's neorealism and Robert Cox's critical theory in terms of their conceptions of agency and structure. Your answer must contain:

1. a **review** that outlines the most important assumptions about agency and structure in each theory.

2. a **discussion** of how those assumptions about agency and structure might imply different normative and political positions about the possibility of change in international relations.

3. a research proposal that **outlines** how each theory would analyze the Russo-Ukrainian conflict. The research proposal must briefly **outline** proposed research question, research design, central theoretical concepts, and empirical material for each theory.

Exam question 2024

1. Choose central concepts from New Materialist IR theory and Green IR theory. **Justify** your choice of concepts and **compare** their theoretical underpinnings.

2. Pick any empirical case linked to the climate crisis and **demonstrate** how your chosen concepts provide useful analytical insights.

3. **Discuss** how a postcolonial perspective would contribute to an alternative understanding of your chosen case.

4) The future

1. Integrate the language and writing support as a permanent feature of International Relations 2

2. Obtain more substantial student feedback (course evaluation)

3. Obtain data on the effect of the language feedback

4. Offer continued consultancy on the formulation of the exam questions

Thank you for listening ☺

Download presentation here: