

Academic Writing

General Expectations

Be Direct

- State your thesis clearly and early. Remove any word or sentence that does not directly contribute to your main point.
- Avoid over qualifying or hedging. Instead of saying, "I suppose the research indicates . . .," simply say, "The research indicates . . ."
- Use precise language instead of euphemisms and vague phrases. Instead of saying, "He's not the tallest person I've ever met," you can more directly say, "He's short," or even more specifically, "He's five feet tall."
- Transitions from topic to topic should be clear. The first sentence (topic sentence) of your paragraph should connect to the previous paragraph and then look forward to what's next.

Social vs. Academic Writing

Informal language between friends and on social media sites is generally not appropriate in academic contexts. Avoid slang, colloquialisms, idioms, and other informal communication in your writing.

Linear Organizational Structure

Introductions should include a thesis (main point), and subsequent paragraphs should begin with a topic sentence. Help readers follow your thread by giving them clear signals in the form of varied sentences and smooth transitions.

Supporting Evidence

Demonstrate a specific point with good reasons, examples, or illustrations. For a research paper, evidence should be supported by credible, outside sources such as from peer-reviewed journals. If you are writing a personal narrative, specific examples will be pulled from your own life to illustrate a point.

Use Neutral Language

Academic audiences prefer precise, neutral descriptions over emotional or "charge" language. Too much emotional language undermines your authority and readers may conclude that you are unable to present information in a balanced, credible way. For example:

- "King Henry VIII was a monster who ordered two of his six wives to be executed."

Though many would agree with the above statement, a more persuasive way of writing would be:

- "King Henry VIII ordered two of his six wives to be executed."

Avoid Extremism

Frequent use of absolutes (all, every, always) and superlatives (words/phrases ending in -est) will also undermine your authority. Statements with such extremes are hard to prove and will invite readers to interrogate the truth of your claims.

- Example: "This is the coldest day of the whole winter."
- Rephrase: "This is one of the coldest days of the winter."

Be Reasonable

Express your ideas with a medium level of certainty. Hedge to lessen the intensity of a phrase, or to protect a writer from making statements beyond their level of certainty. Hedge words include may, sometimes, and usually. For example:

- "Amelia Earhart crashed and drowned over the Pacific Ocean."

Because there isn't a way to verify this claim (no evidence of body or wreckage), it would be more appropriate to hedge here:

- "The consensus among scholars is Amelia Earhart died . . ."
- "Most believe Amelia Earhart . . ."
- "Amelia Earhart is thought to have died. . ."

Works Cited:

"Academic Writing Expectations." Resources - Types of Writing, University of New Hampshire - Connors Writing Center, www.unh.edu/writing/sites/default/files/media/images/expectaions_of_academic_writing_copy.pdf.