

Writing in Academic Style

HELPS (Higher Education Language & Presentation Support)

- Location: CB01.03.08
- Telephone: 9514 9733
- Email: helps@uts.edu.au
- Website: ssu.uts.edu.au/helps

David Sotir – Advisor

Contact us

- To understand & appreciate the characteristics and stylistics of academic writing
- To practice rewriting sentences in a more formal register

Objectives

What is academic writing ?

Academic Writing

- The language of university writing is different from the language you would use when having a casual chat with friends. It is a more formal type of language when writing academic papers.
- This may mean changing habits you have developed and allowing plenty of time to edit and revise your writing style *after* you have finished writing the content.

What is Academic Writing ?

- You can get an idea of the kind of writing style favoured in your subject area by looking at relevant readings
- You'll find your ability to write in an effective academic style will improve the more you read, and the more practice you get in writing.

What is Academic Writing ?

Academic writing:

- is formal
- is impersonal
- is cautious
- references other writers work

What is Academic Writing ?

Formal vs. Informal Writing

Formal Writing

The informal style has the following characteristics:

- It uses a personal style: the first and second person (“I” and “you”) and the active voice (e.g., “I have noticed that...”).
- It uses short simple words and sentences (e.g., “latest”).
- It uses contractions (e.g., “won’t”).
- It uses many abbreviations (e.g., “TV”).
- It uses many phrasal verbs in the text (e.g., “find out”).
- Words that express rapport and familiarity are often used in speech, such as “brother”, “buddy” and “man”.
- It uses a subjective style, expressing opinions and feelings (e.g., “pretty”, “I feel”).
- It uses vague expressions, personal vocabulary and colloquialisms (slang words are accepted in spoken text, but not in written text (e.g., “wanna” = “want to”)).

Informal Writing

The formal style has the following characteristics:

- It uses an impersonal style: the third person (“it”, “he” and “she”) and often the passive voice (e.g., “It has been noticed that...”).
- It uses complex words and sentences to express complex points (e.g., “state-of-the-art”).
- It does not use contractions.
- It does not use many abbreviations, though there are some abbreviations used in formal texts, such as titles with proper names (e.g., “Mr.”)
- It does not use vague expressions and slang words.
- It uses appropriate and clear expressions, appropriate vocabularies
- It uses an objective style, citing facts and references to support an argument.

Formal Writing

Avoid Colloquial language and slang

Informal	Formal
<i>pretty good,</i>	<i>persuasive insightful; was well researched</i>
<i>a shocker</i>	<i>poorly researched unsubstantiated;</i>
<i>heaps of data</i>	<i>provided significant detailed data</i>
<i>pros and cons</i>	<i>advantages and disadvantages positives and negatives.</i>

Things to Avoid

- Gone are the days when English is drilled into students at school.

Rewritten as

- The era when English was drilled into school students has passed.
- This may be due to a succession of wave after wave of change in education practices.

Rewritten as

- This condition may have been caused by a number of successive changes in education

Colloquial Language

Avoid 'Fillers'

- Well, fillers are conversational words stuck on the beginning or the end of a sentence, know what I mean? In conversation, these sound friendly. You should definitely not use them in writing an assignment.

Here are some fillers to avoid at the **start of a sentence**:

- Well ... Anyway ... OK ... Like ... Right ...

and at the **end of the sentence**:

- ... OK? ... see? ... know what I mean? ... like. ... right.

Things to Avoid

Shortened forms of words and phrases

- Do not use contractions (e.g. it's for it is or it has; would've for would have) Contractions are classed as informal language.

For example, the words

- *does not* instead of *doesn't*
- *should have* instead of *should've*
- *it is* instead of *it's*
- *are not* instead of *aren't*
- *cannot* instead of *can't*
- *did not* instead of *didn't*
- *has not* instead of *hasn't*
- *I am* instead of *I'm*

Contractions

Use acronyms (e.g. TAFE) AND INITIALISMS (e.g. UTS) correctly

- The general rule is to write the name in full first time with the acronym in brackets immediately after.
- For the rest of the essay, use the acronym.
- Be consistent—once you have written the acronym, use it all of the time.
- **Do not** use full stops between the abbreviated letters (e.g. UTS).
- If you need to make an acronym into a plural, then add a lower case 's' **without** using an apostrophe (e.g. UTSS).
- If an abbreviation is commonly used as a word, you can use it in the abbreviated form without writing it in full first (e.g. NSW, FAQs).

Acronyms

- It is preferable to avoid using *e.g.*, *i.e.* and *etc.*, particularly in the body of your text. Instead, use *for example* and *that is*
- Avoid using common abbreviations (such as *e.g.*, *i.e.*, *viz.*, *etc.*) It is BEST to write the full term in the text of your writing. For example:
 - cf. (use compare instead)
 - e.g.* (use for example instead)
 - etc.* (use and so forth instead)
 - i.e.* (use that is instead)
 - viz.* (use namely instead)
 - vs.* (use versus instead)
 - & (use and instead)

Abbreviations

Avoid using run-on expressions

Run on expressions include phrases such as 'and so forth', 'and so on' or 'etc'. Try to complete the sentence properly; do not use these if you can avoid them; for example:

Informal (includes run on)	Formal Alternative
Nurses must take into consideration patients' dietary needs resulting from allergies, medication, medical conditions and so on.	Nurses must take into consideration patients' dietary needs resulting from allergies, medication and medical conditions.
Public transport includes vehicles for public use on the roads, airways, waterways etc.	Public transport includes vehicles for public use, such as buses, trains and aeroplanes.

Run on expressions

Avoid Rhetorical Questions

- Rhetorical question is a question for which no answer is expected. Readers might not know the answer and the point being made could be more strongly and clearly expressed as a statement.

Informal (includes rhetorical question)	Formal
Industrial sites cause vast amounts of environmental pollution, so why do we still use them?	The question surrounding the continued use of industrial sites, given their vast pollution production, still remains.
What is a team? A team can be one person but will usually end up including many more.	A team can include one person but usually involves many more.
The question is, however, does the "Design School Model" provide a practical solution to the problem of how to formulate strategy?	It is questionable whether the "Design School Model" provides a practical solution to the problem of strategy formulation.

Notice that you can change your rhetorical questions into statements and still use them effectively in an essay.

Rhetorical Questions

Avoid using Phrasal Verbs

- Phrasal verbs are usually two-word phrases consisting of **verb + adverb** or **verb + preposition**.
- *Put forward*
- *Carry out*
- *Make up*
- *Be made up of*
- *Point out*
- *Point up*
- *Set out to*
- *Work on*
- *Go into*

Avoid Phrasal Verbs

- In her latest article Kaufmann **puts forward** a theory which is likely to prove controversial.
- I intend to **carry out** a series of experiments.
- Children under the age of 15 **make up** nearly half of the country's population.
- Parliament is **made up** of two houses.
- Grenne **points out** that the increase in life expectancy has led to some economic problems.
- In his article Losanov **sets out to** prove that...
- The document **sets out** the terms of the treaty.
- I have been **working on** how young children learn their mother tongue.
- In this book Sergeant **goes into** the causes of the Civil War in some depth

Phrasal Verbs

Replace the phrasal verbs in the sentences with a more appropriate verb from the list below. Don't forget to keep the same tense.

- 1 Researchers have been looking into the problem for 15 years.
- 2 This issue was brought up during the seminar.
- 3 It is assumed that the management knows what is happening and will therefore step in if there is a problem.
- 4 Schools cannot altogether get rid of the problem of truancy.
- 5 The number of staff has been cut down recently.
- 6 It was very difficult to find out exactly what happened.
- 7 House prices have a tendency to go up and down.
- 8 A potential solution was put forward two years ago.

fluctuate investigate eliminate raise

reduce propose intervene establish

Group Activity

Academic writing requires the use of precise vocabulary.

NON-ACADEMIC**ACADEMIC**

got
got better
turned down
looked into
bring down
put on
kids
a hit

became / received
improved
rejected
investigated
reduce
gained
children
successful

Academic vocabulary

Replace the underlined words in these sentences with words that are clearer or more meaningful.

- a) Accountants should write letters well.
- b) There are many things involved in doing an assignment.
- c) Andersen was the first to maintain that metal could be refined using electricity without fire.
- d) The population often doesn't know what their local politician is doing.

Activity

- Develop a list of "power" words - ones that say a lot very succinctly, e.g. "a *controversial* idea" is a much more precise way of saying "an idea that not everyone agrees with"; "*nocturnal*" is a more precise word for "active at night".
- Use powerful reporting verbs. When you discuss other people's research you can create extra meaning by using a more precise reporting verb.

Power Words

Other useful reporting verbs are:

- contend examine state disagree
- persuade dismiss refute object
- contradict recommend concur propose
- describe observe assert support
- purport examine suggest claim

Reporting Verbs

Academic writing:

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- is cautious
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What is academic writing ?

Avoid using personal language

- Do not use personal pronouns in your formal writing.
- Most academic writing should be objective, you are usually advised to avoid using personal pronouns (e.g. I, me, my, we, us, our, you) in your writing.

impersonal

Research has shown

personal

We believe

- However if you are asked to use examples from your personal experience in your writing, then it is quite appropriate to use personal pronouns in that part of your essay.
- Sometimes you will be asked to write 'reflectively'. This may be as part of an essay or it may be for a [reflective](#) diary or log. Here you need to talk about yourself – what you have done, what you have learnt, what you might do differently. In this case it is quite acceptable to use 'I' or 'we'

Personal Language

Rewrite these sentences without personal pronouns.

- a) When we study coal production, we find these figures.
- b) With this evidence I have proved my hypothesis that reading out loud is an effective editing strategy.
- c) You can apply the same theory of learning to small children.
- d) You can only do this after the initial preparation has been conducted.

e Practice

Avoid Emotional language

If you feel strongly about a topic, you may be tempted to use emotional words that are inappropriate for academic writing.

Be careful that you use language in a neutral way so that you keep your likes and dislikes (emotions) to yourself. Appealing to your reader by using strong words is not acceptable in most academic writing.

For example:

- *It was extremely disappointing that the bureaucracy chose to target students who did not understand the rules of plagiarism in the first year of their university studies. Some caring lecturers approached the issue by delivering a series of brilliant workshops to assist the students to overcome their referencing problems. It was a fantastic strategy as most of their students did not have to face being accused of plagiarism*

Emotional Language

- When describing processes, use the passive voice. When you use the active voice, the subject (the person or thing performing the action) is important.
- It's not important who did the action as what the action is. For instance, if you are writing a lab report, you shouldn't write:

I prepared the test-tubes by heating them.

You should write:

- *The test-tubes were prepared by heating them.*

Passive Voice

Academic writing:

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What is Academic Writing ?

Use language sensitively

Avoid using language toooooo strongly

It is wise to use a cautious tone in your writing, because very often you are discussing issues in which there is no absolutely right answer, or absolutely correct definition, or absolutely perfect solution

So it's usually better to 'suggest', rather than 'state.'

Examples

- Rather than: Smith has an extremely important point to make because ...
You could try: Smith's view is significant because ...
- So avoid words like: 'very', 'really', 'quite' and 'extremely'.
- Rather than: 'This view is correct because ...'
- You could try: 'It could be said that ...', 'It appears that ...', 'It seems that ...'

Be Cautious

Hedging words and phrases

When evaluating theories and discussing implications your writing should appear to be well-considered and reasonable.

If it is appropriate for you to be tentative (medium certainty) with your claims, you can use language techniques to 'soften' your claims to indicate the degree of certainty you want to express. This technique is called hedging.

Examples of cautious or tentative style

It appears that...

It may be that...

It seems as though...

It is likely that...

This suggests that...

It is possible...

Be Cautious

Low certainty	Medium certainty/Hedging	High certainty
<p>seldom, rarely, never, improbable, impossible, unattainable ...</p>	<p>probably, perhaps, likely, occasionally, sometimes, generally, may, might, can, could, appears to be, seems to be, tends to be, suggests, considers ...</p>	<p>undoubtedly, absolutely, certainly, definitely, incredible, amazing, unbelievable, particularly, very, vitally, totally, wholly, often, must, would, should ...</p>

Certainty Barometer

Try to make these statements more cautious.

1. Today everyone uses credit cards for all their shopping.
2. Drinking wine is bad for you.
3. Global warming will have disastrous consequences for the whole world.
4. Teleworking leads to isolation.
5. Women are worse drivers than men.

Practice

Do not stereotype, generalise or make assumptions

This especially applies to individuals or groups on the basis of their gender, race, nationality, religion, physical and mental capacity, age, sexuality, marital status, or political beliefs.

Generalisation

- Avoid using dashes to add information
- Do not use dot/bullet point lists unless you are told to
- Do not shift verb tense unnecessarily
- Do not use exclamation marks (!!!) in your essay
- Do not use questions and commands
- Do not misuse font and font styles (mainly italics & underlining)

Other things to avoid

Academic writing:

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What is Academic Writing ?

- Academic writing refers to information from a range of print, digital and other sources, all of which must be clearly referenced in your text.
- **Remember!** You must always clearly identify the work and ideas of others in your writing.

Include Other Writers

- There are three main reasons why you must reference clearly, systematically and consistently:
 - If you include the work or ideas of others without referencing it clearly, this is plagiarism. Plagiarism is a form of academic cheating and carries strict penalties.
 - A well-referenced piece of work demonstrates to your lecturer that you have thoroughly researched the topic, and that your work is based on evidence.
 - Readers of your work may wish to look at the external information you have referred to in your writing, so will need full details of the source to locate it.

Referencing

- Claims & Assertions
- Qualifications & Evidence
- Integrating evidence in to your own assertions
- Expressing your voice in academic writing

Use of Evidence

Finding your academic voice

When you engage in critical writing you are developing your own academic voice within your subject.

Wellington et al. (2005 p.84) offer some suggestions for distinguishing between the academic and the non-academic voice:

Your Academic Voice

- “healthy scepticism ... but not cynicism;
- confidence ... but not ‘cockiness’ or arrogance;
- judgement which is critical ... but not dismissive;
- opinions ... without being opinionated;
- careful evaluation and use of published work

Your Academic Voice

- being 'fair': assessing fairly the strengths and weaknesses of other people's ideas and writing ... without prejudice; and
- making judgements on the basis of considerable thought and all the available evidence ... as opposed to assertions without reason.

Wellington J., Bathmaker A., Hunt C., McCulloch G. and Sikes P. (2005). *Succeeding with your doctorate*. London: Sage

Your Academic Voice

- Weekly workshops
- Drop-in consultations
- Writing clinics
- Conversations@UTS
- Intensive academic English programs
- Self-help learning resources

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