



Academic Writing

Lesson 1

Academic writing at Masters Level

- The language has to be clear, concise and neutral.
- Material is to be well researched.
- Appropriate theories should be used.
- It should be supported by relevant literature.
- All literature should be correctly acknowledged.

What is academic writing?

- Academic writing is formal and follows some standard conventions
- Each academic discipline has its own specialist vocabulary which you will be expected to learn and use in your own writing
- **Note:** The following conventions are general guidelines for academic writing. Be sure to follow the specific requirements for each assignment.

What is the point of academic writing?

- The substance of academic writing must be based on solid evidence and logical analysis, and presented as a concise, accurate argument.
- Academic writing can allow you to present your argument and analysis accurately and concisely.

How is it done?

- Aim for precision. Don't use unnecessary words or waffle. Get straight to the point. Make every word count.
- If there is any uncertainty about a particular point, use cautious language (such as 'may', 'might', 'could', 'potentially').
- Unless you are a confident writer, it is best to avoid over-long sentences and to aim for a mixture of long and short sentences for variation and rhythm.
- Avoid repeating the same words

Avoid overly elaborate language

- When using words that are not technical or subject related, use simple words in place of obscure words that have the same meaning.
- Using overly elaborate language can make your writing seem pretentious.

Technical and specific language

- Use technical language and words specific to your discipline where appropriate.
- However, it is wise to avoid convoluted phrases and terms when writing about general information.

Why is the following text not a good example of academic style?

- Today being fat is totally bad for your health. About 30,000 fat people die every year in the UK and loads more fat people die in the USA. By 2005 more people will die of being fat than smoking and it doesn't have to be this way, this could easily be prevented, couldn't it?

Answer

- The number of deaths per year attributable to obesity is roughly 30,000 in the UK and ten times that in the USA, where obesity is set to overtake smoking in 2005 as the main preventable cause of illness and premature death.

Avoid abbreviations and contractions

- Abbreviations and contractions are informal, and are best avoided in academic writing. For example:
- ‘Department’ should be used instead of the abbreviation ‘dept’.
- ‘Is not’ should be used in place of the contraction ‘isn’t’.

Activity

- Can you think of common abbreviations in your subject area?

Avoid slang words and phrases

Compare the following:

- 'The doctor looked **kind of** worried when he reviewed the case notes.'
- 'The individual was sentenced for **stealing** a bike'
- 'The doctor looked **slightly** worried when he reviewed the case notes.'

Avoid conversational terms

- This totally changed people's lives'
- Why is 'totally' there?
- If it's a 'filler' it can be omitted.
- If it's used for emphasis, a more appropriate word could be used, for example 'significantly' or 'fundamentally'

Avoid vague terms

Consider the following:

- 'The right thing' would be better expressed as 'the right action' or 'the right procedure'
- 'A nice addition to the collection' would be better expressed as 'A popular addition to the collection' or 'A prestigious addition to the collection'

How can you make writing impersonal?

- What is writing in the first person?
- What is impersonal writing?
- Can you give an example of impersonal writing?

Be Impersonal

- In many academic disciplines, writing in the first person is **not** acceptable as it is believed to be too subjective and personal. Many tutors prefer impersonal language to be used in assignments.

Writing in the first person

- First person sentences use the pronouns 'I' and 'we'. For example:
- We have considered...
- I suggest that...
- I have observed...

- These can be transformed into-

Impersonal sentences

- Consideration has been given to...
- The suggestion is made that...
- It has been observed that...

Types of Academic Writing

- Coursework
- Reports
- Dissertations



What are the differences between essays and reports?



Reports

- Present information
- Present data and findings that you have collected yourself e.g. in an experiment, survey, case study or particular experience.
- Are divided into separate sections
- Their structure means they can be scanned quickly
- Often include recommendations for action.
- Are typical of writing produced in the workplace.

When are reports produced?

- Often after a project or investigation.
- Projects/Investigations can be practical
- Or literature based

Academic reports

- A report presents the results of an investigation.
- Reports are highly structured forms of writing.

References, appendices

- References (Harvard or Vancouver)
- Appendices - An appendix contains material which is too detailed to include in the report.

References

- COTTRELL, S. *The study skills handbook*. Second edition. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan; 2003.
- JORDAN, R.R., *Academic Writing Course: Study Skills in English*. Second edition. Harlow: Pearson Education; 1990.