

JK II Session IV

Being formal and informal

Academic language should always be clear and logical, but it should also conform to its own genre or style, otherwise it risks distracting the reader or listener from the main purpose. Academic English, particularly when written, is usually described as 'formal' language.

Task 1 Look at two texts on the same subject. What are the main differences between them? Identify at least three specific examples.

1. What should you wear when you give a presentation at a conference? Obviously, things are different depending on whether you're a guy or a gal, but a lot of the decisions are the same. You're probably worried about the speech itself but looking good is a part of the game, isn't it? But also, it's a two-way street, you don't want to be overdressed if the other people wear something pretty casual, right? It's all about the "unwritten rules" of the event so try to find out as much about it as you can from your friends.
2. Many doctoral students are unsure about the clothes they need when they embark on their academic career, in particular when they are going to give a presentation at a conference. The details are different for men and women, but the principles are the same. In some cases, the main concern is to be dressed appropriately to the occasion. That means that one is to be dressed neither too smartly, nor too casually. To avoid doubts or embarrassment, it is recommended to enquire about the "unwritten rules" of the event from more experienced colleagues.

Task 2 The formality of academic writing is characterised by the following:

1. An **impersonal** rather than personal style, including the use of structures that begin with *it* and *there*, rather than the personal pronouns *I*, *we* and *you*.
E.g. A) We need a proper exploration of the causes of this problem.
→ There
- B) I cannot predict the advancement of technology in future decades.
→ It
- C) Some people have argued that a greater number of male teachers at primary school level might improve the performance of young boys in the classroom.
→ It
- D) We had a difference of opinion within the team.
→ There

2. A tendency to base structures around **nouns** rather than verbs (called 'nominalisation').
 E.g. A) The research team assessed the data carefully.
 → The research team made
 B) The presenter questioned whether some of the research was relevant.
 → The presenter questioned
 C) It is striking how similar the two phenomena are.
 → The is striking.

3. The use of **formal vocabulary**, such as:
 rather than *quit a job*,
 apologise rather than,
 verify rather than,
 request rather than,
 terminate rather than,
 rather than *call off*, etc.

4. A preference for **cautious** and **objective** approach, with **evidence** to support your ideas, and consideration given to the views of others, along with the avoidance of emotive or subjective language such as *disgusting* or *marvellous*.
 (adapted from Paterson, K. *Oxford Grammar for EAP*. OUP, 2013.)

Task 3 Match the phrases below with parts of a presentation. Which of the phrases are less formal?

Beginning the presentation

Changing the topic

Summary

Inviting questions

Conclusion

1. Well that's it from me. Thanks for listening.
2. First I'd just like to give you some background information about...
3. I'd like to conclude by...
4. Do you want to ask about something?
5. Right, let's move on to...
6. Before I start, does anyone know...?
7. So to summarise the main points of my talk...
8. Just a quick recap of my main points...
9. Are there any questions?
10. This leads me to my next point, which is...
11. Now, let's consider...
12. If you have any further questions, please don't hesitate to ask.

(<https://www.tolingo.com/sites/en/service/business-english/presentation-phrases/>)