



## TEACHING THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN ACADEMIC AND GENERAL WRITING

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**Abstract** Despite being both vital communication tools, academic and popular writing differ greatly in their goals, tones, structures, and styles. For students who need to successfully traverse both domains, these differences—which result from the demands of various audiences and contexts—present difficulties. With an emphasis on instructing students in these distinctions, this study examines the essential contrasts between academic and general writing. The article offers instructors useful tactics to improve their students' writing abilities and flexibility so they may comfortably take on academic and non-academic writing assignments. Scholarly publications that emphasize the significance of comprehending these distinctions support the discussion of a range of instructional approaches and methodologies.

**Key words:** formal writing style; general writing; uses for general writing; tone and style

### Introduction

Writing is a vital communication tool that cuts across all fields, social groups, and situations. But not all writing is made equally. General writing has a wider range of styles and formats that permit greater flexibility, creativity, and subjectivity than academic writing, which is frequently quite formal, structured, and research-driven. Students must modify their writing abilities to satisfy the unique requirements of both academic and general writing, thus it is essential that they comprehend the differences between the two.

Teaching these differences in a way that makes it easy for students to move between the two worlds is essential for writing instructors. This article explores the distinctions between general and academic writing and offers suggestions for efficient teaching methods that can help students become proficient in both.

### 1. Defining Academic and General Writing

#### 1.1 What is Academic Writing?

A formal writing style utilized in academic contexts, including research institutes, universities, and scholarly journals, is referred to as academic writing. It usually entails the

organized presentation of thoroughly thought-out concepts, arguments supported by data, and critical analysis. According to Wales and Feak (2012), the main goal of academic writing is to further knowledge and scholarly discourse by having writers participate in discussions or offer novel perspectives.

Objectivity, formality, accuracy, and the use of evidence to back up claims are some essential traits of academic writing (Harris, 2006). Academic writing is meant to inform, argue, and evaluate using research and logical reasoning, not to convey personal views or feelings.

### **1.2 What is General Writing?**

On the other hand, the term "general writing" refers to a wide range of writing styles intended for a wider range of informal readers. It encompasses both public writing, like newspaper articles and web content, and private writing, like letters, diaries, and blogs (Bitchener, 2011). General writing offers greater latitude in terms of tone, style, and organization, even though it could still call for consistency and clarity. By including their own experiences, feelings, and viewpoints, authors in this field can make their writing more approachable and relatable to a larger readership (Kern, 2000).

The degree of formality and impartiality is the primary distinction between academic and general writing. Academic writing is more objective and impersonal than general writing, which usually has a more conversational tone and frequently expresses personal viewpoints.

## **2. Purpose and Audience**

The target audience and goal are two of the most important distinctions between academic and popular writing.

### **2.1 The Objective of Scholarly Writing**

The main goal of academic writing is to increase understanding in a certain subject of study. Its goal is to educate or convince a scholarly or professional audience, and it frequently entails offering fresh ideas, theories, or critical viewpoints on previously published works (Graff & Birkenstein, 2010). Authors must provide strong evidence to back up their assertions, usually from an analysis of the literature or empirical study.

Additionally, logical flow and clarity are highly valued in academic writing. A research paper or essay's introduction, body, and conclusion all work together to build a logical structure, with each section intended to advance the argument (University of Toronto Writing Centre, 2013). Academic writers must make the assumption that their readers are already familiar with the subject and possess a certain level of expertise.

### **2.2 Purpose of General Writing**

There are many more uses for general writing. It might seek to communicate personal opinions, educate, entertain, or convince. People from a variety of backgrounds, many of whom may not have any academic expertise of the subject matter at hand, make up the audience for broad writing, which is frequently non-specialized (Gibbon, 2009). As a result, the writer's objective in general writing is frequently to use a tone and style that appeal to a wide range of readers in order to make their message more approachable and captivating.

The author might add subjective opinions and personal experiences to generic writing to make it more approachable and accessible. In terms of research and analysis, this kind of writing is typically less structured and does not call for the same degree of rigor or depth.

### 3. Tone and Style

Writing style and tone are important factors that set academic writing apart from non-academic writing. While style includes the way the writing is presented, including its language choices, sentence patterns, and general readability, tone refers to the writer's attitude toward the subject matter and audience. How well a writer conveys their ideas to their intended audience is greatly influenced by both tone and style.

#### 3.1 Tone and Style in Academic Writing

The tone of academic writing is typically formal, impersonal, and objective. Presenting arguments, analyses, and research findings devoid of subjectivity, emotion, or personal prejudice is the main objective of academic writing. By keeping the writer and the content at a professional distance, this tone makes sure that the writing concentrates on logic and evidence rather than on the author's own experience or feelings.

1. **Formality:** According to Wales and Feak (2012), academic writing keeps a formal tone and refrains from colloquial terms, contractions (such as "don't" becoming "do not"), and conversational language. Academic writers could say, for example, "The results suggest that," rather than "I think the results show that," which eliminates the subjective viewpoint and conforms the text to impartiality and objective standards of academia.

2. **Impersonality:** To put more emphasis on the arguments and studies than the author, academic writing frequently uses an impersonal tone. This is particularly noticeable when the passive voice is used (for example, "It was found that" rather than "I found that") and when first-person pronouns (such as "I" and "we") are avoided. According to Harris (2006), this practice aims to highlight the research process rather than the specific researcher. Although there are certain exceptions based on the discipline, using personal pronouns is generally discouraged in domains such as the social sciences and scientific sciences.

3. **Objectivity:** The dedication to objectivity is one of the pillars of academic writing. Arguments and interpretations made by academic writers must be supported by data and evidence. This impartiality is essential to making sure that the writing is regarded as authoritative and believable. To support an argument in a style that is both assertive and supported by evidence, for instance, statements such as "It is clear that" or "The data supports the notion that" are frequently employed.

4. **Clarity and Precision:** Academic writing places a strong emphasis on using precise words and sentence structures (Swales & Feak, 2012). Authors are urged to concentrate on precise, succinct explanations rather than ambiguous or overly general assertions. Discipline-specific language that presumes a certain level of audience understanding is commonly used in academic writing. Such technical language should still be used with clarity in mind, though, and should not obfuscate meaning or turn off readers who are not in the immediate academic field.

The tone and style of academic writing are in line with the main objective of adding to the body of knowledge. The language is intended to be professional, rational, and coherent, providing arguments and insights supported by thorough study. As a result, the style favors direct, fact-based communication above superfluous ornamentation or rhetorical flourishes.

### 3.2 Tone and Style in General Writing

General writing, on the other hand, permits far more stylistic and tonal versatility. Because the audience for general writing is frequently broad and non-specialized, authors can freely modify their tone according to the situation, the intended goal, and the audience's emotional response (Bitchener, 2011).

1. **Informality:** The informality of ordinary writing is one of its distinguishing characteristics. General writing frequently adopts a more conversational, approachable style, whereas academic writing keeps a formal, distanced tone. Depending on the situation, writers may employ contractions (for example, "it's" for "it is"), colloquial expressions (for example, "a lot of" instead of "numerous"), or even slang (Gibbon, 2009). In contrast to the generally more official tone seen in academic writing, an author of an opinion blog might say something like, "You know, a lot of people don't realize how much this impacts their daily lives," which is far more approachable and informal.

2. **Personalization:** There is greater opportunity for individual voice and personal expression in general writing. It is recommended for authors to express their feelings, thoughts, and experiences. The first person ("I" or "we") or second person ("you") pronouns are frequently used to accomplish this personalization. First-person language is frequently used in opinion pieces, blog entries, and personal narratives to connect with readers. For example, "I've always believed that..." or "In my experience, this has worked best..." may be the opening lines of a personal blog post.

3. **Emotional Appeal:** In order to elicit a response from the reader, general writing usually uses persuasive or emotional appeals. To keep readers interested, authors may employ storytelling tactics, comedy, or detailed details. To bolster their points, authors of creative nonfiction and opinion articles may decide to appeal to the emotions of their readers. To engage readers, a writer could use phrases like "Imagine waking up in a world where..." or "This heartbreaking reality is what many people face every day."

4. **Originality and Experimentation:** More originality is possible with the general writing style. Authors are free to experiment with their rhetorical methods, paragraph organization, and sentence forms. Hyperbole, similes, and metaphors are frequently used to enhance the vividness and entertainment value of literature (Gibbon, 2009). By describing a busy metropolis as "a chaotic orchestra, with the honking horns providing the percussion and the crowd's chatter creating the melody," for example, a writer in a feature article can add color and personality to the piece, making it more interesting for the reader.

5. **Audience Engagement:** In general writing, the tone is frequently intended to directly engage the reader. It is common for writers to predict the reader's emotional responses and

modify their writing style appropriately. For example, in blog writing, the use of direct address ("You might be surprised to learn...") or rhetorical questions ("Have you ever wondered why...?") helps create a dialogue-like atmosphere where the writer appears to be speaking directly to the reader (Bitchener, 2011).

### **Key Differences in Tone and Style**

The varying expectations of their distinct audiences are reflected in the tone and style of general and scholarly writing. A more formal, impartial, and reserved tone is required for academic writing in order to communicate ideas clearly and precisely. Contrarily, general writing offers a great deal more freedom, enabling authors to tailor their message, evoke strong feelings, and interact with a wide range of readers in an approachable, casual way.

For students to successfully negotiate the divergent demands of academic and general writing, teachers must assist them in understanding these differences. Whether the objective is to inform, convince, entertain, or express personal beliefs, effective communication requires the employment of proper tone and style.

## **4. Structure and Organization**

### **4.1 Structure in Academic Writing**

Academic writing is extremely regimented and usually adheres to particular formats that are determined by the kind of work being produced (e.g., essays, dissertations, or research papers). According to Graff and Birkenstein (2010), this format typically consists of an introduction that poses the research question, a literature review that gives background information, a technique section (for empirical research), results or findings, and a conclusion.

Academic writing also follows a regular paragraph structure. According to the University of Toronto Writing Centre (2013), each paragraph usually begins with a topic phrase, is followed by evidence to support it, and concludes with a statement that connects to the main idea.

### **4.2 Structure in General Writing**

The structure of general writing is far more flexible. Depending on the style of writing (personal narrative, blog post, opinion article, etc.), the format can vary greatly, and the writer can experiment more freely with non-linear or unusual patterns. Headings, subheadings, and bullet points are frequently used in general writing, particularly in magazine articles and online content where readability and engagement are valued highly (Gibbon, 2009).

Furthermore, a wider variety of components, such as dialogue, introspection, and emotional appeals, can be used in general writing than in academic writing because of the requirement for impartiality and formal tone.

## **5. Language Use and Vocabulary**

### **5.1 Language in Academic Writing**

Academic writing uses formal, precise language. To accurately communicate their thoughts, writers employ sophisticated sentence structures and discipline-specific language (Swales & Feak, 2012). Academic writing selects its terminology based on its accuracy and

topical relevance. Using technical jargon is allowed since academic writers sometimes presume that readers are familiar with specialized terms.

Complex vocabulary is important, but it shouldn't impede understanding because academic writing also appreciates clarity. When appropriate, academic writers must define complex words so that their readers may understand the point even if they employ technical language.

## **5.2 Language in General Writing**

The language used in general writing is simpler and easier to understand. In order to make their writing more comprehensible to a broad readership, authors employ common language and shorter sentence structures (Gibbon, 2009). Although broad writing can still be elegant and complex, it typically stays away from specialized terminology in favor of globally understood plain language.

## **6. Citation and Referencing**

### **6.1 Academic Writing Citations**

Academic writing relies heavily on citations and references because they enable authors to acknowledge the contributions of others and support their claims. Establishing credibility, avoiding plagiarism, and directing readers to other sources for extra reading all depend on accurate referencing (Harris, 2006). Citation styles vary depending on the academic discipline (APA, MLA, Chicago), but the fundamental idea is always the same: provide due credit to all sources utilized in the work.

### **6.2 In general writing, citation**

Citations are usually not necessary in general writing unless the author is referring to particular data or outside sources. Although there is no official system for referencing sources, direct references to books, papers, or studies may be made informally in blog posts, opinion pieces, or personal writings (Bitchener, 2011).

## **7. Teaching Approaches to Addressing the Distinctions**

Teaching pupils to distinguish between academic and general writing is a difficult task for educators. A well-rounded strategy consists of:

1. **Explicit Instruction:** Educating students on the essential distinctions between structure, tone, purpose, and citation styles.
2. **Practice and Feedback:** Giving students the chance to write in both academic and non-academic settings and then providing them with helpful criticism to help them grasp and become more proficient.
3. **Modeling:** Giving instances of general and academic writing that emphasize the salient characteristics of each style.
4. **Peer Review:** To help students understand the advantages and disadvantages of both forms of writing, peer review exercises are encouraged.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, students who want to excel in both academic and non-academic settings must comprehend the differences between academic and general writing. Teachers can better prepare students with the knowledge and abilities they need to write effectively and adaptably by acknowledging the distinctive qualities of each. Students can become excellent and adaptable writers in a variety of communication contexts by learning to negotiate the complexity of both forms through clear teaching, practice, and feedback.

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