

Tips for Academic Tone

Writing in an academic voice lends to readability and credibility. When writers use a professional tone, they are more respected by instructors, fellow students, and anyone else who might read their papers.

1st, 2nd, or 3rd Person

Most of the time, **3rd person** is the best choice for academic papers.

3rd Person uses pronouns like *they* or *them*. Other terms like “some” or “others” are other alternatives. Although some may also use the term “one,” overuse of that term can sound awkward.

2nd Person uses pronouns like *you* and *your*. Avoiding second person helps prevent antagonizing readers. When writers use “you” and “your,” readers often feel the author is speaking directly to them, and it becomes like a self-help book. This is especially true in argumentative papers in which the point is to present the argument, not to be confrontational.

- **2nd Person Original Sentence:** You should eat apples for a good source of vitamin C.
- **Revision:** Apples are a good source of vitamin C.

1st Person uses pronouns like *I*, *me*, *we*, or *our*. First person is used in personal narratives, reflection papers, and some research papers. Many professors like students to avoid using first person because they want writers to avoid opinion-based writing. Be sure to check with your instructor before using first person. First person can be avoided by creating clear subjects.

- **1st Person Original Sentence:** While I was researching, I found red apples are popular.
- **Revision:** Research shows red apples are popular.

Choosing Language for an Academic Tone

Follow these tips to convey thoughts clearly and accurately.

Avoid Contractions (unless using Chicago/Turabian Style)

Contractions are two words joined with an apostrophe, like *isn't*, *it's*, or *can't*. To write with an academic tone, spell out both words. Example: *Isn't* → *is not*

Refer to Authors by Entire Name or Last Name

- When first naming an author, usually use their entire name. For instance, “John Smith first penned his paper in 1912.”
- After naming the author the first time, use only the last name. For instance, “Smith then published two additional papers.”
- Avoid using only the first name of an author because in most cases, a first name is better suited for personal or casual conversation.

Word Choice Non-Options

Examples

Hyperbole

Hyperboles express exaggeration or make the writer seem literally incredible.

Rather than, “Since the dawn of humankind, we have known millions of things.”

Try, “Humans have long hypothesized about many scientific facts.”

Colloquial Language and Clichés

Colloquial language is considered casual and conversational language. Clichés are usually overused phrases.

Rather than, “He was downright angry with them all, and what he did was a horse of a different color.”

Try, “The man was angry with the group and found a unique way to show them his ire.”

Textspeak

Textspeak is as simple as writing in the same way we text.

Rather than, “Idk why some people like spinach.”

Try, “I do not understand why some people like spinach.”

Vague Terms/ Unclarified Pronouns

An unclarified pronoun is a pronoun that is used before it is connected to another subject.

Rather than, “This is why we do not jump on the bed.”

Try, “Because many people may be injured, we do not jump on the bed.”

Rather than, “It was in the air when it landed on the ground.”

Try, “The balloon was in the air when the UFO landed on the ground.”