What is Academic Writing?
Workshop Objectives

• To understand & appreciate the characteristics and stylistics of academic writing

• To practice rewriting sentences in a more formal register
Look at relevant readings:

• Become familiar with the style

• Your writing will improve the more you read
Formal, academic style has some of the following characteristics:

- **Impersonal style:**
  - ≥ the third person (“it”, “he” and “she”)
  - ≥ often the passive voice (e.g., “It has been noticed that...”).
- Complex words and sentences
- No contractions
  - ≥ *it is*
  - X *It’s*
- Not many abbreviations
- No vague expressions or slang
- Appropriate, clear and precise vocabulary
- **Objective style**
  - ≥ citing facts and references to support an argument.
**Avoid** colloquial language and slang

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informal</th>
<th>Formal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pretty good</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>very bad</td>
<td>poorly researched unsubstantiated;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>heaps of data</td>
<td>provided significant data; detailed data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pros and cons</td>
<td>merits and demerits; positives and negative Persuasive;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>insightful; was well researched</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Use acronyms (e.g. TAFE) and initialisms (e.g. UTS) correctly

- The general rule is to **write the name in full first time** with the acronym in brackets immediately after.
- For the rest of the essay, use the acronym.
- **Be consistent**—once you have written the acronym, use it all of the time.
- **Do not** use full stops between the abbreviated letters (e.g. UTS).
- If you need to make an acronym into a plural, then add a lower case 's' **without** using an apostrophe.
- If an abbreviation is commonly used as a word, you can use it in the abbreviated form without writing it in full first (e.g. NSW, FAQs).
Avoid abbreviations

- It is best to write the full term in the text of your writing.

For example:

& (use ‘and’ instead)
edg. (use ‘for example’ instead)
i.e. (use ‘that is’ instead)
vs. (use ‘versus’ instead)
cf. (use ‘compare’ instead)
viz. (use ‘namely’, ‘that is’, ‘to be specific’, ‘specifically’ instead)
Avoid using run-on expressions

Try to complete the sentence properly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informal (includes run on)</th>
<th>Formal Alternative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nurses must take into consideration patients' dietary needs resulting from allergies, medication, medical conditions and so on.</td>
<td>Nurses must take into consideration patients' dietary needs resulting from allergies, medication and medical conditions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public transport includes vehicles for public use on the roads, airways, waterways etc.</td>
<td>Public transport includes vehicles for public use, such as buses, trains and aeroplanes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Avoid Rhetorical Questions

A rhetorical question is a question for which no answer is expected.

Try to use statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formal</th>
<th>Informal (includes rhetorical question)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Industrial sites cause vast amounts of environmental pollution, so why do we still use them?</td>
<td>The question surrounding the continued use of industrial sites, given their vast pollution production, still remains.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is a team? A team can be one person but will usually end up including many more.</td>
<td>A team can include one person but usually involves many more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The question is, however, does the &quot;Design School Model&quot; provide a practical solution to the problem of how to formulate strategy?</td>
<td>It is questionable whether the &quot;Design School Model&quot; provides a practical solution to the problem of strategy formulation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Avoid using Phrasal Verbs

Phrasal verbs are usually two-word phrases consisting of \textit{verb + adverb} or \textit{verb + preposition}. For example:

- \textit{Put forward}
- \textit{Carry out}
- \textit{Be made up of}
- \textit{Point out}
- \textit{Work on}
- \textit{Go into}
Activity

Replace the phrasal verbs in the sentences with a more appropriate verb. Don't forget to keep the same tense.

(1) In her latest article Kaufmann puts forward a theory which is likely to prove controversial.
(2) Parliament is made up of two houses.
(3) Smith points out that the increase in life expectancy has led to some economic problems.
(4) The document sets out the terms of the treaty.
Possible answers:

(1) In her latest article Kaufmann proposes a theory which is likely to prove controversial.

(2) Parliament consists of two houses.

(3) Smith indicates that the increase in life expectancy has led to some economic problems.

(4) The document outlines the terms of the treaty.
Academic writing requires the use of precise **formal vocabulary**.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NON-ACADEMIC</th>
<th>ACADEMIC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>got</td>
<td>became / received</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>got better</td>
<td>improved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>turned down</td>
<td>rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>looked into</td>
<td>investigated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bring down</td>
<td>reduce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>put on</td>
<td>gained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kids</td>
<td>children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a hit</td>
<td>successful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Activity

Replace the underlined words in these sentences with words that are clearer or more meaningful.

a) Accountants should write letters well.
b) There are many things involved in doing an assignment.
c) The population often doesn't know what their local politician is doing.
Possible Answers

a) Accountants should write letters **clearly**.
b) There are many **factors** involved in **addressing** an assignment.
c) **Constituents/electorate** are often **unaware** of what their local politician is **accomplishing**.
Power Words

- Develop a list of **power words** which say a lot very succinctly,
  e.g. ‘**controversial** idea’ rather than ‘**an idea that not everyone agrees with**’ 
  e.g. ‘**nocturnal**’ rather than ‘**active at night**’.

- Use powerful **reporting verbs**.
Some **useful reporting verbs** are:

- contend  examine  state  disagree
- persuade  dismiss  refute  object
- contradict  recommend  concur  propose
- describe  observe  assert  support
- purport  examine  suggest  claim

*When would you use these reporting verbs?* (see handout)
Avoid Emotional language

Use language in a neutral way

Example of emotional language:

*It was extremely disappointing* that the bureaucracy chose to target students who did not understand the rules of plagiarism in the first year of their university studies. Some *caring lecturers* approached the issue by delivering a series of *brilliant workshops* to assist the students to overcome their referencing problems. It was a *fantastic strategy* as most of their students did not have to face being accused of plagiarism.
Avoid using personal language

• Usually do not use personal pronouns (*e.g.* *I, me, my, we, us, our, you*).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impersonal</th>
<th>Personal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Research has shown</em></td>
<td><em>We believe</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• Sometimes it is appropriate to use personal pronouns
  (*e.g.* a reflective diary)
Passive Voice

• The active voice emphasises the subject - the person/thing performing the action

• In the passive voice the action/process is more important than who did it

• Example: lab report

  *I prepared the test-tubes by heating them.* **ACTIVE**

  *The test-tubes were prepared by heating them.* **PASSIVE**
Activity

Rewrite these sentences without personal pronouns.

a) When we study coal production, we find these figures.

Example: Studies of coal production have revealed these figures.

b) With this evidence I have proved my hypothesis that reading out aloud is an effective editing strategy.

c) You can only do this after the initial preparation has been conducted.

d) The figures are accurate to within 1%, but you should note that local variations may apply.

e) In the second section of the report, we will consider the environmental consequences.
Possible Answers

b) Such evidence proves the hypothesis that reading out aloud is an effective strategy.

c) This can only be done after the initial preparation has been conducted.

d) The figures are accurate to within 1%, but it should be noted that local variations may apply.

e) Environmental consequences will be considered in the second section of the report.
Use language **sensitively**

Avoid using ‘strong’ language. Use a **cautious tone** in your academic writing. It is usually better to 'suggest', rather than 'state'.

**Avoid** words like: 'very', 'really', 'quite' and 'extremely'.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rather than write:</th>
<th>Try writing like this:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Smith has an extremely important point to make because ....</em></td>
<td><em>Smith's view is significant because ....</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>This view is correct because ....</em></td>
<td><em>It could be said that ....</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>It appears that ....</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>It is evident that ....</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hedging words and phrases

Your writing should be **well-considered, reasonable and cautious**.

### Examples of cautious or tentative style

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It appears that ....</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This suggests that ....</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is likely that ....</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is possible that ....</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This may be attributed to ....</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Words that indicate the level of certainty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medium Certainty/Hedging</th>
<th>High Certainty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>probably, perhaps, likely, occasionally, sometimes, generally, may, might, can, could, appears to be, seems to be, tends to be, suggests, considers ...</td>
<td>undoubtedly, absolutely, certainly, definitely, particularly, very, vitally, totally, wholly, often, must, would, should ...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Activity

*Try making these statements* **more cautious:**

1. Global warming will have disastrous consequences for the whole world.

2. Teleworking leads to isolation.
Avoid generalisations

Do not stereotype, generalise or make assumptions
This especially applies to individuals or groups on the basis of their: gender, race, nationality, religion, physical and mental capacity, age, sexuality, marital status, or political beliefs.
Other things to avoid

• X Dashes to add information
• X Dot/bullet point lists (unless you are permitted to do)
• X Unnecessary verb tense shifts
• X Exclamation marks (!!!)
• X Questions or commands
• X Misuse font styles (including italics & underlining)
Include Other Writers

- A range of print, digital and other sources
- Referenced clearly
- Always identify the work and ideas of others
Always use evidence for:

- claims, assertions and arguments
- qualifications and justifications
- expression of your voice
Referencing

Evidence must always be referenced.
You must reference clearly, systematically and consistently to:

- Avoid plagiarism
- Demonstrate your thorough research
- Allow readers to locate the information
Discover these!

- Online self-help learning resources
- Drop-in & 1:1 consultations
- Writing support sessions
- Conversations@UTS
- Intensive academic English programmes
- Daily workshops
- Volunteer programmes

www.helps.uts.edu.au