



Formal and Informal Language: An Introduction

VV064

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Formal and Informal Pairs

- 1) How do you do?
 - 2) It's a pleasure to meet you. Goodbye.
 - 3) I'm afraid your child is experiencing difficulty.
 - 4) One grows weary in these matters.
 - 5) I agree with my colleague that.
 - 6) Please state your business.
- A) What'cha want?
 - B) Nice to meet you. See ya!
 - C) Lily's right...
 - D) Your kid is causing trouble.
 - E) I'm tired of this junk.
 - F) What's up?

Formal vs Informal Language

- Single word adverbs
 - Arise, board
- Formal connecting words
 - In addition, furthermore, however
- Impersonal
 - It is claimed that...
 - It is generally known that...
- Abstract nouns
 - Is happiness possible during unemployment?
- No contractions
 - I will, we cannot
- Phrasal verbs
 - To get up, to get on
- Informal connecting words
 - And, but, so
- Personal
 - People claim that...
 - You know that...
- Modal verbs, adjectives
 - Can people be happy when they haven't got a job?
- Contractions
 - I'll, we can't

Academic Written Language

- Standard usage and grammar
- Standard vocabulary
- Distance between the writer and reader
 - Third person
 - Passive voice
- Authoritative and neutral
 - Not aggressive, timid, or too enthusiastic

Distance

- Passive voice – the focus is the result of an action, not the subject doing the action
 - “Scientists observed strange behavior in hedgehogs after feeding them fish and chips.”
 - “Strange behavior was observed in hedgehogs after they were fed fish and chips.”
- Third person (not “I” or “you”)
 - “One often feels the pressure of modern lifestyle.”

Tone

- The following should be avoided:
- 1) Aggressive tone
 - “This is the correct way of spreading butter on bread.”
- 2) Timid tone
 - “This might be a decent way of spreading butter on bread.”
- 3) Enthusiastic tone
 - “This way of spreading butter on bread is amazing and should be learnt by everyone!”

Style

- **Polonius:**

My liege, and madam, to expostulate
 What majesty should be, what duty is,
 What day is day, night night, and time is time,
 Were nothing but to waste night, day, and time;
 Therefore, **since brevity is the soul of wit,**
 And tediousness the limbs and outward flourishes,
 I will be brief. Your noble son is mad. . . .
 (*Hamlet Act 2, scene 2, 86–92*)

- **AKA get to the point!**

Academic Writing Guidelines

- Avoid common but vague words (nice, big, ...)
- Focus on structure and paragraphs
- Avoid too much personal and emotive language
- Hedging (cautious language) = avoiding commitment
 - > should not be overdone!
 - For example, **it is possible to see** that in January this person weighed 60.8 kg for eight days,
- Avoid generalizations



Academic Writing vs. Presentation

Writing

- / used the least in Computer Science than in other fields
 - (Swales and Feak. *Academic Writing for Graduate Students*. 3rd ed. Michigan. 2013.)

Presentation

- Academic/research speech different: *stuff, things, a bit*; metaphors
 - (Swales and Feak. *Academic Writing for Graduate Students*. 3rd ed. Michigan. 2013.)