

Academic writing

ACADEMIC STYLE

What is academic style?

When you write in an academic style, you use vocabulary that is formal, impersonal, objective and precise.

Is the following written in an academic style?
How do you know?

A lot of people thought that Swan Lake was good. They say that everybody knows this. I think they are quite right because my lecturers, etc. liked it. Reviews have shown that people liked it every time.

A lot of people thought that...

This is imprecise as the question that the reader will most likely ask is how many is 'a lot'.

Can you think of any more suitable academic phrases?

A lot of people thought that...

What is the difference between 'a lot of people thought that' and the phrases below?

A significant / considerable number of people believed that ...

A significant / considerable number of scientists / experts believed that...

It was widely believed that...

It was generally accepted that...

... Swan Lake was good.

Again this is imprecise as 'Swan Lake' does not refer to a specific performance. In addition, 'good' could be changed into something more formal.

Can you think of a more academic alternative to the phrase above?

... Swan Lake was good.

What is the difference between ‘...Swan Lake was good.’ and...

‘...the gala performance of Swan Lake by the Singapore Dance Theatre was a successful production.’

They say that everybody knows this.

‘They’ is imprecise as we do not know who ‘they’ refers to. In addition, pronouns such as ‘they’ are often avoided in more formal written compositions as ‘they’ is often considered to be subjective and informal.

‘...everybody knows this.’ This is also imprecise as it does not tell us who ‘everybody’ is.

What’s the alternative?

They say that everybody knows this.

What is the difference between 'they say that everybody knows this' and

Dance critics ascertain that they heard favorable remarks from many of the audience members.

‘I think they...

‘I think...’ This is an informal personal statement that expresses the writer’s subjective belief.

‘they are...’ This is imprecise as we still do not do not know who ‘they’ refers to. In addition, remember that ‘they’ is often avoided in more formal written compositions as it is often considered to be subjective and informal.

I think they are quite right because my lecturers, etc. liked it.

Do you know what is wrong with the style of this sentence? Can you think of a more academic alternative?

I think they are quite right because my lecturers, etc. liked it.

‘...my...’ Subject pronouns are often avoided in formal compositions as these are generally considered informal.

‘...lecturers etc.’ This is also imprecise as we do not know what ‘etc.’ refers to.

I think they are quite right because my lecturers, etc. liked it.

Can you think of a more academic alternative?

I think they are quite right because my lecturers, etc. liked it.

What is the difference between 'I think that they are quite right because my lecturers, etc. liked it' and...

For example, response to the performances on the 15 – 18 March revealed that most people including dance experts that attended any one of the performances had positive comments about the dancers' abilities.

Original text:

A lot of people thought that Swan Lake was good. They say that everybody said this. I think they are quite right because my lecturers, etc. liked it.

Academic alternative:

A considerable number of people that attended the gala performance of Swan Lake by the Singapore Dance Theatre was a successful production. Dance critics ascertain that they heard favorable remarks from many of the audience members. For example, a survey of the responses to the performances on the 15 –18 March revealed that most people including dance experts that attended any one of the performances had positive comments about the dancers' abilities

Identify the examples of poor academic style. Can you write a more academic alternative?

To be inserted

How does your composition compare with the model answer below?

Identify the features that make this an academic text.

To be inserted

Academic v. non-academic texts

Academic writing

Non-academic writing

Full forms

Short forms

There *is*

There's

The test *did not* show

The test *didn't* show

Academic v. non-academic texts

Academic writing

Linking words/phrases

The theory appears to provide an explanation for this phenomenon.

However, this is not the case on a closer examination of the facts.

The experimental design was weak. *Moreover*, the methodology was faulty.

Non-academic writing

Linking words/phrases

I want to go to the cinema, *only* I have to work late.

Because of work, I can't go to Bangkok this weekend. *Anyway*, I don't have enough money.

Academic v. non-academic texts

Academic writing

Use of nominal groups (i.e. verbs made into nouns)

The *application* (*noun*) of the results needs to be carefully considered.

rather than:

We need to carefully consider how we *apply* (*verb*) the results.

Non-academic writing

Use of pronouns

We need to carefully consider how *we* apply the results.

Academic v. non-academic texts

Academic writing

Concise (i.e. short but clear) vocabulary

...the focus is on x

Researchers assumed that...

Non-academic writing

Informal vocabulary

...talks about x

They thought that...

Academic v. non-academic texts

Academic writing

Point of view

Objective and impersonal, e.g.
This essay attempts to...

Using qualifying language, e.g.
One possible reason may be...

Non-academic writing

Point of view

Subjective and personal, e.g.
In my essay I will attempt to...

Asking rhetorical questions, e.g.
How can this be so?