

GAC002 Academic English I: Reading and Writing Skills

GAC Academic English

What this module is, and how it is marked

GAC002 is the reading and writing half of Academic English at Level I, over the same six themes as GAC001. Again the theme is the material; the skills are what carry the marks.

Assessment is written and continuous: **reading tasks** 阅读任务, several pieces of **writing** 写作 built up over the semester, and **coursework** 平时作业. The final piece is usually a short **essay** 论文 that has to plan and connect ideas rather than list them.

- **Plagiarism** 抄袭 is dealt with in this module as content, because western universities treat it as a serious offence rather than a formatting mistake.
- △ Marks are for structure and accuracy together. A well-organised text in imperfect English beats perfect sentences in no order.

Communicating: reading skills

Academic reading is not reading every word from the start. It is choosing a technique for a purpose.

- **Skimming** 略读 is reading fast for the general idea: title, first and last paragraph, the first sentence of each paragraph in between.
- **Scanning** 查读 is hunting a page for one item — a date, a name, a figure — while ignoring everything else.
- **Close reading** 精读 is slow reading of a short passage for exact meaning, and it is what an argument deserves.
- Choose by purpose: skim to decide whether a source is useful, scan to find the number, read closely to quote it.
- The **topic sentence** 主题句 usually opens a paragraph and states what it is about. Reading only the topic sentences of a long text gives you its shape in a minute.

Countries and cultures: vocabulary in context

You cannot look up every unknown word, and you are not expected to.

- **Context clues** 上下文线索 come first: the rest of the sentence, an example after a colon, a contrast marked by *but* or *however*.
- **Word parts** 词根词缀 carry meaning. *Bio-* is life, *-logy* is the study of, *un-* reverses, *-able* means can be done. One prefix unlocks a family of words.
- The **part of speech** 词性 constrains the meaning. If the word sits after *the*, it is a noun, whatever else you know about it.
- An **English-English dictionary** 英英词典 is the module's tool of choice, because a definition in English teaches usage and collocation that a translation hides.
- △ Do not trust a translation app for an academic word. It gives a synonym, not a register, and the wrong register is visible to a marker instantly.

Worked example. "The city's water supply proved *precarious*: a single dry summer emptied the reservoir."

The colon introduces evidence, and the evidence is a failure after one dry summer. So *precarious* means unstable or easily lost. The word was never looked up, and the guess is supported by the sentence, which is exactly the marked skill.

Modern lifestyles: sentences that link ideas

A complex idea needs a sentence built to hold it.

- A **simple sentence** 简单句 has one clause. A **compound sentence** 并列句 joins two equal clauses with *and*, *but*, *so*. A **complex sentence** 复合句 joins a main clause to a subordinate one with *because*, *although*, *when*, *which*.
- **Subordination** 从属 shows which idea matters: *Although the survey was small, the result was clear* puts the weight on the result.
- **Connectives** 连接词 signal the relationship: *however* (contrast), *therefore* (consequence), *moreover* (addition), *for instance* (example).
- △ A **run-on sentence** 流水句 joins clauses with commas alone. Use a full stop, a semicolon, or a connective.
- Vary the length. Every sentence long is as hard to read as every sentence short.

Journeys and travel: the paragraph

The paragraph is the unit of academic writing, and it has parts that are marked.

- A **topic sentence** states the paragraph's single idea. One idea per paragraph, always.
- **Supporting sentences** 支撑句 develop it with explanation, evidence or examples.
- A **concluding sentence** 结尾句 closes the idea or turns it towards the next paragraph.

- **Cohesion** 衔接 is what makes sentences feel joined: pronouns pointing back, repeated key nouns, connectives that fit.
- **Unity** 统一性 means every sentence serves the topic sentence. A sentence that does not belong in another paragraph, or nowhere.

Worked example. *Public transport in the city has improved sharply.* (topic) *The new metro line opened in 2021 and now carries 400,000 people a day.* (evidence) *Bus routes were redrawn to feed the stations rather than to compete with them.* (evidence) *As a result, the average commute is eleven minutes shorter than it was.* (conclusion)

Four sentences, one idea, each doing a different job.

Living things: plagiarism and how to avoid it

This unit exists because the rule is cultural as much as academic, and because breaking it unknowingly still counts as breaking it.

- **Plagiarism** is presenting someone else's words or ideas as your own. Copying without a citation, translating without a citation, and buying work are all the same offence.
- **Quoting** 引用原文 uses the exact words in quotation marks, with a citation.
- **Paraphrasing** 改写 restates an idea in your own words and sentence structure — and still needs a citation, because the idea is borrowed.
- **Summarising** 概括 compresses a longer text to its main points, and needs a citation too.
- A **citation** 引用 in the text points to a full entry in the **reference list** 参考文献表.
- △ Changing a few words is not paraphrasing. If the sentence shape survives, it is still the source's sentence.

Worked example. Source: "Rising sea temperatures have accelerated coral bleaching across the Great Barrier Reef since 2016."

Not acceptable: "Increasing sea temperatures have sped up coral bleaching across the Great Barrier Reef since 2016." — words swapped, structure identical, no citation.

Acceptable: "Since 2016, coral on the Great Barrier Reef has bleached faster, and warmer water is the cause (Hughes, 2018)." — new structure, new words, credited.

Technology: planning a short essay

The last unit puts the parts together into one piece of continuous writing.

- **Analyse the question** 审题 first. Underline the command word — *discuss, compare, evaluate* — because it decides the shape of the whole answer.
- **Brainstorm then select** 筛选. Write more ideas than you need, then cut to the three that can be supported.
- **Outline** 提纲 before writing: one line per paragraph, in order. Reordering an outline costs a minute; reordering a finished essay costs an evening.
- The **introduction** 引言 gives context and states the **thesis** 论点 — your answer to the question, in one sentence.
- The **conclusion** 结论 answers the question and adds no new evidence.
- **Synthesis** 综合 means combining sources into your own argument rather than describing them one after another. It is the skill that separates a Level I essay from a school report.

Worked example. Outline for "Discuss the effects of smartphones on student study habits."

1. Introduction: phones are universal among students; thesis — they help access and hurt attention, and the balance depends on how study is organised.
2. Access: material, dictionaries, group coordination.
3. Attention: notification interruption and the cost of resuming a task.
4. What decides which wins: planned use versus constant availability.
5. Conclusion: answer the question, no new evidence.

Five lines, written before any prose. The essay is now a matter of expanding each one, and the argument cannot wander because the plan already answers the question.