# Academic Writing Style by Dr Jo Cormac [Video Transcript]

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This video will suggest a few pointers to develop your writing style a little further. Once you have grasped the basics of TOPIC you need to try to write in a way that is concise, reasoned, and precise.

## Concise.

Writing in a concise way is difficult, but it is well worth the effort. One way to achieve it is to avoid repetition. For example, this extract says the same thing a couple of times:

It has been found that exposure to illness is related to social class (Bruce, 1968). It is suggested that lower socio-economic groups experience higher levels of chronic illness. This has to be seen as a major source of inequality in society.

You could improve this simply by deleting the second sentence.

Writing concisely also helps you to avoid clumsy phrases. Try not to use so-called phrasal or ‘two-word verbs’ that are made up of a verb and a preposition. One-word equivalents sound far more sophisticated.

So, ‘think about’ would become ‘consider’,

‘Talk about’ becomes ‘discuss’,

‘Find out’ becomes ‘investigate’.

## Reasoned.

At undergraduate level you are expected to argue a case that is based on evidence. Therefore, your argument should be reasoned. Let’s look at this argument.

‘Jane Austen is the best writer in the English Language for three reasons. Firstly, her use of humour continues to be enduringly popular, secondly, the subjects with which she deals are still relevant today, and thirdly, her characters are believable and drawn with skill and detail.’

We can see that the author has made a case based on three reasons, which are enumerated. This is a good way to maintain clarity, but the case is very forceful and doesn’t acknowledge that an alternative view might exist. It is often better to use ‘attitudinal signals’ that hint at your point of view. These are words such as, apparently, significantly, unusually, or importantly.

We could tone down this example by adding a few attitudinal signals.

‘Jane Austen is **arguably**the best writer in the English Language for three reasons. Firstly, her use of humour **apparently** continues to be enduringly popular, secondly, the subjects with which she deals are still **largely** relevant today, and thirdly, her characters are **generally**believable and **widely****acknowledged** *to be* drawn with skill and detail.’

Adding these words doesn’t change the argument, but they make it appear more objective.

We can also use words like: several, few, the majority, the minority; to qualify sweeping statements. In this example we might change ‘the best writer’ to ‘one of the best writers’.

However, don’t fall into the trap of being overly cautious. Using a phrase like ‘It may perhaps be said that..., but on the other hand it could be argued that…’ will only make it seem like you don’t know what you think about a topic.

## Precision.

The final thing to remember is to be precise. Make careful vocabulary choices. Words such as ‘nice’ or ‘thing’ or ‘people’ have vague meanings and should be avoided.

Sometimes you’ll also need to offer a bit more information to make your meaning clear. For example, this is quite vague: ‘In the mid-nineteenth century there were a lot of diseases that affected lots of people.’ You would need to give examples of the diseases and also break down who would have been affected. Which people?

So overall just remember that to develop your writing, try to be concise, reasoned and precise.

Need any more help?

Come to a Drop-In on campus or online, every Weekday 12-1pm, Book a Tutorial with someone on the learning development team, or email us at the addresses shown here:

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Thank you.