



Since academic writing is unlike any other writing, you might feel like you have to write using more sophisticated or complicated language than usual. Keep in mind:

The goal of all writing is to make your reader understand what you're trying to say.

In academia, it's true your reader will expect a certain formality of language, and straying from this expectation can make it difficult for a reader to follow your points.

In academic writing:

- Avoid contractions (like "don't," "can't," etc.)
- Avoid "you" statements
- Avoid slang (like "kinda," "gonna," etc.)
- Typical grammatical standards will be expected

• Grammar Standards •

Grammar standards are norms rather than rules. This means you're writing using the type of language that your reader will expect—which is not necessarily the only "correct" language. Slang, informal, and dialect language are equally correct when used in other contexts, like messaging and conversation.

In academic writing, readers expect Standard Written English. Using different forms of English may confuse or distract readers.

• Standard Written English Overview •

Sentence Structure:

A complete sentence involves three main ingredients: SEE [INDEPENDENT AND DEPENDENT CLAUSES](#) handout.

1. An actor (subject):
2. An action (verb)
3. One complete idea
 - o **Example:** A child's development (actor) skyrockets (action) after the first year.

Fragments – Avoid incomplete sentences that are missing an actor or action or do not create a complete idea.

SEE [SENTENCE FRAGMENTS](#) handout.

- o **Example:** Although a child's development skyrockets after the first year. (Incomplete idea)

Run-On Sentences (including Comma Splices) – Avoid combining complete sentences without appropriate punctuation.

SEE [COMBINING INDEPENDENT CLAUSES](#) handout.

Verb Forms:

Subject-Verb Agreement – Make sure you’re using the verb form that corresponds to the noun it refers to.

SEE [SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT](#) handout.

1. Singular noun verb forms: Smith claims; Barnes discusses; Johnson argues.
2. Plural noun verb forms: Scholars claim; They discuss; Johnson and Smith argue.

Verb Tense Consistency – Make sure you don’t switch unnecessarily between verb tenses.

SEE [COMPLEX VERB PHRASES](#) handout.

1. Past for past events that have already taken place (“Susan B. Anthony argued...”)
2. Present for current events (“Climate change is...”) and literature (“Hamlet dies...”)
3. Future for upcoming plans (“I will prove...”) and predictions (“Populations will grow...”)

Articles:

Be sure to use the appropriate articles for your nouns.

1. Definite article: the. Describes a specific noun. (The President – refers to the current president. No ambiguity.)
2. Indefinite article: a/an. Describes a general noun. (A president – refers to any president, not one specific person.)

Punctuation:

The other big aspect of standard English is punctuation, which guides your reader through your thoughts. Using unexpected punctuation can easily confuse your reader. Take a look at the Writing Center’s Punctuation handouts for information on standard punctuation use.

SEE [PUNCTUATION OVERVIEW](#) handout.

• Vocabulary •

Keep in mind that your main goal is to get your ideas across as clearly as you can. Therefore, here are some wording tips:

1. Use the most accurate word you know. If a simple word gets the point across better than a fancy word, use the simple one. Don’t make things confusing by trying to sound like a dictionary!
 - o To avoid repetition, you can try our list of Strong Verbs—but ONLY use the words you’re sure about!! Again, make clarity your first goal.
2. Spell out acronyms/abbreviations completely the first time you use them. An acronym can be useful to save on space—just be sure your reader knows what it stands for, first.
 - o Example: The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is the government’s meteorological agency. NOAA has extensive hurricane preparedness plans available for public use.
3. Here’s a list of academic definitions to help you if you’re confused on what something means:

Abbreviations—may be discouraged within student papers.

et al. – “et alia” (Latin), meaning “and others.” Indicates that some names have been left unstated.

- **Example:** Smith, Johnson, and Barnes -> Smith et al.

i.e. – “id est” (Latin), meaning “that is.” Indicates a rewording or clarification.

- **Example:** My parents, my aunts, and my uncles (i.e. my whole family)

e.g. – “exempli gratia” (Latin), meaning “for example.”

- **Example:** I study insect orders (e.g. Hymenoptera, Lepidoptera, and Diptera).

etc. – “et cetera” (Latin), meaning “and all the rest.” Used at the end of a list to indicate that some similar items have been left unstated.

- **Example:** Common family pets include dogs, cats, fish, etc.

ibid. – “ibidem” (Latin), meaning “in the same place.” Used in footnotes and endnotes to indicate that information is from the same source as the previous note.

p./pp. – “page” or “pages.” (Doubling the letter indicates plurality.) Use p. to indicate a single page, and pp. for a range of pages.

Documentation

APA – American Psychological Association. Usually refers to the APA style of citation, documentation, and formatting for papers in the Sciences and Social Sciences.

- SEE [USING APA 7](#) handout.
- References Page – APA-format reference list, placed at the end of an essay.

Chicago Style – The University of Chicago’s style of citation, documentation, and formatting for papers in Art and History fields.

- SEE [USING CHICAGO](#) handout.
- Turabian – student version of Chicago Style. The differences are negligible.
- Bibliography – Chicago-format reference list, placed at the end of an essay.
 - o Bibliography – (as opposed to Works Cited) a list of all the sources consulted during research, including ones not cited within the paper.
 - o Footnotes – citation information is indicated in the text with a superscript number, which corresponds to a citation note at the bottom of the page.
 - o Endnotes – exactly like footnotes, but collected at the end of the paper (preceding the Bibliography) rather than at the bottom of each page.

MLA – Modern Language Association. Usually refers to the MLA style of citation, documentation, and formatting for papers in the Humanities.

- SEE [USING MLA](#) handout.
- Works Cited Page – MLA-format reference list, placed at the end of an essay. It includes all the works specifically cited within an MLA paper.

AMA – American Medical Association. A citation style for medical works.

AP – Associated Press. Refers to the AP style of citation, documentation, and formatting for Legal and Public papers. (NOT often used in academia.)

ASA – American Sociological Association. A citation style similar to APA.

IEEE – Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers. Refers to the IEEE style of citation, documentation, and formatting for papers in the Engineering field.

Academic writing

Abstract – a brief summary of a paper which faithfully represents all the main points, including results and conclusions. Usually 250 words or fewer.

- SEE [ABSTRACTS AND PRECIS](#) handout.

Annotation – a notation accompanying a bibliographic entry, summarizing the content and significance of a source.

- SEE [ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHIES](#) handout.

Argument – the central claim that a paper seeks to prove with evidence and analysis.

Claim – a statement that a writer asserts to be true, using supporting evidence.

IMRaD – Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion. The standard organizational structure for Scientific and Research papers.

- SEE [SCIENTIFIC WRITING STRUCTURE \(IMRaD\)](#) handout.

Literature Review – a discussion of the current academic conversation on a topic.

- SEE [LITERATURE REVIEWS](#) handout.

Synthesis – an exploration of a topic drawing from multiple sources.

Thesis – 1. Thesis Statement, the one sentence in an introduction that summarizes the main point of a paper.

- **2. Thesis**, a long research paper that completes a degree, usually the Master's.