

How to Have an Academic Tone

When writing papers and essays for college, one of the hardest things to accomplish is using an academic tone. Although we often use contractions, abbreviations, and slang when we speak, these things make papers feel too conversational. Fortunately, there are ways to make a paper sound more formal. Here are some tips:

Do not use contractions

- Simply saying “cannot” instead of “can’t” and “she is” instead of “she’s” makes a paper sound more scholarly.

Avoid second person

- Replace all instances of “you” with words like “someone,” “a person,” or even “one.”

Stay away from slang or conversational phrases

- Phrases like “back in the day” can be replaced with a specific time period, such as “in the early 2000s.”
- Words like “nowadays” can be replaced with “today.”

Do not address the reader directly

- Avoid phrases like “I am going to talk about” or “This paper will discuss.” Just start explaining your main point.

Stay away from rhetorical questions

- Statements are generally preferred in academic papers. “This may not be the best idea” has a much stronger impact than “Is this really the best idea?”

Avoid shortened words and abbreviations as much as possible

- Words like “undergrad” can be replaced with “undergraduate.”
- Sometimes abbreviations are necessary if a long word or phrase is repeated throughout a paper. In that case, spell out the word the first time, then use the abbreviation for the rest of the paper. For example, use “United States” first, then use “USA” for the rest of the paper.

Refer to an author by his or her last name

- When using a source, give an author’s full name first, then use his or her last name for the rest of the paper. For example, Anne Rice would be referred to as “Rice.”