



Writing Education at University

GUIDES FOR WRITING IN SPECIFIC DISCIPLINES

1 What is Education?

Education is the process of facilitating the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, beliefs and habits. It often takes place under the guidance of educators who have been specifically trained to understand, analyse and conduct learning situations.

Effective self-expression, both in writing and in speech, is crucial for these professionals. Good teachers must have excellent communicative language competence; they are role models for their students and are responsible for giving them good language education.

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2 Writing in Education

Throughout their university studies, future teachers should prepare themselves to use language well, accurately and, at the same time, with great flexibility and adaptability. As writers, they must be able to communicate appropriately in different situations. They will need to:

- a) adjust their writing when addressing different audiences in the workplace: children, the management team, the teaching staff, parents or the educational administration.
- b) carefully monitor the register they use when writing. Teachers need to show mastery of colloquial spoken language, but in written communication they should tend towards formality and avoid mixing registers.
- c) adapt their writing to their pupils' age, previous knowledge and cognitive capacity, aiming for clarity and concision and bearing in mind the didactic purposes of the texts.
- d) use language sensitively (in reports, in student evaluations and learning materials) to ensure confidentiality and protect personal information and images, and use language that is inclusive and free of prejudice. They should also know how to send personalized messages that are respectful and positive, and that motivate students to learn.

- e) communicate in writing in classrooms (on paper, on traditional blackboards, or with technology-based tools like digital whiteboards) and in distance-learning situations. This requires good knowledge of virtual learning environments and the language features typical of them (writing virtually, using hypertextuality and multimodality appropriately, and network communication dynamics). Teachers must be able to write in a blog or on a social network, to collaborate with others and save their written work in the cloud, and to teach students to write in different digital platforms.
- f) be competent writers of various types of text: explanatory, argument, description and narration. In addition, creative writing should not be unfamiliar to them. They should also know how to write creatively, to teach creative writing and to help students appreciate texts for aesthetic or literary purposes.

At university, future teachers must be able to express themselves in writing with different purposes and using a variety of expressions. Many of the writing tasks that education students complete are explanations of their experience, often based on observations of learning situations or personal reflection. Experiential writing, in which they have to reason, query, reflect and express opinions, is often difficult for students. Subjective writing without many filters is sometimes acceptable (in diaries or personal notes, for example), but academic writing analyses that experience from a distance and relates it to what experts say about the topic. Subjectivity must be redirected and only used in texts that require it. For example, the first-person singular can be avoided by converting it into the first-person plural or an impersonal form.

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Texts written by students of education are often analytical and argumentative. They analyse cultural products (books, articles, teaching materials and learning resources), various sources (primary and secondary) and data (quantitative and qualitative). Students have to understand information, analyse it and integrate it into a well argued, original reflection that acknowledges any consulted sources and refers to them in accordance with conventions. They also must ensure their argumentation is solid and that their texts do not contain empty, gratuitous or baseless statements.

3 Written Texts Commonly Used in Education

Students of education should gain mastery over a wide range of written texts. The day they begin to work as school teachers, they must know how to produce syllabuses, student evaluations (for the students themselves, parents or teams of teachers), short texts commenting on the educational value of activities, notes or letters to parents, student reports, class journals and texts in which they share their experiences with colleagues in the educational community.

While at university, students also produce written texts that are more academic in nature or more closely related to the dissemination of scientific knowledge. These academic-scientific texts are usually assigned towards the end of their studies. They may be articles, papers or posters to present their research at conferences, or a doctoral thesis, for example.

During their teacher training, students may be asked to produce typical academic texts: summaries, reviews, short essays in response to questions (on exams or in assignments), case studies, classwork, final degree projects, rubrics or other assessment texts, outlines, texts to support oral presentations, commentaries, reading worksheets, reflections (on experiences, on their own learning), comparisons (between educational systems, methodologies, educational options, theories), teaching practice reports, learning portfolios with examples of work, biographies texts, syllabuses, objectives, activities, literary texts, short- or long-term plans, descriptions of teaching materials, etc.

One of the writing challenges faced by students is acquiring good knowledge of academic texts. Professors should explain academic writing clearly, and provide examples of the kind of texts they expect students to produce. Unfamiliarity with discourse genres frequently leads to: *a*) teaching practice reports with too much emphasis on a description of the host school, or other contextual features, to the detriment of more essential aspects; *b*) final degree or master's projects without clear and relevant theoretical frameworks; *c*) reviews of books, articles, teaching materials and learning resources already included in the summary of the commented work and, therefore, of reduced or inexistent value; and *d*) texts that do not follow conventions for citing and referencing the sources used.

4 Writing Conventions in Education

All specialized languages have their own conventions. One of their most obvious features is the terminology they employ. Students of education and future teachers must master educational terminology if they want to achieve professional success. In addition, they should remember that education is closely connected to many other disciplines, such as psychology, history, sociology and anthropology, which also employ specialized terminologies.

Educational terminology in Catalan, Spanish, French and English is available through *Termcat's* online *Diccionari d'Educació* (see the link below). Translations for English terms such as *bullying* or *cyberbullying* and *flipped classroom* are easily found and translated.

One of the most visible conventions of specialized languages is the use of a recognized and well-established reference and citation system of the sources used in academic or scientific papers. Scholars in the field of education largely agree on using the citation style of the American Psychological Association (APA), which is also used in psychology and other related disciplines. The following is a reference to a book as it should appear in the bibliography of a written assignment for class or a research article.

Cefai, C. and Cavioni, V. (2014). *Social and Emotional Education in Primary School*. New York: Springer-Verlag.

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In addition to APA style, work written by students of education might have to be adapted to other conventions established by the faculty or individual professors in subjects that provide practice in written expression. Some texts, such as final degree projects or practical placement reports, usually follow very standardized formats (objectives, required sections, length).

Finally, but no less important, written work must only be submitted in its final version, after careful revision, well formatted and spellchecked.

5 Selected Works and Websites for Writing in Education

1. *Diccionari d'Educació*, Termcat
http://www.termcat.cat/es/Diccionaris_En_Linia/132/
 This online dictionary contains over 2,000 terms in the field of education (pedagogy, educational research, educational organization and management, psycho-pedagogical guidance, didactics, special education and educational technology) in four languages: Catalan, Spanish, French and English.
2. *Guide for Writing in Education*, Southwestern University
<http://www.southwestern.edu/live/files/4171-guide-for-writing-in-educationpdf>
 Brief guide for university students with information about the features of writing in the field of education.
3. *Writing in Education*, Monash University
<http://www.monash.edu.au/lls/llonline/writing/education/index.xml>
 Tutorials to improve written expression about educational topics, with explanations and activities.
4. APA Style
<http://www.apastyle.org/>
 Official website of the American Psychological Association (APA).
5. Education UK (The British Council)
<http://www.educationuk.org/global/articles/glossary/>
 A guide to key terms used in UK education compiled by Education UK, the British Council's official website for international students interested in studying at a UK university, college, boarding school or English language school.
6. Education UK (in Spanish)
<http://www.educationuk.org/spain/>
 The Spanish version of their website.
7. Glossary of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)
<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/glossary/>
 Brief explanations of a number of terms used on the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) website.

Servei de Llengües (UAB) and Servei de Llengües Modernes (UdG)

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