



Academic style

Extra practice in formal, impersonal writing

Academic writing is more formal than speech. Words copied from everyday conversation can sound too casual in a paper. Four moves make writing academic: choose precise words, stay impersonal (avoid "you"), use no contractions, and replace rhetorical questions with statements.

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1. Precise word, not everyday. a lot of ✗ considerable · get rid of ✗ eliminate · big ✗ significant
-
2. Impersonal – avoid "you" and often "I". "you can see" ✗ "it can be seen"
-
3. No contractions. don't ✗ do not · it's ✗ it is · can't ✗ cannot
-
4. No rhetorical questions – use a statement. "Is it fair?" ✗ "It is important to consider whether it is fair."
-

SEE — *choose the precise academic word*

Underline the more academic option.

1. The change made (a big / a significant) difference to the result.
2. We (got rid of / eliminated) the outliers before the analysis.
3. (A lot of / Considerable) effort went into calibrating the sensor.
4. The two methods gave (pretty similar / comparable) results.

TRY — *make it impersonal*

Rewrite each sentence to remove "you" or "I". Begin with the words given.

5. You can see that the curve flattens after week six. (Begin: It can be seen ...)

> -----

6. I think this proves the first hypothesis. (Begin: This appears to ...)

> -----

7. If you heat the sample, you get a colour change. (Begin: Heating the sample ...)

> -----

ACT — *remove the contractions*

Rewrite each sentence with no contractions.

8. The data don't support the claim, and it's not clear why.

> _____

9. The reaction wasn't complete, so we couldn't measure the yield.

> _____

10. It's likely the sensor didn't reset between runs.

> _____

ACT — *turn the question into a statement*

Rewrite each rhetorical question as an academic statement.

11. Why is this result important?

> _____

12. So what does this tell us about the cause?

> _____

13. Isn't it surprising that the effect disappeared?

> _____

REFLECT — *judge the three versions*

Three versions of one idea. Mark the most academic, then say what is wrong with the other two.

_____ a. You'll see we got rid of a lot of errors, but it didn't fix everything.

_____ b. We got rid of a lot of errors, but this did not fix everything.

_____ c. Numerous errors were eliminated, although this did not resolve every problem.

Best: _____ What is wrong with the other two?

> _____



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Model answers and short explanations

SEE – precise word

1. a significant difference – precise; 'big' is everyday.
2. eliminated – precise; 'got rid of' is casual.
3. Considerable – precise; 'a lot of' is casual.
4. comparable – precise; 'pretty similar' is casual.

TRY – make it impersonal (sample answers)

5. It can be seen that the curve flattens after week six.
6. This appears to support the first hypothesis.
7. Heating the sample produces a colour change.

ACT – remove the contractions

8. The data do not support the claim, and it is not clear why.
9. The reaction was not complete, so we could not measure the yield.
10. It is likely the sensor did not reset between runs.

ACT – question into statement (sample answers)

11. It is important to consider why this result matters.
12. These results indicate a possible cause.
13. It is notable that the effect disappeared.

REFLECT – judge the three versions

Best: c – precise words, impersonal, no contractions.

a and b are both weaker. 'a' is worst: casual words, a contraction (didn't), and it speaks to 'you'. 'b' is casual ('got rid of', 'a lot of') but at least avoids contractions and 'you'.

Source note. All sentences in this worksheet are original, written for teaching. The academic-style points are informed by the Academic Phrasebank (John Morley, University of Manchester, 2023), 'A Note on Academic Style'. No part of the Phrasebank PDF is reproduced here.