

THE LANGUAGE OF ACADEMIC WRITING (DO'S AND DON'TS)

Much more evidently than in Spanish, academic writing presents characteristics that make it, to a certain extent, a language *per se*. This is partly due to the fact of the evolution of English as a language: its Anglo-Saxon roots (e.g. phrasal verbs) belong to the everyday register, whereas its French/Latin influence (e.g. full verbs) is inherent to the academic register.

What this double “nature” of English means is that not only non-native, but also native speakers must learn a formal use of English as part of their higher education background. The result is neither British nor American English, but what is commonly known as International English, to which all educated non-native speakers must find a direct access through their own daily praxis. This section focuses on the main uses and lexicon of academic written language.

WARMING-UP

1. In a spontaneous way, discuss with your classmates which language/style instructions must be followed in academic writing and add them to the ones in the box:

- Avoid contractions (write *cannot* instead of *can't*).
- Avoid ellipsis, the use of *etc.*, and run-on sentences. Use precise punctuation.
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- Use short, clear sentences. Never lose track of key terms and their referents.

2. Watch these three **videos** and complete the table. If one item comes up more than once, tick it accordingly:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=INg_0ygzaGY

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GbWE3iuN6QQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mZQgd2sPxpK>

3. Which items did you already know and use? Which ones are new? Do you know of any others that have not been mentioned?

THEREFORE, HOW CAN I IMPROVE MY ACADEMIC REGISTER?

The good news is that you do not have to invent anything. You can, and *must* use fixed expressions like the ones offered here or in other academic phrase-banks:

<http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/>

As for lexicon, you can enhance your knowledge through the lists available here:

<https://www.wgtn.ac.nz/lals/resources/academicwordlist>

https://www.examenglish.com/vocabulary/academic_wordlist.html

The **Academic Word List (AWL)** is a corpus of terms that are almost exclusively used in academic writing. Using the terms from this list will help you raise your academic register and sound more professional.

Lists of linkers and connectors, which will be explained in the next section, must also be always available to the researcher.

It is also advisable to use **synonyms** in order to introduce variation (*English Thesaurus Wordreference*), as well as to check the way full expressions have been used previously in similar contexts (*Linguee*).

NOW, TRY YOUR HAND AT THE FOLLOWING EXERCISES:

1. Which words or expressions are preferred in each case for academic style?

No.	Option a	Option b
1	The results confirm that ...	The results suggest that...
2	From my point of view, ...	According to the scientific community, ...
3	A considerable amount of, a wide range of...	A lot of, lots of
4	Issues, aspects	Problems, things
5	Ineffective, unexpected	Not effective, not expected
6	I currently use 5G in...	5G is currently used in...
7	The application looks into / points at...	The application examines / indicates...

No.	Option a	Option b
1	Currently, at present	Actually, in the actual context
2	The results are accurate. However,...	The results are accurate, but...
3	Difficulties	Drawbacks
4	Discover, continue	Find out, go on
5	Get, make	Obtain, develop
6	In table 3 I show...	Table 3 shows...
7	For demonstrating...	To demonstrate...

2. Here are some lists, taken from the **AWL** which you may find useful. They highlight the importance of introducing **variation** in academic language. You can add new terms as you read essays and other research items for your own research:

Academic writing synonyms: nouns	Academic writing synonyms: verbs
Area/field, authority/source Behavior/conduct, beliefs/ethics, benefit/advantage Category/type, component/part, concept/idea, controversy/argument Drawback/disadvantage Expansion/increase Framework/structure Goal/target Hypothesis/theory Interpretation/explanation, issue/topic Method/system Option/possibility, output/production Quotation/citation Results/findings Statistics/figures, study/research Trend/tendency	Alter/change, achieve/reach, assist/help, attach/join Challenge/question, claim/suggest, clarify/explain, concentrate on/focus on, confine/limit Develop/evolve Eliminate/remove, evaluate/examine Found/establish Maintain/insist Predict/forecast, prohibit/ban Quote/cite Reduce/decrease, respond/reply, retain/keep Show/demonstrate, strengthen/reinforce

List of academic adjectives with their opposites:

Absolute / relative	Precise / vague or approximately
Abstract / concrete	Rational / irrational
Accurate / in accurate	Reliable / unreliable
Ambiguous / un ambiguous	Relevant / irrelevant
Analytic / Synthetic	Specific / non -specific
Effective / ineffective	Subjective / objective
Exclusive / inclusive	Theoretical / practical or empirical
Logical / illogical	

Furthermore, adjectives and verbs sound even more accurate when they are modified by academic adverbs: *slightly, considerably, gradually, rarely, broadly, particularly, substantially, basically, currently, recently, increasingly, alternately, similarly, eventually, allegedly...*

3. Use the terms from the table to provide synonyms for the underlined nouns and verbs, and opposites for the adjectives; after that, try to introduce a few adverbs:

Today they are presenting the relative results of the study. These show a concrete trend that reinforces the specific hypothesis. In fact, the figures suggest a theoretical increase in the main items, although this may lead to further disadvantages. In the mid-term future, the logical goal should be to eliminate, or at least reduce the subjective factors.

Adapted from: Stephen Bailey, *The Essentials of Academic Writing for International Students*, Routledge, 2015.

FURTHER REFLECTION:

From your own academic text, choose a short paragraph, different from the one you used in the previous section (from any part, except the abstract), and complete the following tasks:

1. Next to the paragraph, write all the concepts used in this section that, in your opinion, apply to it (e.g., use of full verbs instead of phrasal verbs, cautious style...).

2. Look for synonyms for the academic nouns and verbs used. Try to add adverbs that modify verbs or adjectives (e.g., instead of *the graph shows an evident tendency to...* / *the graph shows an **increasingly** evident tendency to...*).
3. Finally, with the help of the academic phrase-bank (<http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/>), look for alternatives to specific language functions.