



**JAMES COOK
UNIVERSITY**

AUSTRALIA

Brisbane Campus

ACADEMIC WRITING

A BASIC GUIDE FOR STUDENTS

ACADEMIC WRITING

What is academic writing?

It is the formal form of English language that is used to present opinions and ideas about academic topics at University. Basically it is larger words and less sentences.

There are three main areas affected:

- **Vocabulary** – it must be more specific.
- **Coherence and Cohesion** – the linking words such as moreover, In addition and the use of reference words(this & that)..
- **Grammar** – the range(number of different types) and accuracy(few or no mistakes).

You will be required to write all assignments/exams except reflections using as much academic language as possible.

How to write academically?

There are three (3) basic steps to completing one:

1. Write your sentence the best you can.
2. Read it again to see if you can be more specific by adding more detailed vocabulary. Use a dictionary if you have to.
3. Use the checklist at the end of this guide to see if you can improve it more.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary used in academic writing is the use of larger words(nouns) and reference words (this/that) to describe processes, ideas and concepts.

Use the 12 rules below to help you write your assignments in more academic tone.

1. Be more formal

Informal		Formal
a lot of good/bad go up/go down/stay the same	→	a considerable amount beneficial/unfavourable increase/decrease/stabilize

2. Be more specific

Informal		Formal
food problem thing people	→	Traditional Chinese cuisine Cultural misunderstanding electronic device Chinese consumers

3. Avoid rhetorical questions

Informal	Formal
Why is the Australian dollar rising?	The Australian dollar is rising due to a rise in exports.

4. Avoid contractions

Informal	Formal
can't, won't, doesn't	can not, will not, does not

5. Avoid phrasal(2 word) verbs

Informal	Formal
Researchers <u>looked at</u> the policy	Researchers <u>examined</u> the policy.

6. Avoid adverbs such as *really*, *very* and *just*

Informal	Formal
It created a <u>really</u> big reaction	It caused a <u>significant</u> reaction

7. Do not be gender specific

Informal	Formal
Firemen need more funds	Fire fighters need more funding.

8. Use Nominalisation(more nouns less words)

Informal	Formal
buying too many things being poor being rich Relating to money	over-consumption poverty affluence Monetary

9. Avoid using personal pronouns such as *he, she, we, us, you*.

Informal	Formal
Everyone knows that the company made a profit.	It is generally accepted that the company made a profit.
We/You can see that sales have risen	As can be seen from the graph sales have risen.
I will report that	This report will state that..
I will argue that	This essay will argue that..

10. Avoid abbreviations or run ons such as *etc, and so on*

Informal	Formal
In China they manufacture clothes etc.	In China they manufacture clothes etc.
In China they manufacture clothes and so on.	In China they manufacture clothes and so on.

11. Avoid negatives (use *failed* rather than *did not*, for example)

Informal	Formal
The company did not make money.	The company failed to make a profit.
The Australian dollar did not rise	The Australian dollar dropped.

12. Avoid commenting using words like: *unfortunately, virtually impossible, well worth, obviously, hopefully, fortunately, invaluable, undoubtedly, assuredly, literally, etc.*

Informal	Formal
Unfortunately the company went bankrupt.	Unfortunately The company went bankrupt.

Below are some examples of changing a sentence and a paragraph from general to academic language using some of the rules above.

Sentence example

This is an example of rules # 2, 6, & 8. Buy too many cars = over – consumption of cars
 People in China = Chinese consumers. Can make = has lead to. Really = ~~really~~. Air
 pollution = air too dirty

Informal	Formal
People in China buy too many cars and this can really make the air too dirty.	Over – consumption of cars by Chinese consumers has lead to air pollution issues.

Paragraph Example

Key points	Formal
<p><i>This is an example of rule # 8</i></p> <p><i>Aim to reduce its population = population decrease</i></p>	<p>It is speculated that Australia should <u>aim to reduce its population</u> to 15 million, not increase it to 25 million, as is predicted.</p> <p><u>Population decrease</u>, however, brings with it further problems, suggesting that it is likely to be an unviable solution.</p>

Key points	Formal
<p><i>This is an example of rule # 8</i></p> <p><i>To help pay and migrate are joined together to make the phrase “This assisted migration.”</i></p> <p><i>Note that the phrase “the colonies” is also used rather than repeating the word Australia.</i></p>	<p>From the 1830’s, the Australian Government set up schemes <u>to help pay</u> some or all of the cost for people to <u>migrate to Australia.</u></p> <p><u>This assisted migration</u> aimed at encouraging more people to come and live in <u>the colonies.</u></p>

Reporting Verbs(referencing)

The verbs used to introduce an opinion tell the reader your opinion about the research you are citing. You can state that you believe the information is **correct**, **incorrect**, there is **no evidence** or you are **neutral**(i.e. you have no opinion).

Verbs

Student's feelings	Correct	Neutral	No evidence	Incorrect
<p><i>These are used after the author's name in text.</i></p> <p><i>E.g. Smith(2004) explains that the dollar is rising due to higher exports.</i></p>	acknowledges defines demonstrates explains identifies observes outlines shows	according to adds describes explains notes points out reports says states tells	claims suggests proposes argues believes thinks assumes speculates	Confuses Disregards ignores

Examples of reporting verbs

Key points	Formal
<p><i>The use of the verb <u>defines</u> means the student believes Smith's idea is correct</i></p>	<p>Smith(2008) <u>defines</u> this as "when the number of imports is greater than exports."</p>

Key points	Formal
<p><i>The use of the verb <u>claims</u> means the student believes the author has no evidence to support his opinion.</i></p>	<p>Brown(2010) <u>claims</u> that multinational companies seek to damage the environment.</p>

Coherence and Cohesion

This is ensuring that a paragraph's idea is explained clearly and that sentences connect together in a logical or expected way. Most people do this using *and*, *but* or *so*. However Academic writing has an expectation that larger words are used to express the same/similar meaning.

To join ideas and/or sentences together the words below are commonly used.

Adding Information or ideas	Showing cause or result	Saying in another way or giving examples	Showing time	Showing the order of ideas	Contrasting ideas or talking about conditions
<i>And</i> <i>Also</i> <i>In addition</i> <i>Furthermore</i> <i>Moreover</i> <i>As well</i>	<i>So</i> <i>Therefore</i> <i>For this reason</i> <i>As a result</i> <i>Due to this</i>	<i>For example</i> <i>For instance</i> <i>In fact</i> <i>In other words</i> <i>Namely</i>	<i>Then</i> <i>Next</i> <i>After that</i> <i>Until then</i> <i>At the same time</i> <i>Meanwhile</i> <i>Previously</i> <i>Later</i> <i>Eventually</i>	<i>Firstly</i> <i>Secondly</i> <i>First of all</i> <i>Finally</i> <i>To sum up</i> <i>To conclude</i> <i>To start with</i> <i>Overall</i> <i>In conclusion</i>	<i>However</i> <i>On the other hand</i> <i>Despite this</i> <i>In contrast</i> <i>Instead</i>

Example

Informal	Formal
<u>But</u> the economic recession affected Australia less severely than other nations.	<u>However</u> the economic recession affected Australia less severely than other nations.

Punctuation

This is also important for coherence and cohesion.

- Full stops(.) – these are used at the end of a sentence. Each sentence should only contain 1 idea.
- Commas (,) – these are used the following ways:

Function	Example
To divide items up in a list	<i>I like apples, oranges and bananas.</i>
Divide a sentence into two parts(clauses)	<i>Although it was raining, I took an umbrella.</i>
Separate linking words from a sentence	<i>The movie Titanic is about a ship that sinks, but, at the same time, is also a love story.</i>

Grammar – range and accuracy

To ensure that ideas are communicated clearly, a variety of grammar is expected to be used with little or no mistakes. As an example, passive voice may be used more often to avoid using personal pronouns such as *I* or *In my opinion*.

Example

Informal	Formal
I believe Chinese people need to buy more cars	It is believed that Chinese Consumers <u>should purchase</u> more vehicles. or More vehicles <u>should be purchased</u> by Chinese consumers

Grammar – modality (can, could, may, might)

Opinions are usually not written as facts to avoid sounding extreme but as possibilities, suggestions or assumptions. This is done by using language that is not exact. Words such as *perhaps, most, may, could, some, many, usually, often, slightly* and *almost* all help to do this.

Key points	Formal
<i>Opinion written as fact</i>	People who exercise everyday avoid being overweight and live longer lives.
<i>Academic The use of may and can indicate possibility.</i>	People who exercise everyday <u>may</u> avoid being overweight and <u>can</u> live longer lives.

This guideline is just a guideline/introduction and is not expected to be a comprehensive/total guide to academic writing. Therefore it is important that you consult the subject outline and/or the tutor or services on Level 8 before proceeding.

Academic Writing Checklist

Have you

Vocabulary

- Avoided the use of the personal pronouns “I”, “me”, “my”, “we”, “our” and “ours”.
- Avoided using expressions such as “I think”, “In my opinion” and “As I see it”.
- Avoided rhetorical questions.
- Avoided contractions
- Avoided phrasal(2 word) verbs
- Avoided using adverbs such as *really*, *every* and *just*.
- Avoided language that excludes certain groups i.e. ~~fireman~~
- Used nouns to describe processes and shorten sentences.
- Avoided abbreviations or run ons
- Avoided using negatives
- Avoided repetition of the same words and expressions.
- Used can, could, may or might to give opinions
- Avoided commenting using words such as *unfortunately* or *obviously*.
- Avoided starting sentences with *and*, *but* or *so*
- Used the correct report verbs
- Been specific.
- Used examples from society in general rather than personal ones.

For more information

- Attend workshops on Level 8, Room 801
- Attend workshops on Level 2, Library
- Visit JCUB Brisbane Website for online academic help
http://www.jcu.edu.au/business/open/JCU_116032.html
- Meet with/email Lecturer to gain further advice