

## BILC PROFESSIONAL SEMINAR - PRESENTATION

VILNIUS OCTOBER 2021

### No Writer without a Reader – When Writing Becomes a Cultural Competence

No writer without a reader: in this presentation, we will explore the instances in which writing is no longer a channel of communication but a cultural competence.

The key question is:

- Why do we teach writing?
- What need are we trying to meet?

Most of our students' immediate needs will be to use a chat function, use texting on messaging apps, exchange emails with counterparts. Therefore, academic writing must not be the norm through which we teach writing.

However, there are also instances in which academic writing needs to be and will be a professional focus.

This is why we have a one-year intensive academic writing programme in the French War College.

In our view, an academic writing programme must be designed to meet some very specific needs for some very specific profiles going into specific jobs. This is why the presentation will focus on the officer level, more the senior level than junior officers.

A piece of evidence to sustain that is that the 2021-2022 academic writing programme in the French War College brings together only 44 officers out of 300.

To identify the critical differences in terms of needs, it is important to make a clear distinction between military writing and academic writing.

In military writing, the situations that hold the highest challenges in terms of desired effect are

- Writing to subordinates
- Writing to commanders

These are situations where the writer does not really get a second chance to clearly convey the message to the reader and get him to take action or make the right decision.

When writing to subordinates, the message must always focus the recipient's attention on the issue and what needs to be done ie the action the subordinates need to take.

When sending a message up the chain of command, when writing to commanders, decision-makers, leaders, we are talking about a very different reader. The message must provide just enough substance to support decision-making.

This is military writing – writing short concise emails or memos to share a key piece of information and trigger a clear identified action.

Academic writing is similar to military writing – it is formal in tone and style, and it is structured. It differs from military writing as it needs to demonstrate an understanding of the subject and be strongly evidenced.

There are two main examples that demonstrate a potential need to learn academic writing for a senior officer:

- A position paper
- A food-for-thought paper

Here are some examples of positions where this would happen:

- Liaison officer
- Defence section in the embassy
- Exchange student in a war college
- Embedded officer
- NATO jobs
- Coalition

Not only is about convincing the American or British reader, it is also about

- Avoiding cultural misunderstandings
- Defending the interests and position of your country
- Getting the right point across
- Contributing effectively to an international collaboration

In the French War College, to be sure the students are placed in the courses that perfectly fit their needs, we have the perfect solution: we don't place them in any course. They choose the course they will join.

Good course design is not only desirable but a **top priority for engaging teaching and implementing active learning**

Academic writing is a process that involves distinct steps: preparation (research) prewriting (the outline of your paper), feedback, *drafting*, revising, and proofreading + editing, *drafting*, final revision. It is known as a recursive process. While you are revising, you might have to return to the prewriting step to develop and expand your ideas or even change the angle of your paper.

The best instructional strategies for academic writing that we identified are:

Process-driven: progressive activities culminating in a performance (brainstorming sessions, document analysis, thesis pitching with peer-to-peer feedback, thesis statement etc.)

Product-oriented: assignments towards a well-defined product (interview an SME, attend an on-line symposium, paper outline, etc.)

Project-oriented: activities that go on step by step, with benchmarks students have to accomplish in a certain order. The end result is not the only thing important here, but the way students create the project also matters (discussion boards, case studies, group collaboration, etc.)