

# Style tips for academic writing

Academic writing is:

- Formal
- Objective (Impersonal – avoiding ‘I think.....’)
- Cautious or tentative – there are very few absolute truths
- Uses references

## Formal

### ***Avoid slang***

Okay, pretty reliable, fix, dead easy, really difficult, messed up .....

### ***Avoid contractions***

‘Didn’t’, ‘hasn’t’, ‘isn’t’, - write them in full ‘did not’ ‘has not’ ‘is not’ etc.

## Objective

‘I am going to compare three characters’ is personal

‘Three characters will be compared’ is objective

### **Passive voice:**

Is objective

- puts emphasis on the action rather than the person who carried out the action
  - The flask was filled with water.
  - The researcher filled the flask with water
    - Useful if you need to keep confidentiality
    - Good for examples where the doer is unknown

### **Active voice:**

Strong sentences

‘The boy pinned the poster on the wall’

## Cautious or tentative

It appears that... It may be that... It seems as though... It is likely that... This suggests that... It is possible...

## References

### **Use references to support your work:**

You need to provide evidence and justification for the ideas you put forward. References also show off the research you have done!

### **Avoid vague overgeneralisations:**

Dozens of books have been written over the years about this subject by numerous authors. A review paper would support this claim

Various examples have been seen in many parts of the country throughout the years.

## **Simple writing is elegant, clear, and concise**

### **Simple sentences**

Use simple sentences (especially when the ideas are complex)

- The professor's book was on the table.  
(The book belonging to the professor was on the table.)
- James and Feely (2015) reported that ...  
(In a paper written by James and Feely, in 2015, it says that...)

Make every word count. Write with precision. Check the contextual meanings of new words (especially if you have used a thesaurus). The method was 'robust' is not the same as the method was 'sturdy'.

### **Avoid long phrases when a simple word will do the work**

*This evidence suggests the area may have been occupied during the Bronze Age.*

*The evidence presented here could be said to indicate a possibility that the area was occupied during the Bronze Age*

### **Useful Resource**

The Academic Phrasebook offers a series of 'standard' phrases in academic writing, organised by their function, e.g for defining a term, or for introducing criticisms.

<http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/>

