



RESEARCH WRITING

Unit 1 The academic writing process

*Academic
Writing*



Academic vs. personal styles of writing

..... **TASK 1** *Recognising academic writing*

A: Look at the following sentence.

Linguists were and remain convinced by Noam Chomsky of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, who discovered that however disparate human languages seem, all share a common, basic structure, seemingly hardwired into the brain.

Identify at least THREE features of this sentence that you think are **academic**

- complex sentences
- serious subject
- reference to academics
- use of passive voice
- shows truth status of statement

Academic vs. personal styles of writing

B: Now look at the following sentence.

The way you speak says a lot about you.

Identify at least THREE features of this sentence that you think are **academic**

- vague vocabulary
- use of personal pronouns
- simple sentence structure

Academic vs. personal styles of writing

Table 1.1: Different levels of formality

	Academic	Non-academic
Reader	academics	family and friends
Content	serious thought	conversational
Style	complex sentences showing considerable variety in construction	mostly simple and compound sentences joined by conjunctions such as <i>and</i> or <i>but</i>
Organisation	clear and well planned	less likely to be as clear and as organised
Grammar	likely to be error free	may not always use complete sentences
Vocabulary	technical and academic language used accurately	use of short forms, idioms and slang

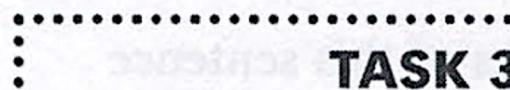
Academic vs. personal styles of writing

..... **TASK 2** *Recognising levels of formality*

Read the sentences and tick (✓) either F (formal) or I (informal) after each sentence. Make notes on which features helped you reach your decision.

Sentences	F	I	Notes
I couldn't finish the interviews on time.		✓	personal pronoun; contraction
The initial tests were completed and the results analysed by June 2002.	✓		passive voice; precise vocab
I'd like to start by drawing your attention to previous research in this area.		✓	personal pronoun; contraction
In the 1990s, some researchers started to point out the problems with this theory.		✓	references required
He agreed with me that this procedure didn't make much sense.		✓	personal pronoun; contraction; vague vocab
We'll repeat the test sometime next year.		✓	contraction; vague vocab
While it is still too early to draw firm conclusions from the data, preliminary analysis suggests the following trends are present.	✓		complex sentence
In addition, the research attempts to answer two further related questions.	✓		use of connector; impersonal style

Levels of formality



TASK 3

Distinguishing between levels of formality

Put the following texts in order by giving 1 to the most academic and 4 to the least academic. To help you, think about: Who is this text intended for? Why would readers pick up this text and read it? What resources did the writer of the text have available?



TASK 4

Explaining features of formality

Using the features shown in Table 1.1, try to explain why you have put the extracts (in Task 3) in the order you chose. Make some notes to share with a group of classmates or with the teacher.

Levels of formality

B

The reciprocal relationship between reading and writing has become a focal point of L1 and L2 literacy research. Empirical findings have led researchers to recognize that reading and composing (i.e. writing) both involve the construction of meaning, development and application of complex cognitive and linguistic skills, activation of existing knowledge and past experience, and the ability to solve problems.

- most academic
- complex sentence structure
- high-level vocabulary

Levels of formality

D

The University of Aizu was established in April 1993 with the goal of educating and graduating students who would become Japan's leading professionals in computer science and engineering (Kunii, 1994). With this in mind, the University's curriculum has been planned to include courses that will provide its graduates with the ability to effectively communicate in English, the international computer science language. The capability to document scholarly and research activities in a form that can be readily disseminated to the international computer science community is considered to be essential for all scientists and engineers. Effective writing is a necessary skill for technical professionals, and it has been claimed that scientists and engineers spend 25% of their professional time on writing a variety of technically oriented documents (15% informal, and 10% formal) (Huckin, 1991). To prepare our students for these endeavours, a two-term English Technical Writing course has been included in the required curriculum of all University of Aizu students.

- second most academic
- complex sentences & passives
- references
- academic vocabulary

Levels of formality

C

The difference between a paper and an online presentation is that in print your document forms a whole and the reader is focused on the entire set of information, whereas on the Web you need to split each document into multiple hyperlinked pages since users are not willing to read long pages.

- mixture of formal and informal styles
- personal pronouns
- passive; long complex sentence

Levels of formality

A

What makes a good paragraph? It's difficult to say. Anyway, I'll try to give you an answer. A good paragraph starts with a main idea of some kind. The rest of the paragraph goes on to develop the main idea by explaining it, or by supporting it with evidence.

- most informal/least formal
- didactic rather than academic
- use of question-and-answer sequence
- informal
- '*Anyway*'

Homework

.....
TASK 5 *Reflecting on academic writing*

Look back at the Introduction and the ‘Thinking about writing processes’ section of this unit, and think about your own language. What might your responses have been if you were looking at academic writing in your own language? Make some notes as you go. Then turn your notes into a short piece of writing that would begin to answer the question:

Are the rules for academic writing in your native language the same as, or different from, those for writing in English?

- Typed
- Blackboard submission

The grammar of academic discourse

See Textbook (p. 20)

Table 1.2: Key attributes of academic and non-academic texts

Academic writing	Non-academic writing
Full forms There <i>is</i> The test <i>did not</i> show	Short forms <i>There's</i> The test <i>didn't</i> show
Connectors <ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ The theory appears to provide an explanation for this phenomenon. <i>However</i>, this is not the case on a closer examination of the facts.▶ The experimental design was weak. <i>Moreover</i>, the methodology was faulty.	Connectors <ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ I want to go to the cinema, <i>only</i> I have to work late.▶ Because of work, I can't go to London this weekend. <i>Anyway</i>, I don't have enough money.
Use of nominal groups (verbs made into nouns) <i>The application (noun) of the results</i> needs to be carefully considered	Use of pronouns We need to carefully consider <i>how we apply</i> the results.

Use of the passive voice

In recent years, several analyses of survey data
have been published.

Concise vocabulary

... the focus is on x

Researchers assumed that ...

Point of view

► Objective and impersonal, e.g.

This essay attempts to ...

► Using qualifying language, e.g.

One possible reason may be ...

Use of the active voice

In recent years, researchers *have published*
several analyses of survey data.

Informal vocabulary

... talks about x

They thought that ...

Point of view

► Subjective and personal, e.g.

In my essay I will attempt to ...

► Asking rhetorical questions, e.g.

How can this be so?

TASK 6. The underlined parts are examples of non-academic language: put each into the correct column, using Table 1.2 for reference.

Linguistic relativity

An area of disagreement among experts in the relationship between language and the mind is **linguistic relativity**, also known as the **Sapir–Whorf hypothesis**, the very popular notion that each language, because of its linguistic uniqueness, develops its own ways of thinking about the world. For example, if you agree with this opinion you would say that people from Korea ‘think differently’ from people from Spain because their languages are so different. Even though this belief is popular in many places, there isn’t much proof for it. Even experts who disagree about lots of other things often agree that this idea is wrong (Steinberg 1993; Pinker 1994).

[Source: R. Carter & D. Nunan *The Cambridge TESOL Guide*. Cambridge University Press, p. 84.]

Pronouns	Informal vocabulary	Active verbs	Point of view
if you agree you would say its own ways	its own ways people from Korea lots of other things wrong	develops isn't you would say experts who disagree	non-academic: based on the informality of the language used

The grammar of academic discourse

- Although the text is non-academic, there are a few elements of academic language use. If you are working in a group, choose a partner and see if you can find three examples of academic language in it.

Linguistic relativity

objective point of view

a nominal group

An area of disagreement among experts in the relationship between language and the mind is **linguistic relativity**, also known as the **Sapir–Whorf hypothesis**, the very popular concise vocabulary notion that each language, because of its linguistic uniqueness, develops its own ways of thinking about the world. For example, if you agree with this opinion you would say that people from Korea ‘think differently’ from people from Spain because their languages are so different. Even though this belief is popular in many places, there isn’t much proof for it. Even experts who disagree about lots of other things often agree that this idea is wrong (Steinberg 1993; Pinker 1994).

[Source: R. Carter & D. Nunan *The Cambridge TESOL Guide*. Cambridge University Press, p. 84.]

TASK 7 *Rewriting for formality*

The following text is written in an informal style. Rewrite it as a more formal text by making changes to the grammar and vocabulary.

Writing a literature review

The literature review means you have to look critically at all the research that is relevant to your research. Some people think that the review is just a summary but I don't agree. A summary is necessary, but you also need to judge the work, show how it holds together, and show how it relates to your work. What I mean is, you just can't describe a whole paper, you have to select which parts of the research you are going to talk about, show how it fits with other people's research, and how it fits with your work.

The literature review is a critical look at the relevant existing research. It is commonly believed that it is a summary; however, it is not. Although the writer needs to summarise the relevant research, it is also vital to evaluate this work, show the connections between different work and how it relates to the writer's concerns. In other words, it is not enough for a writer to simply describe an article; it is necessary to select aspects of the work, for example the methodology, and show how it relates to other researchers' methodologies and to the writer's own methodology.