

ACADEMIC WRITING ESSENTIALS

Academic writing in university is a very different process to that practiced in secondary school and can seem daunting until you become more familiar with it. **The quality of your assignment will rely heavily on the way you phrase your argument. In other words, how you say it is as important as what you say.**

Students often think that they have to use an overly sophisticated vocabulary in order to write in an academic tone, and this can make the prospect of writing an assignment even more daunting. However, this is not necessarily the case, and **the vocabulary you already have can generally be used in a more formal and academic manner.**

This lesson will cover some of the basic skills in assignment writing that you will need to refine your writing skills, as you progress on your journey throughout UCC and beyond.

TOP TIP

The most important thing to remember here is that it is very much a learned skill, and one which gets much easier with practice and patience - so there's no need to panic!

What do we mean by Academic Writing?

So, exactly what is meant by academic writing? **It refers to a particular style and format that your assignments need to follow in order for them to meet university standards.**

Language

The language used in academic writing is:

- **Formal**
- **Clear, precise, concise**
- **Cautious**
- **Factual**
- **Impersonal, objective**

Formal

Generally, the language used in academic assignments is formal, which means that the casual or conversational terms and phrases, we use in everyday speech, are not usually acceptable. *For example, rather than use words such as 'lots' or 'things', you might use 'numerous' and 'issues'.*

Clear and Concise

Avoid complex and long-winded sentences - make it as easy as possible for the reader to follow your rationale by using clear language and terminology. Use specific examples to illustrate and support the points you make and avoid vague terms such as, 'some critics', 'people' or 'ideas'.

Cautious

Avoid using absolutes in academic writing. Phrases such as 'always', 'definite(ly)', 'without fail', 'must', etc.; do not allow enough room for others to disagree with or even question your argument. Remember, that the purpose of academic writing is to generate debate and further research, so leave others room to consider your findings and interpret them, in their own way.

Evidential

Prove your argument throughout your assignment. Research completed by other academics will provide much of the evidence you will need to support various ideas and arguments. When you do use ideas or information which others have already researched, you **need to quote and cite these properly**, throughout your assignment. This not only allows others to trace the sources you have used to support your argument, but it demonstrates respect for those who have researched your topic previously. **Citations should appear in your work for not only a quote but also an idea, which will protect you from more serious charges of plagiarism.**

Objective

Academic language should be objective and impersonal. Where possible, you should **avoid the personal pronoun** or the 'I' voice because overusing the 'I' hinders your argument. This is because it **implies a certain degree of bias** towards a particular perspective.

For example, if you were to write: "Language is, in my view, clearly something social", the phrasing does not provide any insight as to why this may be an academically solid perspective; it only tells the reader what your personal opinion is on this topic.

However, look at what happens if we rephrase it as follows: "As Halliday (1973) shows, language is intrinsically social". Presenting what is essentially the same claim without the use of 'I' is much more engaging and sounds far more objective. **Read it aloud and hear the difference for yourself!**

What else should I avoid when crafting my assignment?

Emotional language

Remember your audience will be an academic one. Keep your language direct and de-personalised and avoid evaluative, emotional language. While you are entitled - and expected - to have an opinion on a particular topic, be careful not to use overly emotional language or sweeping generalisations as you write. Trust that the points you raise, once well-made and logically developed, will be enough to persuade your reader that your argument is credible.

Contractions

Do not use abbreviated word forms. For example, instead of using 'it's', 'can't' or 'they're' use 'it is', 'cannot' and 'they are'.

Overly long sentences

Ideally, your assignment will be a mixture of short, snappy sentences and longer, more complex ones. While a particularly long sentence is sometimes unavoidable, a good rule of thumb regarding sentence length is to read it out loud and, if you have to take a breath before you finish the sentence - it's too long!

Useful Sources

- <https://www.ucc.ie/en/skillscentre/additionalresources/>
- <https://www.tcd.ie/CAPSL/assets/pdf/Academic%20Practice%20Resources/Developing%20your%20academic%20writing%20skills.pdf>
- <https://search-proquest-com.ucc.idm.oclc.org/docview/2222888452?pq-origsite=summon>
- <https://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/using-the-library/students/training-and-skills-support/my-learning-essentials/>
- Gillet, A., Hammond, A. and Martala-Lockett, M., Successful Academic Writing in the Boole Library on Q+3, 808 GILL.
- Hartly, J., Academic Writing and Publishing: A Practical Handbook in the Boole Library on Q+3 808.02 HART.
- Silvia, P., How to Write a Lot: A Practical Guide to Productive Academic Writing in Brookfield Library HS808 SILV.

Other Relevant Online PDFs

- Procrastination & Motivation
- Time Management
- How to Write an Essay
- How to Build an Academic Argument