



Writing Style – Academic Voice

Developing an Academic Voice:

Do you know that you create a persona with the voice and tone of your writing? Most inexperienced writers use only the voices within their experience. When there is narrow experience, there may be the use of inappropriate voice. Writers may resort to their casual voice, which is inappropriate for academic writing. Developing an appropriate voice in academic writing establishes authority and respect for the writer. An academic voice can be developed through understanding categories of voice, recognizing your writing voice, and learning voice changing strategies.

Categories of Voice:

- **Formal** voice is an informative voice used in analysis and critique.
- **Consultative** voice is reserved for opinion, reaction, position, and persuasion papers.
- **Casual** voice allows you to share personal knowledge and experience. This style is not appropriate for an academic paper unless expressly allowed by your professor (as in a personal narrative).

Strategies for Finding the Voice in your Writing:

- **Read aloud**
When trying to find the voice in a paper, listen to the paper being read by another person and evaluate the appropriateness of the voice given the intended audience. Put yourself in the position of the audience. Does the writer sound informed? Believable?
- **Analyze audience and purpose**
Analyze the audience and their connection to the subject of the paper, and how your position will be received by the audience. Additionally, analyze your purpose for concerns of persuasion, explanation, reaction, justification, and personal connection.

Strategies for Changing your Voice:

- **Eliminate casual fillers**
Eliminate words that are associated with casual style and are generally found in conversation.
Example: “You know,” “well,” “now”
- **Person**
Check for the appropriate person for each style of paper. First and second person pronouns are sometimes applicable to the consultative voice, but not the formal. Be sure you are consistent with your usage throughout the paper.
- **Wordiness and Word Choice**
Express ideas clearly and concisely by removing extraneous words that only provide confusion. Also, remove ambiguous words such as “very” or “great” and select words that provide specific definition.

Road Blocks to Developing an Academic Voice:

➤ **First Person Pronouns**

You can strengthen your voice and sentence structure by removing first person pronouns (except when expressly told to use them, of course).

Faulty Sentence: I think that medical doctors should be required to complete communication skills courses.

Corrected Sentence: Medical doctors could better benefit their clients by completing a required communication skills course.

➤ **Second Person Pronouns**

When considering an audience, you establish credibility by avoiding second person pronouns.

Faulty Sentence: When you read *Hamlet*, you should notice clear foreshadowing of events to transpire.

Corrected Sentence: When reading *Hamlet*, readers may notice clear foreshadowing of events to transpire.

➤ **Contractions**

You establish an informal voice that is inappropriate for academic writing when you use contractions.

Faulty Sentence: The Supreme Court can't overrule the case and maintain the spirit of the constitution.

Corrected Sentence: The Supreme Court can not overrule the case and maintain the spirit of the constitution.

➤ **Colloquialisms**

You can ensure you are using an academic voice by avoiding colloquial speech patterns in your writing.

Faulty Sentence: You can tell the author is really into women's rights by her portrayal of feminist heroines.

Corrected Sentence: The author's portrayal of feminist heroines suggests a subjective connection with the women's rights movement.

➤ **Abbreviations**

Abbreviations imply an informality that contradicts academic writing.

Faulty Sentence: The defendant was declared incompetent last Sat.

Corrected Sentence: The defendant was declared incompetent last Saturday.