

## Basics of Academic Writing in English

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### Abstract

Writing an academic paper is a challenging task that demands advanced linguistic skills and adherence to the standards of academic writing in higher education. Academic writing is a formal, structured, and evidence-based mode of communication designed to convey knowledge objectively and persuasively within scholarly contexts. This paper aims to explore the basics of academic writing in English. It briefly discusses its major characteristic features, basic conventions, the politics of academic language and its spirit. The findings suggest that academic writing is a rigorous, evidence-based process that parallels scientific inquiry, fostering knowledge, promoting logical reasoning, and addressing the interplay between linguistic diversity and the dominance of English in academia.

**Keywords:** academic writing, consistency, formal tone, research-based facts, systematicness

### Introduction

Academic writing is a structured, formal, and impersonal style of writing used in scholarly contexts. It prioritizes clarity, precision, and logical coherence, aiming to convey information or arguments objectively. This type of writing is predominantly used in academic works such as theses, term papers, journal articles, research projects, and formal reports. Academic writing is a formal method of composing text aimed at the dissemination of knowledge within an academic setting, commonly used in higher education contexts such as colleges and universities (Johnson, 2016). As an impersonal and formal genre, academic writing is tailored to specific tasks, goals, and audiences, and adheres to strict stylistic and structural conventions (Ferris, 2018). Writing in this context reflects not just individual autonomy but also a collective understanding, shaped by factors like culture, audience, and genre (Paudel, 2020b). This mode of writing requires control over language and structure to effectively convey ideas and persuade an academic audience. Irvin (2010) asserts that academic writing is a form of assessment, requiring the demonstration of discipline-specific skills in analysis and interpretation. Welfe (2007) identifies key elements such as argumentation, evidence, and counterarguments, while Whitaker (2009) highlights its logical and interpretative nature. Academic writing demands a clear, well-organized presentation, often characterized by a formal tone achieved through the avoidance of personal pronouns, slang, and colloquial language (Oshima & Hogue, 2007). It emphasizes factual,

evidence-based communication, as Ivanic (1998) argues, with clarity and structure being paramount.

As a form of scientific inquiry, academic writing includes standard components such as abstracts, introductions, and conclusions, reflecting the structured nature of scholarly communication (Johannessen, 2001). This genre is designed to be comprehensible and concise, avoiding complex sentence structures or vague expressions (Bruning & Horn, 2000). Ultimately, academic writing serves to present well-researched, objective information, ensuring accuracy and relevance across various disciplines (Sigdel, 2020). Thus, despite its formality, academic writing maintains a focus on clarity and accessibility, aiming to enhance the reader's understanding without sacrificing scholarly rigour.

### **Characteristic features of academic writing**

Academic writing is distinct from other forms of writing due to its **formal tone and style**. It uses formal language, avoiding colloquial expressions, slang, and personal pronouns. According to Molinari (2022) and Paudel (2018), academic writing should be free of errors, consistent, and logical in its presentation. Osmond (2016) notes that removing first and second-person pronouns, contractions, and clichés contributes to the formal nature of academic writing, making it accessible to a knowledgeable audience. Additionally, Jordan (1999) argues that academic writing avoids casual language and has a tone suitable for expert readers.

A **well-structured format** is crucial for academic writing. It is organized logically, with sections such as introduction, body, and conclusion, following a clear format suitable for the type of writing. Swales and Feak (2012) explain that structure involves the logical arrangement of ideas and information. Research papers often follow the IMRAD format (Introduction, Method, Results, and Discussion), ensuring clarity and coherence (James, 2008). Bolsunovskaya and Rymanova (2020) highlight the importance of content organization, appropriate language use, and adherence to grammatical conventions. This structured approach ensures that the writing is cohesive, with each section connected logically to the next (Monippally & Pawar, 2010).

Academic writing also relies on being **evidence-based**, requiring the support of claims with relevant, scholarly sources. According to Gillet et al. (2009), it draws on factual data from research and scholarly opinions to build a rational argument. The strength of the argument depends on the quality of the evidence presented. It emphasizes informing readers rather than persuading them, focusing on objective reporting of research findings. Citing sources is essential to give credit to the original authors and to substantiate claims.

**Contiguity of thought** is another vital element, as ideas must flow seamlessly from one sentence or paragraph to the next. Richards (1985) emphasizes that this flow of thought ensures coherence from the beginning to the end of the text, maintaining the reader's engagement and understanding.

Lastly, academic writing values being **straightforward and concise**. It uses direct language, avoiding ambiguous or overly complex sentences. The writing must be clear, avoiding vague expressions like 'many' or 'several' (Richards, 1985). Academic

writing should focus on informing the reader with clarity and avoiding unnecessary details. Paraphrasing long quotations and using unambiguous language further enhance readability, while concise language ensures that only relevant information is included in the text.

Overall, these features- formal tone, well-structured format, evidence-based reasoning, contiguity, and straightforwardness of academic writing ensure its effectiveness in scholarly communication.

**Academic writing as an art** emphasizes the individual creativity and unique expression of ideas by different writers. As Johnson (2016) and Singh and Lukkarilla (2017) state, academic writing allows for various approaches, with each author developing their method for conveying thoughts and messages to their audience. This aspect of academic writing underscores the diversity of perspectives and styles, as no single strategy applies universally to all academic writers. Authors must therefore learn and adapt different techniques to best communicate their views effectively.

**Academic writing as a science** refers to the structured, rule-based nature of writing in academia. Like science, academic writing follows specific norms and guidelines, particularly concerning citation styles, formatting, and structure (Johnson, 2016). These rules may vary across institutions and cultures, but they share a common goal: to present information systematically and objectively. According to Wilson (1999), science involves a controlled, methodical process of acquiring knowledge, and academic writing similarly aims to analyze, persuade, and inform the audience by adhering to formal and technical standards. The impersonal tone of academic writing- free of emotional references and conversational language- reflects its emphasis on facts and ideas rather than subjective viewpoints. This objectivity is reinforced through the use of discipline-specific terminology, making academic writing both formal and technical (The University of Sydney, 2019).

**Academic writing as a craft** highlights the continuous development of writing skills. Academic writing is a skill that requires practice, critical thinking, and perseverance. As Johnson (2016) explains, academic writers must refine their abilities over time, improving through regular writing practice, seeking feedback, and revising their work repeatedly. Mastery of academic writing cannot be achieved quickly but rather through ongoing effort and commitment to the craft.

Thus, academic writing is an art that allows for creative expression, a science that adheres to formal rules and objectivity, and a craft that necessitates continuous skill development through practice.

### **The politics of academic language**

The politics of academic language centres on its ability to shape identities, preserve knowledge, and influence society. Language embodies community affiliations and holds historical, cultural, and social importance (Bloome, 2009). Grasping the politics of academic language starts with recognizing that every language is deeply tied to the identities of its speakers and their connection to their communities (Russell, 2018).

Academic writing, predominantly in English, enhances writers' understanding and equips them to question existing norms (Clark & Ivanic, 1996). It signifies education and serves as a means of social interaction, empowering individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to make an impact. However, the prevalence of English in academic publications poses challenges for multilingual scholars, exposing the interplay between language and power (Pennycook, 2017).

### **Basic conventions of academic writing**

Academic writing shares principles aligned with scientific methods, aiming to convey information, systematically, and objectively.

#### **Explicitness**

Clarity is one of the essential principles is **explicitness**. Like scientific findings, academic writing must present its arguments, discussions, and conclusions unambiguously, ensuring that readers can easily understand the intended message (Osmond, 2016). The choice of words and sentence structure must be precise and concise to avoid confusion and make the writing accessible.

#### **Consistency**

**Consistency** in academic writing refers to the uniformity of structure, content, and style. Similar to scientific presentation, academic writing avoids contradictions, ensuring that its purpose aligns with its findings. This includes maintaining consistency in headings, spacing, style, and grammatical conventions (Bailey, 2018).

#### **Objectivity**

**Objectivity** is another crucial convention, emphasizing the importance of being impersonal and fact-based. Academic writing focuses on facts and evidence rather than personal viewpoints, using formal, third-person language to establish neutrality (Johnson, 2016; Buchanan, 2008). This objectivity is reinforced by avoiding colloquial language, contractions, and first-person pronouns (Arnaudet & Barrett, 1984).

#### **Fact and evidence-based**

Fact and evidence-based information support everything with evidence, presenting the ideas with facts and evidence. As in science, factual experimentation and evidence are used in academic writing which makes use of the simplest words and phrasing. You should be responsible for your claims, facts and evidence in your writing.

#### **Comprehensiveness**

Comprehensiveness is another principle of academic writing which includes all and total information tools and procedures of research as the partial study is not enough in science in the same way it is not enough in academic writing as well.

#### **Systematicness**

Systematicness in academic writing mirrors the structured approach of scientific studies. It involves careful data collection through tools like surveys, interviews, and questionnaires, with analysis supported by statistical methods. A clear thesis statement at the outset guides readers, and sources are systematically classified to optimize efficiency (Carter, 1999). Academic writing often follows a logical progression, such as moving from broad concepts to specific details or presenting information chronologically, particularly in historical or medical contexts. Cohesiveness, or the consistent flow of ideas, ensures that the writing makes logical sense and maintains clarity throughout.

**Unity**

Unity, in its most basic form, is the absence of material from a paragraph that is not directly relevant to the subject under discussion. A complete essay should, in the broadest sense, be coherent; that is, the minor supports inside the paragraphs must support the big supports, which in turn must support the topic sentences. The thesis statement must be supported by each of the subject phrases. Thus, cohesion and coherence, the smooth movement or flow between sentences and paragraphs is maintained.

**Variety**

By providing a little ‘spice’ to the text, variety benefits the reader. It is accomplished in part by combining concepts in a variety of ways. The writer should endeavour to employ synonyms wherever feasible in addition to creating sentences of diverse lengths and sorts.

**Economy**

Economy is a key principle in academic writing, emphasizing conciseness without sacrificing meaning. Effective writers communicate their ideas clearly and succinctly by avoiding repetition, jargon, and unnecessarily long phrases (Bailey, 2018). Techniques such as using simple language, switching from passive to active voice, and employing precise terms help achieve clarity. Concise writing not only saves time and resources but also enhances readability by eliminating extraneous words and focusing on essential information. Like science, academic writing avoids unnecessary elaboration, presenting facts briefly and clearly to convey meaning efficiently.

**Correct citation**

Academic works must follow the APA style guide (2020) by adhering to specific standards for in-text citations, reference lists, and structural formatting. Regarding in-text citations, reference lists, and structure, all academic works should adhere to the standards of the proper APA style guide (2020). It lists three methods for citing sources in the text, including direct quotes, lengthy quotes, and paraphrasing. A direct quote is defined as ‘the actual words (39 words in APA style or four printed lines in MLA style) of the author into the writer's work’ (Bailey, 2015, p. 550). Quotations should be surrounded by quotation marks, and the source should be listed in parentheses (Starkey, 2015). Next, to further their points, the authors cite lengthy passages that exceed 39 words or four printed lines (APA, 2020, MLA, 2016). The last method for citing sources in-text is referencing, which involves restating only the necessary parts of the original text in new terms and structures without altering their meaning (Starkey, 2015; Bailey, 2015). The second way to avoid plagiarism is to cite all sources in-text in the order of the authors' last names, or, if there is no author, the source's first crucial phrase (APA 2020, Bailey 2018, MLA 2016, Starkey, 2015). On a separate page, there is a reference list.

**Avoiding biased language**

Academic writing should use neutral and inclusive language to maintain impartiality and avoid offending readers. Geographical, unique, racial, ethnic, gendered, sexual orientational, cultural, political, or religious language should not be used in academic writing (Johnson, 2016). Academic writing ought to be impartial to avoid offending any

possible readers (Starkey, 2015). Biased language should be eliminated by employing more neutral language.

### **Avoiding plagiarism**

Plagiarism, the unauthorized use of another's work without proper acknowledgement, undermines academic integrity and must be avoided through accurate citation practices. When authors fail to provide credit for someone else's work and instead claim it as their own, this practice is known as plagiarism to the author and credibility of their writing which is a kind of academic theft or crime (Bailey, 2018, Johnson, 2016). Plagiarism is the unauthorized use of another person's work, including original concepts, methods, and findings as well as words, phrases, and creative terminology in writing (Spatt, 2010). Taking ideas from a source without citing sources is plagiarism. Academic writing should be free from plagiarism giving credit to the authors whose materials you have quoted. You can plagiarize through quotation, paraphrasing and summarizing then, you acknowledge your sources appropriately in your writing.

Academic writing plays a crucial role in both academic and professional life. While its specific requirements may vary across cultures and institutions, it shares similarities with scientific writing. Writing fosters both missionary and visionary thinking, helping individuals develop foresight. It enhances reasoning and argumentative skills. Academic writing is seen as a structured, methodical way to acquire knowledge about the universe and condense it into testable laws and principles, following established norms, values, and formats that have universal acceptance (Wilson, 1999). One example is the widely accepted five-paragraph essay format. According to the University of Sydney (2019), academic writing is formal, objective, and technical. It avoids informal language, contractions, and direct references to personal opinions, focusing instead on discipline-specific vocabulary. Since science is a discipline, the scientists first find an issue or problem, then they go through careful and systematic observation based on any suitable methods and finally, they reach an answer or a solution, so is academic writing.

### **Scientific spirit**

Additionally, academic writing embodies a **scientific spirit**, characterized by a commitment to inquiry and the pursuit of new knowledge. Researchers critically assess existing knowledge rather than accepting it blindly, contributing fresh insights that enhance the academic field. Academic writing, especially in research, often begins with a statement of a problem, formulates a research question, and proceeds through data collection and analysis to derive valid conclusions (Vallis, 2010).

Finally, just as scientific findings are valued for their reliability, validity, and universal acceptance, academic writing is esteemed for its logical reasoning and sound conclusions. Both disciplines share a reliance on well-supported arguments and evidence, ensuring that conclusions are credible and widely accepted within their respective fields (Whitaker, 2009).

### **Conclusion**

Academic writing, like science, fosters curiosity, addresses knowledge gaps, and introduces new concepts, encouraging further research and exploration. References in academic writing create a network that connects readers to a vast body of scholarly work, much like the interconnected nature of scientific discovery. Both disciplines rely on evidence, observation, and systematic testing to establish truth, rather than making

unsupported claims. The politics of academic language reflects its power to shape identities, preserve cultural knowledge, and influence societal structures while highlighting the tensions between linguistic diversity and the dominance of English in academia. Academic writing is rooted in factual evidence obtained through scientific methods and presents ideas in a clear, logical, and structured manner. Conclusions are drawn from the analysis of variables and related data, following established procedures of observation, analysis, and logical reasoning. Unlike other forms of writing, academic writing avoids untested claims or reliance on supernatural explanations, emphasizing evidence-based reasoning and rigorous methodology. This makes it distinct, grounded in fact and experimentation, much like the scientific process itself.

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