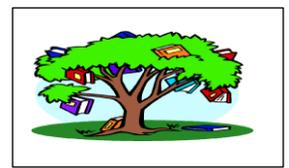


Toward Better Literacy: Reference Outlines



Maintaining an Academic Voice

Your **voice** (the style of wording) should depend on your **audience** (the person or group that you are talking to or writing for). There are standards for academic writing.

1. **Avoid self-reference.** Unless your paper requires a personal component such as a narrative or a reflection, do not refer to **yourself** or **your paper**. Eliminate the **first person** (*I, me, my, we*, etc.) as well as phrases like "this paper."

In this paper, I will show how important art is to society.
Better: Art is extremely important to society.

2. **Keep your reader at a distance.** Eliminate the **second person** (*you, your*, etc.). Stay away from **rhetorical questions** and **direct instructions**. Second person is used only in direct address.

You want to get good grades, right?
Better: All students want to receive good grades, of course.

3. **Use appropriate vocabulary.** College papers should sound like a textbook, not a conversation. Avoid **contractions**, **slang**, **colloquialisms**, and **exaggeration**.

A lot of important stuff's gonna happen this year
Better: Many important events will take place this year.

4. **Be fair.** Avoid language that is inherently **sexist** or otherwise **biased** against a particular group.

A good doctor keeps his patients informed.
Better: A good doctor keeps his or her patients informed.

5. **Be direct.** In giving a personal opinion, state it as if it were **fact**, avoiding weak lead-ins like "Maybe" and "I think." Try to use the **active voice** wherever possible.

I think the defendant was convicted too hastily.
Better: The jury convicted the defendant too hastily.

Note: The imperative voice used above implies the second person ("you"). This is consultative, as used in websites to give instruction. Academic writing is usually objective, not instructive. Intensifiers ("unreal" "amazing" "totally") do not really add much. We don't teach a lesson, but investigate and discover in a community.