

To read: Writing in Academic English: General Guidelines

Writing in Academic English

Academic writing is described as *semi-formal*. It differs from informal writing (e.g. everyday emails, journal writing, and blogging) in several ways. Please review the differences between academic English and general English **below**.

Language-based Features of Academic English

No Contractions (~~isn't/doesn't/it's/they'll~~): Words that are shortened by using an apostrophe are not used. Instead, these words are written in their full form (= "is not/does not/it is/they will")

Avoid Idioms (idiomatic expressions) & **Slang**: Casual expressions that have an idiomatic (non-standard meaning) are not used in academic writing. For example:

- Informal: *People need to know what's up.* (idiom/slang (and contraction))
- Academic: *People need to be aware of the current issues.* (standard language)
- Informal: *It's not their cup of tea.* (idiom)
- Academic: *They dislike it.* (standard language)
- Informal: *It was way too expensive.* (*way* = informal word meaning *very/far/much*)
- Academic: *It was much too expensive.* (standard language)
- Informal: *The fans went crazy.* (*go crazy* = an idiom)
- Academic: *The fans cheered enthusiastically.* (standard language)

Avoid Phrasal Verbs: Phrasal verbs are a combination of a verb and a preposition or adverb, which gives the words a special meaning. For example: *shut up*, *settle down*, *go over*, *look forward to* all have meanings that are different from the literal meaning of the words they use. These words are generally avoided in academic writing. For example:

- Informal: *The business was set up in 2010.* (*set up* = phrasal verb)
- Academic: *The business was founded/established in 2010.* (standard language)
- Informal: *The employees went over the document together.* (*go over* = phrasal verb)
- Academic: *The employees reviewed the document together.* (standard language)
- Informal: *Some of the rich look down on the poor.* (*look down on* = phrasal verb)
- Academic: *Some of the rich disapprove of the poor.* (standard language)

Avoid Other Casual Phrases: Other casual phrases are avoided. These include the following words:

- a lot / lots (change to *many*)
- tonnes/tons of (change to *many*)
- way (change to *much/very*)
- everybody/anybody (change to *everyone/anyone*)
- super (change to *very*)
- totally (change to *completely*)

Also, **indefinite/vague** words such as “things” and “stuff” are not used. Instead use the precise word needed for that sentence. E.g.

- Informal: *The survey revealed many things.*
- Academic: *The survey produced many results.*

Style Differences in Academic Writing

Use Impersonal Language (it/people/they): Instead of using first- and second-person pronouns “I” or “You”, use the third person. The third person is “he/she/it”. For example:

- Too personal: *I like how Shakespeare describes the scene.*
- Academic: *Shakespeare describes the scene beautifully.* (deleted personal pronoun “I”)
- Too personal: *Nowadays, we all have mobile phones.* (*We* = first personal plural)
- Academic: *Nowadays, everyone has a mobile phone.* (*Everyone* = third person)
- Too personal: *Marketers try to convince you to buy their products.* (*you* = second-person singular)
- Academic: *Marketers try to convince people to buy their products.* (*people* = third person perspective)

Use the Passive Voice to Focus on Topic: Academic writing usually focuses on ideas, not people. Therefore, it often uses the **passive voice** (which emphasizes the object of a verb) and not the active voice (which has a person as the subject). Compare:

- Not very academic: *We surveyed 100 people.* (personal pronoun, and active voice)
- Academic: *100 people were surveyed.* (no personal pronoun, passive voice)
- *Larry Page and Sergey Brin founded Google in 1998.* (Active voice – suitable if the topic of your writing is Larry and Sergey)
- *Google was founded in 1998 (by Larry Page and Sergey Brin.)* (Passive voice – suitable if the topic of your writing is Google itself, not the founders)

Avoid Asking Questions: Do not ask questions to your reader in academic writing. This is more common for high-school level writing, or speaking.

- Not academic: *Why aren't more people becoming vegetarians?* (question-form)
- Academic: *One question that remains is why more people are not becoming vegetarians.* (This is the same idea in sentence form.)

Proper Grammar: Write in complete sentences with punctuation.

More Vocabulary: Academic English uses approximately 20,000 words, while conversational English uses roughly 2,000 (Source: Engkent, Skillset with Grammar, 2nd ed.)

<https://www.englishcurrent.com/writing/academic-english-rules-exercises/#exercises>