

ACADEMIC STYLE

Academic style

- work on an assignment
- a writing convention
- logical and clear

Key features of academic style

- objectivity
- formality
- precision
- hedging

Objectivity

- Academic writing
 - presents and evaluates issues
 - arrives at an objective position
- A position focuses on and is informed by research and reasoning rather than personal feelings and opinions.
- Personal pronouns, especially 'I', 'you' and 'we' are usually avoided
- Avoiding 'I' does not mean you cannot express your own opinion. Your own evaluation of the material is still extremely important; however, you can communicate this by using evidence or logical argumentation.

Example: make the statement objective

- *You can demonstrate that climate change is a real phenomenon by studying alterations in Antarctic ice layers. (sounds like a personal opinion)*

Use the topic as the subject

- Alterations in Antarctic ice layers demonstrate that climate change is a real phenomenon.

Use a passive verb

- The reality of climate change can be demonstrated by studying alterations in Antarctic ice layers.

Use 'it' as an empty subject

- It can be demonstrated that climate change is a real phenomenon by studying alterations in Antarctic ice layers.

Formality

- Academic writing is very explicit
- To make your writing more formal, try to:
- Replace informal words that are associated with 'chatty' spoken styles (such as contractions) with more formal vocabulary
- Avoid rhetorical questions the reader cannot answer
- Use full words instead of contractions
- Avoid unspecified categories
- Avoid colloquial language

Example: prove its being informal

The investigation has been going for four years. How good has it been? At this stage, researchers can't tell, because they still need to check out the data to account for differences in age, gender, socio-economic status, etc. Once that work is done though, the information will be really first-class.

- Informal words (going, good, tell, though, really), rhetorical question (How good...?), a contraction (can't), a vague category (etc.) and a colloquialism (first-class, check out)

Using the tips above, improve the passage

- use more formal vocabulary, remove the rhetorical question, write words in full, elaborate on the vague category, and remove the colloquialism:
- *The investigation has been going for four years. How good has it been? At this stage, researchers can't tell, because they still need to check out the data to account for differences in age, gender, socio-economic status, etc. Once that work is done though, the information will be really first-class.*

Informal → formal

- *The investigation has been going for four years. How good has it been? At this stage, researchers can't tell, because they still need to check out the data to account for differences in age, gender, socio-economic status, etc. Once that work is done though, the information will be really first-class.*
- *The investigation has been **underway** for four years. Researchers cannot yet **determine** the **effectiveness** of the project because it is necessary to first **analyse** the data to control for age, gender, socio-economic status **and other demographic variables**. **Despite** this, the information collected is expected to be **highly valuable** for future studies.*

Precision

To communicate your meaning precisely, you should try to:

- Include a sufficient high level of detail and specificity
- The amount of detail you provide depends on the purpose of your work, but you should always try to avoid ambiguity.

Example

- *Most people didn't like changing trains on the way to work, but they still thought it was better than taking a bus. (broad and general, sounds like a personal opinion)*
- How many people are 'most'? How strong is their dislike of changing trains? In what way are trains better than buses?
- Make the sentence more precise: specify exactly the group of people, what their preferences were, and the degree of strength of those preferences.

Example

- How many people are 'most'? How strong is their dislike of changing trains? In what way are trains better than buses?
- Most people didn't like changing trains on the way to work, but they still thought it was better than taking a bus.
- **While the majority of the survey respondents indicated their dislike of changing trains on their commute to work, they preferred taking two trains to taking one bus, which they perceived would be slower overall and less comfortable, or both.**

Precision

- Choose verbs that express concepts succinctly
- Avoid verbs with many possible meanings and multi-word verbs. Verbs with many possible meanings include 'do', 'make', 'put', 'keep', 'have' and 'get'. For example, some of the many possible meanings of 'get' are:
 - Receive (get an email)
 - Obtain (get a better view)
 - Bring (get a bucket and mop)
 - Buy (get a new shirt)
 - Arrive (get there at 7pm)

Example

- The researchers **got** results from a large participant group
- Vs.
- The researchers **obtained** results from a large participant group
- Use a single verb with the same meaning instead of
Cut off, find out, give up, hand out, let down, pick out
- *Discontinue, discover, quit, distribute, disappoint, select*

Hedging

- Hedging language in academic writing is used to express caution and avoid strong, unqualified statements that may be easily disproven.
- To avoid generalisations, you can:
- Use a quantifier (e.g. few, many, some)
- Use adverbs or adverbial phrases (e.g. occasionally, often, usually)
- Use modal verbs (e.g. can, may, might, would, could)

Example

Leading a sedentary lifestyle causes chronic health conditions. (sounds strong)

vs

***Extended** physical inactivity **can** contribute to **a range of** chronic health conditions and **may** have a negative effect on mental health.*

Final tip

- Look for academic style key features (objectivity, formality, precision and hedging) in the academic texts you are reading in your studies:
 - How do authors express their views objectively?
 - What formal and precise vocabulary is used?
 - How do authors avoid making generalisations?
- ➡ The more you look for these aspects of writing in academic texts you are reading, the more easily you will be able to incorporate those features into your own writing.