

Academic writing cultural differences and useful phrases

Read the descriptions of UK and US academic writing below and decide if each point is the same in other places such as your own country or not. If it is the same somewhere else that you know about, write the name of that country or those countries next to, e.g. "Japan" if you think that Japanese academic conventions are the same. If that thing is different in other countries that you know about, leave it blank and move onto the next one.

Academic writing style cultural differences and useful phrases

Academic writing vs other writing styles cultural differences

Papers in peer-reviewed journals are very different to texts in newspapers and magazines such as articles, columns and editorials.

Journal papers are very different from graded academic writing such as class assignments and essays in timed exams like IELTS essays and TOEFL essays.

Academic writing styles can vary from journal to journal, so you have to check each publication's guide for writers and follow it carefully and/ or copy other papers in it.

Academic writing titles cultural differences and useful phrases

Academic papers often have a title with two parts.

If the title of an academic paper has two parts, the two parts are usually separated by a colon ("Mastering 'a' and 'the': The effectiveness of a game-based approach").

Starting academic writing cultural differences and useful phrases

The introduction often includes something about the importance of the paper and/ or its conclusions ("If these results are repeated elsewhere, this could have huge implications for...", "This provides a totally new point of view on...").

The introduction often mentions who the piece will be of interest to.

Papers are often consciously written with both specialist readers and more general readers in mind, and the introduction often mentions both groups ("The conclusions should be of interest to anyone in the fields of...", "The research also touches on the fields of...").

(Rhetorical) questions to the reader are usually unsuitable for research-based papers in academic journals, so you should keep the number of such questions to a minimum (probably no more than one question like "But what does this mean?" per paper).

Introductions usually end by laying out what will be covered in the body of the piece ("This paper will look at and then turn its attention to...", "The three reasons for this will be examined in turn below").

Personal pronouns in academic writing cultural differences and useful phrases

You should avoid addressing the reader as "you".

"You" can be replaced by other expressions ("readers", "readers of this journal", "people reading this paper")

In most journals, you should avoid mentioning yourself in the body of your paper (so you should avoid “I”, “me” and “my”, and even “the author” should be avoided if possible, with expressions like “This paper...” and “In this study...” usually being better).

In some academic fields it is more normal to mention yourself when describing your research (for example when writing about some kinds of anthropological field work).

Academic language cultural differences and useful phrases

Academic words tend to be longer than normal everyday words, meaning that you can make writing more academic by replacing words with a longer word (“attend” for “take part in”, “acquire” or “obtain” for “get hold of”, “retain” for “keep hold of”, “commence” for “make a start”, “the elderly” for “old people”, “substantial” or “considerable” for “quite a lot”, “initially” for “at first”).

Many abbreviations are too informal for academic writing (so you should write “information” instead of “info”, “he is” instead of “he’s”, “we have” instead of “we’ve”, “as soon as possible” instead of “asap”, “okay” instead of “OK”, “document” instead of “doc”).

Abbreviations related to the field that you are writing about are fine in academic writing, but might need to be defined (“The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, henceforth ‘NATO’”).

Some abbreviations are standard in academic writing (in English mainly Latin ones like “e.g.”, “c.f.”, “pp”, “ca.”, “i.e.”, “NB”, “et al.”, “ibid.”, “no.” and “etc”, but also others such as “ed.”, “vol.”, “doi” and “n.d.”).

Some linking expressions are only used to are used to link two ideas in one sentence while others are only used to link two different sentences (“and” vs “In addition”/ “Furthermore”/ “Moreover”, “but” vs “However”/ “In contrast”, “because” vs “The reason for this is...”/ “This is because...”, “so” vs “As a result,...”, “.e.g.” vs “To give an example,...”, “i.e.” vs “To put that another way,...”) and using them in the other way is usually wrong.

Supporting your arguments in academic writing cultural differences and useful phrases

In academic writing, you should avoid stating your opinion without supporting what you say (so you have to say “It is clear that... because...”, not just “It is clear that...”).

The best ways of supporting your arguments include quoting data and trends (“Recent statistics from... show that...”, “There has been a 300% increase in...”), quoting other people’s opinions and experiences (“Chomsky says that...”, “All the speakers at a recent conference agreed that...”), knocking down opposing arguments (“Although many people believe that...”, “It could also be said that..., but this doesn’t mean that...”), and logical arguments such as cause and effect (“This would inevitably lead to...”, “The result of this is likely to be...”).

Hedging and generalising cultural differences and useful phrases

In academic writing, we need to be very careful not to overgeneralise (so avoid writing “Japanese people think...”, “It is thought that...”, “Experts believe that...”).

To not overgeneralise, in academic writing we often add information on how many or how much something matches your statement, for example how many people something is true for (“almost everyone”, “the vast majority of people”, “most people”, “many people”, “a considerable number of people”/ “a substantial number of people”, “some people”, “a considerable minority of people”).

To avoid overgeneralising, in academic writing we often add information on how often something is true or how often something happens (“almost always”, “usually/ generally”, “often/ regularly”, “sometimes”, “occasionally”).

So that we don’t overgeneralise, in academic writing we often add information on how likely something is to be true or to happen (“almost certainly”, “very probably”, “probably”, “possibly”, “conceivably”, “probably not”, “almost certainly not”).

Some hedging/ generalising language has very precise meanings (“possibly” vs “probably”, “most” vs “many”, “usually” vs “often”), so seemingly small changes can make a statement inaccurate.

There is also other hedging/ generalising language with less precise meanings (“seems to...”, “appears to...”).

Punctuation, formatting and paragraphing in academic writing cultural differences and useful phrases

Special formatting (in English usually italics or quotation marks) is used to show unusual words that the reader is unlikely to know and/ or that you will define for them, including words which are not in a standard dictionary such as terms you made up yourself, very technical terms and foreign words (for example “‘kismet’, which according to the Oxford English Dictionary (2011) is...” or “*kismet*, which Smith defines as...”).

Certain punctuation marks are too informal for academic writing (so we don’t use “!”, “-” and “...” in academic papers, apart from in direct quotes).

After a paragraph put a blank line or an indent before you start the next paragraph (not usually both a blank line and an indent).

Each paragraph has one clear topic, so you generally shouldn’t start a new paragraph without changing topic (at least a little).

We also sometimes start a new paragraph if the paragraph gets too long (over about five sentences).

Good paragraphs can be understood on their own (so it's better to write "The second advantage of changing Chinese trade policy is..." instead of "Secondly...", "Another reason for moving towards a more data-driven approach is..." instead of "In addition", "There are also disadvantages to privatisation" instead of "However...").

You should avoid one-sentence paragraphs.

As well paragraphs, academic papers are usually divided into larger sections.

Sections usually have headings, while individual paragraphs usually don't.

Nowadays section headings are usually marked with bold script (rather than underlining, etc).

It's almost always better to avoid bullet points and use continuous prose (sentences and paragraphs) instead.

Important information is usually emphasised with language such as words and phrases, not with punctuation or formatting (so in English we emphasise with phrases like "Please note that...", "It should be noted that..." and "NB...", not with brackets, quotation marks, underlining, bold script or capital letters).

We never use all caps ("SMITH", "NO doubt", etc) in the body of academic writing.

Ending academic writing cultural differences and useful phrases

A conclusion often starts with a summary of the information in the body of the piece ("As has been shown above,...", "To summarise the points above,...", "The main points above can be summarised as...").

Academic writing needs a clear conclusion. If you are worried about overstating how sure you are about your conclusion, you should still have a clear conclusion but should use hedging/ softening language ("The data appear to show that...", "In this situation it was clear that... and it seems likely that this would also be true...").

You should probably mention the implications of your conclusions for future researchers, government departments, etc (maybe quite hesitantly, as in "Because of this, in the future NGOs need to at least consider...").

Brainstorming stage

Without looking above for now, write at least two suitable phrases to do that thing in each of the gaps below. Many phrases not above are also possible.

Academic writing titles cultural differences and useful phrases

If the title of an academic paper has two parts, the two parts are usually separated by a colon (_____).

Starting academic writing cultural differences and useful phrases

The introduction often includes something about the importance of the paper and/ or its conclusions (_____).

The introduction often mentions who the piece will be of interest to. Papers are often consciously written with both specialist readers and more general readers in mind, and the introduction often mentions both groups (_____).

Introductions usually end by laying out what will be covered in the body of the piece (_____).

Personal pronouns in academic writing cultural differences and useful phrases

You should avoid addressing the reader as “you”. “You” can be replaced by other expressions (_____).

In most journals, you should avoid mentioning yourself in the body of your paper (so you should avoid “I”, “me” and “my”, and even “the author” should be avoided if possible, with expressions like _____ usually being better).

Academic language cultural differences and useful phrases

Academic words tend to be longer than normal everyday words, meaning that you can make writing more academic by replacing words with a longer word (_____ for “take part in”, _____ for “get hold of”, _____ for “keep hold of”, _____ for “quite a lot”, _____ for “at first”).

Many abbreviations are too informal for academic writing (so you should write _____ instead of “info”, _____ instead of “he’s”, _____ instead of “OK”, _____).

Abbreviations related to the field that you are writing about are fine in academic writing, but might need to be defined (_____).

Some abbreviations are standard in academic writing (in English mainly Latin ones like _____ but also others such as _____).

Some linking expressions are only used to are used to link two ideas in one sentence while others are only used to link two different sentences (“and” vs _____, “but” vs _____, “because” vs _____, “so” vs _____, _____, …”) and using them in the other way is usually wrong.

Supporting your arguments in academic writing cultural differences and useful phrases

The best ways of supporting your arguments include quoting data and trends (_____),
quoting other people’s opinions and experiences (_____),
knocking down opposing arguments (_____),
and logical arguments such as cause and effect (_____).

Hedging and generalising cultural differences and useful phrases

In academic writing, we need to be very careful not to overgeneralise (so avoid writing _____).

To not overgeneralise, in academic writing we often add information on how many or how much something matches your statement, for example how many people something is true for (_____).

To avoid overgeneralising, in academic writing we often add information on how often something is true or how often something happens (_____).

So that we don’t overgeneralise, in academic writing we often add information on how likely something is to be true or to happen (_____).

Some hedging/ generalising language has very precise meanings, so seemingly small changes can make a statement inaccurate (“possibly” vs _____, “most” vs _____).

There is also other hedging/ generalising language with less precise meanings (_____

_____).

Punctuation, formatting and paragraphing in academic writing cultural differences and useful phrases

Special formatting (in English usually italics or quotation marks) is used to show unusual words that the reader is unlikely to know and/ or that you will define for them, including words which are not in a standard dictionary such as terms you made up yourself, very technical terms and foreign words (for example _____
_____).

Certain punctuation marks are too informal for academic writing (so we don't use _____
_____ in academic papers, apart from in direct quotes).

Good paragraphs can be understood on their own (both traditionally and nowadays when readers usually skim read almost everything, so it's better to write _____
_____ instead of "Secondly,...", _____
instead of "However,...", _____).

Important information is usually emphasised with language such as words and phrases, not with punctuation or formatting (so in English we emphasise with phrases like _____,
_____, not with brackets, quotation marks, underlining, bold script or capital letters).

Ending academic writing cultural differences and useful phrases

A conclusion often starts with a summary of the information in the body of the piece (_____

_____).

Academic writing needs a clear conclusion. If you are worried about overstating how sure you are about your conclusion, you should still have a clear conclusion but should use hedging/ softening language (_____
_____).

You should probably mention the implications of your conclusions for future researchers, government departments, etc (maybe quite hesitantly, as in _____
_____).

Compare as a class or with the examples above. Many examples not above are also possible, so please check if you wrote something different.