

Academic Writing Style

GRS Writing Group – WED 8 MAR

Editing is everything.

- Esther Freud, UK Author and granddaughter of Freud.

I'm all for the scissors. I believe more in the scissors than I do in the paper.

- Truman Capote, American author of Breakfast at Tiffanys

Academic Writing style is often described as being clear, concise, coherent and formal.

The argument should be evidence-based (with deductive reasoning), logical, objective and complete.



Which of the above descriptions of academic writing style do you find difficult to understand and/or difficult to apply?

1. Aim for simple delivery of a complex message. You want your reader to understand your message without stopping to consider how to interpret your text or to reread a passage of text. Go back to basics & apply general principles of good writing. Consider:

- whether the length and complexity of your sentences are appropriate
- each word in your sentences – is every word necessary?
- whether the first sentence of each paragraph is an appropriate topic sentence
- if your paragraphs are an appropriate length
- if your paragraph is focused on the topic identified in the topic sentence
- if your sentences and paragraphs are connected

2. Understand academic writing has restrictions on word choice, uses a set number of phrases, and is structurally rigid. Understand:

- academic conventions
- the specific conventions of your discipline.

Some basic rules:

- Don't use contractions, colloquialisms, idioms, similes, metaphors, rhetorical questions, figures of speech, euphemisms, emotionally expressive language, run on expressions, lead in expressions
- Repeat key words and use synonyms
- Restrict use of transition words – do not use transition words at the beginning of a paragraph
- Consider how you 'hedge' your arguments using modal verbs and clauses



Some useful resources

[Academic Word List](#)

[Academic Phrasebank](#)

[Verbs for reporting](#)

[Transition word categories](#) and more about the common problem with [transition](#) words

[Checklist of language to avoid in academic writing](#)

[Writing concise sentences](#) – with examples of redundant phrases and list of clichés

[Writing with authority](#), [Cautious language](#) and [hedging](#)



If you have some spare time you may want to further explore:

A short disciplinary style guide.

A short general editing guide like Eisenberg, A. 1992. Guide to technical editing. Oxford University Press, New York.

[Paramedic Method](#) for reducing wordiness

Further details of the UWA GRS Writing Group are available here, including advice sheets to download:

<http://www.postgraduate.uwa.edu.au/students/resources/communities#writinggroup>