

Academic Voice

Writing assignments at the university level require that students adopt a way of writing that is known as an academic voice. It is different than writing to a friend or writing for the web.

Academic voice means to meet the writing expectations of academic writing. To write in an academic voice, do the following:

Make Declarative Sentences

Perhaps the most important part of academic voice is creating declarative statements. They are the same as "I" statements, only the "I" is hidden. For example:

"I" Statement

I think that school uniforms benefit students by eliminating competition based on designer labels.

Declarative Statement

School uniforms benefit students by eliminating competition based on designer labels.

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Often you can create a declarative statement from your "I" statement by simply deleting the "I" part of the sentence.

Avoid Casual Language

Writing at the university level requires a professional communication style. Be formal, but not fancy. Picture an audience of academic peers, not friends. Remove the "sound" of your casual conversational style by doing the following:

- Avoid contractions like "can't" or "don't."
- Avoid storytelling indicators like "okay," "well," "then," "next," and "after that."
- Avoid using foul language or off-color humor.
- Do not address the reader casually with the word "you."

Tip: One way to teach yourself formal language is to read newspapers, textbooks, academic journals, and nonfiction publications.

Here is an example of casual language:

Hey, let me get your opinion on this: When people tell a story, which do you prefer? A person who repeats themselves even if their point is already addressed or someone who keeps it simple and gets to the point? If you're like me, then you probably want the person that gets to the point. Most people
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nowadays would prefer someone to keep it short, simple, and cut to the chase. This happens with social encounters at work, with friends, with family, on t.v., the radio, or wherever people communicate.

Here is that same paragraph rewritten in a formal and academic tone:

People tend to enjoy speakers who do not repeat themselves, but who keep their message quick and to the point. In a fast-paced world, people prefer someone who can keep a story short and simple. Brief, effective communication can enhance social encounters at work, with friends, and with family, and may even relay messages better on television, over the radio, or wherever people communicate.

Be Concise

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In academic writing, every sentence you write should get straight to the point. Don't use 7 words to say something that can be said in 3 and don't state the same thing twice. Being concise (/writing-clearly-concisely) helps your reader to get to your ideas quickly, and this is an indicator of good communication.

- Avoid unnecessary filler words or redundancies.
- Avoid overly complex sentences in favor of simple and direct sentences.

Here is an example of a sentence that is overly complex and includes redundancies:

At the present time, a total of four researchers summarized briefly the results of the two different and varying groups' tests.

And here is that sentence revised so that it is more concise:

Four researchers summarized the results of the two groups' tests.

Use Specific Vocabulary and Precise Words

Using specific vocabulary means using the language that is specific to your field of study. For example, if you are studying education, it is appropriate for you to use the terms that educators use.

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Instead of stating:

The teachers are adapting their methods to meet the needs of each student.

Include the specific vocabulary from the field of study by stating:

The teachers are differentiating instruction.

Using precise words means stating specifically what you mean and avoiding vague or subjective language. For example, “a lot” means different things to different people. State precisely how much you mean by “a lot.”

Instead of stating:

Researchers had a *really good* response to the survey.

State precisely what you mean:

Researchers had a *75% response rate* to the survey.

Use Evidence Take a survey
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Writing academically means using credible and relevant evidence (<https://writingcenter.ashford.edu/choosing-best-sources-and-evidence>) to support your claims and ideas. Without the use of evidence, you are asking your reader to simply accept what you say to be true simply because you believe it. And if your evidence is not from a credible source and is not relevant to the specific time frame and topic you are discussing, your reader will not accept it as valid.

- Avoid using popular sources found from a Google search. Instead, use your university library (</library>) to find sources and work with a librarian to help you find relevant sources for your specific topic.
- Cite your sources (</citing-within-your-paper>) within your paper to show where you obtained that information.

Include Your Ideas and Analysis

Part of writing academically is to add your own thoughts, ideas, interpretations, and analysis to the conversation. Because you will have researched your topic in order to have some level of expertise on it, you should have also developed your own analysis of the topic being discussed.

- Avoid ending a body paragraph with a direct quote or a paraphrase of what someone else has said. The evidence you use is for your supporting sentences, but the end of your paragraph is where you should add your own ideas or analysis.
- If your Turnitin report has a high similarity score, but you have cited all your sources, Take a survey to paraphrase more than you need to (https://bridgepoint.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5jUAqflz7vtGazj)

quote directly, and you'll also need to add more of your own ideas and analysis to each body paragraph.

To add your own analysis (/summary-vs-analysis) or ideas to your paragraphs, ask yourself:

- What is your position on the controversial topic you are writing about?
- How might you apply what you have learned to your own field of study?
- How does a research study you read or evidence you've presented specifically relate to or what does it mean for your topic?
- What conclusions have you come to about the topic you are writing about?

Here is an example of a body paragraph where the writer has included their own ideas or analysis:

Television, textbooks, and computer games are just a few technological mediums in which information is presented and widely accepted as a form of communication even for education. This must be taken into account when determining what literacy means and how students receive information as well as how they master the skill of developing their competencies. Where reading and writing skills in
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the medium of spoken word or paper and ink once strictly defined literacy, the definition is widely changing to include proficiency in modern technology such as computers and other digital sources of information. For example, students can access digital applications, and according to Kervin (2016), digital play with carefully selected apps can provide active, hands-on, engaging and empowering learning opportunities. Apps can facilitate versatility in children's literacy experiences by providing opportunities for reading and writing, and to listen and communicate through a range of scenarios and activities (Kervin, 2016). By this explanation, an app on a tablet can provide students an alternate medium for education while introducing them to technology literacy. Although not all available apps are created to enrich a child's educational experiences, the guided use of carefully chosen apps for digital play can be a powerful learning tool when used in academic contexts.

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Related Video Tutorial



<https://youtu.be/Fkk6hU3ZLnQ>

*Click to watch this Write On! video tutorial on academic voice.
The video will open in a new tab.*

Still Confused?

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