Academic Skills and Development

Quick guide to

Writing in an Academic Voice

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| Academic essays are | So how can I make MY writing more ACADEMIC? |
| Precise | Use language accurately, be exact with figures, pay attention to detail |
| Objective | Be open-minded, fair and unemotional in your approach  – avoid I, YOU and WE |
| Well-presented | Make sure it looks professional – check your module handbook for guidelines |
| Edited/proofread | Leave time to read through, re-order, change parts, add ideas, correct grammar |
| Referenced | Ensure all ideas from books/journals have references. Add reference list |
| Formal | Avoid slang/jargon. Use more sophisticated vocabulary. Do not abbreviate |
| Use caution | Do not make over-generalisations. Things are rarely black and white |
| Linked | Use connecting words/phrases to show your reader how ideas are related |
| Explicit | Always be clear, avoid vague statements and vocabulary |
| Structured | Write in paragraphs – one main idea per paragraph - think carefully about the order |
| Supported | Include examples and evidence - paraphrased, quoted, summarised ideas |
| Analytical | Break down issues into component parts – show how they are related |
| Your own work | Be original. NEVER copy someone’s work – student or author. – It is plagiarism! |

# Example 1:

**A lot of people think** that the **weather is getting worse. They say** that this has been **going on** for quite a long time. **I think** that they are quite right. **Research** has shown that **we now get storms etc. all the time.**

# Analysis:

## A lot of = imprecise

People think = personal - focus on idea not person Weather = imprecise/short term

Getting worse = informal expression

Quite a long time = imprecise – how long? I think = informal/personal expression research = vague – whose research?

We now get – informal storms etc. = vague All the time = over generalised

### Example 2: Good academic style:

It is widely believed that the climate is deteriorating. It is claimed that this process has been continuing for nearly 100 years. This belief appears to be supported by McKinley (1997) who shows a 55% increase in the frequency of severe winter gales since 1905.

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### Analysis:

The above re-written passage is **formal, explicit** (not vague), **objective** (not personal), **precise, use caution** (avoids over generalisations) and is **supported** by evidence which is **referenced.**

Example passage adapted from Bailey (2006) Academic Writing

### What we say:

* A formal academic writing style will give your assignments more authority, therefore, appear more sophisticated.
* As well as the language you choose, the structure of your arguments and the way that you order and link your ideas are both very important.
* Be careful not to go too far the other way, though. Do not just use complex words for the sake of it and try not to write long, unnecessarily complicated sentences. **Remember - formality not complexity.**
* Finally, don’t forget those finishing touches. Carefully checking and correcting your grammar and spelling as well as ensuring a professional look could make that vital

difference to your grades.

Further advice and larger text guides can be found online: [**www.surrey.ac.uk/splash**](http://www.surrey.ac.uk/splash)

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