



Quick Tips for Developing Academic Writing Skills in Gen 1.5 Students

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The conversational abilities of Generation 1.5 students can be their major strength but also their major obstacle when they attempt academic writing. As instructors, we can utilize their strength to improve their understanding of the difference between conversational English and academic/professional English.

1. Use those great oral conversational skills by working in groups for all prewriting activities.

Graphic Organizers are essential to develop organized and coherent writing in students who do not plan their writing. Since many Gen. 1.5 students do not realize that there are other ways to structure a paragraph than to begin "*There are several ...*," assigning small groups to develop a variety of graphic organizers on a topic using different patterns of organization can lead them to discover different forms of topic sentences and patterns of organization, which will permit them to write more academically. Try an example like this one.

- A. Have groups of students create graphic organizers or outlines for several different types of paragraphs or essays on a particular theme.

Topic: Cell Phones
Patterns of Organization:
1. Chronological Sequence: History of cell phones
2. Personal Narrative: Personal history with cell phone
3. Opinion: Should cell phones be permitted in classrooms?
4. Comparison/Contrast: Compare or differentiate 2 different cell phones or cell phone plans.
5. Description: Describe features and purposes/benefits of each feature.

- B. When students have completed the graphic organizers, have them develop a topic sentence for each. If you want students to write one of these paragraphs, have them share that graphic organizer with members of other groups. Students can choose to add to or delete from their graphic organizers as a result of the discussions. This is a great time to have students discuss vocabulary they might use. It can be added directly to the graphic organizers.

2. Differentiate conversational from academic/professional language

Generation 1.5 students often feel they know English since they speak it fluidly. They do not understand why they need ESL instruction. However, since they frequently write as they speak, their writing is not academic or professional. They need to have their awareness raised to the fact that there are differences between how a person speaks in a conversation and how that same person writes formally.

A. Simple things to raise awareness in academic writing

- Set Readability Statistics on your word processor and model using this feature for your students. In this way, they can use this tool to get a rough idea of how academic their writing is. For example, if a student's writing scores a 3.6 grade level, have them make some changes – perhaps changing vocabulary, combining sentences or adding details. Then have them rerun the program and they should see an improvement in their grade level. It's a very easy, quick and private way for students to assess their own writing.
- Do not permit contractions in academic writing – In addition to helping students notice that conversational language has differences from academic/professional language, this will highlight the persistent *been/being* issue! The two sample contraction awareness exercise that follow can help with this.

What does the contraction mean?

- A. Choose the phrase that matches the contraction in the sentence.
1. *They've been trying to find a cheap cell phone.*
a. *Their have* b. *They have* c. *They has*
 2. *The newest cell phone is expensive. It'll be on sale next month though.*
a. *It is* b. *It will* c. *It has*
 3. *Those cell phones are old. They're being updated right now.*
a. *They are* b. *They have* c. *Their are*
 4. *You can't get them right now.*
a. *can* b. *canot* c. *cannot*
 5. *They won't be restocked until next week.*
a. *why not* b. *will not* c. *want be*

What does the contraction mean? (Continued)

B. Choose the phrase that matches the contraction in the sentence. Notice which verb goes with “*being*” and which verb goes with “*been*.”

1. *It's been crowded at the cell phone store today.*
 - a. *It is*
 - b. *It has*
2. *My friend's being interviewed for a job by the manager.*
 - a. *She is*
 - b. *She has*
3. *The next applicant's been waiting for the manager for 45 minutes.*
 - a. *He is*
 - b. *He has*
4. *He's been busy checking his social media on his cell phone.*
 - a. *He is*
 - b. *He has*
5. *He isn't being polite to the applicants.*
 - a. *is not*
 - b. *has not*

- Do not permit use of “*you*” and “*we*”* - Hint: Passive Voice and “*it is...*” are very useful here. “*You can easily see the differences in the cell phones.*” vs “*The differences in the cell phones can easily be seen.*” or “*It is easy to see the differences in the cell phones.*”

*Exceptions: personal narratives and personal examples

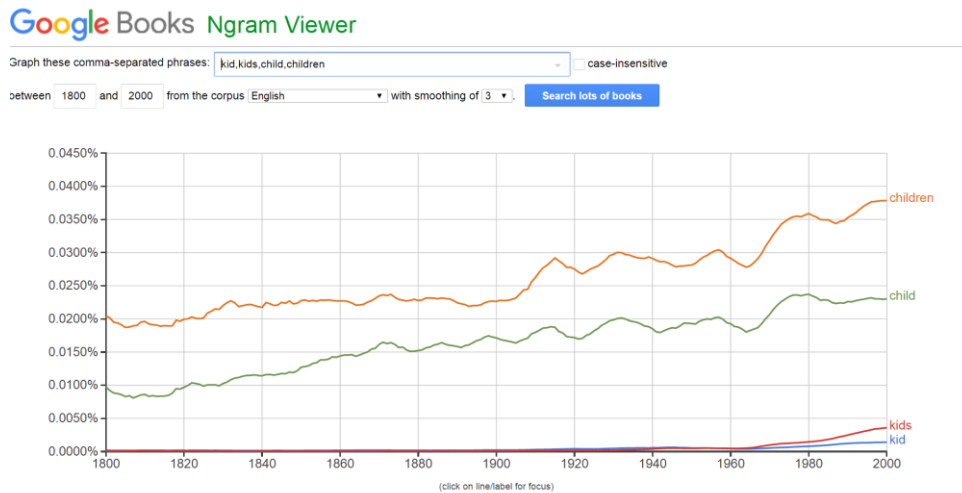
- Have students reduce the usage of continuous tenses in academic writing – Corpus research makes clear that American academic English does not use this verb form frequently. Stick to the simple tenses and present perfect!

2. A less simple thing to do to differentiate conversational from academic and professional language: ***develop academic vocabulary!***

Use technology:

- Show students how to use the thesaurus on the word processor and have students talk about the choices. Decide which choices are more formal and less formal.
- Introduce the concept of academic register with [this site's](#) activities.
- There are numerous sites for the Academic Word List:
 - [AWL site](#) – A nice place to learn about the structure of the lists from the creator of the AWL, Averil Coxhead

- [AWL Profiler](#) – A great site to see how academic your written vocabulary is
- [AWL Vocabulary Exercises](#) – One of many online sites to practice the AWL
- Have students use the Google “[Ngrams](#)” site to see how frequently words are used in writing. The chart below shows the relative frequency in writing of the words *children* and *child* versus *kids* and *kid*. The point? Writers do not use *kid* or *kids*!



Develop abstract vocabulary:

- a. These activities should be done in small groups and then shared with the class:

- I. Give a category; students give examples
 - Start with concrete categories, e.g., “liquids,” and have students give examples
 - Discuss an abstract category, e.g., “bureaucracy.” Define it and give an example. Then have students give other examples. Discuss why some suggestions do not fit the category.
 - Have pairs or small groups of students develop a list of abstract terms with examples.

- II. Give examples and have students develop the category
 - List examples and have students determine the category.
 - Distribute cards with examples of different concrete categories and have students group them and determine the categories.
 - Distribute cards with examples of abstract categories and have students group them and determine the categories.
 - See if students can develop different groupings of the examples and explain why their reasoning might also be acceptable.

- b. Have students go over section 1 of *The Grammar You Need, Level 1: Building Sentences* (an inexpensive fold-out card from Language Arts Press) and complete activities 1.1f, 1.1g, and 1.1h in the [free Student Workbook](#). Many abstract nouns are uncountable but the same word can have concrete and countable meanings.

Have the students, in pairs, go over the following list of nouns to determine whether they are *Countable*, *Non-countable* or *Both* (sometimes countable and sometimes non-countable). Use of a dictionary is encouraged!

	C	N	Both
advice			
child			
love			
phone			
courage			
time			
country			

	C	N	Both
sand			
sandwich			
color			
education			
light			
difficulty			
experience			

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