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English – I (Basic English)

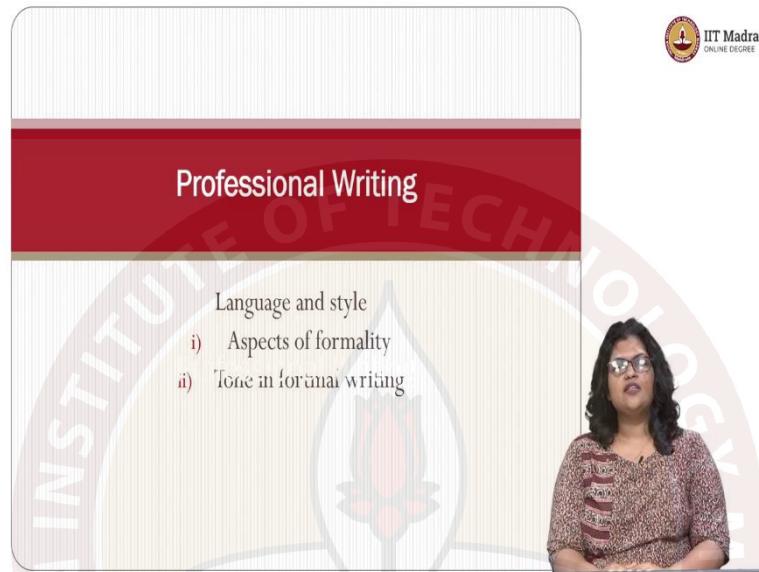
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Professional Writing (Language and style: Aspects of formality, Tone in formal writing)

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For today's class, we will be looking at style and clarity in writing. When we talk about style in professional writing, the style is always formal. So, there are two parts to today's lecture. The first one is of course, looking at the aspects of formality. And the second part is looking at tone of formal writing, or tone in formal writing.

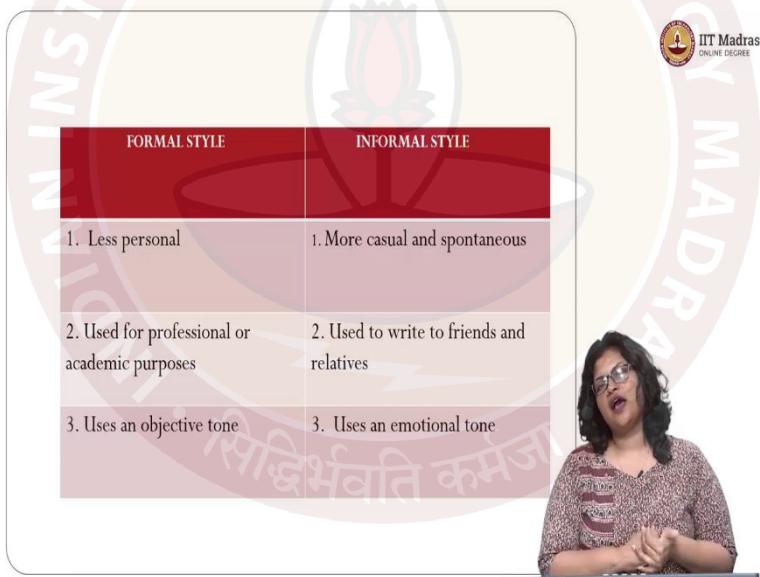
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Aspects of formality



We are going to first discuss the aspects of formality.

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Before we approach the methods, the strategies, the techniques or the guidelines that is involved or that one must follow, to make your writing professional to make your writing style formal in nature, it is useful for us to look at what formal and informal refer to. What is the meaning of formal style and informal style? They are very simple in what you see on your screen, you have three points under each of the styles for formal and informal and, they sufficiently describe and elaborate to you what we understand by formal and informal.

For example, look at the first point under the formal style, it says *less personal* and under the informal style, it says *more casual and spontaneous*. So, one is less personal and the other is more casual and spontaneous. Now, look carefully at the first point less personal, it does not say is impersonal, it does not tell you are completely depersonalized it says less personal. So, keep this in mind when we talk about the aspects of formality, we talk about a range of formality, it is not black and white, because formality is not black and white, it is not formal and informal all the time.

In fact, in reality, when we talk about formality, we are referring to a range of them which means it can range from less formal to more formal and that is how real life situations work. Giving you an example of what less formal or less personal in the situation means is the first point is less personal, what does that mean? We all write emails and emails, and over the years, have now become a very important medium of professional communication at the workplace or even otherwise. It has transformed itself into a medium that is used by all professionals from all fields to communicate at their workplace.

So, if you look at the structure of email, if you have ever written an email, if you know what an email is, we know that depersonalizing email becomes a very difficult task, usually, email is a one-on-one communication or a one-to-many communications. In either case, it is mostly a form of personal communication. So removing all elements of personal tones from an email is an impossible task, which is why it has to be kept personal, yet it should not become too depersonalized, it should not become too personalized or it should not become personalized to the extent where it sounds informal it sounds indecent or impolite, or not suitable for a professional domain. So, less personal is the key word here not impersonal.

Now, the second one says used for professional or academic purposes. Column under the informal style that column says used to write to friends and relatives that do not require any explanation, you understand that very well. But what does this mean use for professional or academic purposes, the underlying meaning or implication here is that formal style of language is basically used when the purpose is particularly or specifically defined to you, when you know the purpose when it is defined clearly to you. The style of language that you adopt has to be formal style or rather the other way around formal style is used or you will find any piece of write-up in a formal style when the purpose of that particular document or a particular writer's writing is clearly defined to the author.

The third point under that is about tone. So for our purpose of professional writing, the tone should be objective in nature. There are other tones you might have heard about people talking about ironic tone, or emotional tone or intellectual tone, the one that we use for professional writing is going to be objective tone, what is objective tone? We are going to talk about it very soon. In the same video. In the same class, I will discuss with you how can you write using an objective tone.

Now, what is the opposite of this? what happens in the informal style? It uses an emotional tone. So this means the emotional tone is not to talk about the objective or tone then the first point will be that in professional writing your writing should not have emotional tones. So, these are the features or the basic understanding of what formal and informal is this, we will move ahead and look at the remaining part.

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What makes language formal?

- Specialized situations
- Audience expectations
- purpose

What makes language formal? Three important factors that decide the formality of written work are specialized situations, audience expectations and purpose, specialized situations. So I will talk to you about the range of formality. So, like an email, if I am to talk about the style to be used, the formality to be used. It is less formal; it is not impersonal but less formal. However, if you are writing, say, an application to a university, you are submitting an application to a university, or you are submitting a job application form, they will be definitely more formal in nature than your email or a report that you submit to your authority is going to be more formal.

So, the language and style that you use in it are going to remain more formal than the one that you would use for an email which is a form of personal communication. Even within personal communication, you have different ranges a text message that is sent to your friend is different from the message that you send to your boss, or a text message sent to the boss is a little different from the email that you send to the same person. So, the medium to decides what sort of style or what sort of language suits are what are within the range of formality, the medium can decide which range or which point of the range in the formality suits better for each of the medium.

So, specialized situations then refer to both medium as well as the domain. The second one is audience expectations. So, the audience could expect differently from you based on again the medium that you are using to communicate. Now, the third one is again needless to mention the purpose. Purpose is everything in professional writing, professional communication are not just in professional writing, generally in professional communication purpose is of utmost importance, it has the power to decide, everything else that is associated with professional communication.

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Factors that make language informal

- Group jargons – any in-group specialized language
- Slangs, idiomatic expressions, colloquialism
Eg.Y'all, Asap, cool, yo
- Stereotypical and biased language- gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, age, disability, sexual orientation
Eg. Mankind, manpower, chairman, man-made (gender based)
- First person pronouns- I, me, my, we, us....
- Contractions- I've, You're,

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Now, what are the factors that can make your language informal? this is very important. Just knowing what makes it formal is not enough to write efficiently, to write effectively, and to write impactfully it is also very important that we know what is not allowed or what is informal or what should be avoided. Now you have a list of things right in front of you to know what can make your language informal. The first one in that group jargon, what is group jargon?

what are group jargons? Any ingroup specialized language, ingroup specialized language, this can vary.

As the name suggests, this is a group language. So, as the group varies the terms phrases the sentences, all of them can differ from one group to the other. To give you a quick example, if you are a student at IIT Madras and you are organizing events such as shastra or saran, which are cultural and technical festivals in IIT Madras, you would see a lot of terms that are used among students here to refer to various designations allotted to them for each of this phase.

So, that includes chords, and super chords. So, chords is coordinators, super chords are super coordinators or you have something like an FR team. If you are not a part of the group, if you are not a part of the group that is IIT Madras, not part of the student group community here, this particular language is not accessible to you, you do not understand if somebody says the FR team, somebody says, please talk to the chord, you do not understand what that means.

So, why is it so it is not because you do not do you do not understand the language, this is a specialized language. So, this is a group in group language that people use to address each other or to talk about a certain situation, which is more specific and which is particular to their community, the group that they belong to. So, these kinds of terms and words are referred to as group jargon. In formal writing or in professional writing one should not use group jargon.

Now, the second one under that, this is something that is common to all of us we all use slang, idiomatic expressions, colloquialisms, and local words that are quite locally situated. Something that is not accessible even to say somebody from the next district, it is too localized for them to understand. So, say examples of dialects these words are specific to that particular language, like in this case, English, which is why we call them idiomatic expressions in English. Our languages have idiomatic expressions too, which may not be accessible to people of other people who speak different languages language different than us.

So, these sorts of usages that are very specific to the language, not just the language which is very specific to the culture of the speaker of that particular language should be avoided in formal writing or professional writing. The point is one should avoid using any of these lines or idiomatic expressions in the professional domain because it is written for a wider audience, it is documented, and you do not want to include anything that can shroud the meaning which can create ambiguity to the reader. The third one is very important; it is called stereotypical and biased language. So, you need to understand what stereotyping and bias mean, we will

look at it you have the categories that can fall prey to stereotype and bias on the screen, what are they are gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, age, disability, sexual orientation, and so on and so forth.

So, you have a few categories here, all of these, all of these categories, often they become prone to what you refer to as bias and stereotypes. So, we need to understand this a little more. This is a vast topic. This is a study by itself, a lot of work has included special topics, you know, they have added separate topics on understanding what stereotypical and biased language means, we will quickly try to understand what we mean by bias language. So, say when we talk about gender, so, how can you overcome it? To give you a quick example, you might have heard people saying something like a chairman or postman, mankind is sexist. It does not.

So, why do people say sexist? Because it assumes that a person is always a man. So, what can you use instead of mankind, you can say, human beings, you can say individuals, you can say persons, that makes it sound more neutral, and it also is more inclusive, we just talked about gender. So when you talk about ethnicities or racist, try and use the labels or definitions that are formally recognized by both the community as well as the scholarship around that community.

So, for example, you have when you talk about race, you can use terms like South Asians, the African Americans. Black and white are also very, they are very well recognized these days. So, it is not offensive to use black and white when you refer to race and ethnicity because there is a whole gamut of scholarship in that field and it is a very formally very well recognized identity marker these days. So it is not wrong to use that as well. Similarly, for each of the categories that you see on the screen, whether for socioeconomic status or age or disability or sexual orientation, these days a lot of work has happened a lot of scholarship also exists in the field of LGBTQI.

So, when you write anything one should be more, you should be sensible and sensitive to these labels, you should be sensitive to the identities of people and make sure that you do not use false hierarchies when talking about dominance and stay away from stereotypes and avoid bias in language. So, this is about the third point. Now, the next one is the first-person pronoun. So, when you are writing professionally when you are writing formally, do not use first person pronouns like *I, me, my, we, or us*, and also do not use the second person you.

So, using you or addressing your audiences *you* makes it thoroughly informal. The last one is to avoid using contractions now, so you have on the screen, what is it? *I have*. I have apostrophe *ve*, then you have *you* apostrophe *re* *you're*, not your, the your *y o u r* your and *you're*, *you're* is different from each other. This is the contraction, or the contrastive form of *you are*. The first one is the contracted form of *I have*. So, in these kinds of constructions, the contrast of constructions must be avoided in formal writing. In formal style one should stay away from these contractions. So, these are a few points or factors that could make your language informal. So, keep them in mind and make it a point to stay away from all of them while you are writing for a professional.

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Professional Writing: Style and clarity

Formal writing avoids phrases or sentences that are wordy, clichéd, jargonised, and are indirect to ensure clarity.

- Wordiness includes lengthy sentences that owe their length to cluttered phrases that are irrelevant to the meaning of the sentence.
- Clichés are overused expressions that lead to redundancy in writing.
- Jargons are inaccessible expressions that can make the writing ambiguous to the reader.

So, formal writing, should avoid phrases to ensure clarity, to enhance the clarity of what you write, it should avoid using phrases or sentences that are wordy, one, to clichéd and jargonized, why should you not use them? Why should you not use wordy phrases and sentences or cliches or jargonized phrases because they add irrelevant details to the sentences that do not add to the meaning of the sentence. So, they sit there in the sentence they occupy the space making it wordy make it lengthy. However, they are irrelevant to the meaning of the sentence they only add to the length of it, and take up space.

So, that is what cluttered faces do. So, any wordy sentence, or any wordy phrase will essentially have something like a cluttered phrase. So you should remove it in order to make it better. Second one is cliches, What do we mean by cliches? cliches are overused expressions. They are so overused, they were popular. These cliches could have been popular, you know, they

could have been popular usages at some point in time, but they are so overused now that now they sound redundant. Whenever people use them either in speech or in writing, they have a tendency to make the write-up or the speech redundant, so that is what cliches are, I will give you examples of all of them. So cliches are overused expressions.

Now the last jargons is not very different from the group jargon that we talked about. Again, jargons are those generally inaccessible expressions? And what do they do? They can make your writing ambiguous. If they are inaccessible it will result in ambiguity.

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Examples

Wordy sentences

i) In my personal opinion, the project should be considered for approval. (use instead 'In my opinion')

ii) She has a tendency to become vengeful when opposed. (use instead 'becomes vengeful')

iii) I came to the realisation that the office remains open till eight in the night. (use instead 'realised that')

So let us look at the examples of this, and then we will talk about what you can do to avoid jargon and cliches and wordiness because that is also important; just knowing what they do not help, but one should also know how to avoid them, what should we do in order to avoid them? So, let us look at examples first, then of wordy sentences, you have three sentences in front of you look at them, *in my personal opinion, the project should be considered for approval, she has a tendency to become vengeful when a post. I came to the realization that the office remains open till eight in the night*, look at all the three of them.

Now, the ones that are in red font, all the expressions that are highlighted in red, are what are referred to as the wordy patch in a sentence or the cluttered phrase like the one that you saw in the previous slide. So, these are examples of all of these in red 1, 2, 3. These are what you refer to as cluttered phrases, or this is what adds to the wordiness of the sentences. What can you do instead of writing *in my personal opinion* you can use instead *in my opinion*. Both of them

mean the same *in my opinion, the project should be considered for approval*, instead of writing too many words together, you can just say *in my opinion*.

Similarly, for the second sentence, *she has a tendency to become vengeful* can be replaced with *she becomes vengeful*. So, see that whole set of words here 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Five of them are replaced with just one use instead *becomes vengeful, she becomes vengeful* when a post instead of using all of those words. So, you are cutting down, you are decluttering the phrase, the last one. I came to the realization that can simply be very simply put as I realized that, I realized that the office remains open till eight at night.

So you can have a list of search phrases, you can find them anywhere the source is it is all over the internet you can find them or as an exercise what you can do is you can write down something by yourself and check for such phrases which you think are there in your sentence and definitely not adding any meaning to it, it is just occupying space. So, look at those phrases and see if you can cut them down into one word or two words; you can do this exercise.

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Cliché

- Make no mistake
- It is not rocket science.
- Agree to disagree
- It is what it is.
- Leave no stone unturned
- Last but not the least.

Now, the next cliché expressions; these you might be familiar with are a few of them at least. *Make no mistake*. *It is not rocket science* *agreed to disagree, agree to disagree* is a thoroughly overused expression *agree to disagree* or *I beg to disagree* is also another one it is what it is or *leave no stone unturned*. *Last but not least*, this is also like *agreeing to disagree* used, another thoroughly overused expression is *last but not least*. So, these are all examples of cliché keep away from cliches, they do not add any meaning to whatever you have written your sentences

would make good meanings they would produce very good meanings even without the usage of all of them. And these particulars do not look good in the writing because they are so overused now that they become trite, it looks boring, trite and very repetitive in nature which is a negative thing while you are writing.

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Jargon

- Every discipline and sub-fields have jargons that are specific to them.
- Below is a list of more common and general jargon in writing,
 - i) Tip of the iceberg
 - ii) Low hanging fruit
 - iii) Bottom line
 - iv) Big picture

Now, the last one here is jargon. Now about jargon, every discipline has its own jargon. So, people, who are specialized in a particular discipline known. There are a few words that they keep using repetitively among themselves. So, those are jargon for other people. Or, you know, you have something called discourse convention. So, discourse convention means, you know, every discourse follows certain guidelines, methods keywords, etcetera within themselves. So, this jargon is could be something like jargons can also be discourse conventions, but, there are other jargons there are general jargons which people you know casually use while they speak or they write even those kinds of jargon are problematic group jargon are problematic definitely when you are talking to a wider audience, but, even general jargon should also be stayed away from you have examples of general jargon is right in front of you.

Tip of the iceberg, low-hanging fruit, bottom line, big picture, these are all considered jargon because they do not essentially contribute to the meaning of what you are writing. Whereas, at the same time, it can create confusion and ambiguity to the readers also not everybody would understand this. Even if it is a generally used one, people may not understand or there can be ambiguity because jargons they can they can create confusion. Because they have they do not usually have literal meanings, they have metaphorical meanings. And whenever metaphorical

language is used, a vast lot of people may not find, they may not relate to what has been said they may not understand what has been said. So, for that reason, even general organs should be jargon should be avoided from professional writing.

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The slide has a light blue header with the text "Tone in professional writing". Below the header is a circular watermark containing the IIT Madras logo and the text "INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY" in English and "இந்திய மத்தொழில்நுட்பக் கல்லூரி" in Tamil. In the center of the slide, there is a video frame showing a woman with dark hair and glasses, wearing a patterned blouse, speaking at a podium. The video frame is overlaid on the circular watermark. The bottom portion of the slide contains a list under the heading "Jargon".

Jargon

- Every discipline and sub-fields have jargons that are specific to them.
- Below is a list of more common and general jargon in writing,
 - i) Tip of the iceberg
 - ii) Low hanging fruit
 - iii) Bottom line
 - iv) Big picture

So, quickly two points about how to avoid before we start talking about tone in professional writing. In terms of cliche, what you can do to avoid cliches, it usually happens because you are not concentrating well enough on what you are writing or maybe you have been continuously writing for a long time. So, if that is the case, then take a break. Take a break and then come back to your writing. Do not exert yourself too much, do not spend too much energy writing and do not drain yourself out. Probably most of the time that becomes the reason why

you start engaging yourself, you know, once you start using cliched expressions because your brain has stopped thinking it is now refusing to think about anything new. It is unable to come up with new constructions because it is overworked.

So, take a break, look at your work afresh. So, you will be avoided you will be able to avoid a lot of cliched expressions. Same applies to jargons. So instead of using jargons, you can sit back relax and think of new analogies new other comparisons that you can use instead of something that looks like a jargon and can create ambiguity. How do you identify cliche, or jargon in what you have written? This is also important when you are reading. If your eye has a tendency to skip certain phrases or skip certain words while you are reading, then most probably are most often than not, it can be a cliche or a jargon.

Your brain is purposefully avoiding it is keeping reading it because you do not understand it, because it is not accessible to you because whatever is accessible to you, you will, you know, you understand it, so you read it, but if you think that it is not accessible to you are definitely going to skip it.

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How to use objective tone in professional writing?

- Emphasis must be on ideas and things, not on people and feelings.
Eg. I think that the argument is valid.
These findings indicate that the arguments are valid.
- Evaluative words that are suggestive of non-evidence based findings or observations must be avoided.
- Avoid intense and emotional expressions.
Eg. The writing is terrible / wonderful. . (use instead 'less convincing' or 'well argued')
- Use modalities to allow room for disagreements.
Eg. The policy does not negatively affect any sections of the society.
There is a possibility that the policy works good for everyone.
- Use authentic sources for credibility.



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Quickly talk about tone in professional writing. I have a few examples for you to understand what tone means. So, I already told you that tone in formal writing is objective in nature. So, in this particular slide, we are going to look at what does this objective means? What do we mean when we say you should use an objective tone? So let us quickly look at that. What is the first one look at this emphasis must be on ideas and things and not on people and feelings. So

do not emphasize while you are writing do not emphasize on people or their feelings. Instead, what you should do is you should put your attention you should put your focus on the ideas itself. The ideas themselves are the things themselves. Look at the example. I think that the argument is valid, I think that the argument is valid. What do you want to do you want to put the emphasis on the idea or the things.

So, in order to do that, you have now written the statement you can write you can rewrite that statement as these findings indicate that the arguments are valid. So, you remove the personal pronoun I from there. So, this also, you know, I told you they feed into each other, tone, style clarity. So, we already have seen that personal pronouns should be avoided in formal writing. So, instead of saying I think that the argument is valid, now, you have put the emphasis you have brought back the emphasis on the findings, these findings indicate that the arguments are valid, not I these findings indicate that the arguments are valid, that sounds more formal and more professional than saying I.

Now, the second one is evaluative words that are suggestive of non-evidence-based findings or observations must be avoided. So do not use expressions which do not agree with technical evidences. What does that mean? If you think that a piece of work that you have read or if you think that something is not based on technical judgments, if something is not based on evidence, then avoid using our evaluative words for them. Third, one very important, avoid intense and emotional expressions. This is in connection with the previous point we were talking about. Avoid intense and emotional expression.

So, for example, you are giving review to someone on their writing, you do not say the writing is terrible, or the writing is wonderful, both of them both, you know, absolute positives, and absolute negatives must be avoided when you write. Do not say something like, this is terrible, or this is wonderful. Instead, you should resort to something less personal, something more neutral in nature, like, if you want to say that the writing was not really up to the mark.

So, you can use the writing is less convincing, instead of saying the writing is terrible, you can say, the writing needs improvement, the writing is less convincing. This can, more work could be done on this, or the other way around if you want to, if you are impressed with what has been presented to you, then you can use expressions like the writing is well argued, the writing is well put, instead of saying this is wonderful, this is excellent. You can use more neutral,

make more neutral choices, like well argued, well put, well researched. So this is the example of avoiding intense and emotional expressions, the third point.

Now, the fourth point here is allowing modalities, modalities, if you have already come across this word, but if not, what is the word modality means it refers to various attitudes of the speakers. For example, obligation, or possibility, or ability. So these are all referred to as modalities. And they help you in expressing the attitude. And if you are a reader, it helps you understand the attitude of the speaker. So when you are writing, use modalities to allow room for disagreements, if you do not write absolute statement for example, look at the first one, the policy does not negatively affect any sections of the society, this is an absolute statement somebody is saying it does not affect any anybody in the society. So, when you are writing in the professional domain do not write absolute sentences or sentences that give you a tone of absolutism.

So, do not do that, instead you can write a sentence like there is a possibility. See, look at that possibility this is what is called using modality, I have included the modality of possibility in this. So, there is a possibility that the policy works good for everyone. So, what is the what is it with this kind of a sentence when I say there is a possibility that the policy works good for everyone, I am allowing some room for disagreement to the other person I am saying there is a possibility someone can argue and say that no, that is not the case there could be this possibility to it is also possible that it affects negatively or it does not create a good impact on X society X Y Z section of the society.

So, basically I am allowing some space for them to disagree instead of being an absolutist saying no, it does not affect at all that is not how you writing that is not how you write professional. So, this is the fourth point under the objective tone and the last one is use authentic sources for credibility whenever you are writing for professional work or professional purposes, make sure that you refer to good books, authors you know other books, other books like articles etcetera research papers and use quotes from them, quote these orders or quote their works while you are writing in order to enhance your credibility in order to tell the reader that whatever you have written is well researched. And that this is not simply a loose article that you have produced on your own it is backed with good evidence and there are well established authors, writers or organizations that support these claims and have worked on this.

So, always bring credible sources use authentic sources to build your credibility in formal writing. Use them and cite them in your work so that your chances of credibility you know your writing becomes more trustworthy and more formal in nature. So, this what, this is how you achieve objectivity in tone. When we say objectivity of tone in formal writing, these are what more or less we are referring to.

So, I hope you have understood what we have discussed in today's class, the first part was about the aspect of formality. We look at what formal and informal means and from there we moved on to the clarity, what roles and style can play in ensuring or hampering clarity and finally we looked at the tone, which is also like a very important aspect of formal writing which is objective tone in this case, and a few points or methods that you can adopt to make your tone objective.

That is all for today's class, I will meet you again to discuss the last part, the last element in professional writing very soon. Until then, thank you and see you again.

