

Academic Writing Tips

After you read these tips, try to determine the principle underlying them. (Note: the principle is not "academic writing is required to be boring.")

1. **Avoid "you."** This word is inappropriate in academic writing. The tone is too personal; moreover, there is no academic occasion in which its meaning is needed. The same is usually true of "I" and "we."
Avoid: our, my, we
2. **Avoid "etc." and "and so on."** These expressions are general and imprecise. Using them after examples is redundant. In other places, you should use "and other _____", filling in the blank with a noun that categorizes what you are listing. (*Example: Wars are going on in Iraq, Chechnya, Sri Lanka, etc. → Wars are going on in Iraq, Chechnya, Sri Lanka, and many other countries around the world.*) Also avoid the use of the ellipsis (...).
3. **Avoid absolutes**, such as "all," "every," "none," "never," "always." These words leave you no "wiggle room": they commit you to a position or a statement that allows for not even one exception. This includes superlatives ("the most dangerous," "the biggest topic," and other such extremes.) In general, don't exaggerate the importance of an example or argument. This includes "X is becoming more and more Y in recent years," unless you have *evidence* that a problem is genuinely becoming increasingly serious.
4. **Avoid informal vocabulary**, including "a lot of," "lots of," "tons of," "a couple of," and "really." Especially, avoid such informal terms and phrases as "gonna" and "wanna." In addition, "such as" usually works better than "like." In addition, avoid vague words such as "things" and "stuff." A few other examples: "nowadays," and "hot topic."
5. **Avoid using idioms and proverbs.** They will not make you sound sophisticated and well read; they will make you sound unoriginal and too informal.
6. **Avoid using phrasal verbs.** (Phrasal verbs are essentially idioms.) There is always a verb that has the same meaning; use it. Example: instead of "look up to," use "admire;" instead of "figure out" use "solve" or "understand."
No: can't, aren't, isn't
7. **Avoid contractions** such as "isn't," "aren't," "can't," and "it's." Spell all the words completely. You can use acronyms such as UN and WHO as long as you spell them out in full the first time you use them; i.e. United Nations (UN) and World Health Organization (WHO).