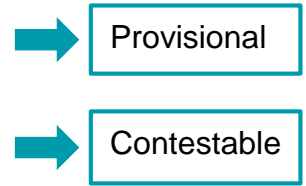


Academic tradition of reason and argument

Academic work in the UK draws on a tradition of debate and argument, reasoning and evidence.

In this tradition, 'knowledge' is viewed as provisional and contestable. We accept that 'knowledge' represents our best understanding of something at this time; however, we may have to change our views if new, more convincing evidence or theories are produced.



Learning through critical evaluation

At university, it is unusual to have an absolute answer, either 'right' or 'wrong', or one correct interpretation. This leads to exploring, testing and asking questions of knowledge. Academics tend to build on the work of others by evaluating and critically examining it and then adding their own contributions, which they expect to be also critically evaluated. They will also acknowledge what remains problematic or unresolved.

Ways of constructing and writing about knowledge vary considerably from one subject area to another. Therefore it is important to be aware of the ways of talking and writing in your field.

One way to develop your academic writing is to find a few articles from key journals in your field that are clearly written and easy to follow. Investigate:

- How has the argument been structured?
 - Can you make an outline of it?
 - Can you identify the evidence or reasoning that supports it?
- How do the authors discuss or refer to the work of others?
 - Are they supporting it, challenging it or simply stating it?
 - What sort of language do they use?
- How have diagrams and other non-verbal elements (if any) been used?

Compare these articles with others (on the same topics) that you find difficult to read. Can you identify why some articles are easier to read than others?

You may want to use the easy-to-read articles as models for the way you write.



Textbooks (books written specifically for students) are often not good models for critical writing because they tend to focus more on presentation/explanation in a friendly, informal style, rather than putting forward an argument.