

Student name: _____

Class: _____

Date: _____

Speaking in academic settings often requires you to use more formal language that involves longer and more complex sentences, and to use less personalized and emotive language. Academic presentations and discussions are factual and serious. As such, they require the speaker to choose language that is less conversational and a more thoughtful style of communication.

Practice

1  In pairs, read the two versions of the same project presentation. What are the main differences?

Project presentation 1

Our experiment was a great success. We got a lot of results, especially the drop in figures for 2018. We think it shows temperatures falling. That means global warming is not a problem. Many weather scientists don't agree. They think it supports climate change. These people think climate change produces many different effects. Outcomes can be falling temperatures and rising temperatures, causing ice erosion and a rise in extreme weather. Everyone needs more evidence to make a decision. But we do need to act now. Scientists say we can use less energy and fuel. Also, we should use fewer natural resources.

Project presentation 2

A large number of results were produced from the experiment; particularly of interest was a reduction in the 2018 temperature values. One conclusion to draw from this result is that global warming is not a serious issue; however, this view is not held by many current scientists, who claim climate change has many effects. Furthermore, such effects could result in rising temperatures in addition to falling temperatures, which could result in ice erosion and a rise in extreme weather. More evidence is required for any firm conclusions to be made regarding the extent of global warming; however, what is clear is a need for action to be taken. A number of measures that are recommended by climate scientists include reducing the level of energy that is used globally and decreasing the amount of natural resources that are consumed.

Discuss the language in the two presentations:

- a Which presentation is more formal? Why?
- b Which one is more informal? Why?
- c Which presentation uses longer sentences?
- d Which presentation uses more linking words/phrases (*due to, leading to, etc.*)?
- e Which presentation uses more relative clauses (*which ..., who ..., etc.*)?
- f What conclusions can we make about more formal language?

- g What conclusions can we make about more informal language?

2 Change the short sentences into a more formal single sentence.

- a The results were not conclusive. The scientists decided to do more experiments.
- b The rise in numbers has had many negative effects. There have been some positive effects.
- c The prize for innovation was awarded to a University of Manchester chemist. She developed an idea for a groundbreaking new conducting material.
- d The survey produced a lot of different results. These showed older people prefer newspapers. Also, younger people like online news.
- e There have been high levels of deforestation recently. This has led to a loss of animal habitats. Examples include monkeys, snakes and birds.
- f There has been a dramatic increase in car use. The result has been a rise in air pollution. Noise pollution has increased, too. It means the quality of life has fallen.

3 In pairs, use the unfinished sentences to speak for a minute. How many longer, more formal sentences can you use?

- a The greatest invention was ...
- b In the future, everyone will ...
- c Science and engineering have had a huge impact on our lives ...
- d An interesting experiment would be to ...
- e The world faces many serious issues ...
- f Students can achieve success at university by ...
- g The most important historical events for our country were ...
- h Important aspects of good academic writing ...
- i Important aspects of good academic speaking ...
- j The best way to learn a language is ...

TIP

More formal speech involves using longer sentences with more complex ideas involving an increased use of linking words, relative pronouns and other language structures.

4 Decide which sentence sounds more formal. Discuss your answers in pairs.

- a 1 I performed the experiment last year.
2 The experiment was performed last year.
- b 1 We concluded the results contained errors.
2 The conclusion was that the results contained errors.
- c 1 The significant increase in prices was caused by inflation.
2 Inflation caused prices to increase significantly.
- d 1 The interesting survey led to some amazing results.
2 The survey led to significant results.
- e 1 It has had very serious effects on the environment.
2 I think its effects on the environment have been disastrous.
- f What conclusions can we make about active and passive language?

- 9 What conclusions can we make about emotional language?

TIP

More formal speech is less personal. This means using more passive structures, not using *I* and *we* and avoiding emotional language. The voice used will also reflect this and be more neutral in tone.

- 5  In pairs, read the seminar discussion. Is it informal or formal? Answer the questions below.

- Chloe** All the multinational companies create unemployment. They are uncaring and irresponsible. They just go to a cheaper country and the workers lose their jobs. It's so unfair!
- Dean** Actually, I think high inflation causes awful levels of unemployment. Personally, I think high inflation produces lots of problems in our society. We need to tackle ridiculous inflation levels before we solve the sad issue of poverty or the lack of jobs in our economy. Surely, we should lower interest rates across the banking sector, and the government needs to consider protecting our currency more. We're only just finding out this is a problem. In my opinion, the stock market is too closed and we need to take drastic action soon. It's a terrible situation.
- Sara** I think economists would obviously disagree with both of you. Economic cycles cause unemployment in the developed world. Research has shown this to be clearly true in every country.

- a Underline all the uses of emotional language.
b Underline the uses of active forms.
c Discuss changes you could make to the discussion to make it more formal.

TIP

Unlike academic writing, academic speech does not need to be very formal all the time. You may use some language features to make it more formal (e.g. passive forms, longer sentences, etc.). However, it is more important to avoid slang and very personalized conversational language.

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

investigate
obtain
solely

laboratory
occupation
somewhat

maintain
present
substantial

nevertheless
primarily
utilize

observe
recently
virtually


almost
lab
only

get
large
put forward

having said that
lately
see

job
look into
slightly

keep
mainly
use

- 7**  In pairs, prepare to discuss the issues in a formal tutorial with a tutor. Present your tutorial discussion to your group and record it. Give feedback on how to make discussions more suitable for academic settings.

Tutor Let's talk about academic skills, shall we? What needs to be considered to produce good academic writing?
Student 1 ...
Tutor Does anything else need to be considered?
Student 2 ...
Tutor If we can move to taking notes. I would like some suggestions for how this can be done well, please.
Student 1 ...
Tutor Could anyone add more to that, please?
Student 2 ...

Continue the conversation by discussing speaking skills, listening skills, reading skills, research skills and any other academic skills.

Reflect

- 8** Listen to the recording of the tutorial discussion. What language did you use to make it formal? Could you have used other language to make it more formal? Could you have avoided some informal language?