

# ES1103

## English for Academic Purposes

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### TUTORIAL 6

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# Academic Style and Register

## Tutorial Learning Outcomes

By the end of this tutorial, you should be better able to:

- recognise instances of informal language in academic writing
- understand what constitutes an academic writing style
- avoid common errors connected with register and style

## Introduction

You might recall that an academic genre can be identified by the style of writing that is characterised by aspects such as purpose, structure and language. Another important aspect is the deployment of an appropriate **tone for academic writing**. This tone is known as the **register** of a text and it refers to **the degree of formality** used by the writer.

In academic writing, the **register is usually formal** and so writers have to be mindful of the language they select in advancing their arguments or points. This could mean that even if a piece of writing is grammatically correct, it may nonetheless convey an inappropriate tone, resulting in a text that may be unintentionally casual or unsophisticated. The converse is also true: language that might be appropriate in an academic context may sound too formal or pretentious if used in less formal circumstances.

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A well-developed academic writing style and register often incorporate characteristics such as appropriate verb choice, relatively little repetition and redundancy, and the avoidance of clichés, hyperbole and vague language. We consider these aspects of register here to help sensitise you to some of these features so that you can ensure that your writing is more characteristic of good academic work.

## General Principles for Good Academic Writing

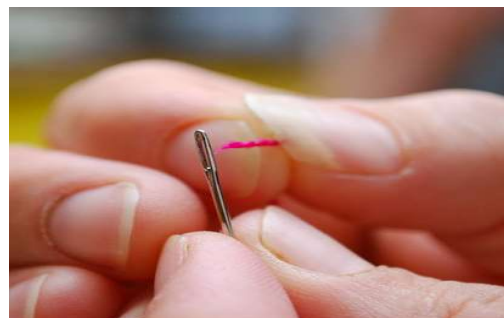
Be **clear**



Be **concise**



Be **precise**

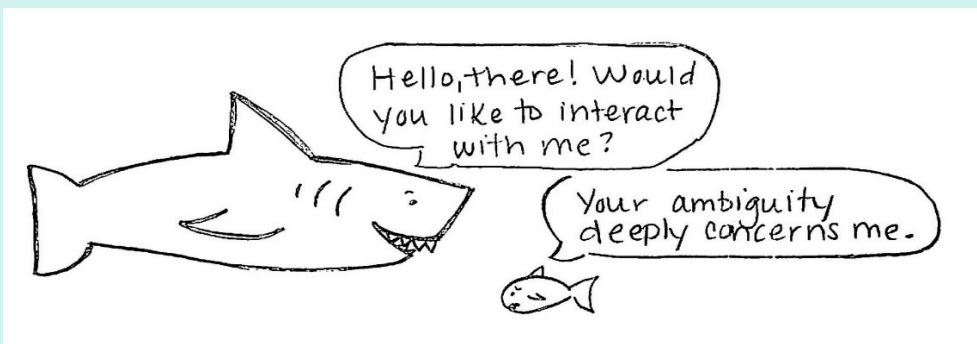
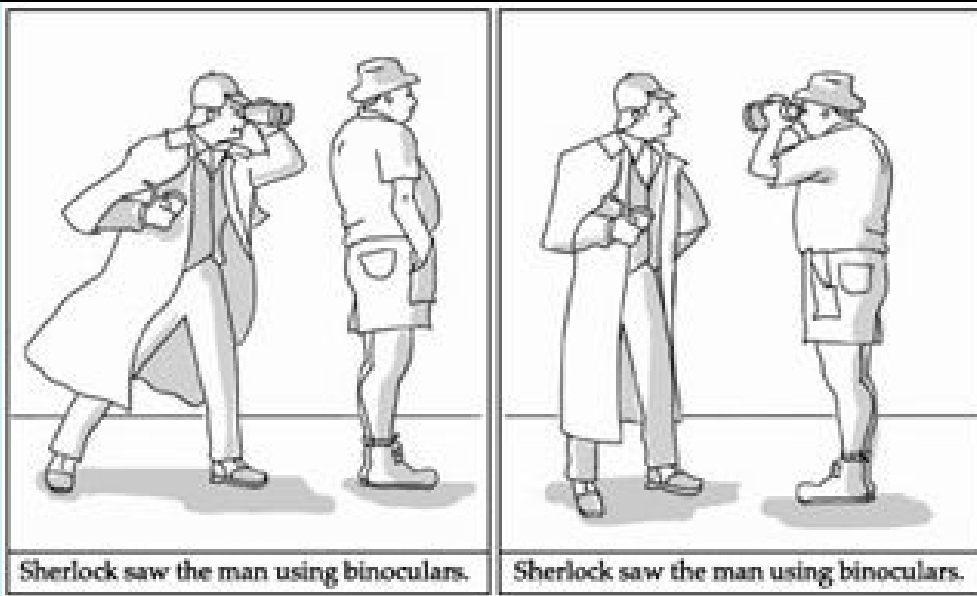


## Be Clear

Being clear is making sure that you **say only what you intend to say**. Also, being clear means **making sure that no one misreads** the argument or point you want to present.

To be clear in your writing, you must **avoid ambiguity and needless complexity**. Express your ideas as simply as possible. The more complicated the point you want to make, the simpler the language should be.

### Ambiguity



## Needless complexity

The male oryctolagus cuniculus domesticated companion in one's possession for a half-score of years succumbed to myxomatosis a sennight ago.



One's corpulent betrothed swain procured a transparent crystal of tetrahedrally bonded carbon atoms in a covalent network lattice digit girdle for one.

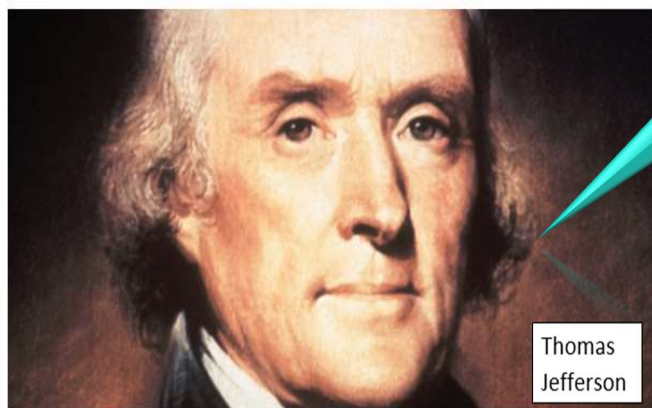
My ten-year-old rabbit died last week.

My fat fiancé bought me a diamond ring.



## Be Concise

Being concise means cutting any unnecessary words from your text. By **using as few words as possible** to express your ideas, you will save yourself and your reader unnecessary effort and avoid needless complexity.



The most valuable of all talents is that of never using two words when one will do.

| Cut <b>unnecessary</b> words      |   |                       |
|-----------------------------------|---|-----------------------|
| words to cut                      | examples  | being concise         |
| redundancies                      | <i>my <b>personal</b> opinion<br/>blended <b>together</b></i> | my opinion<br>blended |
| zero phrases                      | <i><b>as a matter of fact</b><br/><b>as is well known</b></i> |                       |
| needless adjective<br>and adverbs | <i><b>rather</b> unique<br/><b>completely</b> eradicate</i>   | unique<br>eradicate   |
| needless negatives                | <i><b>does not have</b><br/><b>did not remember</b></i>       | lacks<br>forgot       |



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## ***Be Precise***

Being precise is the most important goal of good academic communication. Being precise is making sure you say what you want to say. Tell the reader exactly what is in your mind. This means **choosing the right words and appropriate level of detail**.

Whenever you can **provide specific information and statistics**, you should do so rather than making general statements. Also, to avoid generalising the points you want to make, you should always **choose words carefully** because many terms have **specific meanings** or can have **different meanings** depending on the context in which they are used.

For example, if we are discussing the cost of addressing a problem, which of the following words is more appropriate for an academic paper? What do you think are the connotations (implied meaning) of each of these words?

cost-effective

cheap

inexpensive



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One of the problems with over-generalising in an academic paper is that it not only leads to a lack of precision, it can also lead to exaggerated statements. These **exaggerations should be avoided in academic writing**.

**Hyperbole** is the use of exaggeration as a rhetorical device or figure of speech. Although it is legitimate, and often grammatically correct, to employ this feature in rhetoric, poetry and oratory, it is often out-of-place in academic writing as it tends to evoke strong feelings and impressions. Academic writing, in contrast, is primarily evidence-based, and therefore subjective, value-laden language does not fit easily in the genre.

Here are some examples of hyperbole.

- In some countries, people *have to wait an eternity* to get treatment at hospitals.
- I *would rather die than* take that job.
- I have *thousands of things to do* this week.

Now that you have some idea of what is meant by hyperbole, let's check your understanding.

### Task 1

Read and consider the following sentences on the topic of smartphone addiction and identify any words or phrases that possibly convey a sense of exaggeration (hyperbole). Suggest alternatives where possible.



1. Vast numbers of people in the world use a smartphone (Murphy, 2017), with many becoming addicted due to the amazing convenience that they bring as well as the astonishing features that come with their incredible designs.
2. The over-usage of smartphones then snowballs into an avalanche of addiction over time. Furthermore, the constant buzz of social media and email notifications leads to never-ending distraction.
3. The risk of eye damage increases if one checks his smartphone excessively. The deadly culprit behind this eye damage is the blue-violet light that is emitted by devices with LED screens, such as smartphones (Buckley, 2014).
4. Smartphone addiction has fatally altered the way children interact with each other and now there is a huge gap between the amount of digital and human interaction that children engage in. The consequences of this addiction are dire.
5. Incredible improvements in the functionalities of smartphones have led to unbelievable gains in popularity. However, one problem lies in the vast affordances smartphones provide to people from all walks of life: smartphones grant us instant access to information, ease of communication and even billion-dollar transactions - all in a millisecond. This has gradually promoted smartphones to a glorified state of indispensability in our daily lives.
6. Gradual loss of vision, dealing with dry eyes and headaches, and having ciliary muscle spasm are just a few consequences of smartphone addiction. However, the exponential increase in number of things that can be done on the phone makes it almost impossible to refrain from using it. Despite that, vision loss interferes with a person's ability to complete basic tasks such as using the telephone or doing housework, and can even lead to death.

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## Writing in an Academic Style and Register

It is essential to remember that you must **always use formal language** in your academic writing, specifically

- formal grammar
- formal vocabulary

Let's first consider formal grammar. Even though they may be used in a manner that is grammatically correct, many verbs lack an academic register and can therefore sound informal when included in a written text. Some examples include *verbs plus prepositions*, *phrasal verbs* or *verbs with journalistic connotations*. Such verbs are therefore better suited to other, non-academic genres.

| Avoid using <b>informal grammar</b> |  |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| avoid using                         | examples   |
| contractions                        | <i>A solution to this problem <b>hasn't</b> been found.</i>                                      |
| negatives                           | <i>The test has <b>not produced</b> any valid data.<br/>There were <b>not many</b> problems.</i> |
| weak endings                        | <i>This device can be used to track lions, tigers<br/><b>and so on.</b></i>                      |
| direct questions                    | <i><b>What</b> can be done to solve the problem?<br/><b>What</b> do these findings mean?</i>     |

Let's first consider formal vocabulary now. As with grammar, it's important for you to be able to identify and **use more formal vocabulary** and avoid using informal vocabulary in your academic writing.

| Avoid using <b>informal vocabulary</b> |  |
|--|--|
| avoid using                            | examples   |
| multi-word verbs                       | <i>Scientists have <b>come up with</b> a potential solution.</i>   |
| repetition                             | <i>This <b>solution</b> is the best <b>solution</b> from a number of <b>solutions</b> to this problem.</i>   |
| redundancy                             | <i><b>In my opinion, I think to my mind</b> that this is the best solution.</i>                              |
| informal tone                          | <i>Ali (2019) proposed an <b>absolutely brilliant</b> solution to address a <b>really awful</b> problem.</i> |
| clichés                                | <i>The situation will improve because <b>every cloud has a silver lining</b>.</i>                            |



## Task 2

Read and consider the following examples with problems of verb choice and academic register and suggest alternatives.

1. Our IT capabilities need to be beefed up.
2. Moore hedge fund has recently brought up several important issues and is now actively staking out other energy companies for investment opportunities.
3. Many companies now use customer loyalty schemes, so they are able to set up a base of trusting customers who can then pick up priority offers.
4. An improved solution would be for governments to come up with better policies to make public education and vaccination programs come together.
5. Fabricated news can cause damage to persons or organizations if not addressed thoroughly. At present, the governing bodies from various countries have come out with solutions to address this issue. This essay will address the problem that arises from fake news, its impact as well as solutions put in place to tackle the issues.
6. This shows that members of these suppressed groups are extremely sensitive to their cultural heritage being stepped into by others and how such a simple act can spark unhappiness between the dominant and the marginalized groups.
7. Celebration of cultural festivals, or visits to local museums are the platforms to boost and showcase the beauty of traditional Malay attires to the younger generations.
8. Peer review is challenging because it is difficult to know what mistakes to look out for in a colleague's work. Despite this, it is possible to point out some ideas that lack clarity and relevance and give constructive feedback.

In contrast to informal-sounding verbs, **clichés are overused words and expressions**. Although they are not grammatically incorrect, they often introduce or conclude sentences in an **overgeneralising** or **vague** way. In academic writing, clichés could either **be paraphrased** in a more academic fashion or simply deleted.

### Task 3

Read and consider the following sentences that contain clichés and suggest alternatives.

1. As time goes on, ‘cultural appropriation’ has evolved from a topic of rhetorical criticism in academia into an issue triggering internet outrage and oversensitivity.
2. Globalisation is like a double-edged sword: although it has numerous benefits, it has also brought adverse consequences, such as global warming. Therefore, one can conclude that globalisation can be both a boon and a bane.
3. All in all/ In a nutshell/At the end of the day, fake news will only be able to contribute to racial tension when the people within the country lack trust and are divided, making it easy to spread unhappiness between different races and religions.
4. It should be illegal to don the Native American headdresses without permission from certified Native American representatives. It goes without saying that unless people act, such cultural appropriation will continue to remain unresolved in the coming years ahead.
5. Essay writing, just like many other things, is a skill learned with practice since good things come to those who wait. So, over the duration of this course, some of the academic dos and don’ts should become clearer.
6. As we know, things are always changing so fast in today’s interconnected world. As cultural fusion has become a world phenomenon, it has become clear that every rose has its thorn. One such problem that has recently attracted attention is cultural appropriation.

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Although it is useful and sometimes necessary to remind readers of the ideas and evidence which support your points or arguments, you should try to **avoid overusing words and phrases** in your writing, especially where they occur in close proximity. Too much repetition runs the risk of your work sounding monotonous and unnecessarily repetitive. Instead, **employ the techniques of paraphrasing, lexical chaining and substitution** in order to add variation to your academic style (see Tutorial 9 on Writing Cohesive Texts).

#### Task 4

Read and consider the following sentences. Identify any repetitive content and suggest possible amendments to improve the texts.

1. Digitalisation is a global phenomenon that has prompted significant adoption of internet-connected digital technologies, with its most coveted by-product – the digital smartphone.
2. Ensuring that the children and youth in South Africa are properly equipped for school aids them in being better able to understand and grasp key concepts taught in school, and have a better fighting chance to enter university and better their lives (World Bank, 2018).

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3. Smartphone addiction is especially problematic for growing children as the lack of human interaction due to excessive usage is detrimental for their development. There are two ways smartphone addiction can cause a lack of human interaction: firstly, spending too much time on smartphones and secondly, the replacement of human interaction with online interaction.

4. However, even though smartphones can bring convenience, the high usage of smartphones could lead to undesirable consequences such as smartphone addiction. Priddy (2015) mentions that smartphones have become such an important component in our daily lives, that some are at a loss without their smartphones. Without their smartphones, some would experience restlessness and the inability to function well.

5. Several solutions to offset the high expense of school fees are possible. Firstly, higher education school fees can be partially subsidized by the government, so that students only need to pay a smaller proportion of the school fees. In addition, the government can consider giving out bursaries to students from lower-income families, so that they can pay further reduced school fees. For students who still could not afford the school fees even after all the subsidies and bursaries, bank loans could be made available to pay off the remaining of their school fees upon graduation, within a certain period of time.



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In this tutorial, we have considered some key features and techniques to ensure your writing has a formal academic style and register. As you write, review and revise your academic papers, you should take note of these issues and ensure your writing is clear, concise and precise.

In the next tutorial, we will focus on how to establish and maintain logical relations between the points or arguments in your writing and how to develop complex sentences, which are also characteristics of good academic writing.