Adding **Interest** to Academic Writing

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http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ssees/research/polish-migration/profiles

https://ioe.academia.edu/SaraYoung
Background

- BA (Hons) English Literature
  Royal Holloway, University of London
- MA English Studies 1700-1820
  Queen Mary, University of London
- MRes Social & Educational Studies
  - PhD Applied Linguistics
    University College London
    Institute of Education
- TESOL teacher in Greece, Hungary and UK.
- Tutor on Pre-Sessional English Language Programme, Royal Holloway.
- Writing and language editing work – including *The Guardian*, academic work.
Structure of the Workshop

- **Part I:** presentation on academic writing
  1. Thinking about an approach to writing.
  2. General suggestions.

- **Coffee Break**

- **Part II:** workshop -> opportunity to discuss own work in small groups.
Thoughts about {Academic} Writing

- Dry?
- Tedious?
- Difficult?
- Time-consuming?
- Painful?
Sticking points

• What specific issues do you have?

• Discuss together; make notes

-> return to this during workshop.
Edward Johnston (1872-1944)


• Note the use of diamond points on the ‘i’s rather than just dots e.g. of making something dull more interesting.

Clarity

• Is it ‘for your own amusement’, or aimed at a readership?
• Who is the reader?
• Is it understandable to someone who isn’t in the field?
• If you don’t understand it, no-one else will!

“LET THE MEANING OF YOUR WORK BE OBVIOUS UNLESS IT IS DESIGNED PURELY FOR YOUR OWN AMUSEMENT”

Edward Johnston 1872 - 1944

Images: London Transport Museum

Extract taken from Chapter 8: ‘Sovereign Identities and the Politics of Forgetting’

• Important to note that this is considered something of a classic; however, example of how even ‘classic’ texts can be somewhat difficult to unpick.
What makes this difficult to understand?

Sovereignty and repetition (p.159)

“The careless embrace of acute ontological antagonisms in the deceptively simple name of political realism. The attempt to fix origins in texts that problematise all origins. The insistence that something called ethics be inserted into politics at an intersection that is already constituted as the paradigm of modern political ethics. The disciplining of scholarly procedures by constant appeals to epistemological privilege. Oscillations and continuities informed by pervasive spatial metaphors. Typologies translating horizontal territorialities into apparently hierarchical levels. Articulations of cosmopolitan aspiration for principles that celebrate the virtues of particularity. Such strategies, I have argued, delineate some of the distinctive limits of modern political discourse in an era perplexed by temporal accelerations and historical/structural transformations. These limits are especially apparent in the categories and debates of international relations theory as the discipline most explicitly constituted as a limit of authentically political life within the territorial container of the sovereign state.

To read theories of international relations in this manner, I have also suggested, is to understand them less as an explanation of contemporary world politics than as an expression of processes they are claimed to explain. As such, I have sought to interrogate the assumptions, reifications and textual strategies of international relations theory not because I hope to contribute to a better explanatory theory, at least not one about international relations, but in order to problematise theoretical and practical horizons that continue to be taken for granted.”
{Legible} Beauty

• Is it interesting to read?
• When you come back to it, do you want to read it?
• Does it make anyone else want to read it?

“THIS THEN IS THE Scribe’s DIRECT PURPOSE: THE MAKING OF USEFUL THINGS LEGIBLY BEAUTIFUL”
Academic Writing as a Creative Project

Rather than merely a technical piece of writing, an academic piece can be seen as a creative project. Interest through variety of language, including grammar.

Analogy with song writing:

- What is the genre: pop, opera, heavy metal?
- Who are the audience: 100 people in a small radio station, or 100,000 in a huge stadium?
- What’s the rhythm (of the language)?
Stage 1

- Develop: an understanding of writing; think about the differences in the language(s) you use.
- What language(s) are you writing in?
- Devote a whole session (e.g. a working day) just to language amendments.
Stage 2

• Clarity of thought: is the writing clear?
• Use the ‘find’ button to see how many times a word has been repeated; look for (accurate) synonyms.
• Start each sentence in a different way.
• Dictionaries and thesauruses – not just for cheats!
Stage 3

- Editing: if it doesn’t add to the ‘story’, get rid of it!
- Check for understanding; ask a speaker of a different language to read it through.
- Proof reading: check for mistakes.
References

• Images: London Transport Museum

• ‘Picture of Edward Johnston, 1902’