1. Speaking vs. writing

*What are the differences between speaking and writing? (Think about how you would communicate something differently in these two ways, and why.*)

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2. Features of academic writing

Academic writing...

- is writing that shows evidence of learning
- considers a subject in its different aspects, relations and implications
- reviews a subject with a sense of sceptical enquiry
- re-examines a subject in order to test and develop ideas and theories

*Here are some examples of opening sentences from articles in academic journals. What identifies these sentences as belonging to academic forms of writing? What characteristics do they share?*

1. Edwin Morgan will be seventy this year and his oeuvre is now a substantial one.

2. This essay examines some of the ways in which racialized ideologies were constituted in the nineteenth century in the context of British imperialism.

3. Edna O’Brien is a writer more often judged as dealing with private passions than the wider world of politics.

4. The rapprochement of bibliography and contemporary theory has become so familiar a fact of Shakespeare studies that it is now routinely invoked as a *fait accompli*.
When is it appropriate to write ‘I’?

Supervisors hold differing opinions on this, but here are a few hints to guide you in deciding whether a personal pronoun would be appropriate.

- One reason supervisors dislike the use of ‘I’ is that it suggests a lack of objectivity. A police detective does not say ‘I think X is guilty’, but rather ‘The evidence points to the fact that X is guilty’. Using ‘I’ can lead you to adopt an informal, chatty style in which it is easy to start spouting opinions rather than concentrating on the hard evidence. Supervisors are more interested in your ability to weigh up evidence than in your opinions!
- Sometimes the use of ‘I’ can add something specific and useful to your essay, as in this example: ‘While Jones argues strongly for the applicability of theory X in this context, on the basis of the evidence available, I would contend that Y is a more appropriate model’. Here you are distancing yourself from another critical view, and proposing a different one. The personal voice as used in this example is very effective in rhetorical terms, as your own voice and argument emerge clearly, but still within a formal, academic register. The impact would be lessened if you used the structure more than a couple of times in an essay. As a general rule, use ‘I’ if you want to distinguish your ideas or arguments from those of others.

3. Writing to persuade

What do you find convincing about this example of academic writing (written by a final-year student of English under examination conditions)?

‘Anarchic passions / accepted restraints.’ Does this adequately characterise the novels of the Brontës?

A conception of Charlotte and Emily Brontë’s narratives as constructed around a central dichotomy – which may be expressed variously as passion versus restraint, or the individual versus the conventions of society – is a commonplace in critical work on their novels. Carol Christ extends this dialectic to her analysis of the ‘aesthetic conflict’ which she perceives in the work of Charlotte between the conventions of romance and those of realism. Yet while *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* do admit of a dichotomy between the inner and outer realities, can we really understand this to correspond to one of passion and restraint? ‘Anarchic’ would seem an entirely inappropriate description of the presentation of passion within Charlotte’s novels, while the world of *Wuthering Heights* cannot be said to operate within a larger set of societal restraints. If a simple dichotomy exists at all in these novels, it is that of well-directed and misdirected passionate energies; but the moral guidance must come from within, not without.

If ‘anarchic’ evidently misrepresents the long-enduring suffering of Caroline in *Shirley*, it is perhaps a more apt epithet for the younger Jane of *Jane Eyre*. Yet the ‘resolute, wild, free thing’ unable to control her passionate sense of mistreatment at the hands of the Reeds and at Lowood seems only a shadow of the later Jane: wildness is replaced by a witty confidence and, finally, the most fulfilling outlet for her feelings towards Rochester is not one of passionate, romantic adventure but one of selfless caring. In *Villette* Charlotte arguably fails to develop the more passionate side of Lucy, certainly in the public arena, so that while we may disagree with Ginevra Fanshawe when she says, ‘You seem to me insensible both to pain and fear and grief’, we can certainly understand her response. ‘Anarchic’ would seem perhaps to pertain most accurately to the nature of passion in *Wuthering Heights*, yet Cathy and Heathcliff’s passion is anarchic only in the sense of being external to the realm of conventional morality. It wreaks havoc only when denied fulfilment: Heathcliff for Cathy is the only creature who can ‘reconcile her to God and Humanity’. There is little anarchy of passion in any of the Brontë novels which is not the direct consequence of frustration.
Yet this frustration rarely takes the form of oppressive conventions, imposed ‘restraints’ which must be accepted if the protagonist is to reconcile herself to the world. The world of Wuthering Heights does not present the two settings of its main action as representing the anarchic force of passion and the restraint of decorum: neither Linton nor Isabella show ‘restraint’ that is not selfishly motivated. The force of restraint is demonstrated only through the voice of the narrator Nelly, who judges Heathcliff and Cathy as ‘unprincipled’ and ‘diabolical’. Narrative restraint on the part of the author also characterises Jane Eyre and Villette: we only see Jane and Lucy submitting to Prudence and Reason, not the struggle within. The impassioned letter which Lucy writes to Graham Bretton never directly enters the narrative: we are only made aware that she tears it up. Within the texts themselves, however, ‘restraint’ – as represented by the harsh cruelty of Lowood or the iron self-denial of St John Rivers – cannot be imposed on the heroine: that which saves Jane from the dangerous temptation of Rochester is not conventional morality but her own, personal sense of rightness. Likewise, restraint in Wuthering Heights does not function as the diametrical opposite to passion: it is not restraint or a response to decorum on Cathy’s part which leads to tragedy but a deliberate denial of her self.

Far from pitting passion against restraint, the Brontë novels frequently demonstrate the civilising and restraining power of well-directed passion: Hareton loses his uncouth and barbaric attitudes under the younger Cathy’s influence, and Rochester enjoys the healing effect of Jane’s love. Where Cathy fails is in her misconception that life could be readily split into public and private spheres: Wuthering Heights does not admit of more than one mode of existence. Interestingly, Charlotte’s novels, particularly Villette and Shirley, are characterised by precisely that split between ‘the life of thought and that of reality’: Lucy cannot easily bring the subjective part of her experience into the public realm of relationships and society, and this is perhaps why the narrative falls strangely silent as she makes a public commitment to M. Paul. Here, the public is anything but ‘restrained’. The model of the young passionate protagonist who must learn to restrain her ideals in conformity to society is clearly an inadequate appraisal of the Brontës’ work; neither are we presented with narratives which oscillate between romance and realism but a profound exploration of a new, psychologically orientated realism which problematises not just desire, but the relationship between the subject and objective worlds of experience.

Persuasive writing is always clear writing. Here are some tips to improve the clarity of your writing:

- Use the first sentence of each paragraph to introduce the main point of the paragraph.
- Make clear transitions between points. Linking words and phrases shows the logic between one point and another.
- Write concisely, eliminating unnecessary words and phrases. The inclusion of words which do not serve a specific purpose ultimately detracts from your argument. Using subordinate clauses allows you to emphasize certain ideas more than others, thus making clear the hierarchical relationships between information in your sentences.

Compare these two examples:
(a) ‘Dickens frequently uses humour in his portrayal of politicians and the court, but this serves the larger purpose of a serious critique of social institutions in nineteenth-century England.’
(b) ‘Although Dickens frequently uses humour in his portrayal of politicians and the court, this serves the larger purpose of a serious critique of social institutions in nineteenth-century England.’

The use of a subordinate clause in (b), rather than the two equally weighted clauses of (a), makes the point clearer, by mirroring the hierarchy of the points made in the structure of the sentence itself.
Using style and rhetoric to persuade:

- The use of rhythmic variety in your sentences suggests that you are fully in control of your material. For example: think about varying the length of your sentences. A series of short sentences gives the impression of undeveloped thought; a series of long sentences suggests pomposity or longwindedness. Try to mix up long and short sentences in order to add variety, interest and impact to your writing style.

- An authoritative voice can also be established through a manipulation of syntax. Try to put information which is more ‘basic’ in a subordinate clause, as it suggests that you know that this information is only your starting-point, and certainly shared by your reader. Compare these two examples:
  (a) ‘Dickens is a humorous writer, but the major theme of his work was one of great seriousness: the terrible poverty experienced by the underclasses in Victorian Britain.’
  (b) ‘Although Dickens is certainly a humorous writer, the major theme of his work was one of great seriousness: the terrible poverty experienced by the underclasses in Victorian Britain.’
  The use of the subordinate clause in (b), and the addition of the word ‘certainly’, suggest that the writer knows s/he does not need to spend time elaborating this point because it is an obvious one.

- Careful referencing and polished presentation always help to establish scholarliness and academic credibility.

Re-read an essay you have written recently. Identify:

- one or more techniques of persuasive writing which you are already using

- one or more techniques of persuasive writing which you would like to develop further

4. Approaching the Year Abroad Project

- defining a topic

- developing a bibliography

- referencing (see the attached sheet for general guidance and an example of a commonly used referencing system)

- challenges and common pitfalls