

DEVELOPING ACADEMIC STYLE

When writing an academic text in English, it is easier if you divide the writing process into two stages:

- Stage 1 (first draft): Focus on the content, i.e. all the relevant information that needs to go in the text, but don't worry at this stage about the language (accuracy, style, organisation...)
- Stage 2 (second draft): Now work on the language, but systematically focus on aspects that you would like to develop in the text.

These slides provide some suggestions and exercises to develop the style and improve the formality of your text.

VERBS FOR ACADEMIC WRITING

- In the first draft of your text, you may find it more natural to use basic verbs such as *to get, have* and *find out*. In later drafts, these can be replaced by more specific verbs
- For example **to show** → Indicate; **suggest**; demonstrate; depict; exhibit; reveal; disclose; **display**; illustrate; exemplify; characterise; make evident; inform; comment on; affirm; assert; testify; interpret; define; **prove**; disprove... **any others?**
- Phrasal verbs (verb + preposition) tend to be more general than single verb alternatives. For example: to look at → examine, explore, search, inspect, consider, ...

EXERCISE (1): ACADEMIC VERBS

Choose a single verb from the list that reduces the informality of each sentence by replacing a phrasal verb. Note that you may need to add tense to the verb from the list.

assist

reduce

create

investigate

raise

establish

increase

determine

fluctuate

eliminate

1. The instruction manual for the video player can help out the user in case of problems.
2. The project was set up to improve access to medical care.
3. Research expenditures have gone up to nearly \$350 million.
4. Improved health care services should cut down the number of working days lost through illness.
5. Researchers have found out that this drug has serious side-effects.
6. Building a new power plant will not get rid of the energy problem completely.
7. Politicians have been looking into this problem for several years now.
8. This issue was brought up during the meeting.
9. The fashion designers have come up with a completely new look for next summer.
10. The emission levels from this factory have been going up and down.

(Modified from Swales & Feak, 1994).

EXERCISE (2)

Reduce the informality of the following sentences by substituting a single verb for the one in italics (Swales & Feak, 1994). This time, you are not provided with alternatives but need to find them yourself.

1. The implementation of computer-integrated manufacturing (CIM) has *brought about* some serious problems.
2. The process should be *done over* until the desired results are achieved.
3. Plans are being made to *come up with* a database containing detailed environmental information for the region.
4. Subtle changes in the earth's crust were *picked up* by these new devices.
5. Proposals to construct new nuclear reactors have *met with* great resistance from environmentalists.

FORMAL GRAMMAR AND STYLE

The following are recommendations for maintaining a formal academic writing style (modified from Swales and Feak, 1994):

a. Avoid contractions (*won't, can't, it's, don't*);
use the full form instead (*will not, cannot, it is, do not*).

b. Use the more appropriate formal negative forms:

not ... any → no

not ... much → little

not ... many → few

The study *did not* provide *any* significant results.

→ The study provided **no** significant results.

The hypothesis *did not* receive *much* support.

→ The hypothesis received **little** support.

The lake *did not* contain *many* fish species.

→ The lake contained **few** fish species.

Wherever possible, replace “not” in negative structures to improve strength:

The experiment did **not** succeed.

→ The experiment **failed**.

The measurements were **not** accurate.

→ The measurements were **inaccurate**.

Significant differences were **not** found.

→ **No** significant differences were found.

Other examples for you to try:

The two researchers **did not agree** →

The instructions were **not easy** to follow →

A link between the two murders **could not be** established →

Exercise (3) Prefixes: Put one of the following prefixes in front of each of the words in the list to make the negative form: **UN-**, **IN-**, **MIS-**, **IL-**, **IM-**, **DIS-**

<i>Prefix</i>	<i>Word</i>
	correct
	important
	legal
	plausible
	valid
	accurate
	stable
	divisible
	legitimate

<i>Prefix</i>	<i>Word</i>
	appropriate
	qualify
	reasonable
	acceptable
	aware
	consistent
	adequate
	natural
	significant

- Which prefix from the list is not used in the table?
- What words does it go with?
- Can you think of any other common prefixes from your field?

c. Limit the use of “run on” expressions, such as “and so forth” and “etc.”

Habitat fragmentation impedes the movement of birds, mammals, insects *etc.* →

Habitat fragmentation impedes the movement of birds, mammals, insects *and other animals.*

d. Limit the use of genitive forms:

The study's main outcomes were ...

→ The main outcomes of the study were...

In Smith's recent review

→ In the recent review by Smith

WORDINESS

One of the most efficient ways to improve your writing is to edit it for conciseness. If you can **let your original draft “cool down” a while**, you will find it easy to recognize unnecessary words and edit them out. Here are some common patterns of wordiness, with sensible things to do about them.

(Source: <http://www.utoronto.ca/writing/wordines.html>)

Doubling of Words (*choose one*):

mutual agreement (*agreement*)

consensus of opinion (*consensus*)

whether or not (*whether*)

future prospects (*prospects*)

reconsider again (*reconsider*)

inadvertent error (*error*)

Intensifiers, Qualifiers (*omit or give specific details*):

very

extremely

a considerable amount of

really

definitely

to a certain extent

Formulaic Phrases (*use a one-word form or omit*):

for the purpose of (*to*)

at this point in time (*now*)

with regard to (*about*)

as the case may be (---)

due to the fact that (*because*)

in the near future (*soon*)

in view of the fact that (*because*)

basically, . . . (---)

Catch-all Terms (*can sometimes omit*):

aspect

case

fact

factor

feature

field

kind

matter

nature

problem

quality

situation

sort

thing

type

Padded Verbs (*use a one-word form*):

to have an expectation, hope, wish, understanding, etc.

(to expect, hope, wish understand, etc.)

to make an arrangement, plan, decision, inquiry, acquisition, etc.

(to arrange, plan, decide, inquire, acquire, etc.)

Can you replace the padded verbs in these examples?

To carry out research →

To perform an analysis →

To reach a conclusion →

EXERCISE 4: IMPROVING FORMALITY

What changes could you make to the following sentences to improve their formality?

1. If you fail the exam you can't enter the university.
2. OK, what are the causes of poverty? Many possibilities exist.
3. You can clearly see the difference between these two processes.
4. A small bit of water is added to the mixture slowly.
5. These new tax laws have been enacted in six states: Illinois, Iowa, Ohio, etc.
6. The students didn't have much difficulty with the task.