

Formal vs. Informal Register

Task 1

Put the following list of words into two groups: academic/formal words and informal words. There are 10 words in each list.

accurate	adjust	discover	get
study in detail	support	acquire	assess
ascertain	put together	suitable	deal with
compile	appropriate	correct, exact	change slightly
analyse	advocate	judge	address

ACADEMIC/FORMAL	INFORMAL

Task 2

Which words from the above list go into the following sentences?

- Data was..... over a period of time.
- Examinations are not the only means ofa student’s ability.
- Researchers..... grades from 10,000 students.
- The political partythe return of the death penalty.
- The temperature problem has to be

Formal vs. informal English

The differences between **formal and informal language** (both in speaking and writing) are especially important in English. Here are some of the most common features:

Informal Features	Formal Features
Words of Anglo-Saxon origin look into get, have got	Words of Latin/French origin investigate obtain, acquire, have
Phrasal verbs be made up of	Single word verbs comprise
Use of contractions They can’t complete the work on time.	No contractions The work cannot be completed on time.
Informal/neutral linking word but, so, and	Formal connecting words yet, however, thus, moreover, as well
Active constructions, personal address They say that... They’ve torn down the building. I’ve found out that...	Impersonal / passive constructions It is said that... The building has been demolished. The results showed that... / It was discovered that...
Frequent adverbs and adjectives for emphasis really, very, so, nice, such a, lots, a lot	Fewer, more formal adverbs and adjectives indeed, truly, notably, remarkably, a great number, considerably
Modal verbs, adjectives etc. Can people really be happy when they don’t have a job? When the bits everyone was getting wrong had been explained...	Abstract nouns Is happiness truly possible during unemployment? After clarification of the problem areas....

When writing or speaking, we choose the words which seem most **suitable to the purpose and audience**. In academic writing, we use formal language, avoiding the **use of slang and colloquial language**.

Try to learn a range of appropriate language for expressing your opinions and referring to those of others.

Task 3

Some of the language in the following examples is more appropriate for **speaking** than **writing**. Identify which sentences are used in written and spoken language and give reasons.

- 1 MIT academics foresee dismal prospects for many types of jobs as powerful new computer technologies are increasingly adopted not only in manufacturing, clerical, and retail work but in professions such as law, financial services, education, and medicine.
- 2 It's so obvious that people were given jobs just because they were male or female. I don't think that's an acceptable approach and it's even against the law.
- 3 Because of the developments in computer technology, some MIT researchers don't see much of a future for factory workers, secretaries, and sales assistants, and not even for lawyers, accountants, teachers, and doctors.
- 4 It appears that in a number of instances jobs were assigned on the basis of gender. Given the current anti-discrimination laws, this raises serious concerns.

In contrast to spoken English, a distinctive feature of academic writing style is for writers to choose the more formal alternative when selecting a verb, noun, or other part of speech.

English often has two (or more) choices to express an action or occurrence. The choice is often between, on the one hand, a verb which is part of a phrase (often verb + preposition), and a verb which is one word only. Often in lectures and in everyday spoken English, the phrasal verbs or a verb + preposition is used (e.g. speak up, give up, write down); however, for written academic style, the preferred choice is a single verb wherever possible.

For example**Informal:**

The computer analyst looked at the server to find out which protocols had been implemented.

Academic:

The computer analyst examined the server to establish which protocols had been implemented.

Task 4: Practice

Rewrite the sentences below in a more academic style using the verbs from the list:

- investigate
- discover
- eliminate
- raise
- assist
- establish
- increase

- 1 Systems analysts can help out managers in many different ways.

- 2 This program was set up to improve access to the internet in developing countries.

- 3 The number of drones used by the US military went up significantly in 2014.

4 Researchers have found out that this drug has serious side effects.

5 We will never get rid of all the risks of using the internet.

6 Researchers have been looking into this problem for 15 years now.

7 This issue was brought up during the meeting.

Task 5

Read the following text carefully. Then, in the second version below, write in a **less formal equivalent** for each of the **boldface** words (your answer may use more than one word in each case).

Reading Scientific Abstracts (formal)

The structure of abstracts is generally consistent. In the introduction, the authors 1) **provide** information on the 2) **concerns** that led them to 3) **undertake** the study. There will also be a statement of the aim, or what the study is expected to 4) **reveal**.

In the next section, the authors should 5) **indicate** how and where they 6) **obtained** their data, and then how the data was 7) **assessed**. In other words, the methods of the study are described. Other researchers will study this section to 8) **ascertain** whether the data obtained were 9) **sufficient** to fulfil the stated aims. Objections can arise from the decisions on which data to 10) **retain** and which to exclude, or over methods that may 11) **enhance** certain features of the data or otherwise 12) **alter** the results.

While scientists most often 13) **initiate** discussion of a study by looking at methods, the general public is more interested in the next section of an abstract, which 14) **comprises** the analysis and results. Here the authors offer the general statements or observations that 15) **derive from** their evaluation of the data and state how these 16) **contribute** to the aim of the study.

Finally, in the conclusions, the authors offer the 17) **implications** of the study for practice or further research. The conclusions should also reflect an awareness of the limitations of the study and may even 18) **concede** certain failings. In this case, the authors may 19) **advocate** further study of specific aspects, or propose ways of improving on the problems in future research.

Reading Scientific Abstracts (informal)

The structure of abstracts is generally consistent. In the introduction, the authors

1) _____ information on the 2) _____ that led them to

3) _____ the study. There will also be a statement of the aim, or what the study is expected

to 4) _____.

In the next section, the authors should 5) _____ how and where they

6) _____ their data, and then how the data was 7) _____.

In other words, the methods of the study are described. Other researchers will study this section to 8) _____ whether the data obtained were 9) _____ to fulfil the stated aims.

Objections can arise from the decisions on which data to

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Task 6: Additional practice

Write an appropriate **academic word** in the gaps below. The first few letters have been provided for you.

- 1 They need to conduct a detailed **an** _____ of the water.
- 2 Such a phenomenon does not **oc** _____ very often.
- 3 The **var** _____ in the equation are x, y and z.
- 4 What are the **cons** _____ of a change in air temperature?
- 5 The **fo** _____ of this lecture is on the theoretical background.
- 6 As traditional energy sources become used up, we need to find **alt** _____ sources of energy.
- 7 We do not have **suf** _____ information to solve the problem.
- 8 The doctors have **attr** _____ the cause of the illness to an unknown virus.
- 9 First, we need to formulate a **hyp** _____ and then we need to see if we can prove it to be true.
- 10 The **ra** _____ of men to women in the department is ten to one.

- 11 The book was a **compr**_____ study of the dynamics of heat.
- 12 It's wise to give **pri**_____ to those subjects where you are weakest.
- 13 His work was **cruc**_____ to the project's success.
- 14 **Flu**_____ in temperature will affect the results.
- 15 There is a lot of **contr**_____ over the issue of creationism.

Task 7: Listening practice of a semi-formal academic talk

The future of work ("The jobs we'll lose to machines — and the ones we won't")

A Watch [Anthony Goldbloom's 2016 TED talk](#) and answer the following questions.

1. In the future, how many jobs will become automated by machines according to the 2013 Oxford University study on the future of work?
2. What is 'machine learning'?
3. What two challenges did Goldbloom's company issue?
4. How successful were the algorithms that were created in the context of this challenge?
5. In which area will humans never be able to compete with machines?
6. What is it that humans can do and machines cannot?
7. What did Percy Spencer, an American physicist, invent?
8. How can you assess whether or not a job will become automated?
9. What does Goldbloom conclude about jobs in the field of business strategies?
10. How do you see the future of work? In what ways do you think the world of work will change?
11. Do you worry that your (future) job will no longer exist some day?
12. Assuming the Oxford study is accurate, what will this mean for our economy? Do you think something can/should be done to prepare for this development? If so, what should be done and who should do it?

Vocabulary _ Week 2

[AWL Sublist 2 Definitions and exercises](#)

[AWL Sublist 2 Word families](#)

[AWL Sublist 2 More exercises](#)

Sublist two – this list of words contains the second most frequent group of words in the Academic corpus

achieve	design	potential
acquisition	distinction	previous
administration	elements	primary
affect	equation	purchase
appropriate	evaluation	range
aspects	features	region
assistance	final	regulations
categories	focus	relevant
chapter	impact	resident
commission	injury	resources
community	institute	restricted
complex	investment	security
computer	items	sought
conclusion	journal	select
conduct	maintenance	site
consequences	normal	strategies
construction	obtained	survey
consumer	participation	text
credit	perceived	traditional
cultural	positive	transfer