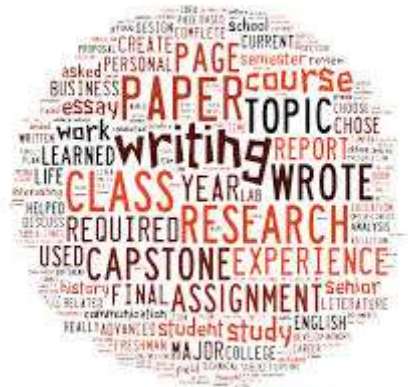


Academic Writing: Definition and Criteria



'**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:

- 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'.
- The passive form of writing or impersonal subjects, instead, is used; as in: It is believed that..., it can be argued that..., Water changes its qualities when being....
- The 'attitudinal adverbs', such as apparently, arguably, ideally, strangely, unexpectedly; are used. 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 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- 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.

6- 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,

Some Exercises with their answers

Exercise 1

Identify the informal expressions in the following sentences. Rewrite the following sentences, replacing the informal expressions with a more formal equivalent.

1. With women especially, there is a lot of social pressure to conform to a certain physical shape.
2. Significantly, even at this late date, Lautrec was considered a bit conservative by his peers.
3. It focused on a subject that a lot of the bourgeois and upper-class exhibition-going public regarded as anti-social and anti-establishment.
4. Later Florey got together with Paul Fildes in an experimental study of the use of curare to relieve the intractable muscular spasms which occur in fully developed infection with tetanus or lockjaw.
5. When a patient is admitted to a psychiatric inpatient unit, the clinical team should avoid the temptation to start specific treatments immediately.
6. Therefore after six months the dieter is behaving according to all twenty-six goals and she has achieved a big reduction in sugar intake.

Avoiding informal language - answers

1. With women especially, there is **a great deal of** social pressure to conform to a certain physical shape.
2. Significantly, even at this late date, Lautrec was considered **somewhat** conservative by his peers.
3. It focused on a subject that **much** of the bourgeois and upper-class exhibition-going public regarded as anti-social and anti-establishment.
4. Later Florey **collaborated** with Paul Fildes in an experimental study of the use of curare to relieve the intractable muscular spasms which occur in fully developed infection with tetanus or lockjaw.
5. When a patient is admitted to a psychiatric inpatient unit, the clinical team should avoid the temptation to **commence** specific treatments immediately.
6. Therefore after six months, the dieter is behaving according to all twenty-six goals and she has achieved a **considerable** reduction in sugar intake.

Exercise 2

Rewrite the following sentences, replacing the informal abbreviated form with a more formal equivalent.

1. The radical restructuring of British politics after 1931 doesn't lie in the events of 13-28 August, but in the changing attitudes within the National Government.
2. This isn't easy to do since most historians persist in speaking of *The National Government* as if the same sort of government ruled from 1931 to 1940.
3. The first National Government wasn't intended to be a coalition government in the normal sense of the term.
4. These aren't at all original or exotic but are based on the ordinary things that most people tend to eat.

Avoiding abbreviations - answers

1. The radical restructuring of British politics after 1931 **lies not** in the events of 13-28 August, but in the changing attitudes within the National Government.
2. This **is not** easy to do since most historians persist in speaking of *The National Government* as if the same sort of government ruled from 1931 to 1940.
3. The first National Government **was not** intended to be a coalition government in the normal sense of the term.
4. These **are not** at all original or exotic but are based on the ordinary things that most people tend to eat.

Exercise 3 Avoiding two word verbs

There is often a choice in English between a two word verb and a single verb - bring up/raise, set up/establish. Rewrite the following sentences, replacing the *informal two-word verb* with a more formal equivalent.

1. A primary education system was *set up* throughout Ireland as early as 1831
2. This will *cut down* the amount of drug required and so the cost of treatment.
3. The material amenities of life have *gone up* in Western society.
4. The press reflected the living culture of the people; it could influence opinion and reinforce existing attitudes but it did not *come up with* new forms of entertainment.
5. Thus, he should have *looked into* how the patient has coped previously.
6. The aggregate of outstanding balances *went up and down* quite violently.

Avoiding two-word verbs - answers

1. A primary education system was **established** throughout Ireland as early as 1831
2. This will **reduce** the amount of drug required and so the cost of treatment.
3. The material amenities of life have **increased** in Western society.
4. The press reflected the living culture of the people; it could influence opinion and reinforce existing attitudes but it did not **create** new forms of entertainment.
5. Thus, he should have **investigated** how the patient has coped previously.
6. The aggregate of outstanding balances **fluctuated** quite violently.

Instruction

Complete the sentence by choosing the appropriate word from the list.

concluded / suggested / proven / estimated

1. It can be that, for young adult males, the portrayal of alcohol on a television screen might lead to increased alcohol consumption.

The answer is: concluded.

The clue is in the clause 'the portrayal of alcohol on a television screen might lead to increased alcohol consumption'. In this

clause the writer is drawing a logical conclusion and therefore the word 'concluded' is the best fit.

The word 'suggested' would not work because the clause, 'the portrayal of alcohol on a television screen might lead to increased alcohol consumption' is not a suggestion.

The word 'estimate' is also unsuitable because the clause 'the portrayal of alcohol on a television screen might lead to increased alcohol consumption' is not a guess - guesses suggest that there is no evidence.

The word 'proven' is also unsuitable as this conclusion has not been scientifically proven. The word 'might' demonstrates this.

will / may / must

2. ..., which have been the case when they entered our laboratory setting alone.

The answer is: may.

'Must' is unsuitable because an element of doubt needs to be expressed. 'Must' does not demonstrate doubt.

'Will' is unsuitable because this is not set in the future.

definite / unlikely / normal

3. It is not that the characters in the movies are generally regarded as positive (McIntosh et al., 1999), which should add to the low level priming effect of observing drinking behaviour.

The answer is: unlikely.

'Definite' is unsuitable because the word 'generally' shows that this isn't always 100% true.

'Normal' is unsuitable because it does not make lexical sense.

should / could / may

4. When in real life, anticipation of others' reactions be among the causes of imitation.

The answer is: may.

'Should' is unsuitable because it suggests strong advice. The example sentence is not giving advice.

'Could' is a possibility, however, it does not highlight the concept of possibility as well as the word 'may'.

will / would / must

5. Nevertheless, from an experimental perspective, it be better to a) compare a movie without any alcohol portrayals versus a movie with many alcohol portrayals or b) to use one movie but to do careful editing to leave out all alcohol scenes in one version.

The answer is: would.

'Would' expresses the idea of an imaginary situation and/or possibility.

'Will' is inappropriate because it suggests that we are talking about the future, which is not true.

'Must' is unsuitable because it does not communicate the notion of possibility.

probable / possible / definite

should / will / might

6. Furthermore, it is also that besides imitation, the activation of alcohol norms appeals to pre-existing norms and expectancies of people, which lead to alcohol intake, or that alcohol portrayals on films and in commercials function as a cue that affects craving in drinkers (Larsen et al., 2009)

There answers are: 'possible' and 'might'

'Probable' is not suitable because it suggests that this is basically correct. Whereas possible still maintains the notion of possibility.

'Definite' is inappropriate because it removes the notion of possibility.

'Should' is not possible because it is strong advice removes the notion of indefiniteness.

'Will' is not suitable because we are not discussing something definite in the future.

Hedging:

Q1. Viewing a movie in which alcohol is portrayed appears to lead to higher total alcohol consumption of young people while watching the movie.

yes

no

Yes - 'appears' is a verb used to express caution and is therefore a hedging word.

Q2. Furthermore, this proves that humans are wired to imitate.

yes

no

No. This sentence does not use a hedging expression.

Q3. It is unquestionable that our survey proved that the portrayal of alcohol and drinking characters in movies directly leads to more alcohol consumption in young adult male viewers when alcohol is available within the situation.

yes

no

No. This sentence does not use a hedging expression.

Q4. Implications of these findings may be that, if moderation of alcohol consumption in certain groups is strived for, it may be sensible to cut down on the portrayal of alcohol in programmes aimed at these groups and the commercials shown in between.

yes

no

Yes. This sentence uses hedging words.

Implications
may be

Q5. This effect might occur regardless of whether it concerns a real-life interaction (Quigley & Collins, 1999).

yes

no

Yes. This sentence uses a hedging word.

might

Q6. It definitely proves that a movie in which a lot of partying is involved triggers a social process between two participants that affects total drinking amounts.

yes

no

No. This sentence does not use hedged language.

Verbs – Informal & Formal

Informal	Formal
ask	enquire
begin	commence
block	undermine
blow up	explode
bring about	cause
climb	ascend
deal with	handle
end	finish
fill in	substitute, inform
find out	discover, ascertain
free	release
get	obtain
get in touch with	contact
get on someone's nerves	bother
go	depart
go against	oppose
go down	decrease

Informal	Formal
go up	increase
help	assist
It's about	It concerns, It's in regards to
keep	Retain, preserve
leave out	omit
let	permit
live	reside
look at	examine
make up	fabricate
mend	repair
need	require
point out	indicate
put off	postpone, delay
put up	tolerate
rack up	accumulate
ring up	call
say no	reject
say sorry	apologize, apologise
seem	appear
set up	establish
shorten	decrease
show	demonstrate, illustrate, portray
show up	arrive
stand for	represent
start	commence
stop	cease

Informal	Formal
tell	inform
think about	consider
use	consume
want	desire

Letter Expressions – Informal & Formal speech

Informal	Formal
Cheers,	
Hi Robert,	Dear Sir or Madam
Hope to hear from you soon	I look forward to hearing from you
Just wanted to let you know...	I am writing to inform you...
Love,	Yours sincerely, Yours faithfully,
You can call me if you need anything	Please do not hesitate to contact me
Yours Truly, Best regards, kind regards	

Transitions (connectors) and other words – Informal & Formal speech

Informal	Formal
	In order to
again and again	repeatedly
All right	Acceptable
Also	In addition, Additionally
Alternative choices	Alternatives
Anyway,	Notwithstanding, Nevertheless
ASAP	as soon as possible/at your earliest convenience
at first	initially
at once	immediately
bad	negative

Informal	Formal
Basic fundamentals	Fundamentals
better	superior
But	However
cell	cell phone
chance	opportunity
cheap	inexpensive
childish	immature
clear	transparent
Completely eliminate	Eliminate
dim	indistinct
Employed the use of	Used
empty	vacant
enough	sufficient
friendly	amiable
good	positive
house	residence
I think	In my opinion,
In a nutshell/Basically	To summarize,
In as few words as possible	Concisely
in charge	responsible
in the end	finally
In the meantime	In the interim
kids	children
lack	deficiency
laid back	relaxed
lively	energetic

Informal	Formal
loaded	rich
lots of/ a lot of	much, many
lucky	fortunate
mad	insane
mainly	principally
net	Internet
next	subsequently
Okay, OK	acceptable
on and off	intermittently
On top of it all,	
photo	photograph
Plus/Also	Moreover/ Furthermore
really big	considerable
really, very	definitely
right	correct
sight	vision
smart	intelligent
So	Therefore/Thus
sweat	perspiration
T.V.	television
To sum up	In conclusion,
To top it all off,	
tons of, heaps of	large quantities of, a number of
totally	completely, strongly
understanding	comprehension
Well,	
whole	complete
worse	inferior

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