

Level: Master 1

Lecture 01: Academic writing

1. What is Academic Writing?

Academic writing is a **formal style of writing used in universities and scholarly publications**. You'll encounter it in journal articles and books on academic topics, and you'll be expected to write your essays, research papers, and dissertation in academic style.

2. What are the main features of academic writing?

- ❑ **Objectivity:** Academic writing presents and evaluates issues and arrives at an objective position; a position that focuses on and is informed by research and reasoning rather than personal feelings and opinions. Personal pronouns, especially 'I', 'you' and 'we' are usually avoided, as these are often associated with subjective views that are influenced by personal preferences or biases. To help establish an objective distance from the topic, instead of using a personal pronoun, you could try:
 - **Using the topic as the subject**
Alterations in Antarctic ice layers demonstrate that climate change is a real phenomenon.
 - **Using a passive verb**
The reality of climate change can be demonstrated by studying alterations in Antarctic ice layers.
 - **Using 'it' as an empty subject**
It can be demonstrated that climate change is a real phenomenon by studying alterations in Antarctic ice layers.

- ❑ **Formality:** Academic writing is very explicit and provides the reader with all the information they need to understand your meaning. This is in contrast to written or spoken English in less formal contexts, which often relies on readers or listeners to supply extra information that completes the message. To make your writing more formal, try to:

- Replace informal words that are associated with ‘chatty’ spoken styles (such as contractions) with more formal vocabulary
- Avoid rhetorical questions the reader cannot answer
- Use full words instead of contractions
- Avoid unspecified categories
- Avoid colloquial language

❑ **Precision:** To communicate your meaning precisely, you should try to:

- **Include a sufficient high level of details and specificity:** The amount of detail you provide depends on the purpose of your work, but you should always try to avoid ambiguity.
- **Choose verbs that express concepts succinctly:** Certain verbs are considered too imprecise for academic writing, in that they do not provide detailed, exact meaning we require. These include verbs that are commonly used in less formal contexts, particularly those with many possible meanings and multi-word verbs. Verbs with many possible meanings include ‘do’, ‘make’, ‘put’, ‘keep’, ‘have’ and ‘get’. For example, some of the many possible meanings of ‘get’ are:

Receive (get an email)

Obtain (get a better view)

Bring (get a bucket and mop)

Buy (get a new shirt)

Arrive (get there at 7pm)

If you use the single verb that expresses exactly what you mean by ‘get’, your writing will be more precise

- ❑ **Hedging:** Hedging language in academic writing is used to express caution and avoid strong, unqualified statements that may be easily disproven. To avoid generalizations, you can:
 - Use a quantifier (e.g. few, many, some)
 - Use adverbs or adverbial phrases (e.g. occasionally, often, usually)
 - Use modal verbs (e.g. can, may, might, would, could)

