

Now discuss with a partner the following two questions. How serious is the problem? How would you evaluate the solution?

Task Six

Here is another passage with the same structure. Read it and answer the questions that follow. Sentence numbers have been added here (and in subsequent texts) for ease of reference.

¹Madagascar has one of the world's oldest systems of natural reserves. ²This system, established during the early 1900s, was designed to protect lemurs and other animal species unique to the island. ³However, due to severe economic hardship, this island country lacks the funds to properly manage the reserves; as a result, many species risk extinction. ⁴One recent solution to this problem has been offered by the international community. ⁵If Madagascar begins to better protect its reserves, its foreign debt will be reduced. ⁶This incentive should lead to some level of improvement.

(Based on information from *Scientific American*, January 1993)

1. For what type of audience was this written?
2. What assumptions does the author make about the audience's knowledge background?
3. What is the author's purpose?
4. What does *this problem* in sentence 4 refer to?
5. What does *this incentive* in sentence 6 refer to?
6. What does the author think of the solution?
7. If the writer had thought that the solution would not work, what might he have written for the last sentence? In such a case, would this last sentence be enough to complete the text? If not, what would need to be added?

Style

Academic writers need to be sure that their communications are written in the appropriate style. The style of a particular piece must not only be consistent, but must also be proper for the message being conveyed and for the audience. A formal research report written in informal English may be considered too simplistic, even if the actual ideas and/or data are complex.

One difficulty in using the appropriate style is knowing what is considered academic and what is not. Academic style is not used in all academic settings. Lectures are generally delivered in a relatively nonacademic style. It is not uncommon to hear lecturers use words and phrases like *stuff*, *things*, *bunch*, or *a whole lot of*, which would not be appropriate for an academic writing task. They may also use elaborate metaphors and other vivid expressions to enliven their speaking style. While it is valuable to understand and acquire such language for personal use, it is not generally appropriate for academic writing. This *vocabulary shift* is indeed the most salient feature of academic writing.

Language Focus: The Vocabulary Shift

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

Verbs

English often has two (or more) choices to express an action or occurrence. The choice is often between a phrasal or prepositional verb (verb + preposition) and a single verb, the latter with Latinate origins. Often in lectures and other instances of everyday spoken English, the verb + preposition is used; however, for written academic style, the preferred choice is a single verb wherever possible. This is one of the most dramatic stylistic shifts from informal to formal style.

Researchers *looked at* the way strain *builds up* around a fault.
(less formal style)

Researchers *observed* the way strain *accumulates* around a fault.
(academic style)

Task Seven

Choose a verb from the list that reduces the informality of each sentence. Note that you may need to add tense to the verb from the list.

assist	reduce	create	investigate	raise
establish	increase	determine	fluctuate	eliminate

- Expert Systems can *help out* the user in the diagnosis of problems. _____
- This program was *set up* to improve access to medical care. _____
- Research expenditures have *gone up* to nearly \$350 million. _____
- The use of optical character readers (OCRs) should *cut down* the number of problems with the U.S. mail service. _____
- Researchers have *found out* that this drug has serious side effects. _____
- Building a nuclear power plant will not *get rid of* the energy problem completely. _____
- Researchers have been *looking into* this problem for 15 years now. _____
- This issue was *brought up* during the investigation. _____

- Engineers can *come up with* better designs using CAD. _____
- The emission levels have been *going up and down*. _____

Task Eight

Reduce the informality of each sentence by substituting a single verb for the one in italics.

- The implementation of computer-integrated-manufacturing (CIM) has *brought about* some serious problems. _____
- The process should be *done over* until the desired results are achieved. _____
- Plans are being made to *come up with* a database containing detailed environmental information for the region. _____
- Subtle changes in the earth's crust were *picked up* by these new devices. _____
- Proposals to construct new nuclear reactors have *met with* great resistance from environmentalists. _____

Nouns and Other Parts of Speech

English has a very rich vocabulary derived from many languages. Because of this, there may be more than one way to express an idea. You should strive to choose words that are less informal in nature and also precise. In lectures, you will likely hear less formal speech; however, in writing you should use a more formal form if one exists.

Task Nine

Which of the underlined words would be more suitable for an academic paper?

1. The government has made good / *considerable* progress in solving environmental problems.
2. We got / *obtained* encouraging results.
3. The results of a lot of / *numerous* different projects have been *pretty good* / *encouraging*.
4. A loss of jobs is one of the things *that will happen* / *consequences* if the process is automated.

Supply a more academic word or phrase for the one underlined in each sentence.

5. The reaction of the officials was *sort of* negative. _____
6. The economic outlook is *mighty nice*. _____
7. The future of Federal funding is *up in the air*. _____
8. America's major automakers are planning to *get together* on the research needed for more fuel efficient cars. _____

Language Focus: Formal Grammar and Style

The following are some nonvocabulary-related recommendations for maintaining a formal academic writing style.

1. Avoid contractions.

Export figures *won't* improve until the economy is stronger. →
Export figures *will not* improve until the economy is stronger.

2. Use the more appropriate formal negative forms.

not . . . any → no
not . . . much → little
not . . . many → few

The analysis *didn't* yield *any* new results. →
The analysis yielded *no* new results.

The government *didn't* allocate *much* funding for the program. →
The government allocated *little* funding for the program.

This problem *doesn't* have *many* viable solutions. →
This problem has *few* viable solutions.

3. Limit the use of "run on" expressions, such as "and so forth" and "etc."

These semiconductors can be used in robots, CD players, *etc.* →
These semiconductors can be used in robots, CD players, *and other electronic devices.*

4. Avoid addressing the reader as "you" (except, of course, if you are writing a textbook).

You can see the results in Table 1. →
The results can be seen in Table 1.

5. Limit the use of direct questions.

What can be done to lower costs? →
We now need to consider what can be done to lower costs. *or*
We now need to consider how costs may be lowered.

6. Place adverbs within the verb.

Adverbs often are placed midposition rather than in the initial or final positions. In informal English, adverbs often occur as clauses at the beginning or end of sentences.

Then the solution can be discarded. →
The solution can *then* be discarded.

The blood is withdrawn *slowly*. →
The blood is *slowly* withdrawn.

In summary, in one way or another most of our recommendations are designed to help you maintain a scholarly and objective tone in your writing. This does not mean (and we have not said) that you should *never* use *I* or *we* in your writing. The use of *I* or *we* does not make a piece of writing informal. The vocabulary shift and some of the other features we have mentioned are more important for maintaining a consistent academic style. In fact, you may remember that Gene wrote, "I have examined . . ."

Task Ten

Reduce the informality of each sentence.

1. If you fail the exam, you can't enter the university.
2. OK, what are the causes of deformation? Many possibilities exist.
3. You can clearly see the difference between these two processes.
4. A small bit of ammonium dichromate is added to the gelatin solution gradually.
5. These special tax laws have been enacted in six states: Illinois, Iowa, Ohio, etc.
6. The subjects didn't have much difficulty with the task.

Task Eleven

Now that you have become more familiar with some of the conventions of academic writing, write a one-paragraph problem-solution text about a problem in your country. Refer, if you like, to the Madagascar text on page 14. Your audience is a group of American peers and professors interested in your country. Follow the style guidelines on pages 18–19 as you write.

Flow

Another important consideration for successful communication is flow—moving from one statement in a text to the next. Naturally, establishing a clear connection of ideas is important to help your reader follow the text.

Task Twelve

Consider the following passages. Underline the parts in passage *b* that differ from passage *a*. Why does *b* have better "flow" than *a*?

- a.* Lasers have found widespread application in medicine. Lasers play an important role in the treatment of eye disease and the prevention of blindness. The eye is ideally suited for laser surgery. Most of the eye tissue is transparent. The frequency and focus of the laser beam can be adjusted according to the absorption of the tissue. The beam "cuts" inside the eye with minimal damage to the surrounding tissue—even the tissue between the laser and the incision. Lasers are effective in treating some causes of blindness. Other treatments are not. The interaction between laser light and eye tissue is not fully understood.
- b.* Lasers have found widespread application in medicine. For example, they play an important role in the treatment of eye disease and the prevention of blindness. The eye is ideally suited for laser surgery because most of the eye tissue is transparent. Because of this transparency, the frequency and focus of the laser beam can be adjusted according to the absorption of the tissue so that the beam "cuts" inside the eye with minimal damage to the surrounding tissue—even the tissue between the laser and the incision. Lasers are also more effective than other methods in treating some causes of blindness. However, the interaction between laser light and eye tissue is not fully understood.