

ACADEMIC VERSUS COLLOQUIAL

The term “colloquial” refers to a style of writing that is conversational (how we talk on a daily basis). In academic writing, writers discard the colloquial style and embrace a more professional, analytical tone (i.e., academic writing). This means using precise language, sounding confident, avoiding language with which you are unfamiliar, prioritizing clarity, and getting rid of filler words such as “really,” “very,” “literally,” “basically,” and “quite.” Also, avoid using contractions (i.e., can’t, don’t, doesn’t, couldn’t, shouldn’t).

EXAMPLE OF COLLOQUIAL LANGUAGE	TIPS ON HOW TO MAKE THE SENTENCE SOUND “ACADEMIC”	EXAMPLE OF ACADEMIC LANGUAGE
<i>I thought the writer did a great job in the book because it talks so much about her life as an actress.</i>	AVOID EMPTY PHRASES that lack details or evidence. In this example, “did a great job” isn’t useful. <i>What did she do a great job of?</i>	<i>The writer skillfully narrates her experiences as an actress through the use of witty language and non-linear storytelling.</i>
<i>But frankly, I cannot believe she got to meet all the people she said she did. She must be making the whole book up.</i>	AVOID IMPOLITE ASSESSMENTS OR HASTY GENERALIZATIONS of a text; (“must be making the whole book up”)	<i>Because she does not provide many details about the famous people she met, the reliability of her stories is questionable.</i>
<i>I think she ought to use more specific details about her celebrity friends.</i>	AVOID CONVERSATIONAL EXPRESSIONS (“frankly,” “got,” “making the whole book up,” and all contractions, e.g., “can’t” and “don’t”)	<i>More specific details would add flavor and life to her celebrity friends.</i>
<i>In the second chapter, the writer reconnoiters her feelings of lonesomeness despite being inundated by people</i>	AVOID LANGUAGE YOU CAN’T DEFINE. Most of the time, using words that you can’t define backfires. It often leads to awkward syntax and misunderstandings about your ideas. Using academic language isn’t about wordiness or using complex language. It is about clarity.	<i>In the second chapter, the writer explores her feelings of loneliness despite being surrounded by people</i>
<i>Sometimes, she volunteered in the ghetto’s soup kitchen, which was full of poor people.</i>	AVOID OFFENSIVE LANGUAGE because it demonstrates a lack of respect or understanding for your subject matter. Instead, be very specific about the people or things you are discussing.	<i>Sometimes, she volunteered in a soup kitchen.</i>

***HEDGING IS NOT THE SAME AS QUALIFYING. Avoid overly broad assessments such as:**

“To resolve an argument, women like to talk about their feelings while men prefer to move on from an argument quickly.”

Instead, qualify your statement:

“In a survey by Dingo, 76% of women said they like to talk about their feelings in order to resolve an argument. On the other hand, sixty-seven percent of men preferred moving on quickly (2007).”

This kind of assessment needs a citation to support it because it is not commonly accepted knowledge.

See our “Summarizing, Quoting, and Paraphrasing” handout for more information.

ADDITIONAL TIPS

Early in the semester, ask your professor if you may read an “A” paper from one of their students. When you do, look for use of language, style choices, and what’s appropriate in your discipline.

If your professor offers feedback on full or partial drafts before the deadline, submit yours early.

Read the introductory materials in your citation handbook (MLA, APA, CMS, etc.). These manuals explain the kind of writing expected in various disciplines.

Read journal articles in your discipline to learn more about your field’s preferred writing style.

Avoid using common day-to-day words and phrases (i.e., ‘wanna,’ ‘gonna,’ ‘y’all,’ ‘till,’ ‘I’m blue,’ ‘she went nuts’).

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