# ACADEMIC SKILLS

## Worksheet

### Use formal and informal language (1)

C21 ENGLISH FOR THE 21st CENTURY
Levels 1 and 2

**Student name:** _____

**Class:** _____

**Date:** _____

FOCUS

**Giving an informal presentation**

In a short, informal presentation, there isn't time to repeat or summarize key points, so it is important to plan your presentation with a logical structure.

You learn about using informal language in *C21 English for the 21st Century*, Level 5. Learning when to use formal and informal language is a key skill for using spoken English in academic settings. By identifying when they are used you can take part in more serious academic discussions. Language features such as politeness, softening words, modal expressions, use of longer academic words and a reduction in slang, contractions and idioms clearly mark the formality of language. By learning about these forms, students can speak appropriately in their academic activities.

## Practice

**1** **In pairs, look at the academic situations. Score them from very informal (1) to very formal (10).**

_____ asking questions in a lecture
_____ asking questions in a presentation
_____ chatting to friends after a lecture
_____ debating ideas in a seminar
_____ discussing problems with accommodation staff
_____ interviewing for a PhD at a university
_____ planning a project with your group
_____ responding to exam feedback from tutors
_____ talking about coursework in a tutorial
_____ talking about coursework in your study group

**TIP**

The level of formality required in spoken academic activities can be different in different places depending on the country, academic staff, etc. Observe and listen to what is and isn't acceptable around you.

**2** **In pairs, read the tutorial conversation. Identify examples of language from the list.**

- softening words (*perhaps*, *maybe*, etc. – to make language less direct)
- modal expressions (*could*, *would*, etc.)
- *If* requests
- respectful language (including titles)

**Tutor** I've looked through your project. It perhaps needs improving somewhat.
**Student** Yes, Dr McNair. Could you identify any specific areas I should work on, please?
**Tutor** Yes, of course. Well, your data is just a little confusing. Possibly change the way you visually represent the results.

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**Student** Would you mind suggesting an alternative, Dr McNair? I might be able to get a better understanding with a specific example.

**Tutor** Well, this chart would potentially be clearer as a line graph with perhaps better labels for your axes. If I could add one more point. Maybe highlighting the title a little more might help the reader follow more easily.

**Student** Thank you, Dr McNair. Shall I use the same format throughout?

**Tutor** I think that might be a good idea. If we can just look at the other points quickly, as I have another tutorial scheduled in a minute. Now, the conclusions could be a little shorter and clearer.

**Student** Might they be better presented as bullet points, Dr McNair?

**3** **Make the sentences more formal using the ideas in Exercise 2.**

a Make the labels on the images clearer.
b Any suggestions for a title, Mr Jones?
c Let's move on to another topic.
d You have not written enough. Increase the word count to two thousand.
e What do I have to do to get a better grade?
f It's a very poor essay introduction.
g You haven't used clear topic sentences for your paragraphs.
h Where is your data?

**TIP**

Being more polite and less direct is often a good way to communicate in more formal academic situations.

**4** **In pairs, find examples in the word cloud. Discuss if they are formal or informal.**

a slang
b phrasal verb
c idiom/expression
d shorter common word
e abbreviation
f contraction
g synonyms
h full form
i longer academic word
j longer academic verb

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**5** **In pairs, read the discussion. Identify the highlighted language in the conversation.**

a slang
b phrasal verb
c idiom/expression
d shorter common word
e abbreviation
f contraction
g synonyms
h full form
i longer academic word
j longer academic verb

**Student A** We need to find out more data from the internet.
**Student B** Piece of cake.
**Student C** FYI, I think we've got lots of stuff already. We don't need more data and things.
**Student A** Nope. We'll need to put in the data for 2018. Our tutor will ask for it.
**Student C** Maybe you have a point. I'd look up the figures from the NICE site.
**Student B** NICE? What does that stand for?
**Student C** C'mon, you know. National Institute for Care Excellence.
**Student B** OK. Do you want to investigate the figures for that? And get the references, too?
**Student C** Sure. Can we call it a day? I'm late for a tutorial.

**TIP**

Using full forms instead of contractions is good practice in formal academic writing, but it is unnecessary to use them every time for more formal academic speaking.

**6** **In pairs, match the more formal academic words with the more informal words. Practise using them.**

advantages and disadvantages
aim to
attempt
characteristic
check
conduct
consist of
correct
deliver
demonstrate
discuss
document (*v*)
examination
final
in summary

carry out
exam
give
go into
go through
in short
last
made up of
pros and cons
right
set out to
show
try
typical
write about

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**7** **Complete the two checklists for using formal and informal language.**

| More informal | More formal |
|---|---|
| *Used in …*<br>• talking with _____<br>• chatting with students about work<br>• _____ a project | *Used in …*<br>• interviews for academic positions<br>• feedback about exams and coursework<br>• _____ presentations<br>• seminar discussions<br>• tutorials<br>• questions in _____ |
| • _____ or casual words (*OK*, *you know*, etc.)<br>• phrasal _____ (*find out*, *look up*, etc.)<br>• _____/expressions (*under the weather*, etc.)<br>• shorter _____ words (*but*, *and*, etc.)<br>• abbreviations (*asap*)<br>• contractions (*We'll be there*, etc.) | • softening words (*perhaps*, *maybe*, etc.)<br>• _____ expressions (*could*, *would*, etc.)<br>• _____ language (*Dr*, *Professor*, etc.)<br>• *If* requests<br>• _____ (*graphs*, *visual data*)<br>• full forms (*I have finished*, *please turn over*)<br>• longer academic words (*however*)<br>• longer academic _____ (*investigate*) |

**8** **In pairs, make notes for an academic discussion. Add language features to show how informal or formal it is. Present the conversation to your group and record it. Give feedback on other pairs' discussions. How informal/formal was the discussion? What language features told you it was formal or informal?**

## Reflect

**9** **Listen to your recording from Exercise 8. What other language could you have used to make it more or less formal?**

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