What is academic writing style?

Academic writing style refers to the rules and conventions for producing written texts in academic contexts. Although some variations do exist between different disciplines, below are the common shared features:

- Formality,
- Objectivity, and
- Clarity.

This Survival Guide focuses on the third feature, clarity. A piece of writing is clear when your ideas are presented in a precise and concise manner so they can be understood easily.

How to be precise

Being precise refers to using exact language to communicate your intended message effectively so you are able to best demonstrate your knowledge and understandings. Below are some strategies you can apply.

1. **Specify what you mean**

Provide details, examples and explanations so your meaning is clear. Avoid using vague descriptors in your writing.

**Example:**

*Alan used the skills learnt in the course to start his own business.*

(What skills in particular? Which course?)

*Alan used the financial management skills learnt in the Certificate IV course in Business Studies to start his own business.*

2. **Use discipline-specific vocabulary**

When you write for an academic audience, it is a good idea to use discipline-specific vocabulary. This refers to the terminology, technical words or jargon assumed to be common knowledge amongst those studying or working within a particular discipline.

**TIPS!**

- Start a glossary to record the new vocabulary or terminology you come across in your course readings and lectures. This can serve as a quick reference.
- Buy a discipline-specific dictionary or access one online. Some useful links to free resources are provided below:

  - **Engineering Dictionary**
    http://www.engineering-dictionary.org/
  - **Medical Dictionary**
    http://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/
  - **Legal Dictionary**
    http://legal-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/
  - **Financial Dictionary**
  - **Oxford Dictionary of Education**
How to be concise

When you write in a concise manner, your writing is succinct and straight-to-the-point so your reader is able to understand you easily without having to unpack too many words. Below are some suggested strategies.

1. **Replace wordy or empty phrases with one-word alternatives**

   Examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wordy phrase</th>
<th>Replacement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>at this point in time</td>
<td>now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the not-too-distant-future</td>
<td>soon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is able to</td>
<td>can</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the final analysis</td>
<td>finally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in spite of the fact that</td>
<td>although</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

   The patient had a prolonged illness due to the fact that he had not completed the course of antibiotics.

   *In the event that If* security is breached, notify the IT department immediately.

2. **Eliminate redundancies — meaningless repetitions that make your writing wordy**

   Examples:

   *First and foremost, the technology was old.*
   *The courtyard was round in shape.*
   *Employees who work in the same company are encouraged to collaborate across teams.*

3. **Replace phrasal verbs with one-word alternatives**

   Phrasal verbs are two-word phrases consisting of a **verb + adverb** or a **verb + preposition** usually used in conversational settings.

   **Examples:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phrasal verb</th>
<th>Replacement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bring up</td>
<td>raise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>look into</td>
<td>investigate, examine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>speed up</td>
<td>accelerate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>deal with</td>
<td>address</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>go back</td>
<td>return</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

   The club was set up *established* in 1890.

   The new manager has put forward *introduced* many good initiatives.

4. **Write straightforward sentences**

   To avoid writing convoluted sentences, eliminate expletive constructions like ‘there is’, ‘there are’ and ‘it is’.

   **Examples:**

   *There are The various physical factors that affect the global distribution of agricultural systems, which include climate, soil and slope conditions.*

   *In 1982, there were one billion people in China; today, there are 1.411 billion people.*

   *China’s population grew from one billion in 1982 to 1.411 billion people today.*