**Scholarly Writing Style**

Many academic writers mistake a scholarly tone for dull, boring language or a mixture of jargon and multisyllabic, "intelligent-sounding" words. Academic writing, however, does not need to be complicated nor lacking in style (APA, 2010, section 3.07); instead, it can be both engaging and clear.

In this workshop, we will discuss academic writing style. In particular, we will focus on:

* + writing in an academic tone,
  + unpacking complex ideas clearly,
  + avoiding wordiness,
  + using signposts and transitions.

**Write in an Academic Tone**

Formal language and tone are generally expected in scholarly writing, although the definition of formal varies over time and by field.

* + Use literal language. Avoid informal language such as colloquialisms, contractions, or slang.

For example, “reveal” rather than “shines a light on”

* + Avoid “academese” - unnecessarily complicated language or jargon

For example, We **utilized** UV light to induce mutations.

Better: We **used** UV light to induce mutations.

* + Use precise language

Plants were kept in the cold overnight.

Better: Plants were kept at 0° Celsius overnight.

* + Avoid vague pronouns (they, it) and empty subject phrases (it is, there are)

It is known that there are three subtypes of the KL-2 virus.

Better: There are three subtypes of the KL-2 virus.

**Write in an Academic Tone**

Academic writing focuses on research, rather than personal opinion.

* Avoid language that expresses personal feelings: “I believe,” “I think,” “I feel”

For example: *I think that students need to pay more attention to what they read.*

Instead, support your beliefs with evidence from your research:  
*Adler (1940) argued that most Americans did not understand what they read, so the author outlined a series of three reading strategies to aid comprehension.*

* + Avoid rhetorical questions and second person pronouns (i.e., you)

**Write in an Academic Tone**

Because academic writing usually involves complex topics, writing clear and direct sentences is especially important.

* + Avoid overly long and complex sentences
  + Avoid writing in an indirect fashion to sound more scholarly or formal (e.g., using [passive voice](http://academicguides.waldenu.edu/writingcenter/scholarlyvoice/activepassive))

**Unpack Complex Ideas Clearly**

“Readers expect to see old (or familiar/concrete) information … at the beginning of the sentence and new (or difficult/abstract) information at the end of a sentence where it is emphasized more (or already given context by the beginning)” – from Scientific Writing and Communication, p. 36

Which is easier to read?

* A region of [spacetime](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spacetime) exhibiting such strong [gravitational](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gravitation) effects that nothing—not even [particles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Particle) and [electromagnetic radiation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electromagnetic_radiation) such as [light](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Light)—can escape from inside it is called a **black hole**.
* A **black hole** is a region of [spacetime](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spacetime) exhibiting such strong [gravitational](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gravitation) effects that nothing—not even [particles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Particle) and [electromagnetic radiation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electromagnetic_radiation) such as [light](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Light)—can escape from inside it

Unpack Complex Ideas Cleary (slide 2)

The order of words within a sentence can also make a difference:

What about ordering words for emphasis?

1. Mosquitoes often carry parasites.
2. Parasites are often carried by Mosquitoes.

In sentence A, “this positioning tells the reader that ‘mosquitoes’ are the topic of the sentence and that ‘parasites’ is to be emphasized. To most readers, the format of this sentence implies that the author has talked about mosquitoes before and is about to introduce the new topic, ‘parasites’” (34).

Unpack Complex Ideas Cleary (slide 3)

One of the easiest ways to spot text that requires variety is by noting how each sentence opens. Writers can often overuse the same word, like an author’s name, or a subject, like pronouns to refer to an author, when beginning sentences. This lack of subject variety can be distracting to a reader. Review the each of the following paragraphs:

*My philosophy of education is derived from my personal experiences. I have been an educator for 4 years, and I have learned a lot from more experienced teachers in my district. I also work mainly with students from a low socioeconomic background; my background was quite different. I will discuss how all of these elements, along with scholarly texts, have impacted my educational philosophy.*

*My philosophy of education is derived from my personal experiences. Having been an educator for 4 years, I have learned a lot from more experienced teachers in my district. I also work mainly with students from a low socioeconomic background that is quite different from mine. In this paper, I will discuss how all of these elements, along with scholarly texts, have impacted my educational philosophy.*

**Avoid Wordiness**

Williams and Bizup identify principles of concision (Williams and Bizup 127)

* + Delete words that mean little or nothing
  + Delete words that repeat the meaning of other words
  + Delete words implied by other words
  + Replace a phrase with a word
  + Change negatives to affirmatives
  + Delete useless adjectives and adverbs
* Delete words that repeat the meaning of other words
  + “analyze and discuss”
* Delete words implied by other words
  + “complex and abstract technical terms”
* Replace a phrase with a word
  + “in a meaningful way”
  + “if they are to”
* Change negatives to affirmatives
  + “cannot avoid employing”
* Delete useless adjectives and adverbs
  + “successfully"

**Provide Signposts and Transitions**

* + Highlight important claims
  + Forecast subtopics
  + Use topic sentences

Other points to keep in mind:

* + Monitor length of sentences and paragraphs
  + Offer specific or concrete examples to illustrate ideas