Characteristics of Academic Writing

Most academic disciplines employ their own stylistic conventions. However, all academic writing shares certain characteristics.

Clear and limited focus. The focus of an academic paper—the argument or research question—is established early by the thesis statement. Every paragraph and sentence of the paper connects back to that primary focus. While the paper may include background or contextual information, all content serves the purpose of supporting the thesis statement.

Logical structure. All academic writing follows a logical, straightforward structure. In its simplest form, academic writing includes an introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion. The introduction provides background information, lays out the scope and direction of the essay, and states the thesis. The body paragraphs support the thesis statement, with each body paragraph elaborating on one supporting point. The conclusion refers back to the thesis, summarizes the main points, and highlights the implications of the paper’s findings. Each sentence and paragraph logically connects to the next in order to present a clear argument.

Evidence-based arguments. Academic writing requires well-informed arguments. Statements must be supported by evidence, whether from scholarly sources (as in a research paper), results of a study or experiment, or quotations from a primary text (as in a literary analysis essay). The use of evidence gives credibility to an argument.

Impersonal tone. The goal of academic writing is to convey a logical argument from an objective standpoint. Academic writing avoids emotional, inflammatory, or otherwise biased language. Whether you personally agree or disagree with an idea, it must be presented accurately and objectively in your paper.

Most published papers also have abstracts: brief summaries of the most important points of the paper. Abstracts appear in academic database search results so that readers can quickly determine whether the paper is pertinent to their own research.