FORMAL AND INFORMAL WRITTEN LANGUAGE

Students writing academic essays would be expected to use formal English, and maintain consistency and uniformity in their writing, in other words, formal and informal styles would not be mixed.

Formal language is characterised as being more objective and impersonal. It is the type of written language that would be used in academic writing, official reports, documents and other similar genres.

Informal writing, on the other hand, would be characteristic of the kinds of writing found in newspapers, magazines, advertising, personal letters and so on.

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These notes summarise the main features, which differentiate formal and informal written language.

GRAMMAR		
FEATURE	**FORMAL LANGUAGE**	**INFORMAL LANGUAGE**
▪ relative pronoun and the position of the preposition	The results depended on the cylinder **in which** the liquid was placed. The scientists **for whom** the funds are being collected proceeded with the experiment.	The results depended on the cylinder **which (or: that)** the liquid was placed **in**. The scientists **whom** the funds are being collected **for** proceeded with the experiment.
▪ contractions are to be avoided in formal writing	The study **did not** *commence* because of the difficulties.	The study **didn't** *start* because of the difficulties.

STUDY ENGLISH

▪ impersonal style for formal language, using passive constructions, especially when describing procedures	The procedures **were written by** specialists in the field.	The specialists in the field **wrote** the procedures.
▪ use of abstract nouns in formal writing	The judge sought **clarification** of the differences.	The judge wanted the differences **explained**.
▪ avoid personal pronouns (I, you, we) and use the impersonal 'one' or constructions with 'it is' or 'there is/are'	**One** should consider the options. **It is said** that….	**You** should consider the options. **They say** that….
▪ using language that is tentative	**modal verbs**: can, could, should, may, would Example: The government **should** require industry to pay for removing its waste. **adverbs**: probably, possibly, perhaps Example: Although this is an old and **probably** ineffective method, there is nothing on the market that could replace it. **adjectives**: probable, possible Example: A **possible** solution to the problem requires industry to pay for removing its waste. **nouns**: possibility, claim, evidence Example: The scientists were concerned with the **possibility** of side effects from the untested drug.	
▪ repetition should be avoided in formal style	**Environmental pollution** will be the focus of this study. **It** is a serious problem facing mankind today.	**Environmental pollution** will be the focus of this study. **Environmental pollution** is a serious problem facing mankind today.

SENTENCE COMPLEXITY AND LINKING WORDS

- use of a variety of simple, compound and complex sentences for more formal writing

- avoid beginning sentences with coordinating conjunctions 'and' and 'but' (these conjunctions join sentences not start them)

- predominance of simple sentences is less formal than a variety of simple, compound and complex sentences

Air pollution is harmful to plants because of the effects of poisonous gases. **In addition**, **it** can damage the ozone layer.

linking words expressing	formal	less formal
addition	moreover, furthermore, in addition to	also, and, besides
opposition	nevertheless, nonetheless	but
result	consequently, accordingly	so,
referring to a subject	with reference to, regarding	at any rate, anyway
cause and effect	accordingly, therefore, thus, consequently	so
ordering	first(ly), in the first place	and, and then

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

FEATURE	FORMAL LANGUAGE	INFORMAL LANGUAGE
• the term is written in full the first time it appears in the writing followed by its abbreviation or acronym in brackets • Latin abbreviations are written in full	After her brilliant performance in *Hamlet*, Jane was excited by the prospect of becoming a student at the National Institute of Dramatic Art **(NIDA)**. The Institute offers programs for all phases of teaching and training of educational personnel. **For example**, it provides advanced work in counselling, pastoral care and guidance.	Most of the students who performed last night were graduates of **NIDA**. The Institute offers many training programs, **e.g.** advanced work in counselling, pastoral care and guidance.

VOCABULARY		
■ use of phrasal or prepositional verbs are inappropriate in formal writing	**Examples**	
	Formal choice	**Phrasal verbs**
	abolish complete conduct consider discover distribute encounter invent reconsider review	do away with fill in carry out weigh up find out hand out come across make up think again go over
■ examples of more formal vocabulary usually found in academic writing Note: longer words are more formal than shorter	absence of accurate advantageous advised alternatively beneficial commence conceal consecutive consolidate deteriorate diminish duration endeavour explain identical indicate initial maintain marginal modify occur preserve probability	no right useful, helpful told or useful, helpful begin, start hide following on, next to combine, join, merge get worse lessen time try show, tell same show, write down first keep, support small, slight change happen keep chance