



## Academic Voice

Writing assignments at the university level require that students adopt a formal tone of communication known as academic voice. This tone differs from conversational ways of speaking that include slang, contractions, intimate language, colloquialisms, and other informalities. Often (but not always), academic voice avoids “I” statements and “announcing” strategies or signals such as “In this paper, I will discuss....” Academic voice is a formal way of writing and speaking that is clear, straightforward, and professional without sounding fancy or using unnecessarily complicated vocabulary words. The central components of academic voice include:

- declarative statements
- avoiding casual language
- authoritative register (voice)

### Make Declarative Statements

Perhaps the most important part of academic voice is creating declarative statements. They are the same as “I” statements, only the “I” is hidden. For example:

**“I” Statement:** I think that school uniforms benefit students by eliminating competition based on designer labels.

**Declarative Statement:** School uniforms benefit students by eliminating competition based on designer labels.

Often you can create a declarative statement from your “I” statement or announcement merely by deleting the “I” part of the sentence. Make authoritative statements—declare your point.

### Avoid Casual Language

Writing at the university level requires a professionalized communication style. Be formal, but not fancy. Picture an audience of academic peers, not friends. Remove the “sound” of your casual conversational style and avoid contractions like “can’t” or “don’t.” Think about the language you read in a textbook or academic journal – most academic publications do not use contractions, words like “okay,” or storytelling indicators like, “then,” “next,” and “after that.” They also do not address the reader casually with the word “you.” And of course, always avoid using foul language or off-color humor.

**TIP:** One way to teach yourself formal language is to read newspapers, textbooks, academic journals, and nonfiction publications.

## **Develop an Authoritative Register**

A “register” is the type of language you use in a specific setting. For instance, you speak differently to your friends than you do to your boss, your professor, or your faith leader. In each setting, you use a different register based on what you understand is appropriate behavior for that environment. There’s a reason people don’t swear in church: It is the recognition that certain types of speech are not appropriate for certain situations.

Students should strive to develop an authoritative register. To have authority over a subject is to know that you have done your research and can support your declarative statements. As students become content experts in their fields of study, they should adopt an authoritative register. This eliminates casual language and relies on informed, declarative statements.

## **Transforming Informal Language into Academic Voice**

*Here is an example of informal language:*

Hey, let me get your opinion on this: When people tell a story, which do you prefer? A person who repeats themselves even if their point is already addressed or someone who keeps it simple and gets to the point? If you’re like me, then you probably want the person that gets to the point. Most people nowadays would prefer someone to keep it short, simple, and cut to the chase. This happens with social encounters at work, with friends, with family, on t.v., the radio, or wherever people communicate.

*Here is that same paragraph re-written in a formal tone:*

People tend to enjoy speakers who do not repeat themselves, but who keep their message quick and to the point. In a fast-paced world, people prefer someone to keep a story short and simple. Brief, effective communication can enhance social encounters at work, with friends, and with family, and may even relay messages better on television, over the radio, or wherever people communicate.