



FORMAL AND INFORMAL LANGUAGE

What is the difference between formal and informal language?

Formal and informal language serve different purposes. The tone, the choice of words and the way the words are put together vary between the two styles. Formal language is less personal than informal language. It is used when writing for professional or academic purposes like university assignments. Formal language does not use colloquialisms, contractions or first person pronouns such as 'I' or 'We'.

Informal language is more casual and spontaneous. It is used when communicating with friends or family either in writing or in conversation. It is used when writing personal emails, text messages and in some business correspondence. The tone of informal language is more personal than formal language.

Examples of formal and informal language are shown below:

Contractions

Informal: The improvements can't be introduced due to funding restrictions.

Formal: Improvements cannot be introduced due to funding restrictions.

Informal: I don't believe that the results are accurate.

Formal: The results are not believed to be accurate.

Informal: The research project won't continue next year.

Formal: The research project will not continue next year.

Phrasal verbs

Informal: The balloon was blown up for the experiment.

Formal: The balloon was inflated for the experiment.

Informal: The patient got over his illness.

Formal: The patient recovered from his illness.

Informal: The results of the study were mixed up.

Formal: The results of the study were confused.

Slang/Colloquialism

Informal: The mob was very rowdy during the protest against cuts to university funding.

Formal: The crowd was very rowdy during the protest against the cuts to university funding.

Informal: Lecturers still count on students to use correct grammar and punctuation in essays.

Formal: Lecturers expect students to use correct grammar and punctuation in essays.

Informal: It was raining cats and dogs.
Formal: It was raining very heavily.

First person pronouns

Informal: I considered various research methods for the study.
Formal: Various research methods were considered for the study.

Informal: We believe the practice is unsustainable.
Formal: It is believed the practice is unsustainable.

Informal: During the interview I asked students about their experiences.
Formal: During the interview students were asked about their experiences.

Acronyms

TAFE	Technical and Further Education
ANZAC	Australian and New Zealand Army Corps
QANTAS	Queensland and Northern Territory Aerial Services

Initialisms

UTS	University of Technology Sydney
ISO	International Standards Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

The first time an acronym or initialism is used in an essay, it is acceptable to write the name in full with the acronym or initialism in brackets after it. Every subsequent time it is used the acronym or initialism can be used on its own. Commonly known acronyms such as ANZAC and QANTAS do not need to be written in full.

If an acronym or initialism needs to be made into a plural, add a small 's' to it without an apostrophe.

For more information on writing in academic style, please refer to the sources below:

Learning Lab 2013, *Academic style*, RMIT, viewed 29 November 2013,
<<http://emedialab.rmit.edu.au/learninglab/content/academic-style>>.

UniLearning 2000, *Academic writing*, UOW, viewed 29 November 2013,
<<http://unilearning.uow.edu.au/academic/1a.html>>.

