

LET - Academic Writing & Language

Academic style: Some key points

Your ability to write clearly and precisely is an important part of your development at university. Some of the features of academic writing may be new to you. This factsheet gives a useful overview of the typical features of academic writing style.

1. Academic writing is usually quite **formal**, and avoids the following:

- a) Contracted forms (e.g. *It's, don't, haven't*). Full forms are generally used instead (e.g. *It is, do not, have not*).

There is little or no coverage of this important feature of academic writing. ✓

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- b) Colloquialisms and slang (e.g. *freak out, daft*). These may be labelled in dictionaries as idiom, colloq or sl and should be avoided in academic writing.

The government funds *a significant amount* of research in this area. ✓

The government funds *loads* of research in this area. ✗

- c) Phrasal verbs (e.g. *help out, get rid of*). More formal equivalents may be used instead (e.g. *assist, eliminate*).

Recent research *supports* the importance of early diagnosis. ✓

Recent research *backs up* the importance of early diagnosis. ✗

- d) Direct questions (e.g. *Is it worth having a mentor?*). An indirect question may be used instead (e.g. *Some people wonder whether it is worth having a mentor.*)

2. Academic writing usually attempts to be **impersonal**. It avoids:

- a) The use of personal pronouns (*I, we, you*).

This essay will discuss the relationship between theory and practice... ✓

In this essay, I will discuss the relationship between theory and practice... ✗

- b) Highly emotional or subjective adjectives.

Jones's theory has had a profound effect on public policy. ✓

Jones's theory has had an *amazing* effect on public policy. ✗

3. Academic writing is usually quite **cautious**, and may use phrases that show degrees of certainty or probability, rather than absolute certainty (e.g. *it is more likely that...*, *it is perhaps the case that...*).

The results of the study *may provide* a solution to the problem. ✓

The results of the study *provide* a solution to the problem. ✗