

Academic writing style



Academic writing

- has its own tone which dictates the choice of words and phrasing. This can vary significantly depending on the subject-area and the academic discipline you are writing for.
- typically aims to be:

Clear and concise

Your writing needs to communicate clearly and unambiguously.

- A wide range of vocabulary is important but you must use the right word and often shorter ones are better than long ones.

Long 'rambling' in the approximate vicinity of disseminate misinformation	Short and clear about/near spread lies
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- His/her – can cause problems. Use plurals instead:

Example

A student should go over his/her feedback carefully. (ok)

Students should go over their feedback carefully. (better)

- **Avoid** any vague words or phrases:
 - Ensure that your reader knows who or what you are referring to when you use words such as: 'it', 'them', 'they'.
 - Words such as 'people' and 'ideas' can be vague. So, avoid saying: 'according to many people'. Ensure that you explain which people or which ideas.
 - When talking about events that have happened in the past, avoid phrases such as: 'in the past' or 'in recent times'. You need to be specific.

- Make every word count

<p>Too 'wordy'</p> <p>The theorist called Sigmund Freud wrote a significant piece of work called On Narcissism which offers valuable insights into ...</p>	<p>Clearer and more concise</p> <p>Freud (1914) offers valuable insights into ...</p>
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Formal and structured

Academic writing need not be complicated, but it does need to have an element of formality. Your choice of words for an academic assignment should be more considered and careful.

Tip: It may be useful to read your writing aloud. If it sounds more like a written version of a chat with a friend, you will need to revise what you have written.

- **Avoid** using informal words

<p>Informal/spoken</p> <p>White's bit of research is all right...</p>	<p>Formal</p> <p>White's research is significant because...</p>
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<p>Informal/spoken</p> <p>'get' 'big' 'a lot'</p>	<p>Formal</p> <p>'obtain' 'considerable' 'many'</p>
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- **Avoid** contracted forms of verbs; always use the full form

Examples:

it's → it is; he'll → he will; it'd → it would/had

- **Avoid** using exclamations (!) and dashes (-) and brackets (). **Avoid** 'etc.'
- **Avoid** direct questions if possible.

<p>Informal</p> <p>Why was a mixed methods research strategy adopted?</p>	<p>Formal</p> <p>It would be useful to find out why a mixed methods research strategy was adopted.</p>
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Although you aim to use more formal words in academic writing, you should not aim to obscure your meaning behind a lot of impressive words. Ultimately you should try to achieve succinct, clear prose.

Impersonal, objective, cautious

The style of academic writing is quite objective and impersonal, which means that it avoids mentioning personal feelings.

- **Avoid** expressing opinion too strongly.

Too strong: White has an extremely important point to make because..	Better: White's view is significant because...
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So, avoid words like 'really', 'very', 'extremely'

- **Avoid** evaluative words based on non-technical judgements and feelings. Use more moderate language.

Too emotive 'amazing' 'badly' 'disappointing' 'Parents who smoke are obviously abusing their children.'	More 'academic' 'valid' 'inaccurate' 'reliable' 'clearly demonstrates' 'Second-hand smoke has some harmful effects on children's health.'
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- **Avoid** sweeping generalisations which cannot be supported.

Too general/sweeping Vulnerable people live in poor housing. International aid is key to solving world poverty.	Better Some vulnerable people <u>may</u> live in poor housing. <u>It is claimed</u> that international aid <u>contributes</u> to solving world poverty.
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So, to show caution, or to allow others to disagree, use 'may' 'might' or phrases such as 'It could be said that...' 'It appears that...' 'It seems that...'

- Find authoritative sources (authors, researchers in books or articles) who support your point of view and refer to them in your writing.

<p>Too personal</p> <p>In my opinion, language is clearly something social. (too personal)</p>	<p>Using author to support your point</p> <p>As Halliday (1974) shows, language is essentially social.</p>
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Useful website:

More on formality/objectivity/complexity: :

<http://www.uefap.com/writing/writfram.htm>

For more information on this and other aspects of academic study, please see our website at:

www.els.qmu.ac.uk

If you would like to talk to someone in the Effective Learning Service then email us at els@qmu.ac.uk