

Formal & Informal Register: Part 1

A distinctive feature of academic writing style is choosing the more formal alternative when selecting a verb, noun, or other part of speech.

E.g.

- [i] Researchers *looked at* the way strain *builds up* around a fault.
- [ii] Researchers *observed* the way strain *accumulates* around a fault.

Exercise 1

Reduce the informality of the following sentences by replacing the italicised part with one verb:

1. It is often said that leadership is a dynamic process. This means *putting across* a range of leadership styles is preferable to any one 'best style'.
2. Incentive schemes are often *set up* in companies to improve employee morale.
3. Expenditure on global advertising has *gone up* dramatically in the past decade.
4. The implementation of JIT production often *cuts down* unnecessary waste within businesses.
5. Researchers have *found out* that branding is a powerful tool which has a significant impact on both consumer buying patterns and company profits.
6. Outsourcing will not completely *get rid of* the problem of costly overheads within companies.
7. Accountants have long been *looking into* ways of reducing corporate taxation.
8. This issue was *brought up* during the meeting.
9. Consultants are often hired to *come up with* recommendations that are feasible in both the long and short term to address company problems.
10. The company's profit figures have been *going up and down* for two years.



Tip: Avoid the use of phrasal verbs in academic writing...

Exercise 2

Now, replace the italicised phrasal verbs below with alternatives that would retain the semantic value of each sentence, but would reduce the informality. Pay particular attention to collocation.

1. The implementation of computer-integrated-manufacturing (CIM) has ***brought about*** some serious problems.
2. The process should be ***done again*** until the desired results are achieved.
3. Plans are being made to ***come up with*** a database containing detailed information of the annual figures for the small business.
4. Subtle changes, which compromised the quality of the product, were ***picked up*** by these new devices.
5. Proposals to increase working hours have ***met with*** great resistance from employees.

Exercise 3

Supply a more suitable academic word/phrase for the italicised parts of the following sentences:

1. The reaction of the Managing Director was ***sort of*** negative.
2. The economic outlook for the business is ***pretty bad***.
3. The future of funding is ***up in the air***.
4. Britain's major car manufacturers are planning to ***team up*** on the research needed for more fuel-efficient cars.
5. It is imperative to concentrate in meetings so as to ***catch*** the important issues.

Exercise 4

In pairs, discuss how the following could be replaced in academic writing to create formal grammar and register. Provide an example for each to illustrate your point.

- [i] contractions:
- [ii] negative forms using 'not':
- [iii] etc.; and so forth/on
- [iv] use of second person pronoun:
- [v] direct questions (to address the reader):
- [vi] positioning of adverbs within a sentence:



Tip: Some of the above are considered acceptable in American English...Choose carefully when writing academic English for a British audience...

Exercise 5

Reduce the informality of each of the following sentences by bearing in mind the points discussed in exercise 4.

1. If you fail the psychometric test, you won't be employed by the company.
2. Ok, what are the causes of low employee morale? Many possibilities exist.
3. You can clearly see the differences between these two processes.
4. A small bit of ammonium peroxide is added to the solution gradually.
5. These special tax laws have been approved in some counties in the U.K.: Cumbria, Dorset, Devon, West Midlands, East Anglia, etc.
6. The subjects didn't have much difficulty with the task.

[adapted from Swales, J. & Feak, C. (1994) *Academic Writing for Graduate Students: A Course for Non-native Speakers of English*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press]

Formal & Informal Register: Part 2

[adapted from Marcouse, I. & Lines, D. (2002) *Business Case Studies*]

Exercise 6

Which of the following passages is more formal? Identify the features of the informal passage.

[A] The Birmingham Furniture Company (BFC) was set up in 1972 and until recently, it was a fairly profitable business. In 1999, its sales turnover averaged £15,000 per week. Given that it operates a 200% mark up (quite normal in furniture retailing), its £7,500 of weekly overheads were easily covered. The owners, Mr and Mrs Vine have always believed that much of their success has been thanks to the incentive scheme they operate; the 2% on all sales provides a carrot for the 6 members of staff.

[B] The Birmingham Furniture Company (BFC) was established in 1972 and for many years had continued to grow into a reasonably profitable business. By 1999, its average weekly turnover had risen to £15,000 against overheads of £7,500, with a sales markup of 200%. The owners and founders, Mr and Mrs Vine, laid great stress on their incentive scheme and this, they believed, contributed to the success of the company. Each of the six members of staff is paid 2% commission on all sales.

Exercise 7

The following sentences are all informal. Rewrite them in formal academic register:

1. She said it wasn't good enough.
2. I thought the lecture was terribly difficult to follow.
3. The results were a lot better than I expected.
4. None of the other students knew the answer either.
5. He said, 'It's hell writing your dissertation!'

Recognising Language Styles

Exercise 8

Defining Education...Are the following definitions spoken or written?

1. People going to school and learning.
2. The process by which your mind develops through learning at school, college, or university; the knowledge and skills that you gain from being taught.
3. Education: teaching, schooling, training, instruction, tuition, tutoring, cultivation, upbringing, indoctrination, drilling, learning, knowledge...
4. 'Tis Education forms the common mind,
Just as the twig is bent, the tree's inclin'd.
5. Education can be seen either as a battlefield for values or a question of systems or, more simply, as an extension of the biological function of the upbringing of children – known more simply as parenting. We'll start by looking at how far the role of teacher goes beyond being a parent.

Now match them with their sources listed below...

SOURCES

- | | |
|--|-------|
| a. Spoken – an introduction to a lecture on education. | |
| b. Spoken – a simple explanation by an adult. | |
| c. From a poem in 1734, by Alexander Pope (1688-1744). | |
| d. <i>The Oxford Thesaurus</i> , (1991) OUP. | |
| e. <i>Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English</i> (1995). | |

[source: Jordan, R.R. (1999) *Academic Writing Course*]

Cautious Language (Hedging)

The four sentences in exercise 9 contain definite statements. Rewrite them so that the statements are more cautious.



Tip: Consider changing the verb forms, and/or adding appropriate qualifying adverbs, adjectives or nouns...

Exercise 9

1. Interest Rates will not rise further this year.

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2. Reading is effective when it has a particular purpose.

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3. The answer to problems is found in asking the right questions.

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4. Countries disagree on the interpretation of democracy.

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Inconsistent Language

Exercise 10

*The passage below combines colloquialisms and other inappropriate words with formal register. Rewrite it in an academic way with appropriate vocabulary, structures and cautious language. An example of inconsistent language has been provided in **bold**:*

Research has shown (James) that learners of English find writing the most difficult thing they've got to do. There are 3 main types of error that the learner will make.

The biggest sort of error leads to misunderstanding or a total breakdown in communication. There are lots of causes of this: usually translating word for word **the student** uses the wrong sentence patterns (grammar) and the wrong words (vocabulary). Another cause is choosing to write long and complicated sentences with far too many supplementary clauses. The longer the sentence, the bigger is the chance of making mistakes and failing to communicate the meaning. Therefore, in the early stages of **your** writing, **you** shouldn't write sentences longer than 3 lines.
