

**Title:** Good Academic Writing: Kazakh Identity and Western Norms

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### **Text**

What do you think of when you hear the expression *good writing*? What about good writing in your second language or even third language? In many English-medium academic contexts, how good one's writing is assessed according to Western rhetorical traditions that tend to prioritize argumentation, directness, and linear logic. In my experience, multilingual writers, and especially those educated outside Anglophone settings often bring experience challenged by linguistic transfer, and culturally shaped understandings of what counts as effective academic writing, including how authority, respect, and relationality are communicated in text.

This project examines how undergraduate university students in Kazakhstan who study academic writing at English-medium institutions and programs, adapt, or reframe their linguistic and cultural values, and rhetorical knowledge when producing academic texts under Western-oriented evaluation criteria. Specifically, I am interested in how writers negotiate identity when “good writing” is defined through imported Westernized standards, rubrics, and strict institutional expectations.

### **Context and Sites**

Universities such as Nazarbayev University and Narikbayev University teach academic writing through curricula that are strongly influenced by U.S./U.K. academic standards. These programs often rely on Western genre expectations (e.g., thesis-driven argument, explicit claims, and structured evidence) and standardized assessment practices. I am interested in how students conceptualize Kazakh identity, rhetorical and linguistic heritage within these demands, and how they simultaneously attempt to conform to Western norms of academic writing.

### **Research Questions**

- How do instructors in Kazakhstan describe and evaluate “good academic writing” in English-medium academic writing courses?
- How do students position Kazakh cultural identity (and multilingual experience) in relation to Western academic writing expectations? (in their writing samples)
- How do course documents (syllabi, outcomes, rubrics) frame “good or effective writing”?

At this stage, I use qualitative methods, with two primary data sources: (1) a small corpus of student academic texts produced in English in Kazakhstan-based academic writing courses, and (2) a comparative review of academic writing syllabi and assignment/rubric materials from Kazakhstan-based and U.S.-based universities. Textual analysis focuses on how claims, evidence, stance, and organizational patterns are produced and evaluated, and how these features are described by course materials.

## Theoretical Orientation

My primary theoretical frameworks are L2 writing pedagogy and cultural rhetorics. In cultural rhetorics scholarship, language use and self-expression are understood as inseparable from culture and lived experience. Powell and colleagues argue that culture is always already rhetorical, and rhetoric is always already cultural. This orientation supports an analysis of “good writing” not as a universal standard, but as a situated set of expectations shaped by institutions, histories, and values. In L2 writing pedagogy, the text produced by multilingual writers are impacted by the linguistic transfer, and even considering that, language instructors mainly focus on error correction which complicates the learning and integration processes into writing college level academic texts.

## Methodological Design and Data Collection

This study uses a qualitative, multi-sited design to examine how “good academic writing” is defined, taught, and taken up in English-medium academic writing courses in Kazakhstan, and how students negotiate identity and rhetorical values within these expectations.

The project is organized around two interrelated sources: (1) student-produced academic texts written in English in Kazakhstan-based academic writing courses, and (2) course documents that institutionalize and circulate writing norms (syllabi, learning outcomes, assignment sheets, and rubrics). Together, these data sources allow me to analyze both the texts students produce and the institutional frameworks that shape how those texts are evaluated.

**Student texts.** I have compiled a small number of undergraduate student texts produced in academic writing courses at English-medium institutions and programs in Kazakhstan. The corpus includes multiple genres commonly assigned in Western-aligned curricula (argument essays, research-based papers, reflective writings). I prioritize texts that include instructor feedback and rubric-based evaluation. (in-progress)

**Course document set.** I collected syllabi, outcomes, assignment prompts, and rubrics from Kazakhstan-based English-medium writing courses ( Nazarbayev University and Narikbayev University) and a comparative set of academic documents from the U.S.-based first-year composition (University of Tennessee). This comparison is to trace how particular Western writing values travel, become institutionalized, and are framed as common-sense standards in Kazakhstan-based contexts.

## Analytic Strategy

My analysis combines document analysis and textual/rhetorical analysis with an explicit attention to how writing standards become normalized through institutional language and assessment practices.

### **Document analysis (institutional framing of “good writing”).**

I conducted an analysis of course documents, focusing on the repeated use of certain descriptors and evaluative terms denoting quality (e.g., clarity, coherence, critical thinking, linear organization, direct thesis, originality, “academic tone,” use of evidence). My focus was on how these descriptors are related to outcomes and assessments, what kinds of language practices are or are not encouraged, and how documents portray students in relation to these expectations (e.g., deficit frames, “error correction,” meeting the “standard,” or growth-oriented language). This strand focuses on academic writing and cultural rhetoric: I view documents as institutional narratives that generate the legitimacy and influence that is expressed or evaluated in students’ writing.

### **Textual/rhetorical analysis (how standards are taken up in student texts).**

For the student corpus, I examine how claims, evidence, stance, and organization are realized in students’ English texts, and how these features align with or depart from the expectations articulated in rubrics and syllabi. To keep the analysis systematic, I focus on a small set of rhetorical features that are both common in Western writing assessment and sensitive to cross-cultural variation, such as:

1. **claim structure and explicitness** (how and where claims are stated, how thesis is framed);
2. **organization and sequencing** (linear development, paragraphing, and transitions);
3. **stance and authorial presence** (hedging, self-mention, evaluative language);
4. **evidence integration** (quotation/paraphrase practices, citation positioning, summary vs. synthesis);
5. **relationality and respect markers** (how authority and deference are expressed, if relevant to the genre).

Where possible, I am planning to further examine how instructor feedback and rubric marks reveal what is treated as successful, insufficient, or non-academic. The key aim is not to label student writing as correct/incorrect, but to identify moments where students appear to negotiate (a) imported norms, (b) multilingual resources and prior schooling, and (c) culturally grounded rhetorical values.

### **Ethical Considerations and Researcher Positionality**

Because this project is associated with student writing, I prioritize anonymization and careful handling of recognizable institutional data. Coming from the position of a Kazakh multilingual

writer and student/educator familiar with the educational contexts of both Kazakhstan and the United States, this is how I interpret the study. Thus, I am very much aware that “good writing” is defined as a universal standard, and that such a definition can obscure cultural and institutional history in the assessment of writing.

## Preliminary Results

Preliminary document analysis focuses on how “good or effective writing” is framed in course materials (syllabi, assignment prompts, and rubrics) in Kazakhstan-based English-medium academic writing contexts, with a small comparative set from the University of Tennessee.

To date, I have analyzed 10 Kazakhstan-based course documents (2 syllabi, 2 rubrics, 2 writing prompts, 4 student drafts) and 2 University of Tennessee documents (1 syllabus, 1 writing prompt), for a total of 12 documents. This analysis follows my planned approach of identifying repeated descriptors of quality and tracing how they are tied to assessment and expected language practices.

1) “Good writing” is evaluated through a small cluster of evaluative keywords.

The consistency of Western expectations (argumentation, directness, linear logic) with the broader position of the project, which is often the default assessment base in the English context, is the reason for the similarity with the Kazakhstani rubrics, where the most recurrent criteria were clarity, coherence and structure of the essay. Thus, clarity of presentation, logical consistency and organization into recognizable patterns are qualities of the academic form.

2) “Good writing” is also indexed through linguistic control, not only rhetorical performance.

Repeated rubric attention to grammatical structures, spelling, and punctuation indicates that academic legitimacy is partly measured through surface-level correctness.

3) Citation.

The syllabi bring up citations and mention a lot about avoiding plagiarism, using students' own words, citing information correctly. It is central to what the course calls “good writing.”. They actually shape what counts as real academic work at those institutions.

4) Assignment prompts (argument essays and research proposals).

Together, these preliminary results address the third research question by showing how course documents define “good writing” through repeated terms that normalize Western-aligned academic form as common-sense expectations at Kazakhstani universities.

## Supporting Information

### 1) Institutional Description

This project is shaped by the growth of English-medium instruction (EMI) and Western-aligned higher education reforms in Kazakhstan. In institutions where academic writing is taught in English, writing curricula and assessment often draw from U.S./U.K.-based models (e.g., first-year composition, EAP/academic argument, and outcomes-based rubrics). Institutional pressure to meet international standards (including English proficiency benchmarks, publication expectations, and global ranking metrics) can intensify the perceived stakes of conforming to Western academic discourse, even as students maintain culturally grounded rhetorical values and self-positionings.

### 2) Key Theorists

**Cultural Rhetorics (Malea Powell and colleagues)** Cultural rhetorics frames rhetoric as always embedded in culture, history, and relational accountability. It supports approaching academic writing norms as situated practices rather than universal standards.

**L2 writing (Paul Kei Matsuda and colleagues)**: Matsuda argues that the study of L2 writing is a distinct field of study that includes composition studies and applied linguistics. Here, students' writing is not viewed in terms of deficiencies, but in relation to the previous language knowledge, institutions, and identity.

**Academic Literacies (Mary Lea and Brian Street)**: Academic literacies approaches treat writing as a social practice shaped by institutional power, disciplinary norms, and gatekeeping. This perspective can guide analysis of how course documents define legitimacy and how students learn to perform institutional expectations.

**Translingual/Negotiated Norms (Bruce Horner, Min-Zhan Lu, Suresh Canagarajah)**: Translingual perspectives emphasize language difference as normal and meaning-making as negotiated across linguistic resources.

## Glossary

1. **Good writing** — A locally and institutionally defined label for what counts as effective or high-quality writing;
2. **Western rhetorical traditions** — Commonly accepted institutional expectations in US/UK-influenced academic writing instruction.
3. **English-medium instruction (EMI)** — Educational programs in which English is the primary language of teaching and assessment.
4. **EAP / Academic Writing in English** — English for Academic Purposes.

5. **L2** - The second language (L2) is a language spoken in addition to the first language (L1).
6. **Cultural rhetorics** — A scholarly approach that examines how rhetorical practices are shaped by culture, history, and relationships.
7. **Academic literacies** — A perspective that treats academic writing as a social practice tied to institutional power, and contested norms.
8. **Translingual practice** — An orientation that values multilingual meaning-making and views language boundaries as fluid and negotiated in communication.
9. **Nazarbayev University / Narikbayev University** — Examples of Kazakhstan-based universities where English-medium academic writing instruction and Western-aligned curricula are prominent.