

ACADEMIC ENGLISH FEATURES AND SPECIFICS

Babkina Valeriia

Voronezh State Medical University

General medicine faculty, second course, group

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Academic English is the genre of English used in the world of research, study, teaching and universities.

Academic English



How is it different?

ACADEMIC ENGLISH FEATURES

INCLUDE: complexity, formality, precision and objectivity, sentence patterns and grammar.

COMPLEXITY

- Written texts are lexically dense compared to spoken language: they have proportionately more lexical words than grammatical words. Written texts are shorter, however, they have longer, more complex words and phrases. They have more noun-based phrases, more nominalisation, and more lexical variation.

NOMINAL GROUPS

- Formal written English uses nouns and nominal group (noun-based phrases) more than verbs. One simple example is:
- [?] Like all other forms of life, we human beings are the product of evolution.
- [?] Like all other forms of life, we human beings are the product of how we have evolved.
- The noun "evolution" is preferred to the verb "evolve" and the "wh" clause
- A typical nominal group is structured in the following way:

- Nouns can be premodified or postmodified:
- premodifier+ noun
- adjective - the national survey, post-operative complications, epidemiological study
- ed-participle - a balanced analysis, inactivated vaccine, advanced technique
- ing-participle - growing problem, increasing incidence
- noun – ‘key hole’ surgery , flu outbreak, healthcare workers

- noun + postmodifier
- prepositional phrase (preposition + nominal group)- people with poor mental health, the solution to the problem of bacterial resistance to antibiotics,
- relative (who, that, which) clause - students who have no previous experience
- to-infinitive – the study to analyse this
- ing-clauses – the case group consisting of 50 patients
- ed-clauses - treatments used for common, complex medical conditions.
- adverb (or adverbial group) - the road back, the people outside
- adjective (or adjectival group) - varieties common in India, the festival proper, something different

NOMINALISATION

- Formal written English uses nouns more than verbs. For example, "judgement" rather than "judge", "development" rather than "develop", "admiration" rather than "admire". Changing a verb or other word into a noun is called nominalisation. Compare these sentences:
 - 1. Organisms reproduce. This is a major characteristic of life.
 - 2. Reproduction is a major characteristic of life.

- In general they mean the same, but sentence 2 is expressed more concisely. It uses the word “reproduction”, whereas sentence 1 uses the word “reproduce”. Here the word “reproduce” is a verb. It would change to “reproduces” if “organisms” changed to “an organism”. “Reproduction” is a noun made from the verb “reproduce”; we call this process nominalisation.

FORMALITY

Formality is a basic characteristic of academic English. It mainly relates to formal words or formal vocabulary used in academic writing. There are lists of commonly used words and expressions for academic writers. At the same time, in academic English you should try to avoid:

- colloquial words and expressions, e.g. stuff, a lot of, thing, sort of,
- contracted forms, e.g. can't, doesn't, shouldn't
- two – word (phrasal) verbs, e.g. put off, bring up
- asking direct questions and making exclamations

COMPARE

Informal

- The symptoms got worse
- The GP couldn't make out what the patient was suffering from so he sent him to the consultant

Formal

- The symptoms deteriorated
- The GP was unable to make a diagnosis so the patient was referred to the consultant

PRECISION AND OBJECTIVITY

- Academic writing must be precise and objective. Precision is a key characteristic of Academic English, which means that writers use information, data or figures when they present their paper. For example, instead of using a lot of people a writer must say 20 million people.
- Objectivity is another feature of academic writing. This means that the language is in general objective rather than personal. Writers avoid using words like I, me, you. They focus on facts, data and evidence rather than on personal beliefs or opinions. Impersonal language is appropriate when presenting your own points, e.g.

- It is worthwhile to consider (not I consider)
- The data indicates that (not I will show that)
- Several possibilities emerge (not I will demonstrate possibilities)

Objective language is also unemotional which means that we do not normally use expressive words like surprisingly, unfortunately, or exclamations and direct questions, etc.

GRAMMAR

- Passive Voice is commonly used in academic English to emphasize that the action is more important than the agent. Passive structures make the tone more objective and impersonal.

Tense Passive form: be + past participle

The research is done in John Hopkins University.

The research is being done in John Hopkins University.

English is now used as the language of science. By learning a single language scientists around the world gain access to the vast scientific literature and can communicate with other scientists anywhere in the world. However, the use of English as the universal scientific language creates distinct challenges for those who are not native speakers of English.

English language has very strict rules for word order, use prepositions and etc. Each verb is to be followed by one and only one preposition, otherwise it would mean something not only entirely, but also embarrassingly, different:

- Thank you very much for putting me up for the night (letting me stay).
- Thank you for putting up with me for the night (tolerate my presence).

Certain verbs that always need a specific preposition:

- We listen to our patients.

Certain verbs that will never ever take a preposition:

- You must take this tablet once a day.

Thanks for your attention