

FEATURES OF ACADEMIC WRITING

Objectives

When you have finished this section, you will be able to

- recognise features of academic writing;
- understand how academic texts are written in English;
- identify the writing conventions and rules for academic texts;
- use these academic features in your own academic writing.

Resource List

- 1) Features of academic writing:
<http://www.uefap.com/writing/feature/featfram.htm>
- 2) Characteristics of academic writing:
http://www.rmit.edu.vn/sites/default/files/file_basic_page/characteristics_of_academic_writing_new.pdf
- 3) Exercises on Formality:
<http://www.uefap.com/writing/feature/formal.htm>
- 4) Exercises on Objectivity:
<http://www.uefap.com/writing/feature/objectiv.htm>
- 5) Newcastle University: Features of academic writing:
<http://www.ncl.ac.uk/students/wdc/learning/academic/>

Key Concepts

- Academic vocabulary
- Academic conventions
- Formal words and informal words

Procedure

Before Class

1. Familiarise yourself with the online resources on features of academic writing in the Resource List.
2. Look at books and journal articles written by university lecturers, professors and other specialists which you are required to read in your own disciplines. Observe the writing style and choice of words.

In Class

Reflecting on what you have read and surveyed, compare your answers for **Task A1 & A2** with a partner or in a small group. Be prepared to share your answers with the rest of the class.

After Class**Do Task B.****Tasks****A. Discussion****1. Vocabulary**

Read the three texts below, noting the use of so-called informal and formal elements. Answer the questions which follow.

Text A**Exchange Bias in Nanoscale Antidot Rays**

. . . . In summary, we have established that it is possible to induce exchange bias in ordered nanoscale antidot arrays. We observed that the antidot arrays exhibit asymmetric hysteresis loops and show larger H_E and H_C values as compared to the continuous film. The exchange bias field progressively increases as the size of antidots increases, possibly due to reduced FM-FM interactions and constraints imposed on the AFM domain size by the antidots. The uniaxial symmetry of H_C and the unidirectional symmetry of H_E was confirmed using angular dependent measurements, and it was concluded that higher order anisotropy terms cannot be neglected for antidot arrays. **Our** results demonstrate a convenient technique to tune and probe the exchange bias in systems with reduced lateral dimensions. (p. 022502-3)

Source:

Tripathy, D., Adeyeye, A.O., & Singh, N. (2008). Exchange bias in nanoscale antidot rays. *Applied Physics Letters*, 93, 022502- 022502-3. doi: 10.1063/1.2959727

Text B**Fine Brush and Freehand: The Vocabulary-Learning Art of Two Successful Chinese EFL Learners**

. . . . In particular, in this study I examine two successful adult Chinese EFL learners and portray in detail what they do in vocabulary learning. I show, for example, how these learners conduct rote learning such as memorising word lists.³ In so doing, I attempt to account for the apparent discrepancy between the rote style of learning and the high levels of success achieved by these learners. This study also attempts to confirm what other researchers (e.g., Ahmed, 1989; Gu & Johnson, 1996; Parry, 1997) have indicated, directly or indirectly: that learners can achieve success through different approaches to and styles of learning. I examine three stages of learning a word (Brown & Payne, 1994; Gu & Johnson, 1996): (a) initially identifying and handling a new word, (b) committing the word to memory, and (c) attempting to use the newly learned word. (p. 77)

Source:

Gu, P.Y. (2003). Fine brush and freehand: The vocabulary-learning art of two successful Chinese EFL learners. *TESOL Quarterly*, 37, 73-104.

Text C

**Becoming Middle Class: How Working-Class University Students
Draw and Transgress Moral Class Boundaries**

... Many of these studies conceptualize working-class status as a form of deficiency or barrier, which creates dispositions for agency that lead to largely socially reproductive outcomes. This article aims to investigate working-class students' strategies of drawing upon their class status as a source of strength and foundation for mobility. (p. 633)

Source:

Lehmann, W. (2009). Becoming middle class: How working-class university students draw and transgress moral class boundaries. *Sociology*, 43, 631-647.

doi: 10.1177/0038038509105412

(a) What informal words did you find in Text A and Text B?

(b) How does Text C differ from Texts A & B?

2. Writing Style

Read the three texts below noting whether the writing style is formal or informal.
Answer the questions which follow.

Text A

English has a very rich vocabulary derived from many languages. Because of this, there may be more than one way to express an idea. You should strive to choose words that are less informal in nature and also precise. In lectures, you will likely hear less formal speech; however, in writing you should use a more formal form if one exists and seems to be more precise than its less formal alternative.

(Swales & Feak, 2004)

Text B

feeling nostalgic on this eve of Xmas eve, "Nostalgia is like a grammar lesson: You find the present tense and the past perfect"

(a message on Facebook reproduced with the writer's permission)

Text C

Plagiarism functions at different levels. On one level there are the so-called paper mills, online services that provide academic term papers for a fee. On another level there is what this article is more concerned with, namely, textual plagiarism, or the copying of sections of one text in the composition of another. To combat these practices, at both levels, an increasing number of plagiarism detection software applications are being developed and put into use. Ironically, however, in some cases, the same companies are

both operating paper mills and offering antiplagiarism services. Together with the antiplagiarism movement there has developed what might be called a widespread antiplagiarism discourse.

(Flowerdew & Li, 2007)

- (a) Which of the text(s) is/are written in a formal style?
- (b) Which is/are written in an informal style? Why did you choose that one?

B. Analysing

Below are some aspects of written English, which may or may not be considered as formal by the academic community.

Where would you place each one on a continuum of 1 (informal) to 5 (formal)?

- (a) Frequently putting exclamation marks (!) and ellipsis (. . .) at the end of sentences
- (b) Using the passive voice instead of the active voice
 - It was suggested that the developing world will require in excess of US\$100 billion in aid every year to cope with the effects of global warming. (Passive)
 - Some observers suggest that the developing world will require in excess of US\$100 billion in aid every year to cope with the effects of global warming. (Active)
- (c) Using expressions or phrases such as:
 - lots of
 - what's more
 - looks like it
 - didn't yield any new results
 - not . . . much
 - doesn't have many solutions
 - You can see the results in Table 2.
 - a great many
 - moreover
 - it seems to be so
 - yielded no new results
 - little
 - has few solutions
- (d) Using spellings that imitate speech (*wanna*) or employing non-standard grammar (*I ain't got no idea*)
- (e) Using abbreviations and short forms, such as *aka*, *Engin*, *etc.*

- (f) Using direct questions, e.g. *What can be done to mitigate climate change?*
- (g) Incorporating sentences without verbs into the text. For example: *Not so. Of course. Like that.*