



ACADEMIC AND OFFICIAL WRITINGS DOS AND DON'TS

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Answers

12.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we shall,

- focus on the concept of Academic and Official writing skills
- discuss the concept of writing skill, and how it differ from Academic and Official writing skills
- learn various forms of academic and official writing skills

On completing the unit, you will be able to,

- talk about concept of Academic and Official writing skills
- differentiate general writing skill, and Academic and Official writing skills
- identify various aspects of Academic and official writing skills

12.1 INTRODUCTION

Language is one of the most important inventions of human-beings. Rather it can said that it is not only a powerful tool but also a creative tool for communication. Language has major four skills namely Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. Out of these language skills the first two are Primary language skills and the next two are Secondary language skills. Further, two can be divided into Receptive skills and two in Productive skills. It would be very unfair to give more importance to any one language skill rather all the equally important to acquire or learn for a successful life or career in any discipline.

Writing is definitely one of the most important language skills. Knowing all the aspects, it is also important to note that though speaking and writing skills are productive, both are different in form and nature. Unlike Speaking, Writing is tangible and can be documented. Since, people are convinced that language is power, writing skill has occupied an important place among all the language learning aspirants. It is very interesting to observe that no individual write-up or writer is similar or common. All differ from each other. *Hence it becomes very important to learn how they are different and at what levels.* Answer to this statement is very important to get as it will strengthen our understanding of writing skill in general and Academic writing skill.

12.2 UNDERSTANDING ACADEMIC WRITING AND OFFICIAL WRITING

In order to understand the basics of academic writing and official writing, it becomes important to know that both are more or less complex and complicated kinds of writings. The previous one is linked with a specific study disciplines and therefore invariably contains jargons interwoven with some complex ideas to talk about specialized knowledge. However, the official writing does contain jargons, but comparatively less but is much more formal in tone in comparison to the Academic writing.

There are certain points to keep in mind about both the types of writing; Academic writing and Official writing. They are as listed below.

- Both have different objectives and purpose
- The audiences are different
- Style of writing is different, including forms of writing
- Both have different impacts on the audience
- Both are formal kinds of writing

12.3 WHAT IS FORMAL AND INFORMAL STYLE OF WRITING?

Talking about Academic writing and official writing which are to large extent much formal in tone, it becomes necessary to differentiate Formal and Informal writing style.

They serve different purposes and vary in tone, choice of words and syntactical pattern. Formal language is less personal and written for professional or academic purposes. In Formal writing use of colloquialisms, contractions or first person pronouns such as 'I' or 'We' is avoided. Formal writing is objective and no personal opinions are projected or put forth. Björk, Knight, & Wikborg (1992) have suggested some DOs and DON'ts for Formal and Informal writings.

Compulsory English	What not to do?s	What to do?
	Avoid the use of slang, jargon, colloquialisms, or sexist language.	Use formal language
	Avoid the use of contracted verb forms such as <i>they're, isn't, can't</i> .	Use the full verb form instead, e.g. <i>they are, is not, cannot</i>
	Avoid the use of common vocabulary, such as <i>have got, a lot, nice, the other thing</i> .	Make more formal vocabulary choices, e.g. <i>have found, a great deal, attractive/ advantageous, the other issue/problem/notion/idea/topic etc..</i>
	Avoid the use of conversational opening phrases, such as <i>Well, you see, Yes..., Let's move on</i> .	Use appropriate connectors and introductory phrases.
	Avoid writing <i>I think</i> - especially not at the beginning of a sentence, i.e. do not write, for example, <i>I think Nunan (2008) believes that global warming will...</i>	Rather you can write e.g. <i>Nunan (2008) believes that global warming will...</i>
	Avoid the use of personal pronouns e.g. <i>I, you, we</i> (unless specifically required), i.e. do not write <i>We think that you should be able to compete</i> .	Be non-personal, e.g. <i>It should be possible for everyone to compete</i> .
	Avoid the use of sweeping generalisations	State your idea clearly and concisely in your own words in topic sentences.
	Avoid the use of bullet points or lists, unless it is in a report.	Use complete sentences and link these into logical paragraphs to become coherent.
	Avoid making assumptions or giving your opinion (unless specifically asked).	Be objective.
	Do not plagiarize and maintain 'Academic Integrity'.	Provide references and acknowledge others work whenever you say something that is not your own.
	Never take spelling errors for granted rather spot all spelling mistakes, since for example, your spell check will not pick up on <i>whether vsweather</i> .	Must check spelling, grammar and punctuation etcetera. Always use dictionary for Proofread. You can also request somebody to proofread your text for you.
	Do not write direct questions in the continue text, for instance <i>Can carbon emissions be reduced?</i>	Try to convert questions into statements, like, <i>The possibility of carbon emissions being reduced is questionable</i> .

Some examples to strengthen our understanding about Formal and Informal writing are as given below:

LANGUAGE FEATURES	INFORMAL	FORMAL
Syntax	In 2008, the road was built. This was good politically. Two countries united	The road was completed in 2008, which resulted in a positive political move that united two countries.
Contractions	It's not only my responsibility to look after the family.	It is not only my responsibility to look after the family.
Objectivity	I think/believe that the issue of global warming will be the primary concern at the meeting.	There is little doubt/It is clear that the issue of global warming will be the primary concern at the meeting.
Colloquialisms	India's prime minister NarendraModi, totally flipped out when he read the latest report from the press.	The Prime Minister of India, NarendraModi, expressed his concern when he viewed the most recent report from the press.
Vocabulary choice	The research assistant checked out the incident and got back to him the next day.	The research assistant investigated the incident and reported to him the following day.
Specific vocabulary	Germs grow well in dirty and warm temperatures.	Bacteria thrive in unhygienic and warm conditions

12.4 GUIDELINES FOR ACADEMIC WRITING AND OFFICIAL WRITING

Academic writing includes texts namely research papers, research proposals, writing for academics and literature reviews whereas official writing includes letter, emails, memos and reports. Some guidelines for both the types of writings are as following;

- It is important to go for Formatting and take care of grammar rules in writing
- Names are important and therefore spell them properly. Always address people with last names
- References are important and will give your writing authenticity
- Avoid direct quotes rather paraphrase them and cite them with format

12.5 COMMON PROBLEMS AND TO OVERCOME THEM

Accuracy of grammar is extremely important in both Academic and Official writings. Therefore, it becomes very essential to discuss some of the most common problems and errors made in writings and suggestions to overcome them.

1. The use of Quantifiers:

Quantifiers are those words and expressions which are used to denote the

Compulsory English

quantity of something, and are typically indicated by a noun. In terms of word classes, quantifiers are often regarded as pronouns. It is important to know that cardinal numbers e.g. *seven, twelve* are not quantifiers, but numerals.

Ex. Many (Countable)

(1) There were **many people** at the stadium.

(2) He gave them **many presents**.

Much (Uncountable)

(3) I am **much** worried about my daughter.

2. Capitalisation :

Capitalisation is the most basic rule of writing and still most of the time, one of the most ignored rules which simply focuses on *use a capital letter to begin every sentence*. The rules of Capitalisation also refers to the following items;

Items for Capitalisation	Examples
Names and titles	Ms Anna Sacha, Sir Henry Thomas, Auntie Jill and Uncle Jack, Alexander the Great, the Elizabethan Age, Hindu civilization, Buddhist philosophy ;
Geographical names	Paris, France, French cuisine, Bombay, India, Indian culture, Asia, Asian studies, the United States, etc.,
Words in titles of books, etc.	Books, Magazines, Articles, Short Stories, Compositions, Plays, Movies, Television Shows, Etc,
Religious names, etc.	Christian/Christendom/Christianity Jew/Jewish/Judaism Muslim/Islamic/Islamitic/Islam Hindu/Hinduism
Days, months, etc.	January, February, etc. Sunday, Monday, etc. New Year's Day Thanksgiving Diwali the Civil War
Astronomical names	Jupiter Venus Gemini Mars Saturn Orion

3. Sentence fragment

Sentence fragment is a sentence which cannot stand on its own and has no complete meaning. It is always advisable to go for drafting simple or compound sentences at the initial stage and avoid writing long and complex sentences.

The examples given show how a fragmentation of a sentence can affect the writing, and how to improve it;

- (1) Many single parents leave their babies in day nurseries for the whole day. Because they cannot afford to work part-time.

The problem in the sentence: The second sentence is a dependent clause, and as per the rules dependent clauses cannot stand on their own. They have to be a part of some larger structure, such as a main clause.

The solutions:

- (2) Many single parents leave their babies in day nurseries for the whole day, because they cannot afford to work part-time.
- (3) Many single parents leave their babies in day nurseries for the whole day. The reason is that they cannot afford to work part-time.

4. Subject-Verb agreement:

With a view to sound academic in writing, it is important to take care of concordance which is also known as 'Subject-verb agreement'. Majority of the students or academicians struggle with this point. By following this point, one can be meaningful in his or her writing and effectively convey the message and reach to the receiver or audience. Hence, it becomes very important to diagnose the problem and start working on it as soon as possible.

5. Coherence:

We use the term **coherence** for having or bringing in logical links between the words, sentences, and paragraphs of the text. The term is derived from the Latin verb *co-haerere*, which simply means 'to stick together'. This term coherence can also be described as it must have to do with good and smooth text flow. The writer is always expected to maximise the understanding of a text by making it as clear and logical as possible.

The quality of being Coherent can be achieved by many ways. According to Oshima& Hogue (2006), one can be Coherent by the following four rules:

- Repeating key nouns
- Using consistent pronouns
- Using transition signals to link ideas
- Arranging your ideas in logical order

Hence, it can be said that in the absence of all the above reasons, any academic text will lose its comprehensibility and quality of persuasion.

12.6 PUNCTUATION

Punctuations are extremely important for several reasons. With the help of correct and appropriate punctuations all the time will make the texts easy to understand for your readers and arrive at a common understanding. Therefore, it is important to learn the functions of punctuation.

Not following the rules will invariably affect the texts as badly as the errors of spelling or the use of inappropriate vocabulary affects the text. (i.e. slang words in academic writing). Some noted punctuations are commas, semicolons, colons, apostrophes, hyphens, dashes, full stops (periods), question marks, exclamation marks and various brackets.

12.7 IMPORTANCE OF CITATION

The concept of citation is extremely important as it shows the main source that you have referred to. The citation is done within the main text which has been used in the form of words, ideas, figures, images, etc. from another resources.

Citations consist of a few notable and necessary elements which help the readers to track the source from where the ideas have been adopted and adapted. These elements are as follow:

- author name(s)
- titles of books, articles, and journals
- date of publication
- page numbers
- volume and issue numbers (for articles)

There are certain elements which are always suggested to be cited like;

- Facts, figures, ideas, or other information that is not common knowledge
- Ideas, words, theories, or exact language that another person used in other publications
- Publications that must be cited include: books, book chapters, articles, web pages, theses, etc.
- Another person's exact words should be quoted and cited to show proper credit

Citations must be done as they are necessary for many reasons, namely;

- To convenience your reader that you have done proper and systematic research and the information is authentic
- To give credit to all the scholar, researchers for their ideas and contribution
- To get rid of the academic menace or crime called plagiarism by quoting words and ideas used of other scholars

Plagiarism is when you borrow another's ideas or words and care not to acknowledge them as an individual's idea is one's own intellectual property. It is believed that one's idea belongs to an individual and cannot be used without permission. Plagiarism is a very serious offense.

Plagiarism can be avoided by citing your sources - both within the text and in a bibliography of provided at the end of your paper.

12.8 DIFFERENT STYLES OF CITATIONS

There are several styles of citations which have been listed below;

1. MLA: Modern Language Association [Humanities]
e.g. Doe, John: "Causes of the Civil War." Smith.
2. APA: American Psychological Association [Social Sciences]
e.g. Doe, J. (1999). Causes of the Civil War. Ohio: Smith Books.

3. CMS: Chicago Manual of Style [various subjects]
e.g. Doe, John. 1999. *Causes of the Civil War*. Columbus, Ohio: Smith Books.
4. ACS: American Chemical Society
e.g. Anastas, P. T.; Warner, J. C. *Green Chemistry: Theory and Practice*; Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1998.
5. CSE: Council of Science Editors
e.g. John D. Doe. *Causes of the Civil War*. Columbus (OH): Smith Press: 1999.
6. IEEE: Institute of Electronics & Electrical Engineers
e.g. [1] B. Klaus and P. Horn, *Robot Vision*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986.
7. NLM: National Library of Medicine or AMA: American Medical Association

e.g. Doe JD. *Causes of the Civil War*. Columbus, OH: Smith Books; 1999.

Over and above all the discussed citation styles, there will be many other styles of citation and that even to cite different sources there are different citation styles within one pattern of citation.

12.9 LET US SUM UP

As part of this unit, you have learnt the basic and general idea of the difference between Formal and informal writing in general and Academic writing or Official writing in particular. Along with this, you also came across some tips or guidelines to follow in Academic and Official writing to become an efficient in writing skills and aspects to take into consideration to avoid the academic menace called Plagiarism.

12.10 KEY WORDS

Concept - An abstract idea

Jargons - Special words or expressions used by a profession or group that are difficult for others to understand

Interweave - Weave or become woven together.

Vary - Differ in size, amount, degree, or nature from something else of the same general class

Colloquialism - A word or phrase that is not formal or literary and is used in ordinary or familiar conversation

Integrity - The quality of being honest and having strong moral principles

Plagiarize - The practice of taking someone else's work or ideas and passing them off as one's own

Cite - Refer to (a passage, book, or author) as evidence for or justification of an argument or statement, especially in a scholarly work

Authenticity - Of undisputed origin and not a copy; genuine

Paraphrase - Express the meaning of (something written or spoken) using different words, especially to achieve greater clarity

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Persuasion - The action or process of persuading someone or of being persuaded to do or believe something

12.11 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What are the similarities between Academic writing and Official writing?
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2. What is formal and informal writing?
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3. Which category do academic writing and official writing belong to?
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4. Why do you think Colloquialisms in academic or official writing should be avoided?
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5. Share a few formats of academic writing and official writing.
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6. What are a few common problems in academic and official writing?

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7. How errors in sentence formation can be avoided?

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8. What are the four rules to be Coherent in writing?

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9. Discuss the concept of Citation.

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10. What do you understand by the term plagiarism?

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STATE WHETHER THE STATEMENTS ARE TRUE OR FALSE

1. Both academic writing and official writing formats are same.
2. Productive language skills include Listening and Reading.
3. Jargons are only found in special kinds of writing.
4. To avoid Plagiarism one must cite the refered work.
5. One of the qualities of the feature ‘**coherence**’ is to avoid repetition of key words.
6. Citation is important for convenience your reader that you have done proper and systematic research.
7. Bibliography is always found at the end of the chapter or book.
8. Citation style APA is used by Humanities and Social sciences’ subjects.
9. You have to be subjective rather then objective in your formal type of writings.
10. Slangs and colloquialisms are two integral qualities of official or informal writing.

12.12 BOOKS SUGGESTED

Bailey, Stephen. *Academic writing: A handbook for international students*. Routledge, 2014.

Bailey, Stephen. *Academic writing: A practical guide for students*. Psychology Press, 2003.

Bowker, Natilene. “Academic writing: A guide to tertiary level writing.” (2007).

Claire, Thomas R. “Kate L. Turabian: A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers.” (2018): 1-3.

Irvin, L. Lennie. “What Is “Academic” Writing?.” *writingspaces1* (2010): 3.

Raimes, Ann. *Techniques in teaching writing*. Oxford University Press, 200 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10016 (ISBN-0-19-434131-3, \$5.95)., 1983.

ANSWERS : (1-F, 2-F, 3-T, 4-T, 5-F, 6-T, 7-T, 8-F, 9-F, 10-F)