

ACADEMIC STYLE

To some extent, your writing style will depend on the type of assignment, your department, and your tutor's preference. However, most writing at university follows certain conventions and rules, often referred to as *academic writing style*. In the following lesson, you will learn some of the most common rules.

Task 1: Analyzing examples

Study the following two paragraphs (on the same topic) written by students and then answer the questions below.

Paragraph 1:

Playing sports in high school has several benefits for students. Firstly, sporting activities promote good health by ensuring that students exercise on a regular basis, which may improve their ability to concentrate and perform well in academic classes. This positive habit of exercising regularly is something that they may continue in their adult life as well. In addition, playing team sports such as basketball or football can help students acquire teamwork skills, which are considered very important in many types of careers. In summary, the benefits that high school students can obtain through playing sports are improved health and the acquisition of teamwork skills.

Paragraph 2:

I think playing sports in high school brings a lot of good things for students. What are the good effects? Well, the first one is that if you play sports in school, you will probably start exercising every day. As we all know, this could help us have a longer life. Maybe we can even do better in our classes. This is because we can pay more attention, have more energy, and so on. In my opinion, another big benefit is that we can get teamwork skills from playing team sports like basketball and football. Teamwork and competition are important skills for life. And they're also a part of any job. As the old saying goes, two heads are better than one! So, students can get a lot from sports. Go out and exercise and play sports! Just do it!

Discuss with a partner:

1. Which paragraph's style is more formal? Which is informal?
2. Are the following features of formal or informal writing? Write 'F' or 'I' beside each one.
 - a. Using contractions, e.g. *wasn't, it's, they're....*
 - b. Longer words instead of shorter, more common ones, e.g. *significant number of* (not *a lot of*), *benefits* (not *good things*)
 - c. Asking rhetorical questions
 - d. Using common sayings or proverbs, e.g. *Practice makes perfect.*
 - e. Using personal pronouns, such as *I, my, you, your, we, our*
 - f. Using an imperative statement (a sentence that begins with a verb and sounds like a command), e.g. *Plant more trees. Eat healthier food.*
 - g. Using longer sentences and joining ideas together
 - h. Exclamations (a sentence that ends with '!')
 - i. Using specific, clear ideas and vocabulary (e.g. not using *and so on, etc, thing...*)
 - j. Making very generalized statements, such as *As everyone knows...*
 - k. Beginning sentences with *And, But, So, or Besides,*
3. Find examples of these features in the two paragraphs.

Academic Writing Style – Guidelines: Twelve Rules

Review the following guidelines as you practice writing in Year 1.

Rule	Informal writing	Formal / Academic Writing
<p>1. Don't use informal vocabulary; also avoid vague words (such as <i>thing</i>).</p> <p>Do use more academic and specific language.</p>	<p>a lot of good things So, like maybe thing</p>	<p>several benefits Therefore, / Thus, such as perhaps aspect / factor (<i>many possibilities here</i>)</p>
<p>2. Don't write directly about your opinion; you should avoid using <i>I think...</i>, <i>In my opinion</i></p> <p>Academic writing is usually objective and supported by facts or research.</p>	<p>I think In my opinion</p>	<p><i>Just delete these phrases. There's usually no need to introduce something as your opinion.</i></p> <p>** Sometimes the teacher will want you to use first person ('I'). It is best to check with your teacher what style is appropriate.</p>
<p>3. Don't use personal pronouns: <i>I, you, we</i></p>	<p>...this could help us... ...you will probably start...</p>	<p>This could help students... Students will probably start....</p>
<p>4. Don't use contractions <i>that's, don't, won't...</i></p>	<p>...they're a part of... It's beneficial to...</p>	<p>They are a part of... It is beneficial to...</p>
<p>5. Don't use rhetorical questions and exclamations</p>	<p>What are they? Just do it!</p>	<p><i>Just delete the question or change it to a statement:</i> There are three main benefits.</p> <p><i>Delete the exclamation or change it to a statement:</i> Students need to participate in more sports to attain these benefits.</p>
<p>6. Don't use <i>etc</i> or <i>and so on</i></p> <p>Do use specific vocabulary and ideas.</p>	<p>...have more energy, and so on.</p>	<p><i>Delete 'and so on' and add 'and' before the last element in the series:</i> ...students can pay more attention and have more energy.</p>
<p>7. Don't use <i>and, but, so, or besides</i> at the beginning of a sentence</p>	<p>And they're also a part... So, students can get a lot...</p>	<p>Use one of the following choices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect the sentence with the previous sentence • Use a more formal linking phrase, e.g. <i>In addition, However, Thus</i> • Sometimes it is best to delete the word, especially 'and'

8. Don't use imperative statements, for example for giving suggestions. This can sound like a list of advice or commands.	Plant more trees. Eat more fruits and vegetables.	<i>Use passive voice:</i> More trees <u>should be planted</u> . <i>Begin with the -ing form of the verb (noun form):</i> <u>Eating</u> more fruits and vegetables is beneficial to a person's health. <i>Other options:</i> One suggestion is to plant more trees. The government should aim to plant more trees.
9. Don't over-generalize or over-state the truth: be careful about suggesting that something is absolutely true or that everyone knows something	As we all know...	Sometimes you can use this phrase: <i>It is commonly accepted that...</i> Better – use evidence to support your point: <i>Research shows that...</i>
10. Don't use proverbs/sayings and clichés (overly-used words and phrases).	As the old saying goes, two heads are better than one! Other examples of proverbs: Every coin has two sides. Practice makes perfect. No pain, no gain. Examples of clichéd language: Don't use 'Nowadays' or 'With the development of...' at the beginning of an essay. Many students do this! Be more creative in your writing.	Delete the statement and instead support your ideas with reasons, details, and examples. Explain your ideas rather than relying on proverbs.
11. Don't use too many simple and short sentences. Do join related ideas together in more complex and longer sentences. However, avoid using too many very complicated sentences; clear communication is more important!	Teamwork and competition are important skills for life. And they're also a part of any job.	In addition, playing team sports such as basketball or football can help students acquire teamwork skills, which are considered very important in many types of careers.
12. Avoid using many simple two-word verbs (also called 'phrasal verbs') such as <i>look into</i> or <i>go up</i> . Do replace simple two-word verbs with academic one-word verbs, such as <i>investigate</i> or <i>increase</i> .	<i>look into</i> (a problem) the pollution levels are <i>going up</i> This essay will <i>talk about</i> ...	<i>investigate</i> (a problem) The pollution levels are <i>increasing</i> This essay will <i>discuss</i> ...

Task 2: Practice with the rules of academic style

Underline examples of informal language/style in the following sentences. Then discuss with your partner how to make them more formal and academic.

1. I think there are several types of intelligence.
2. Learning how to manage your time is important to performing well in university.
3. If you study hard and take advantage of every chance to learn, you'll have a bright future!
4. This essay will talk about three theories about intelligence. What is intelligence exactly? There are a lot of definitions.
5. We shouldn't spend all our time studying. It's important to have a balanced life.
6. My aim is to compare and contrast university education in China and Japan in this essay.
7. This means that students are expected to be questioning and to think critically. And they must learn to develop their own strategies, and so on.
8. Teaching has many good things about it, including long holidays and generally a creative work environment. However, every coin has two sides. Teachers have to work long hours and often have low pay.
9. As we all know, graduating from university is the goal of most students in China.
10. In UK high schools, the number of students per class is generally around twenty as the subjects become more specific. But, at university the numbers of students per class varies a lot.

Task 3: Informal and formal vocabulary

Fill in the table below with academic words to replace the informal words and phrases. Use the guidelines on the previous pages to help you and use a good dictionary. There are often many possible answers.

Informal	Formal	Informal	Formal
a. Kids learn languages more easily compared to adults.		b. A big problem	
c. Food prices are going down .		d. Students can develop several skills, like interpersonal and intrapersonal skills.	
e. Food prices are going up .		f. This essay will talk about ...	
g. Lots of / A lot of factors		h. Temperatures are a bit higher than last summer.	
i. Prices are increasing a lot		j. More and more students...	
k. Maybe the situation will change.		l. The world is changing fast .	
m. Many things can affect the economy.		n. Nowadays , the economy...	
o. English is hard .		p. Technology will continue to get better .	
q. University students can get many new skills.		r. The city made a plan to reduce the number of cars on the road.	
s. Besides , students can develop a greater understanding of their major.		t. What's more , ...	
u. In a word , studying abroad brings many benefits.		v. Last but not least , ...	

