

Academic writing

Academic writing is generally quite formal, objective (impersonal) and technical. It is formal by avoiding casual or conversational language, such as contractions or informal vocabulary. It is impersonal and objective by avoiding direct reference to people or feelings, and instead emphasising objects, facts and ideas. It is technical by using vocabulary specific to the discipline.

Different disciplines also have different styles and structures of writing. For example, some disciplines, such as in the humanities, expect longer paragraphs, which include topic sentences to show how your argument is structured. Other disciplines, for example in the sciences, expect short paragraphs, with no topic sentences, which are denser in factual information.

To be a good academic writer, you will need to learn the specific styles and structures for your discipline, as well as for each individual writing task. Some ways to do this are to:

- ask for more information from your lecturer/supervisor/tutor
- study the writing style of the academic articles in the most prestigious journals in your discipline
- look at the successful writing by other students in your subject area.

Thus,

Academic writing is the process of breaking down ideas and using deductive reasoning, formal voice and third person point-of-view. It is about what you think and what evidence has contributed to that thinking.

Method

How do you write academically?

- Start by introducing your topic. Try using a series of questions about the topic, using startling or unusual facts or figures, defining an important, subject-related term or quoting a well-known expert on your topic or a literary work.
- State your main idea clearly. This is your thesis statement. It contains the focus of your essay and tells your reader what the essay is going to be about. The thesis statement is usually located at the end of your introduction.
- State the main idea of each paragraph. These are the topic sentences. They contain the focus of your paragraphs and tell your reader what each paragraph is going to be about. Topic sentences are usually located at the beginning of each paragraph. Each paragraph should flow smoothly from one to the next (e.g. the first sentence in each new paragraph should serve as a link to the paragraph before it).
- Use supporting examples and details to make complicated ideas easier to understand. Do not assume that your reader will understand what you are trying to say.

- Use third person point-of-view (e.g. he, she, it and they). No first and second person points-of-view (e.g. I, you, we) are used in academic writing.
- Use formal voice. This means no slang, colloquialism (common expressions of ordinary speech), contractions, etc.
- End by restating your main idea, or summarizing important points, and then drawing a final conclusion for your reader.
- Proofread your work, making any necessary corrections to sentence structure, punctuation, spelling and grammar. Use a dictionary and a writer's guide if you are unsure about the rules.

Examples of Academic Writing

Academic writing is, of course, any formal written work produced in an academic setting. While academic writing comes in many forms, the following are some of the most common.

Literary analysis: A literary analysis essay examines, evaluates, and makes an argument about a literary work. As its name suggests, a literary analysis essay goes beyond mere summarization. It requires careful close reading of one or multiple texts and often focuses on a specific characteristic, theme, or motif.

Research paper: A research paper uses outside information to support a thesis or make an argument. Research papers are written in all disciplines and may be evaluative, analytical, or critical in nature. Common research sources include data, primary sources (e.g., historical records), and secondary sources (e.g., peer-reviewed scholarly articles). Writing a research paper involves synthesizing this external information with your own ideas.

Dissertation: A dissertation (or thesis) is a document submitted at the conclusion of a Ph.D. program. The dissertation is a book-length summarization of the doctoral candidate's research.

Academic papers may be done as a part of a class, in a program of study, or for publication in an academic journal or scholarly book of articles around a theme, by different authors.

Characteristics of Academic Writing

Most academic disciplines employ their own stylistic conventions. However, all academic writing shares certain characteristics.

1. **Clear and limited focus.** The focus of an academic paper—the argument or research question—is established early by the thesis statement. Every paragraph and sentence of the paper connects back to that primary focus. While the paper may include background or contextual information, all content serves the purpose of supporting the thesis statement.
2. **Logical structure.** All academic writing follows a logical, straightforward structure. In its simplest form, academic writing includes an introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion. The introduction provides background information, lays out the scope and direction of the essay, and states the thesis. The body paragraphs support the thesis statement, with each body paragraph elaborating on one supporting point. The conclusion refers back to the thesis, summarizes the main points, and highlights the implications of the paper's findings. Each sentence and paragraph logically connects to the next in order to present a clear argument.
3. **Evidence-based arguments.** Academic writing requires well-informed arguments. Statements must be supported by evidence, whether from scholarly sources (as in a research paper), results of a study or experiment, or quotations from a primary text (as in a literary analysis essay). The use of evidence gives credibility to an argument.
4. **Impersonal tone.** The goal of academic writing is to convey a logical argument from an objective standpoint. Academic writing avoids emotional, inflammatory, or otherwise biased language. Whether you personally agree or disagree with an idea, it must be presented accurately and objectively in your paper.

Most published papers also have abstracts: brief summaries of the most important points of the paper. Abstracts appear in academic database search results so that readers can quickly determine whether the paper is pertinent to their own research.