

Academic Language and Principles

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Session Aims

- To highlight the range of services offered by CASE.
- To raise awareness of the principal features of academic writing and how academic text differs from other types of writing.
- To look at the degree of formality, criticality, and the use of impersonal voice that exists in academic text.
- To look briefly at paragraph structure.

CASE

Lecture/seminar series: *Lecture note taking, Reading strategies, Punctuation, Paraphrasing, summarising and synthesising, Paragraphing, introductions and conclusions, Argument and criticality, Referencing,*
The CASE **Academic Skills Diagnostic Quiz** is now live on Moodle. It will be available on NILE for all degree students very soon.

EPAX available in Malet 109, 413, 422, 423, 457, 458 & 536

Academic Skills Surgery sessions: To book a session you will need to submit 250 to 500 words of writing (or bring a draft of a presentation). To book a surgery appointment, please email case@lsbm.ac.uk

Recommended Resources: Links and a summary of the materials available in Birkbek library/NILE.

University of Northampton online Study Skills for Academic Success course: Free study skills course(March) that all LSBM student can enrol on.

Academic Style: text comparison

How does academic text differ from non-academic text?

Read the following two texts and discuss the following questions with your partner

- **Where are you likely to find each text?**
- **What is the purpose of each text?**
- **How does the style of writing differ?**

The Olympic torch came through here on its way to Sydney. Almost everyone was out to cheer it on, except those people who could not see it, having been blinded by trachoma, a disease as old as the Bible. Australia is the only developed country on a World Health Organization 'shame list' of countries where children are still blinded by trachoma. Impoverished Sri Lanka has beaten the disease, but not rich Australia. Once hunter-gatherers in their traditional society, aborigines had exceptional vision; now I watch the old people stumble, many of them wearing cheap glasses and wiping streaming eyes. According to the Director of the Centre for Eye research in Sydney, Professor Hugh Taylor, up to 80% of Aboriginal children have potentially blinding trachoma because of untreated cataracts. 'This is inexcusable' he said.

Trachoma is still a widespread disease that causes blindness in many developing countries, particularly among rural populations. Considerable efforts have been made to control the disease, including large-scale antibiotic treatment schemes (1). The pattern of trachoma in a community may vary from severe hyperendemic 'blinding trachoma' to less severe, but prevalent, non-blinding forms of the disease (2). This variation in severity may be brought about not only by treatment schemes but also by socio economic progress (3) and behavioural factors (4). [...]

In order to identify populations and individuals with the blinding form of the disease, and to assess changes in the pattern of trachoma over a period of time in a community, it is important to have a grading system that is both simple and reliable. Diagnostic criteria for trachoma and its intensity have previously been analysed (5) and revised for field use (6,8). Although existing methods of scoring clinical signs are suitable for use by experienced eye specialists, they are too complex for general use by non-specialist health personnel.

Academic Style: further example

Extract A

People think that doctors do not like dealing with the whole area of substance misuse. Why's this? Well one of the reasons for this is to do with the fact that addicts often go back to their old habits after they've had treatment. And the other reason is that drug users frequently have behavioural problems when they receive treatment to do with substance misuse.

Extract B

Substance misuse is often considered to be an unpopular subject with many doctors, partly because of the frequent relapse experienced by addicts and partly because of the behavioural problems that can occur when drug users interact with substance misuse treatment services.

Features of Academic Style: 1

Choice of vocabulary: Avoid slang, emotive language, idiomatic language:

- ‘now I watch the old people stumble, many of them wearing cheap glasses and wiping streaming eyes.’
- a disease as old as the Bible
- ‘think’ vs. ‘consider’, ‘to eliminate’ vs. ‘to get rid of’
- ‘go back to their old habits’ vs. ‘relapse’
- The situation is horrible and disgraceful

Advice:

- Read widely to get a feel for academic vocabulary
- Invest in a good Academic English dictionary (Oxford)
- Access academic word lists:
 - UEFAP <http://www.uefap.com/vocab/select/awl.htm>
 - Manchester <http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/>

Features of Academic Style: 2

Using 'I' and other personal pronouns (you, we, they)

- Personal vs. Academic writing: the former tells a personal story whereas the latter comments, evaluates, analyses
- 'You': 'The economic crash showed you can't trust the government'.
- In my opinion/view also not liked by tutors. 'It seems clear that...'
- Use of passive and neutral subjects:
 - 'This essay will discuss...'
 - 'People think that...' vs. 'substance misuse is considered'
 - 'Addicts often go back to their old habits' vs. 'The frequent relapse (that is) experienced by addicts...'
- Use of 'I' is not an absolute no no; check with your tutors, check with reading, reflective writing?, an introduction?
- However, we still want to hear your opinion. You do this by establishing an 'academic voice/taking a stance':
 - <http://www.uefap.com/writing/function/stance.htm>

Features of Academic Style: 3

Length and complexity of sentences

- How many sentences in each extract?
e.g. Behavioural problems occur. (simple sentence)
Behavioural problems occur when drug users interact with substance misuse treatment services. (complex sentence)
- Power of well used linking words/connectives:
e.g. Although I love her dearly, ...
OU Skills for Study:
<http://www2.open.ac.uk/students/skillsforstudy/using-linking-words.php>
- However, we are still aiming for conciseness and clarity so only use complex sentences when needed, and avoid redundant phrases:
 - 'At this moment in time' = ?
 - 'A short summary' = ?
 - 'Due to the fact that' = ?
 - 'There is a risk that the white Rhino will become extinct' = ?

See Osmond (2013) Chapter 6

Features of Academic Style: 4

Avoiding Contractions

- A 'contraction is one word made up of two or more words that have been joined together. Some letters from the words are left out and replaced with an apostrophe, e.g 'Will not' becomes 'won't'
- Do not use contractions in academic writing.
- During proofreading, type an apostrophe into the 'find' tool and you can analyse your use of the apostrophe (contractions, possessives, in quotations): It's great that John's book is deemed to be 'the best'.

Hedging language

e.g. 'behavioural problems occur' vs. 'behavioural problems *can* occur'

- Hedging shows your reader that you are being cautious in your writing:
 - The results make clear that the drug is dangerous.
 - The results suggest that the drug is dangerous.

QMU Academic English: <http://aeo.sllf.qmul.ac.uk/Files/Hedging/Hedging.html>

Features of Academic Style: 5

Punctuation

- Non-use of (rhetorical) questions: ‘Why’s this?’
- Non-use of ‘!’ and ‘...’
- Use of colons, semi-colons and commas.

Citations, Sources and Referencing

- It shows your reader where you found the idea/information.
- It shows your reader that you have read around the topic.
- It shows that you are not plagiarising.

Anglia Ruskin Harvard Referencing guide:

<http://libweb.anglia.ac.uk/referencing/harvard.htm>

Law students: Oscola:

Oscola Guidance:

http://libweb.anglia.ac.uk/referencing/files/Referencing_usingOSCOLA.pdf

[University of Oxford OSCOLA guide:](http://www.law.ox.ac.uk/publications/oscola.php)

<http://www.law.ox.ac.uk/publications/oscola.php>

Features of Academic Style: 6

Criticality

Critical analysis does not mean criticising the work; it means making a judgement about someone else's work.

Elements of critical thinking include:

- Evaluation of the argument.
- Identifying key ideas/themes.
- Comparing and linking the different ideas that you have identified.
- Openness and concession to other viewpoints and arguments.
- Evaluation of your own assumptions on the issue.
- Including your ideas in the discussion and evaluation.

It does not include:

- Memorising the key ideas.
- Conviction that your opinion is correct.

Paragraph Construction

- One paragraph generally contains one main idea.
- Paragraphs usually have a beginning, middle and end.
- Paragraphs generally contain a main point and supporting evidence/examples.
- Paragraphs should join together to build and support the overall argument.
- Paragraphs nearly always have a topic sentence.
- Linking words and linking between paragraphs help to show the reader how your argument is developing.

Introductions should include:

- A brief contextualisation/justification/background of the topic.
- A thesis statement (your own viewpoint/position in one sentence).
- A brief description of the structure of the essay.

Conclusions should include:

- A reference to your thesis statement.
- A statement clarifying your conclusion and why it is significant.
- A summary of the main body of the essay.
- A recommendation for action/further research.

New information **should not** be introduced in a conclusion.

Summary

- Overview of CASE support
- Text analysis
- Academic Style (formality/impersonal voice...)
- Citations, Sources, Referencing
- Criticality
- Paragraphing

References

- Osmond, A, 2013. Academic Writing and Grammar for Students. London: Sage.