

Fundamental Considerations on Text Production and Consumption

I. Factors that Affect Writing and Speaking

1. Topic

There are a lot of topics that you can consider in writing academic and professional texts. Still, the key here is customizing your material for your audience and considering your level of expertise in choosing your topic. Writing about “Essentials of Job Interview” could be relevant to graduating students as they are looking toward employment. But how much is your knowledge in this area? Can you consider yourself as a credible source of information in this field?

2. Role of the Writer

The role of the writer in academic and professional writing intersects at some point but differs at many levels. This is affected by the purpose of the writer, his/her knowledge of the topic, and the type of audience he/she will have. Have you felt the difference between reporting to your classmates and a panel of professors? What are the adjustments that you have made to make your material suitable to the said audience?

3. Purpose of the Material

The purpose of writing whether it is for the academe or a specific field of expertise falls under two categories: (1) to help other learn about a subject, carry out a task, or make a decision; and (2) to reinforce or change the attitude and motivate readers to take action (Markel & Selber, 2018).

4. Target Audience

According to Nilep (n.d.), an academic paper could be written for an instructor or a group of professors. On the

other hand, a professional paper in the form of a technical report is written for colleagues in your field. Thinking about your audience affects what you write and how you write your article. These are the questions to consider when you are aiming to write for a specific audience:

- Who will read the paper?
- How much do they already know about the topic?
- What are the needs of the audience?
- How can you make them want to keep reading?
- How are they likely to react to the ideas that you will present?

II. Aspects of Professional and Academic Language

1. Formality

According to Purdue University (n.d.), the level of formality in “should be determined by the audience’s expectations and the writer’s purpose.” The levels of formality are formal, semi-formal, and informal. It is advised that one should use the formal tone when writing or speaking to an unknown audience. In contrast, a person is allowed to use a semi-formal tone when writing to speaking with an individual that is well-known to him/her. Lastly, one should take note that the informal tone has no place in academic or professional writing.

Table 1

Different levels of formality as used in a letter of application.

Formal	I am applying for the Administrative Assistant position advertised in the newspaper. I am an excellent candidate for the job because of my significant secretarial experience, excellent language skills, and sense of organization.
---------------	--

Semi-formal	I am applying for the Administrative Assistant position that is currently open in the company. As you are aware, I have worked as an intern with your company in this position before. As such, I not only have experience and knowledge of this position but also already understand the company's needs and requirements for this job.
Informal	Hi! I read in the paper that y'all were looking for an Administrative Assistant. I think that I am good for that job because I've done stuff like it in the past, am good with words, and am incredibly well organized.

Lifted and modified from https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/academic_writing/using_appropriate_language/levels_of_formality.html.

2. Objectivity

Academic and professional language should be objective and unbiased. According to Markel & Selber, (2018), if readers suspect that you are trying to manipulate peoples' opinions about an issue, by overstating or omitting facts, they will doubt the validity of the entire document/statement. Listed below are the things you should avoid to ensure objectivity in your language:

a. Personal language

Using this would depend on the writing context, purpose, and audience. This would help the writer or speaker establish a connection and convey his/her passion and involvement in the topic. However, in academic and professional writing and speaking, personal experience is only a support for the development of the main idea. It should not be the main idea itself.

Example:

x	I interviewed a total of 100 respondents from October to December 2019
✓	A total of 100 respondents were interviewed from October to December 2019

b. Emotive language

This type of language appeals to the emotions or values of the audience. Emotive language attempts to stir the emotion of the readers/listeners through superlatives and exaggeration.

Example:

x	These really lucky people may be advantaged by healthcare services that...
✓	These people may be advantaged by healthcare services that...

c. Judgmental language

This language shows the personal judgment of the writer or speaker. It sounds as though the speaker/writer has come to a conclusion based on his/her previously-held beliefs rather than through a review of the relevant literature.

Example:

x	International schools are always elitist...
✓	International schools are often viewed as elitist...

3. Explicitness

Use clear and direct language. Stay away from figurative language such as metaphor, simile, and irony as these can obscure the meaning of your statement. Instead of saying, "This night is colder compared to last night," be explicit by saying, "This night is colder as the thermostat reads 25°C. Whereas, last night, we had 30°C for the whole night". The second statement clearly showed the

reason behind the conclusion made by stating figures. According to Gillet (2020), explicitness is needed (1) to make it clear to the readers how the various parts of the text are related and (2) to acknowledge the sources of the ideas in the text.

<i>Why do we need to use signaling words?</i>	
To signal the readers that the line of argument is going to change	The Bristol 167 was to be Britain's great new advance on American types such as the Lockheed Constellation and Douglas DC-6, which did not have the range to fly the Atlantic non-stop. It was also to be the largest aircraft ever built in Britain. <u>However</u> , even by the end of the war, the design had run into serious difficulties.
To indicate that the sentence gives reasons for something in another sentence	While an earlier generation of writers had noted this feature of the period, it was not until the recent work of Cairncross that the significance of this outflow was realized. Partly this was <u>because</u> the current account deficit appears much smaller in current (1980s) data than it was thought to be by contemporaries.
To signal that you are giving extra information	He is born into a family, he marries into a family, and he becomes the husband and father of his own family. <u>In addition</u> , he has a

	definite place of origin and more relatives than he knows what to do with, and he receives a rudimentary education at the Canadian Mission School.
To explicitly tell the readers that you are giving examples	This has sometimes led to disputes between religious and secular clergy, between orders and bishops. For example, in the Northern context, the previous bishop of Down and Connor, Dr. Philbin, refused for most of his period of leadership in Belfast to have Jesuits visiting or residing in his diocese.
To acknowledge the sources of the ideas that were used	McGreil (1977: 363-408) has shown that though Dubliners find the English more acceptable than the Northern Irish, Dubliners still seek a solution to the Northern problem within an all-Ireland state.

Source: <http://www.uefap.com/writing/feature/explicit.htm>

4. Hedging

Hedging refers to the use of linguistic devices to express hesitation or uncertainty as well as to demonstrate politeness and indirectness (enago.com., 2020). Hedging is used to soften one's words and to avoid making a direct statement, or committing to a particular action or decision. For example, journalists use the term "allegedly" (e.g., We have received a report that a well-known business tycoon was allegedly involved in money

laundering.) when reporting partly because the statements that they made are not yet proven and to protect themselves from criticism and potential legal action. These are few of the several reasons why people use hedged language:

- minimize the possibility of another academic opposing the claims that are being made
- to conform to the currently accepted style of academic writing
- to enable the author to devise a politeness strategy where they can acknowledge that there may be flaws in their claims

Table 2	
<i>Different types of hedged language and examples</i>	
Introductory verbs	seem, tend, look like, appear to be, think, believe, doubt, be sure, indicate, suggest
Nouns	assumption, likelihood, possibility, probably
Lexical verbs	believe, assume, suggest, seem, interpret
Modal verbs	can, could, may, might, should, would
Modal adverbs	possibly, perhaps, conceivably, arguably, certainly, definitely, clearly,
Modal adjectives	possible, probable, certain, definite, clear, likely
That clauses	It could be the case that... It might be suggested that... There is every hope that...

	It can be concluded that...
--	-----------------------------

One should use hedging sparingly as readers/listeners might be confused as to where the writer or speaker stand on regarding a specific issue. Hedging is often used in academic writing, legal documents, and news reports. So, you should learn how to balance between explicitness and caution in the said field so that the statements would not sound as if they were made by a person who does not have confidence in his/her thoughts, ideas, and opinions.

References:

- Bailey, S. (2018). *Academic writing: A handbook for international students* (5th ed.). Routledge.
- Features of academic writing. (n.d.). <http://www.uefap.com/writing/feature/hedge.htm>.
- Gillet, A. (2020). *Using English for academic purposes*. <http://www.uefap.com/writing/feature/explicit.htm>.
- For Students in Higher Education
- Levels of formality. (n.d.). In *Purdue University*. https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/academic_writing/using_appropriate_language/levels_of_formality.html
- Markel, M., & Selber, S. (2018). *Technical communication* (12th ed.). Macmillan Learning.
- Nilep, C. (n.d.). *Audience, purpose, and tone*. <http://www.ilas.nagoya-u.ac.jp/~nilep/audience-purpose.html>.
- What is hedging in academic writing? (2020, April 7). In *enago.com*. <https://www.enago.com/academy/hedging-in-academic-writing/#comments>