

Objective Language

Writing Centre Learning Guide

After a thorough examination of the literature, an academic writer comes to a careful judgment. The convention of 'objective' writing is that arguments use impartial language, which is not personal, judgmental, or emotive. Objective language, therefore, is considered fair and accurate. It avoids exaggeration and bias, and shows respect for the views of others.

Introduction

Everyday language is 'subjective'. It is used to express opinions based on personal values, beliefs or preferences rather than evidence. Opinions tend to be based on subjective judgment rather than on information that can be verified. An opinion is a belief that someone holds without complete proof that it is correct, and hence opinions are often disputed.

The language of academic writing is different from the language you would use when having a chat with friends. Academic writing is 'objective'. Although you may have strong feelings about an assignment topic, your writing should provide and reference the evidence you have used to write your paper.

At university, you are expected to research a topic using information found in relevant publications, reference books, and textbooks. In other words, you will need to cite respected scholars/authorities who are considered credible in the academic community and especially in your discipline.

The information you find for use in assignments should be factual. Facts are objective, concrete bits of information, usually expressed by precise numbers or quantities, in weights and measures, and in concrete language. Since anyone can look up facts, they are generally not the subject of debate.

Personal language

Whether or not you use the first person will depend upon the writing context, purpose and audience. Using the first person pronoun (e.g. I, me, my, mine) is an effective way to convey your passion and involvement in the topic, and to establish a connection with your reader.

Sometimes sharing your personal experience is appropriate, especially when that experience is relevant and part of your research. For example, it may be helpful to establish your credibility with the subject matter, especially if you have a background in the area. As a general rule, however, refer to personal experience only when it supports the development of your main idea.

It is important that you clarify with your course coordinator, lecturers and/or tutors if this style is readily accepted in your discipline area. Under some circumstances, it may be considered appropriate, but under others, it will be considered inappropriate.

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Consider the following examples:

- ✘ I got informed consent in accordance with the procedures specified for research...
- ✔ Informed consent was obtained in accordance with the procedures specified for research...

- ✘ I believe that there is a discrepancy between theory and practice...
- ✔ Research suggests that there is a discrepancy between theory and practice...

- ✘ I interviewed a total of 22 parents during the month of December 2009...
- ✔ A total of 22 parents were interviewed during the month of December 2009...

- ✘ I gave completed questionnaires a number for identification purposes...
- ✔ Completed questionnaires were allocated a number for identification purposes...

Judgmental language

Judgmental language suggests that you are making a personal judgment. By using judgmental language, it may sound as though you have come to a conclusion based on your previously-held beliefs, rather than through a review of the relevant literature. It is important to remember that beliefs you may have held at one time could later be disproved. Academic writing, therefore, tends to be cautious.

Consider the following examples:

- ✘ International schools are always elitist...
- ✔ International schools are often viewed as elitist...

- ✘ Jessen's (1956) theory is the most influential for scholars in education...
- ✔ Jessen's (1956) theory remains one of the most influential for scholars in education...

- ✘ Smith's (2009) paper made such a remarkable contribution to the field...
- ✔ Smith's (2009) paper made a major contribution to the field...

- ✘ Gorard's (1999, pp.31-33) study provided an awesome classification model...
- ✔ Gorard's (1999, pp.31-33) study provided a concise classification model...

Emotive language

Emotive language appeals to the emotions or values of your reader. Emotive language tends to use superlatives and/or exaggeration in an attempt to incite an emotional reaction. While this type of language can be persuasive, it does not consider the literature on its own merits, which is the primary purpose of academic writing.

Consider the following examples:

- ✘ Japanese orthography is too difficult to be well-understood...
- ✔ Japanese orthography is not generally well-understood...

- ✘ These really lucky people may be advantaged by healthcare services that...
- ✔ These people may be advantaged by healthcare services that...

- ✘ Sydney represents an incredibly vivacious school market...
- ✔ Sydney represents an active and dynamic school market...

- ✘ Our children's success in school may be framed in ecological terms...
- ✔ The potential for children's success in school may be framed in ecological terms...

Objective vs Subjective language

Consider one paragraph written in two different ways. Example 1 is written in a subjective manner. That is, it sounds judgmental and opinionated. While this paragraph may be acceptable in conversation, it uses personal, judgmental and emotive language, and does not present an academic argument based on sound evidence. You should also notice that there are no supporting in-text references.

Example 1 - Subjective paragraph

<p>Indeed, there are countless values that are shared by our Australian community and which are extremely relevant to the life-threatening issue of compulsory childhood immunisation. Of course, the protection of the health and well-being of Australian kids must be a shared response. Obviously, they are such vulnerable creatures who cannot protect themselves and it is the full responsibility of the Australian community to stop endangering their fragile lives. Mandatory childhood immunisation policy is definitely consistent with the view we share as Australians, that is, our children's healthcare is a total priority. Clearly, if childhood immunity is not vigorously promoted across Australia, then all our children will contract ghastly vaccine-preventable diseases leading to death!! So, enforcing childhood immunisation programs TODAY is the only logical way for us to watch over the precious youth of our nation.</p>	<p>personal language</p> <p>judgment</p> <p>assumption</p> <p>emotive</p> <p>exaggeration</p> <p>drama</p> <p>exclamation marks</p> <p>capitalisation</p>
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In contrast, Example 2 on the next page presents the same information in an objective manner. That is, it sounds less judgmental and less opinionated. Personal biases have been omitted and the information appears to be based on sound evidence derived from scholarly sources, as supported by the use of in-text references.

Example 2 - Objective paragraph

<p>There are a number of values that are shared by the Australian community and which are relevant to the issue of compulsory childhood immunisation. The protection of the health and well-being of Australian children should be a shared response (Australian Government, 2007). Children can be seen as potentially vulnerable individuals who do not have the capacity to protect and promote their own healthcare, and it is therefore the responsibility of the state and the Australian community at large to behave in ways that do not endanger their lives. It can be argued that a mandatory childhood immunisation policy would be consistent with the view shared by many Australians, that is, children's healthcare needs should be considered a priority (Anton et al., 2005, p.24). If childhood immunity is not promoted across Australia, then children may become at risk of contracting a variety of vaccine-preventable diseases leading to possible death (Gray & Davies, 2004, p.201). Enforcing timely childhood immunisation programs, therefore, would be highly beneficial for protecting the youth of this nation.</p>	<p>clear topic sentence</p> <p>factual evidence</p> <p>non judgmental</p> <p>fair and accurate</p> <p>tentative statement</p> <p>more factual evidence</p> <p>final impersonal recommendation</p>
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Examples by Donna Velliaris

In summary, subjective language tends to be based on assumptions, judgements, opinions, rumours and suspicion, while objective language tends to be based on fact, observation and logical argument.

Useful resources

Writing Centre

The Writing Centre provides academic learning and language support and resources for local, international, undergraduate and postgraduate coursework students enrolled at the University of Adelaide. The Centre offers practical advice and strategies for students to master reading, writing, note-taking, and referencing techniques for success at university. Please note that the drop-in service is not an editing or grammar checking service but staff can help you develop your written English.

For information on services check the website at <http://www.adelaide.edu.au/writingcentre/>.

Websites on academic writing

<http://www2.elc.polyu.edu.hk/cill/eap/academicstyle.htm>

<http://unilearning.uow.edu.au/essay/4av.html>

<http://usq.edu.au/learningcentre/alsonline/acwrite/style>

<http://emedia.rmit.edu.au/learninglab/content/academic-style>

<http://resource.unisa.edu.au/mod/resource/view.php?id=8598>

Video

<http://rwr.polyu.edu.hk/ew.php?wcode=18#videoShow>