

Scientific Writing Style

1. Create an objective, confident voice

- Use the third person (this means not using 'I', 'you' or 'we')
 - Rather than: "In my essay I will discuss the importance of..." or "My research shows that..."
 - You could try: "This essay discusses the importance of ..." or "This research shows that ..." or "It could be said that ..."
- Consider your use of tenses
 - The present tense: Smith's argument illustrates that ...
 - The past tense: The interviews were conducted with a group of parents in the Leicestershire area.

2. Use appropriate language for your audience and purpose

Academic writing need not be complicated, but it does need to have an element of formality

- Avoid contractions:
 - Rather than; 'don't', 'can't', 'it's', 'should've'
 - You could try: 'do not', 'cannot', 'it is', 'should have'
- Use the full forms of words:
 - Rather than: 'TV', 'memo', or 'quote'
 - You could try: 'television', 'memorandum' or 'quotation'
- Avoid using informal words:
 - Rather than: Smith's bit of research is ok.
 - You could try: Smith's research is significant because ...
 - Rather than using words such as: 'get', 'got' or 'a lot'
 - You could try: 'obtain', 'obtained' or 'many'

3. Be clear and concise

- Keep words simple:
 - Rather than: "The denotation was obfuscated by the orator."
 - You could try: "The meaning was hidden by the speaker."
- Avoid verbosity:
 - Do not use two words when one will suffice and do not use a complex word when you could use a simpler one.
- Aim for the right word for the right occasion:
 - Example 1: Crusade against crime
 - Example 2: Campaign against crime

- Make every word count:
 - Rather than: “The theorist called Sigmund Freud wrote a significant piece of work in 1914 called ‘On Narcissism’ which offers valuable insights into ... “
 - You could try: “Freud (1914) offers valuable insights into ...”
- Avoid any vague words or phrases:
 - Ensure that your reader knows who or what you are referring to when you use words such as: 'it', 'them', 'they'.
 - Words such as 'people' and 'ideas' have the potential to be vague. So, avoid saying: 'according to many people'. Ensure that you explain which people or which ideas.
 - When talking about events that have happened in the past, avoid phrases such as: 'in the past' or 'in recent times'. You need to be specific.
- Avoid using clichéd phrases:
 - A cliché is a phrase or expression that is overused to such an extent that it loses its value.
 - For example, 'as bright as a button' or 'clear as mud'.

4. Use language sensitively

- Avoid expressing strong opinions too directly. Academic writing is concerned with presenting your discussion in an objective way, so there is no need to assert your opinions too strongly
 - Rather than: “Smith has an extremely important point to make because ...”
 - You could try: “Smith's view is significant because ...”
 - So avoid words like: 'very', 'really', 'quite' and 'extremely'.

- Lean towards caution

We need to be aware that our views are contributing to a much wider debate surrounding your given topic. Your use of language must show that we you making suggestions which contribute to this wider discussion:

- Rather than: 'This view is correct because ...'
 - You could try: 'It could be said that ...', 'It appears that ...', 'It seems that ...'
- Avoid using taboo language

In academic writing it is important not to offend your reader – you want her/him to trust your judgment and authority. Using swear words or making offensive comments will upset the balance of your writing and undermine your point of view.
 - Do not stereotype, generalise or make assumptions

This especially applies to individuals or groups on the basis of their gender, race nationality, religion, physical and mental capacity, age, sexuality, marital status, or political beliefs.
 - Your use of language should always remain neutral
 - Rather than: fireman or policeman Try using: fire fighter or police officer
 - Rather than: mankind
 - Try using: humankind

Adapted from: De Montfort University Leicester, 2015. How to write in an academic style. [ONLINE] Available at:

<http://www.library.dmu.ac.uk/Support/Heat/index.php?page=488>

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