

Academic English structure and style

1. Effective argumentation

All arguments are, either implicitly or explicitly, comparisons of two hypotheses that attempt to explain the same facts, observations, or ideas. What are some qualities of a good, convincing argument? In order for a published study or a piece of research to convince, persuade, or impress you, what does the writer need to do?

2. Counter-argumentation

A counterargument is a response to an objection (be it a real objection, or potential objection that readers might have). This is standard in much academic writing, lecturing and presentations. One must anticipate potential objections or criticisms to the points that one is trying to make, and then address them. Failure to do so will lead to a weak presentation of your ideas, and may fail to connect with or convince the readers or listeners. Counterarguments may take the following forms.

1. Attempting to completely disprove or refute the objection
2. Dismissing it or showing that it is not relevant
3. Argue that your opponent's evidence does not really support the claims
4. Argue against your opponent's logic
5. Argue against the underlying assumptions of the objection
6. Concessive arguments – granting some validity to the objection, while providing your countering viewpoint: “While X may be so, it is also true that...” or “Although they reported that..., other studies have shown that...”
7. Counterexamples – in some fields where good counterexamples can take down a strong claim.
8. Contrast and comparison, e.g., your idea (experiment, data, etc.) with others' data or ideas; your experiment versus someone else's; your product with previous products

Keep in mind the following tips.

1. Avoid over-summarizing differing or opposing views that would be familiar to the readers.
2. Avoid making overly strong counter-arguments that are not convincingly supported by strong evidence or other support – otherwise, use more concessive sentences

3. Frame the potential objections in subordinate clauses (or other backgrounding structures) when possible, to de-emphasize them in the flow of thought. Contrast markers (*although, though, however, but, while, despite, in contrast, yet, to the contrary*) are commonly used to cite these objections and then answer them, e.g., *Although X has claimed that..., our data show that this is this does not hold when...*
4. More detailed summaries of opposing viewpoints may belong in a literature review section of a thesis or major paper.
5. Avoid logical fallacies or incorrect statements, e.g.:
 - misrepresenting the opposing viewpoint – a strawman argument
 - cherry-picking evidence or arguments – picking only those that support your view and ignoring other evidence to the contrary
 - over-generalization, e.g., simplistic or exaggerated claims, ignoring intricacies, complexities or nuances of the issue
 - exaggerated or unwarranted claims about the other position or its implications

2.1. Selecting and omitting source information

When citing and using information from a source for their own academic writings, novice writers may make the mistake of including too much information from the source, including unnecessary details and items that are not relevant to the purpose of the paper. Experienced writers leave out less important information from the source article, such as:

- background information, historical background, or theoretical background that the potential readers would likely know already
- minor details of experimental design and procedures
- statistical results of experiments
- details of the author's line of reasoning in his/her analysis
- any information that is not relevant to the main point of the writer's paper

Instead, the main findings, conclusions, or implications are usually the focus of the summarized / paraphrased information. Based on what is included or omitted, writers then condense and restructure sentences.

3. Writing across different fields

Examine a published academic article from your field, and compare it with other people's articles from other fields. Describe the style and structure of your article according to the following criteria. Then discuss how your paper differs from papers from different fields. You can begin by comparing papers from these general areas.

1. STEM: science, technology, engineering and math
2. medical and health sciences
3. humanities / liberal arts (excluding social sciences, as listed below)
4. social sciences¹: anthropology, archaeology, criminology, economics, education, history (some areas), linguistics, communication studies, political science, international relations, sociology, geography, law, psychology

¹ Although universities in Korea place some of these in Liberal Arts or Humanities colleges, they are actually social sciences. Some of these fields span both groupings; e.g., history is largely a humanities field, but some subfields involve social science research methods; linguistics is mainly a social science, but some subfields are more like the humanities.

3.1. Structure and organization

1. How is the paper structured? Is there a rigid structure, e.g., literature review, research question, experimental design, methods, results, general discussion, that is typical in the field?
2. How are titles, subtitles, and headings used to organize the development of ideas? Are charts, tables, and graphs used, and in which parts of the paper?
3. To what degree is it persuasive or argumentative? How much counter-argumentation is used (or at least contrast and comparison of differing ideas, such as the author's ideas versus others)? Where in the paper do arguments and counter-arguments appear?
4. How does the author show a clear connection between ideas?
 - What kinds of transitional words (e.g., conjunctions) commonly used?
 - When referring to the same terms or ideas in multiple sentences, do the authors use [1] repetition of key words, [2] synonyms, [3] paraphrases², [4] pronouns (*it, this, that*), or [5] other referring forms (*such, so, this, that, there*, etc.)?
 - How are new topics introduced – by means of transitional expressions, or just plainly introducing it with a full noun phrase in a new sentence or paragraph?

3.2. Style

1. **Paragraph styles.** What common paragraph styles commonly occur? For example, do paragraphs make their points by means of contrast, comparison, analytical discussion³, narrative, description, definitions, classification, or discussing examples? What kind of transitional words are common in these paragraphs? Why would such paragraphs be typical for writing in your field?
2. **Language use.** Look at the language forms that are commonly used. Are some of the following forms noticeably more common? If so, where?
 - Which tenses are most frequently used – past, present, or future? Simple or progressive tenses (i.e., *-ing* verbs)? Why might such tenses be common?
 - Are any particular verb types frequently used, such as modal verbs (*can, could, shall, should, would, must, may...*), passive verbs, participle phrases, gerunds, or others? If so, why might they be used?

3.3. Source use

1. Summarizing / paraphrasing: How much of the contents consist of references to and discussion of other papers? How do the authors incorporate such information into their own discussion? How do authors connect ideas paraphrased / summarized from sources with their own discussion of those ideas?
2. How much is devoted to literature review and other discussion of previous studies in different sections of the paper?

2 E.g., “Smith’s (1990) claim that...” referred to as “this theory,” “this proposal,” etc.

3 For analytical or theoretical discussions, do the authors rely on deductive or inductive reasoning, or “optimization” logic, e.g., “X is the best explanation”?

3. How are sources cited within the paper, and in the bibliography? What is the format, and what kinds of information appear in the citations? In the end references section, in what order do items appear in the citations (author, year, titles, etc.)? To what kind of information does this order give prominence, and why? Are footnotes and/or endnotes used, and if so, what format do they follow, and for what purpose does the writer use them?

3.4. Types of rhetorical support

1. In what way is the author trying to persuade or convince the readers? What is the author trying to convince you about?
2. What kinds of support, data or information does the author provide to support the main points – quantitative (e.g. statistics, experimental comparisons), qualitative (e.g., descriptive data), or theoretical argumentation?
3. What specific kinds of support or evidence are provided?
 - statistical or numerical data
 - experimental data
 - observational data
 - comparison data (e.g., conclusions from statistical comparison of two groups)
 - ethnographic data⁴ – based on observation of people such as human social interactions
 - examples
 - anecdotes
 - historical evidence
 - historical narrative, or background
 - quotations
 - the authority of other scholars
 - legal (forensic) argumentation
 - theoretical analysis or discussion
 - syllogism (e.g., in philosophy) or other logical argumentation
 - mathematical proofs or arguments
 - logical inferences
 - analogy, metaphor
 - more subjective inferences, arguments, impressions, etc.
 - summary
 - others?

Papers that make heavy use of statistical data, experimental data, or statistical analysis of comparative data are typically what we call quantitative research – following strict scientific criteria. Such research is common in science, engineering, and social science fields. Other papers may rely on observational data (including ethnographic data) and the researcher's own interpretation of the data. This is qualitative research, which is common in humanities and social science fields. What kinds are prevalent in your field, particularly in its academic writing? Why would these be preferred?

4 'Ethno-' means people, from Greek; here it can refer to observing and recording data ('-graphic') about individuals or several people, e.g., when an anthropologist observes people in their daily lives and social interactions.