

# Using Academic Language: Avoiding Informality



- ✓ For many, daily writing occurs in casual settings: notes, emails, texts, blogs, and Facebook posts. In these spontaneous writing settings, people use informal language, and it is perfectly acceptable to “write as they speak”. However, when someone enters an academic or workplace setting, writing expectations change, and the writing takes on a more formal tone as the audience changes.
- ✓ College-level and professional writing require clarity in both style and grammar, so complex ideas and content can be easily understood.
- ✓ Academic or professional writing is refined and polished, employing Standard American English (SAE) and complete sentences.
- ✓ Academic language uses more formal vocabulary and avoids slang words or phrases and text abbreviations.
- ✓ At times, informal language may be used for effect, and doing so with intention is acceptable.

## Tips to Using Academic Language

- 1) **Aim for clarity:** Clear language leads to clear ideas. Clarity is important in academic and professional writing because the reader needs to understand the content. Writing without clarity can cause information to become confusing and difficult to follow because of word choice and grammatical structure.

### Example:

**Unclear language:** The tour guide took us **in any which way** where he wanted to go.

**Clarified language:** The tour guide took us **anywhere** he wanted to go.

- 2) **Pay attention to the intended audience:** Choosing language is easier if writers think about the words in terms of the audience. Select terms appropriate for the purpose of the writing, and keep terms and words relevant and familiar to the reader(s).

### Example:

**Without attention to audience (incoming college students):** The key to a successful first year in college is to maintain an **alacritous** attitude in classes.

**Attention to audience:** The key to a successful first year in college is to maintain an **enthusiastic** attitude in classes.

- 3) **Avoid colloquial language:** Colloquial language is the informal, everyday conversational language used in daily interactions. Generally, colloquialisms are geographically-based local dialects; groups of people in specific areas are familiar with the words or phrases, while others may not have heard of them previously. Therefore, colloquial diction becomes an issue because it is not inclusive of all audiences.

**Example:**

**Colloquial language:** When the leader of the revolt unexpectedly **kicked the bucket**, the rebels began to wonder who would be taking his position.

**Without colloquialism:** When the leader of the revolt unexpectedly **died**, the rebels began to wonder who would be taking his position.

- 4) **Eliminate Web and text language:** Technology has influenced the use of abbreviations and text terms in writing; however, these short forms should be removed from academic and professional writing. Web and text language is informal and inappropriate in formal writing. In addition, this language does not necessarily span across all groups and generations, causing even more confusion.

**Example:**

**Web/text language:** Please **LMK** when the job applicant arrives.

**Non-web/text language:** Please **let me know** when the job applicant arrives.

- 5) **Avoid slang:** Slang consists of non-standard words in language, generally used to show inclusion in certain social groups. It is common in speech and informal settings but should be removed from academic and professional writing. Often, individuals use slang regularly when they speak; however, in the academic setting, they should recognize that these casual patterns are unacceptable and eliminate them from formal writing. That is why proofreading is important.

**Example:**

**Slang:** Future **cops** must endure rigorous training before graduating from the academy.

**Non-slang:** Future **police officers** must endure rigorous training before graduating from the academy.