ACADEMIC WRITING: DEFINITION AND CRITERIA

'Academic (adj.)' is related to education especially in schools and universities.

'Formal (adj.)' could mean very correct and suitable for official occasions.

'Informal (adj.)' could mean suitable for normal conversation and writing to friends rather than serious speech or letters.

A very broad definition of **academic writing** could include any writing assignment given in an academic setting, such as: Books and book reports, Translations, Essays, Research paper or research article, Conference paper, Academic journal, Dissertation and Thesis, Abstract and alike. The objective of the academic writing is to inform rather than entertain, using a standard written form of the language.

Qualities of a Good Academic Writing:

1- **A** writer should avoid:
   - **colloquial words and expressions**: "stuff", "a lot of", "thing", "sort of", kid, a lot of/lots of, cool
   - **using informal verbs**, (few verb phrases (verb + preposition) only if necessary). For example: use 'consider' rather than 'look at'.
   - **asking questions**.
   - Using **verb based phrases**; instead, **nominalization** (noun-based phrases) is preferred. For example, instead of writing:
     Crime was increasing rapidly and the police were becoming concerned. The following is preferred:
     The rapid increase in crime was causing concern among the police.
   - using **redundant words**. For example: 'Concisely' is better than 'In as few words as possible',
   - **Directives** that demands the reader to "Do this" or "Do that
   - **Mistakes** in spelling and punctuation.
   - **writing incomplete** or having grammatically mistaken sentences.
   - **Contractions** (in other words, use "It is" rather than "It's", 'had not' rather than 'hadn't').
   - **Abbreviations** that must be spelt out in full when first used, the only exceptions being when the acronym is better known than the full name (BBC, ITV or NATO for example).
   - emotional expressions, such as: exclamation points, ellipsis, etc., unless they are being cited from another source.

2- **A writer should be objective that:**
   - main points are stated confidently and full support arguments are offered.

- Facts and figures are given precisely.
- A formal writing style shows a limited range of emotions and avoids emotive punctuation such as exclamation points, ellipsis, etc., unless they are being cited from another source. **For example: it's so obvious** (**it appears** is preferable); **just because** (**assigned on the basis of** is preferable).
- The first person point of view (I or we) or second person (you) are not used.
- when referring to a certain career or job (such as: "doctor'), 'he' or 'him' are avoided. Instead, it is made plural and referred to as 'they' or 'them'.
- Use passive form of writing or impersonal subjects instead, as in: It is believed that…, it can be argued that…, Water changes its qualities when being….
- Use 'attitudinal adverbs', such as apparently, arguably, ideally, strangely, unexpectedly. These words allow you to hint at your attitude to something without using personal language. For example: informal writing→ academic writing

  It's so obvious that people were given jobs just because they were male or female. I don't think that is an acceptable approach and is even against the law. →
  It appears that in a number of instances jobs were assigned on the basis of gender. Given the current anti-discrimination laws, this raises serious concerns.

3- **Tense**: a correct tense in a written work should be used. Probably, different tenses need to be used throughout depending upon the context, such as:
   - writing about established knowledge requires the present tense to be used. For example: Diabetes is a condition where the amount of glucose in the blood is too high because the body cannot use it properly.
   - writing about an experiment that was carried out or a method that is used requires the past tense to be used. For example: **The** experiment showed wide variations in results where the variable was altered even slightly.
   - When reporting on the findings or research of others, the present tense should be used. This is because it is writing about something that is established knowledge. For example: Smith's research from 2012 finds that regular exercise may contribute to good cardiovascular health.
   - When writing about conclusions or what have been found, then the present tense is used. For example: In this case there is not a large difference between the two diameter values (from Feret's diameter and calculated equation), which again is probably due to the fact that the average circularity ratio is on the high end of the scale, 0.88, and therefore infers near circular pores.
   - writing about figures that have been presented in a table or chart requires the use of the present tense. For example: These figures show that the number of birds visiting the hide increase every year in May....

4- **Clear sentences:**
   - too many short sentences may let writing sound childish while very long sentences may let the reader lose track (generally not more than 25 words).
   - A skillful writer can produce much longer sentences which remain clear and effective. Some topics and some tasks may tend to require longer sentences. What

is important is not numerating every sentence, but monitoring writing to ensure that the meaning is always as clear as possible.
- A writer should try exploring opportunities to vary sentence length when appropriate.

5- Paper structure:
- dividing writing up into paragraphs can be helpful to make meaning more clear.
- connecting words and phrases are advised to be used to make writing more explicit and easy to understand.
- An academic paper has three distinct sections: the introduction, body and conclusion.

6- A researcher could make decisions or conclusions about a particular topic. All that is dependent upon what the researcher has understood from others' works or information. That could be reported by different ways, such as:
- Paraphrasing: rewriting something using own words, keeping a similar meaning.
- Summarizing: mentioning just the main point to make a paragraph or a point shorter.
- Synthesizing: using information from several sources in one paragraph or point.
- Quoting: Copying the words exactly from the original, as the author has written them, taking care to include quotation marks.

7- Hedging: When stating a conclusion, the researcher should be cautious in the words or phrases used in the research expressing a certain stance or opinion. And that is called 'Hedging'. For example:

Research **proves** that drinking a large volume of fizzy drinks containing sugar **leads to** the development of type II diabetes.

Research **suggests** that high consumption of fizzy drinks containing sugar **may contribute** to the development of type II diabetes.

In sentence 1, the statement is presented **as proven fact**; that a high volume of sugary fizzy drinks will **definitely lead** to type II diabetes. This **leaves no room for doubt** or criticism or the fact that some people may drink large volumes of fizzy drinks and never develop type II diabetes.

In sentence 2, the writer has used **'hedging language' - 'suggests' and 'may contribute'** - to show that while there is evidence to link sugary drinks and type II diabetes, this may not be true for every person and **may be proven to be incorrect in the future.**

Some other hedging expressions are like: This suggests...., It is possible that..., A possible explanation..., Usually..., Sometimes..., Somewhat... may, might.

References

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