

## Characteristics of Academic Style in Writing

All writing can be analyzed for its style by considering various features. Academic and colloquial styles run on a continuum which can vary along the following dimensions:

### **structure/organization**

All writing is organized in some way. Even a personal letter contains an introduction, body, and conclusion. Discourse features commonly found in academic writing include simple or extended definitions, problem-solution organization, the literature review, clear and early presentation of the thesis and organization of the text, and clear topic headings.

### **sentence structure**

Academic writing tends to use more complex sentence structures, less common sentence structures, such as subject-auxiliary inversion, and more passive voice. Questions are more typically used in less formal, more colloquial texts as are imperatives (commands).

### **support for argument**

Academic writing tends to use the literature review, scholarly opinion, hard data (including statistics), history, and analysis of this data, and theory to support its argument. It might use specific cases and examples to illustrate points. It usually doesn't use personal anecdotes.

The literature review, scholarly opinion, and hard data mean the academic writer must give in-text citations for these. Colloquial and news texts might refer to such sources, but need not give a citation.

### **language**

vocabulary:

Use of Latin words and phrases, Latin-based words, low frequency but precise vocabulary, professional/specialist terms. Academic written language uses fewer phrasal verbs and idioms but does not eschew them altogether.

linking phrases:

Use of formal phrases, such as *hence*, *nevertheless*, *moreover* rather than *so*, *but*, *and*.

stance or tone:

Academic writing strives for a tone of neutrality and dispassion. Hence it avoids words loaded with strong positive or negative connotations, personal pronouns (see below), and passive voice (see above).

pronouns:

In general academic writers try to avoid referring directly to themselves or to their audience so we find fewer instances of first and second person pronouns. Other scholars and researchers are generally referred to by last name only, unless to do so would cause confusion with another source also used in the text.