

Features of academic spoken English

Introduction

Academic speaking is similar in many ways to academic writing: it is linear, it is explicit, it has one central point and it is presented in standard language. However, it is less complex and objective than written language.

Formal

In general this means that when you are speaking you should avoid colloquial words and expressions.

Explicit

It is the responsibility of the speaker in English to make it clear to the listener how various parts of the talk are related.

Responsible

In academic speaking you are responsible for demonstrating an understanding of the source text. You must be responsible for, and must be able to provide evidence and justification for, any claims you make.

Complex

Spoken language is less complex than written language. Spoken language has shorter words, has a less varied vocabulary. It uses more verb-based phrases than noun-based phrases. Spoken texts are longer and the language has less grammatical complexity.

Objective

Spoken language in general has more words that refer to the speaker. This means that although the main emphasis should be on the information that you want to give and the arguments you want to make, it is not unusual to refer to yourself or your audience.

Recognising lecture structure

Signals

The tables below show some of the most common signals used in lectures to indicate structure (Leech & Svartvik, 1975). Listen for them in your lectures.

1. Introducing
2. Giving background information
3. Defining
4. Enumerating/Listing
5. Giving examples
6. Showing importance/Emphasising
7. Clarifying/Explaining/Putting it in other words
8. Moving on/Changing direction
9. Giving further information
10. Giving contrasting information
11. Classifying
12. Digressing
13. Referring to visuals
14. Concluding

1. Introducing

At the beginning of a lecture, or a section of a lecture, the lecturer will give you some idea about the structure of the lecture.

What I intend to say is What I'd like to do is to discuss What I intend to do is to explain In my talk today, My topic today is Today, I'm going to talk about I'm going to talk to you about My colleagues and I are going to give a short presentation on Today I want to consider In this talk, I would like to concentrate on The subject of this talk is The purpose of this talk is to This talk is designed to	...
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2. Giving background information

Before the new information is given, the lecturer will often summarise what you are expected to know about the subject to be covered.

As we know As we have already seen As we have all read It's clear that	...
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It goes without saying We all understand It is understood You'll remember	
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3. Defining

In a lecture, it is often necessary to define the terms that will be used. This is important as familiar words can have specific meanings in different subjects.

X	is is called is known as may be defined as is a type of Y that/which	...
By X, I mean		
This term is used generally to mean In the field of Y, the term refers to		
A type of Y which ... is X.		

4. Enumerating/Listing

The lecturer will often be explicit about the order in which new points will be mentioned. To make the order clear we use various links and connectives.

Firstly Secondly Next Then Thirdly Lastly Finally		
First of all In the first place For one thing To begin with In the second place For another thing		...
The	first second next	point I'd like to make is

	last		
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5. Giving examples

In lectures, it is common to make generalisations. These generalisations are often supported with examples.

This ...	is	shown exemplified illustrated	by	
For example, For instance, You only have to think of Remember,				...
A key experiment		shows exemplifies illustrates		this. ...
This is shown by the following examples: The following are examples of this: The following is a case in point: Let me give you a couple of examples:				...
X	is a case in point.			
Take	X	for example for instance		
...	such as	...		

6. Showing importance/Emphasising

When you are taking notes, you cannot write down every word. You need to distinguish between important and less important information. The lecturer can use these signals to draw your attention to the important points.

I want to stress I want to highlight I'd like to emphasise I'd like to put emphasis on It's important to remember that We should bear in mind that Don't forget that	...
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The crucial point is The essential point is The fundamental point is	
Furthermore, What's more, This supports my argument that, It follows, therefore, that What (in effect) we are saying is	...

7. Clarifying/Explaining/Putting it in other words

The lecturer will try to explain the meaning of difficult concepts. To do this he or she may repeat the information using different words.

In other words, Or rather, That is to say, Basically To put it another way, If we put that another way, By which I mean Or you could say The point I'm making is That is to say, That is, Namely, i.e. That means	...
What I 'm suggesting 'm trying to say meant to say should have said	is
Let me put it another way.	

8. Moving on/Changing direction

The lecture will be organised around several different points. It is important to notice when the lecturer moves from one point to the next. Listen for these signals.

That's all I want to say about X. OK Now
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All right	
Having looked at ..., I'd now like to consider I'd like now to move on to Turning now to So let's turn to Moving on now to I now want to turn to The next point is Another interesting point is The next aspect I'd like to consider is I'd now like to turn to Let's now look at If we could now move on to	...

9. Giving further information

These signals show that the lecturer is proceeding in the same direction and giving more information.

Furthermore, An additional point Another point A further point A similar point In addition Moreover Similarly Apart from, Not only ..., but We can add I could add that Further As well as, Besides	...
...	also. too. as well.

10. Giving contrasting information

These signals show that the lecturer is proceeding in a different direction and giving unexpected or contrasting information. It is important to listen to this.

Although However On the other hand Whereas Despite Nevertheless But Alternatively	...
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11. Classifying

When we classify, we arrange members of a group. The lecturer may use the following signals to show that a classification is being made.

There are		types kinds		: Y and Z. . These are Y and Z.
The	N	classes categories sorts varieties	of X	are Y and Z.
X	consists of comprises can be divided into	N	categories classes kinds types varieties	. These are Y and Z. : Y and Z.
Y and Z are	classes kinds types categories varieties		of X.	
X may be classified	according to on the basis of depending on		...	

12. Digressing

Sometimes the lecturer may leave the main subject of the lecture for a while and then come back to it.

Incidentally By the way While I remember Before I forget	...
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13. Referring to visuals

The following signals can be used to refer to a handout or an OHT or PowerPoint slide.

On this graph, Take a look at this. Let's have a look at this. I'd like you to look at this. I'd like to draw your attention to Here we can see The ... shows The graph illustrates The horizontal axis represents The vertical axis represents As you can see, If you look closely, you'll see	...
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14. Concluding

The lecture should end with a summary of the main points made.

So, We've seen that First we looked at ... and we saw that Then we considered ... and I argued that In short, To sum up In conclusion, I'd like to emphasise that	...
That completes my lecture.	

TASK:

Look at the pictures below. Each of them represents giving a lecture. Describe what you can see in the picture, comment on the place, audience, possible topics, outline the lectures being given.



