

## Academic Language and Diction

Academic English, like any writing, has its own conventions or 'style'. It is a formal, written style, which means that it has aspects that make it different from 'spoken' academic English, and at the same time, it is quite different from ordinary writing which you might use in letters, emails, or stories. Consider some of the most essential rules:

Rules	Wrong Example	Correction
1. Use <b>formal vocabulary</b> and avoid idiomatic vocabulary	<p><del>X Many dads these days...</del></p> <p><del>X Major urban centers, like London and Beijing...</del></p> <p><del>X There are lots of people who believe...</del></p>	<p>✓ Many fathers currently</p> <p>✓ Major urban centers, such as London and Beijing...</p> <p>✓ There are a significant number of individuals who believe...</p>
2. Avoid using phrasal verbs.	<p><del>X go up, go down, talk about, get better, get worse, go on, bring up</del></p>	<p>✓ increase, decrease, discuss, improve, deteriorate, continue, raise</p>
3. Avoid using contractions	<p><del>X don't, can't, won't, didn't</del></p>	<p>✓ do not, cannot, will not, did not</p>
4. Use <i>formal grammar structures</i> , such as nominalization (noun phrases) and clauses, rather than too many simple sentences	<p><del>X The environment is increasingly polluted. This is a global concern.</del></p> <p><del>X Notetaking is an important skill for EAP students. It is difficult to master.</del></p>	<p>✓ The increasing pollution of the environment is a global concern.</p> <p>✓ Notetaking, which is an important skill for EAP students, is difficult to master.</p>
5. Avoid rhetorical questions.	<p><del>X What were the reasons for the decline?</del></p>	<p>✓ There were four main reasons for the decline.</p>
6. Use <i>impersonal language</i> , such as 'There is...', 'It is...', or passive voice. Avoid personal pronouns (I, we, you, etc.) and adverbs which show your feeling (e.g., luckily, remarkably, amazingly).	<p><del>X I can think of three main problems.</del></p> <p><del>X Amazingly there were very few errors in the experiment.</del></p> <p><del>X In the experiment, I heated the water...</del></p>	<p>✓ There are three main problems.</p> <p>✓ There were very few errors in the experiment.</p> <p>✓ In the experiment, the water was heated...</p>

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<p>7. Be as <i>precise as possible</i>. Use exact figures or values wherever possible, rather than 'about' or 'several'. Use words such as 'factor', 'issue', 'topic', 'aspect' instead of vague words such as 'thing'</p>	<p><del>X There are several reasons for it.</del>  <del>X The turning point was about 30 years ago.</del>  <del>X There were three things which led to this result.</del></p>	<p>✓ There are three main reasons for the increase in marijuana use          ✓ The turning point was in the late 1980s.          ✓ There were three factors which led to this result.</p>
<p>8. Cite your sources. Avoid making vague claims or overgeneralize.</p>	<p><del>X Everybody knows that most people are unaware of the problem.</del>  <del>X Most people are unaware of the problem.</del></p>	<p>✓ Russell (2001) states that over 50% of the population are unaware of the problem.</p>
<p>9. Use <i>cautious language</i> (hedging) such as 'possibly', 'probably', 'may', 'might', 'appears to', and 'seems to' to qualify statements. Avoid absolute statements and words such as 'always'.</p>	<p><del>X Education reduces crime</del>  <del>X This is caused by the effects of global warming.</del>  <del>X Chinese students always make mistakes with tenses.</del></p>	<p>✓ It appears that education reduces crime.          ✓ This is possibly caused by the effects of global warming.          ✓ Chinese students often make mistakes with tenses.</p>
<p>10. Use appropriate <b>transitional signals</b> to <i>link</i> between ideas and to introduce new sections of an essay. Avoid numbering or bullet points (except in certain reports) and basic transitions to begin sentences (e.g. 'And', 'But', 'So'). Also be careful not to use too many transitions (<i>not</i> at the beginning of every sentence!).</p>	<p><del>X 2. Inflation.</del>  <del>X And inflation is an important factor.</del></p>	<p>✓ In regard to the question of inflation.          ✓ In addition, inflation is an important factor.</p>

[Words from the academic wordlist \(AWL\).](#)

[Transition signals](#)