

Academic Writing

“Your success with academic writing depends upon how well you understand what you are doing as you write and then how you approach the writing task.”-- L. Lennie Irvin

The main task of **academic writing** is to refine and focus an idea through research and interrogation, then to clearly state and properly support that idea with effective argumentation and adequate evidence. Any style of writing that stands in the way of your ideas is not serving your task: to communicate. At the University level, some expectations will differ between faculties and departments. Be sure to ask for specific requirements with your discipline and assignment.

Many students think that the word *academic* describes writing that is difficult to read, full of complicated ideas articulated in long sentences, with gargantuan, obfuscatory language only an anointed academic can understand. Sometimes academic writing is like that, but that doesn't mean it always should be. It is important to strike a balance between clearly articulating arguments without diminishing the depth of content. We encourage you to open a conversation with your instructors and program about their definition of successful academic writing.

Academic Writing should be:

- **Considerate:** understand your reader's expectations well enough to meet them
 - *Tip: Have a clear picture of your intended reader's knowledge and biases*
- **Critical:** build the trust of your reader by investigating ideas thoroughly
 - *Tip: Determine how much evidence is necessary to support your claims*
- **Clear:** choose language and punctuation that don't confuse your intended reader
 - *Tip: Strive to begin sentences and paragraphs by stating the main point*
- **Concise:** remove extra information that would distract from the purpose of the text
 - *Tip: Look for unnecessary words or repetitive phrases to cut*
- **Coherent:** be sure all ideas and evidence connect to your main point
 - *Tip: Constantly ask whether each piece of evidence is supporting your point*
- **Correct:** be sure formatting, referencing, and representation of all data is accurate
 - *Tip: Give yourself a day or two before the deadline to proofread*

Types of Academic Writing

We often talk about academic writing as if it were a single thing. But, as mentioned above, it can mean different things to different disciplines. A biology lab report is very formal, has specific conventions like required sections and titles, and never uses “I.” That’s very different from a sociology report based on your personal experiences. Let’s use four large categories:

1. *Descriptive writing*

Descriptive writing is one of the simplest and most common types of academic writing. The main purpose of descriptive writing is to state facts and inform the audience. So, when you hear these terms in any academic piece — report, summarize, identify, record, define — know that it is descriptive academic writing. Descriptive writing also relies on details whether they’re the color of a dress in a more informal personal essay or the color of a filtrate in a chemistry lab report.

2. *Analytical writing*

In addition to using descriptive writing, you also need to organize your information in a way that allows your readers to understand the content better. Instead of simply stating your facts and data, you also explain what they are and how they are related to each other. Phrases such as “examine,” “compare,” “relate,” “contrast,” and “analyze” are the most common words used in analytical writing.

3. *Persuasive writing*

Persuasive writing adds your opinion to a descriptive or persuasive work. It may be an interpretation, argument, recommendation, or evaluation of the facts. Whichever it may be, make sure to support your arguments with evidence. Words such as “evaluate,” “argue,” and “discuss,” signify a persuasive form of academic writing.

4. *Critical writing*

Critical writing is considered another level in persuasive writing because apart from your opinion, you need to discuss another viewpoint. Usually used for research, dissertations, reviews, and critical analysis, researchers usually discuss existing researchers’ opinions before emphasizing their opinions. Here, phrases such as “evaluate,” “debate,” “critique,” and “disagree” denote critical writing.