

**Tightened text**

RRV is the etiological agent of epidemic polyarthritis, first described in 1928 [reference]. This disease occurs regularly as epidemics in eastern X, and as sporadic outbreaks elsewhere in X [references]. (30 words)

Perhaps this author wished to emphasize the point about 'wide geographic distribution', in which case the revision might not be acceptable as it merely implies this point. That is another consideration to keep in mind when you are doing this exercise: what ideas do you want to profile? (See → 'Effective paragraph development' in Chapter 4.)

**Aspects of voice and tone**

Voice in writing is shaped by individual style, including tonal qualities of your text or presentation and diction choices, as well as how you manipulate academic and disciplinary writing practices. Two issues of voice are often raised, and sometimes confused, by students:

**Impersonal versus personal mode**

Some disciplines favour sole use of the first person 'I', considering such usage a matter of principle that authors accept full responsibility in their writing for their ideas and research. Other disciplines reject this usage altogether, as deflecting attention away from a true focus on discussions and arguments and towards the writer. Many authors from a wide range of disciplines, including the sciences, now use a mix of impersonal (for example, in the body of the writing) and personal (for example, in introductory sections).

**Active versus passive voice**

As with personal or impersonal mode, lecturers/supervisors often express a preference in terms of active and passive voice, which can mean changes to your practice.

When the active voice is used, the agent/producer/instrument of the action expressed in the verb is foregrounded. The reverse is true of the passive construction. Take the following examples:

**Active construction:**

Management **introduced** new measures to address output problems. (Foregrounding the agent of change, 'management'.)

**Passive constructions:**

(a) New measures **were introduced** by management to address output problems. (Foregrounding the 'new measures', while acknowledging the agent of change, 'management'.)

(b) New measures **were introduced** to address output problems. (Foregrounding 'new measures', while obscuring the agent of change, 'management'.)

The active construction, which is more direct and energetic, need not involve use of the personal mode, as seen in these examples:

**Active constructions:**

- (a) Results **confirm** an increase in the incidence of this type of crime. (Passive would be: An increase in the incidence of this type of crime **is confirmed** by the results.)
- (b) Interventionist policies of the British colonial government **aggravated** tensions among ethnic minorities. (Passive would be: Tensions among ethnic minorities **were aggravated** by the interventionist policies of the British colonial government.)

It is not unusual to see a mix of active and passive voice in a single text, because authors may wish to apportion emphasis in a sentence differently at different times.

**Strategic use of tone**

Tone is a device that can be manipulated in writing to achieve desired effects. Whether you recognize it or not, the tonal qualities of your writing will convey emotional and/or mental attitudes that are influential in shaping audience responses to your text.

Tone can be approached on three levels, as follows:

1. Your attitude towards yourself as the writer (aim to be confident).
2. Your attitude towards the subject matter you are discussing (aim to show interest in and commitment to your ideas).
3. Your attitude towards your readers and/or listeners (aim to be respectful).

Confidence can be an issue for some students. Tentative language (for example, perhaps, it appears, it seems, it could be) is appropriate to use when commenting on possibilities, as when speculating. But too much of such language may trigger the reader-response that you lack confidence, as illustrated:

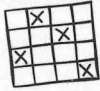
**More confident writer:**

This study **shows** that ... or This study **suggests** that ... In section 2, I **assess** the reasons for ...

**Less confident writer:**

This study **might mean that** ... or It **seems that the author is saying** ... In section 2, I **will try to assess** the reasons for ...

Neutral, impartial or judicious tones, with varying degrees of engagement, tend to characterize formal academic writing.



### exercise: voice and tone

It can be informative to interrogate the use of voice and tone by scholars you are reading by considering these questions:

- Are the best writers using personal or impersonal voice, and in what situations of writing if there is a mix?
- Do they favour the active or passive voice, or is there a mix and in what situations of writing?
- What is the writer's attitude towards herself/himself, towards the subject matter, and towards readers? How do these encoded attitudes influence your response to the text?



### further resources

Alley, M. (2000) *The Craft of Editing: A Guide for Managers, Scientists, and Engineers*. New York: Springer. Provides an abundance of useful information and strategies for any academic writer wishing to take full control of the editing process.

Gilmore, J., Strickland, D., Timmerman, B., Maher, M. and Feldon, D. (2010). 'Weeds in the flower garden: an exploration of plagiarism in graduate students' research proposals and its connection to enculturation, ESL, and contextual factors', *International Journal for Educational Integrity*, 6(1): 13–28.

Strunk, W. Jr and White, E.Bs (2000). *The Elements of Style*. 4th edn. Boston, MA: Pearson Education. An all-time favourite in the academic community (in print since 1918), this compact little book covers basic rules of grammar, misused words and phrases and aspects of style and presentation, all with straightforward practical illustrations.