Learning Development

Introduction to Academic Style

In your academic studies you will be reading, thinking and writing in an academic way and using an academic style. In general this means writing in an objective, precise and concise way using specialised vocabulary. Academic style can appear complicated because it is part of the language that is used to describe and discuss subjects at a high level of understanding. You are not expected to be fluent in this style at the beginning but your fluency will develop as you communicate, especially through writing.

Typical features of academic style:

- Academic style tends to be formal. This means avoiding contractions such as don’t. It also means avoiding slang or colloquial language.
- Academic style aims to be restrained and to sound fairly neutral. This means avoiding emotive or extreme language such as strong adjectives and adverbs (e.g. huge, vast, amazing, incredible, awfully, sadly, etc.)
- Academic writing often contains specialised and technical words that are related to the particular subject being studied. You become familiar with these as your expertise develops. It can be useful to consult a subject-specific dictionary to help with understanding and using these words.
- The tone in academic writing is serious, so chatty remarks, humour and sarcasm are not usually appropriate.
- Academic style tends to avoid using personal language and therefore, depending on the subject, it is sometimes inadvisable to use I, you or we when writing. There are exceptions to this rule, for example, when reflective writing is used.
- Academic style seeks to be objective and to support opinions and viewpoints with evidence and arguments.
- Abstract nouns* and groups of nouns are frequent in academic style.
- Academic texts are organised in recognised ways with specific elements, for example: introduction, main part, conclusion, references. There are many different types of text such as essays, reports, theses, reviews, journal articles, textbooks, etc.
- Academic texts often refer to other academic texts, to cite evidence and data, and to support the writer’s argument.

*Nouns are words that name things. Some nouns are physical things that you can touch and see, for example, ‘tree’, ‘car’, ‘airport’. These are called concrete nouns. Some nouns express ideas, processes or events, such as ‘quality’, ‘production’ or ‘crisis’. These are abstract nouns. Abstract nouns are very common in academic writing as they enable a writer to express concepts and ideas at an abstract or theoretical level.