

4. AVOIDING INFORMAL LANGUAGE IN ACADEMIC WRITING

When writing a paper, you want to communicate to your reader that you have thought carefully about your ideas. If you write in an informal style that reminds the reader of a casual conversation, your reader may not take your ideas as seriously.

It is important to edit your paper for language that is informal.

INFORMAL LANGUAGE TO EDIT	HOW TO MAKE LANGUAGE MORE FORMAL
<p>Generalizations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>Criminals are dangerous.</i> ■ <i>Americans are overweight.</i> 	<p>Be more specific</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>Violent criminals can be dangerous.</i> ■ <i>Two-thirds of Americans are overweight.</i>
<p>Vague language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>School is a <u>big thing</u> in my life.</i> ■ <i>They arrested <u>some people</u> at the march.</i> ■ <i>Drinking while driving is <u>bad</u>.</i> 	<p>Use more specific words</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>School is <u>an important part</u> of my life.</i> ■ <i>They arrested <u>some protesters</u> at the march.</i> ■ <i>Drinking while driving is <u>dangerous</u>.</i>
<p>Using “you” instead of a specific person/group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>When <u>you</u> work with a patient who is very ill, <u>you</u> need to be patient.</i> 	<p>Replace “you” with a specific person/group</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>When <u>nurses</u> work with a patient who is very ill, they need to be patient.</i>
<p>Informal words and expressions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>My aunt has <u>a lot of kids</u>.</i> ■ <i>The criminal justice system is <u>messed up</u>.</i> 	<p>Use more formal words</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>My aunt has <u>many children</u>.</i> ■ <i>The criminal justice system has <u>serious problems</u>.</i>
<p>Phrasal verbs used in conversation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>I <u>looked up</u> information about nursing positions.</i> 	<p>Replace with a one-word verb</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>I <u>researched</u> information about nursing positions.</i>
<p>Contractions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>Many patients <u>don’t</u> listen to their doctors.</i> 	<p>Remove the contraction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>Many patients <u>do not</u> listen to their doctors.</i>
<p>Incomplete sentences (Fragments)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>I chose to attend a CUNY college. <u>Because it is near my home</u>.</i> 	<p>Join the fragment to a complete sentence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>I chose to attend a CUNY college <u>because it is near my home</u>.</i>

EXERCISE 1 (Have a tutor help you.)

1. Identify the different types of informal language in the following paragraph.
2. Follow the instructions to make the language more formal.

Americans disagree whether the death penalty is a bad idea or not. Some people don't think that the death penalty is humane, while many conservatives believe that it's fair punishment for killing someone, even if the murderer is under 18 years old.. I believe the death penalty is a good way to stop kids from killing each other. Nobody would commit a crime. When you find out that guys you know have been fried for a crime.

1. IDENTIFY THE INFORMAL LANGUAGE	2. MAKE THE LANGUAGE MORE FORMAL
Generalizations	Be more specific
Vague language	Use more specific words
Using "you" instead of a specific person/group	Replace with a specific person/group
Informal words and expressions	Use more formal words
Phrasal verbs used in conversation	Replace with a one-word verb
Contractions	Remove the contraction
Incomplete sentences (Fragments)	Join the fragment to a complete sentence

EXERCISE 2 (Do this by yourself or have a tutor help you.)

1. Review a paper you have written.
2. Underline all the language that is too informal, and make a note about why the language is too informal (e.g., the language is vague; the sentence is incomplete).
3. Then, rewrite the sentences with the informal language to make them more formal.