

AN EVALUATION OF EMBEDDING ACADEMIC WRITING PROVISION INTO A FIRST YEAR UNDERGRADUATE CORE POLITICS MODULE.



English Language Centre

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Outline

- Background**
- What was done**
- What worked**
- What needs improvement**
- Questions/Discussion**

Writing Provision at HEI

Why is it needed?



- Increase in student numbers**
- Diversification/internationalisation of HE**
- Means of communication/assessment/learning**
- Student retention/experience**
- Transferable skill**

Curry, MJ. & Lilis, T. (2003) Issues in academic writing in higher education. In: Coffin, C. ed. Teaching Academic Writing. London: Routledge, pp1-18.

Writing Provision at HEI

Academic writing provision in the UK:

- ❑ **Socialisation - immersion technique/osmosis**
- ❑ **Skills Model – deficit model/study skills classes**
- ❑ **Academic Literacies - social & disciplinary/WID**

Curry, M.J. & Lilis, T. (2003) Issues in academic writing in higher education. In: Coffin, C. ed. Teaching Academic Writing. London: Routledge, pp1-18.

Lea, M.R. & Street, B.V. (1998) 'Student Writing in Higher Education: an academic literacies approach'. Studies in Higher Education 23 (2) pp. 157-171.

Levels of Working with Departments

3 levels of working with departments

1. **'cooperation'** - **writing teacher collects information from subject specialist**
2. **'collaboration'** - **writing teacher and subject specialist plan lessons/ create materials together**
3. **'team-teaching'** – **writing teacher and subject specialist teach together**

Dudley-Evans, T. & St John, M.J. (1998) *Developments in English for Specific Purposes: A multidisciplinary approach*. Cambridge: CUP.

What happened?

- Request from department**
- Initial lecture: 'An Introduction to Academic Writing'**
- Discussion with department**
- Formative assignment analysis**
- Workshops**
 - Structuring an essay, and writing introductions
 - Writing a critique
 - Structuring a paragraph and referencing
 - Examination skills

What worked?

- Using authentic materials**
 - Access to Turnitin (previous and current year)
 - Analyse/ compare subject tutor comments
 - Utilise a range of texts
 - Increased authenticity and relevance

Session 1: Structure

- In this section, we ask you to compare the structures between two high achieving assignments (Assignments 1 and 2) and the low achieving one (Assignment 3). For this purpose, we have labelled the students' texts with headings and retrieved the structures that were not indicated in the original texts which were written without the headings we have assigned to the paragraphs. Please discuss how the three structures present the arguments the writers are developing.
- Can you see reasons why Assignment 3 was unsuccessful?

Should the Study of Politics be Considered an Art or a Science? (Grade A)	Should the Study of Politics be Considered an Art or a Science? (Grade A)	Should the Study of Politics be Considered an Art or a Science? (Grade C+)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduction <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1. Definition of key terms 1.2. Outline of the debate 1.3. Thesis statement 2. Main argument: politics as a science <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2.1. Definition of what constitutes a science 2.2. Applying definition to comparative politics 2.3. Comparison of testing in science and politics 2.4. E.g. of testing in politics 2.5. Conclusion and confirmation of thesis statement 3. Counter argument A: politics being subjective <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3.1. Outline of counter argument A 3.2. Support for counter argument A 3.3. Refutation of counter argument A 3.4. E.g. of refutation 3.5. Conclusion and confirmation of thesis statement 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduction <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1. Outline of the debate 1.2. Thesis statement 1.3. Outline of essay 2. Introduction to counter argument: politics as a science <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2.1. Brief evidence for claim 2.2. Brief definition of science 2.3. Link to the study of political science 3. Expansion of counter argument <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3.1. Outline of counter argument 3.2. Comparison with science 3.3. Usefulness of counter argument and conclusion of paragraph 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduction <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1. Repetition of question 1.2. Key definition 2. Argument that the study of politics is art <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2.1. Explanation of politics as art 2.2. E.g. of argument 2.3. Conclusion of argument 3. Second argument that politics is art <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3.1. Explanatino of argument 3.2. Possible counter argument to this 3.3. Conclusion that politics could be both

<p>4. Counter argument B: political philosophy as an art</p> <p>4.1. Outline of counter argument B</p> <p>4.2. E.g. of counter argument B</p> <p>4.3. Refutation of counter argument B</p> <p>4.4. Conclusion and confirmation of thesis</p> <p>5. Counter argument C: presentation of politics as an art</p> <p>5.1. Outline of counter argument C</p> <p>5.2. Refutation of counter argument C</p> <p>5.3. Conclusion and confirmation of thesis statement</p> <p>6. Conclusion</p> <p>6.1. Repetition of thesis statement</p> <p>6.2. Summary of main arguments for</p> <p>6.3. Summary of counter arguments and refutation</p>	<p>4. Refutation: the limitations of politics as a science</p> <p>4.1. Outline of limitation</p> <p>4.2. Explanation of limitation</p> <p>4.3. Link to thesis statement and conclusion of paragraph</p> <p>5. Main argument: Politics as an art</p> <p>5.1. Explanation of argument</p> <p>6. Continuation of main argument</p> <p>6.1. the study of politics is creative</p> <p>6.2. link to previous discussion</p> <p>6.3. E.g. of claim</p> <p>6.4. Conclusion and link to thesis statement</p> <p>7. Conclusion</p> <p>7.1. Summary of debate</p> <p>7.2. Summary of thesis statement</p>	<p>4. Brief summary of debate so far</p> <p>5. Argument that the study of politics is a science</p> <p>5.1. Explanation of the argument</p> <p>5.2. Conclusion that it could be a science</p> <p>6. Politics could be an art or a science: research methods</p> <p>6.1. Examples for both arguments</p> <p>6.2. Conclusion that is more of a science</p> <p>7. Conclusion</p> <p>7.1. Repetition of question</p> <p>7.2. Summary of politics as an art and partial agreement of</p> <p>7.3. Summary of politics as a science, and agreement of</p> <p>7.4. Thesis statement</p>
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Should the study of politics be considered an art or a science?

The nature of the subject of politics remains essentially disputed. For example, disagreement continues to rage over the definition of politics¹, what constitutes 'the political'² (and even whether that question in itself is political³), and over whether politics is an exclusively human affair, or whether it can be identified and observed as taking place between other species as well⁴. To add to the confusion, it has been observed that "what is being studied as politics in one place seems very different to what is being studied elsewhere."⁵ The clear presence of contention over the very nature of the subject presents the conundrum of how to approach its study – should the study of politics be considered an art or a science? It will be argued that the study of politics should be considered an art. In order to piece together as complete a picture as possible, a need to subjectively select and combine methods arises, and each approach – non-scientific and scientific alike – has its unique value in achieving this aim. To underpin this conclusion, the scientific approach to the study of politics, as well as its strengths and limitations will be examined first, followed by discussion of the benefits of considering the study of politics as an art.

The scientific approach to the study of politics is widespread and popular. Links between politics and science have been made since the early establishment of the discipline⁶. 'Science' can be defined as "a method of learning based on systematic observations using the

¹ Leftwich, Adrian. *What Is Politics: The Activity and Its Study*. Oxford: Polity Press, 2004. Print. p.1

² Marsh, David, and Gerry Stoker. *Theory and Methods in Political Science*. London: Palgrave, 2002. Print., p.9

³ Leftwich, p.2

⁴ Leftwich, p.1

⁵ Leftwich, p.3

⁶ Bond, Jan R., *The Scientification of the Study of Politics: Some Observations on the Behavioral Evolution in Political Science*. <<http://sitemason.vanderbilt.edu/files/i187n/Pres.%20Address%20BOND.pdf>>, p. 1

Title: Should the study of politics be considered an art or a science?

Candidate number: R12014

Word Count: 1400

In this paper we shall look at whether the study of politics should be considered an art or a science. Such a question suggests an opposition between the notions of art and science, which shall be presented. In this essay, art shall be defined as the process through which ability and creativity are applied to contribute to a field of expertise or affect the senses. Science shall be used as the intellectual process of observation and experimentation to study the world. The "study of politics" suggests the procedure of research within the domain of politics.

Firstly we must present and analyse the view that the study of politics is an art, and not a science. The notions of ability and creativity, used in the above definition, are closely linked to the idea of finding a research question and theory in studying politics. As Gary King, Robert Keohane and Sidney Verba (1994) see it, there are four components to the study of politics: the research question, the theory, the data and the use of the data. Finding appropriate research questions and theories necessitates a high level of ability and creativity, thinly interlinking the notion of art with theory building, based on the definition given above. This is closely related to a point Paul Kellstedt and Guy Whitten (2007) make, suggesting that building a theory is an "art" in itself. They claim that there are certain strategies for developing theories that lead to "good theories". Consequently, for them the process through which 'correct' theories are created is an art, insofar as the process used is what they call artistic. Therefore, the consensus between these authors is that at least the research question and the theory, significant parts of political study, should be considered an art.

Based on the earlier definition, the notion of art can affect the senses, but in the study of politics this is not generally considered. However, the idea of contribution associated with the notion of art does give some evidence that the study of politics should be considered an art. As King, Keohane and Verba (1994) write, the research question in a study must be both important and contribute to the field of political study. These are two significant criteria for 'good' political research according to the authors, and the notion of contribution is clearly one central to the concept of art. Therefore, it would appear that 'good' political studies, through the process of contribution, correspond adequately with the earlier definition of art. However, that said, it would be foolish to claim that in opposition to this, science does not offer this idea of contribution to a field of expertise. In fact, it is the general opinion that 'good' scientific study does 'contribute'. Consequently, despite the fact that the theme of contribution brought up by King, Keohane and Verba (1994) can be associated with the notion of art, it can equally be related to that of science. Although claiming that research studies are artistic because they can contribute to the field of politics is correct, it is also true that they can be scientific. Therefore, distinguishing the two concepts based on the idea of contribution is false; it should not solely be narrowed down to the notion of art.

writing an introduction

In order to determine whether the study of politics should be considered an art or a science, the definition of politics must be clarified. It is difficult to find an exact definition due to the extensive nature of the subject and thus Heywood's definition will be used for its broadness. He defines politics as "the activity through which people make, preserve and amend the general rules under which they live". The study of politics can be approached in two ways: an artistic or interpretative manner which stresses historical context, judgement, qualitative evaluation and empathetic understanding; and in a scientific manner which seeks to identify patterns, regularities, processes and general laws within politics. Kant defines art as "a kind of representation that is purposive in itself and... promotes the cultivation of the mental powers for sociable communication". Science may be defined as establishing causal relationships and developing explanatory or predictive models through experimentation. With this understanding of definitions, it can be argued that whilst the study of politics contains elements of both art and science, ultimately it should be considered a science.



writing an introduction

The nature of the subject of politics remains essentially disputed. For example, disagreement continues to rage over the definition of politics, what constitutes 'the political' (and even whether that question in itself is political), and over whether politics is an exclusively human affair, or whether it can be identified and observed as taking place between other species as well. To add to the confusion, it has been observed that "what is being studied as politics in one place seems very different to what is being studied elsewhere." The clear presence of contention over the very nature of the subject presents the conundrum of how to approach its study – should the study of politics be considered an art or a science? **It will be argued that the study of politics should be considered an art.** In order to piece together as complete a picture as possible, a need to subjectively select and combine methods arises, and each approach – non-scientific and scientific alike – has its unique value in achieving this aim. **To underpin this conclusion, the scientific approach to the study of politics, as well as its strengths and limitations will be examined first, followed by discussion of the benefits of considering the study of politics as an art.**



What worked?

- Responding to students' immediate needs**
 - Writing a critique
 - Examination skills

- Initial Introduction to Academic Writing Lecture**

- Working with the Department**

What needs improvement?

Participation

- Times – 4-6pm
 - Close to assignment deadlines
 - General end of term malaise
 - Selectivity of workshops – ‘remedial’
 - Uncertainty over content and delivery
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- Earlier / open to all / content announced / content tutor present / promoted by content tutors

What needs improvement?

The timing and organisation of the workshops could be improved, as they were held at the end of term and during submission week. I feel that I would have benefited much more from the lessons if I had time to go home and go over what we had learnt.

The workshops should be promoted in lectures and via email. I strongly feel that the workshop should have been much earlier in term, it was difficult to make time and concentrate as the workshops were during the time of essay submission.

.....because it is very useful not only to international students, but native speakers as well

The workshop was extremely helpful and would benefit all students.

What needs improvement?

- Discipline specific nuances / contrasting feedback**
 - Examination technique/criteria
 - Referencing technique
 - Essay formatting
 - Turnitin percentages
 - Academic writing

- More collaboration

What needs improvement?

- ❑ **Feedback on formative assignments**
 - ❑ Difficult to decipher
 - ❑ Contradictory
 - ❑ Bibliography **or** list of references
 - ❑ Use of *ibid.*
 - ❑ Paragraph indentation
 - ❑ Using sources for definitions

Poor analysis and understanding. A high proportion of this submission was taken directly from secondary sources (35%). This is not appropriate and should not be repeated. Poorly written and argued. Weak structure. Need for improvement in use of language. Referencing was inadequate. D

This essay seems to cover the key arguments. In a formative essay of this type I would like to have seen more of what the student thinks and a bit less attention to quoting others. In some cases the quotes were also rather bland. This over-reliance on quotation also led to a rather high similarity count and the student will want to watch out for this in future. C

Analysis and understanding: *Thorough understanding of main issues and original critical analysis*

Selection and coverage of material: *Appropriate use of material and references*

Structure and organisation: *Well organised, good use of paragraphs and citations.*

Well formatted references

Style and use of language: *Arguments are well developed, clear and logical structure. Elaborate language and competent use of grammar*

Referencing: *Fine.*

Paragraphs should be justified. A++

(1) Analysis and understanding

Good, you develop an argument well

(2) Selection and coverage of material Good, but the art side is relatively neglected. Are there examples of how an art approach has been useful ?

(3) Structure and organisation Good, but the introduction could also introduce the essay as well as the issues.

(4) Style and use of language

Good, with exception of odd cumbersome sentence..

(5) Referencing Thorough and correct o X Some minor errors o Major errors o

(6) Overall comments and suggestions for improvement:

I like the use of the French Revolution example and you should think about others as they help to illustrate the argument well. This is particularly relevant for the arts side of the argument because, at the moment, this is less clear than the science one.

At the moment you seem to make arts stand for the normative (as opposed to positive). This is one way of distinguishing the two, but not the only one. The contrast is sometimes drawn between natural science and social science in terms of closed and open systems. Science is closed in the sense that the laws of nature are what they are and they exist independently of our conjectures about them. The same does not seem to be the case in social science, not least because our theories affect our behaviour: it is an open system and this makes scope for creativity. Another way of thinking about this is that the future in politics (unlike the material of science) is importantly different from the past. The future is not just a projection from (or another instantiation of) the past and this would seem to open up a role for a more creative understanding of what happens in politics.: i.e. an invitation to think also in terms of the arts.

Mark: A (72) 1st marker:

What needs improvement?

- Feedback on formative assignments**

- Difficult to decipher

- Contradictory

- More collaboration

- Contact with the department**

- More collaboration

What needs improvement?

- ❑ **Department's understanding of 'teaching writing'**
 - ❑ *What are you going to teach?*
 - ❑ Formative / summative assignment difference
 - ❑ 8 hours

- ❑ ?
- ❑ Staff development / training

All in all

- Good feedback**
- Department want it again**
- They are happy to incorporate improvements**
- Personal satisfaction**

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