# Academic Writing Tips

After you read these tips, try to determine the principle underlying them.

(Note: the principle is not “academic writing is required to be boring.”)

1. **Avoid “you.”** This word is inappropriate in academic writing. The tone is too personal; moreover, there is no academic occasion in which its meaning is needed. The same is usually true of “I” and “we.”
2. **Avoid “etc.” and “and so on.”** These expressions are general and imprecise. Using them after examples is redundant. In other places, you should use “and other ”, filling in the blank with a noun that categorizes what you are listing. (*Example:* Wars are going on in Iraq, Chechnya, Sri Lanka, etc.Wars are going on in Iraq, Chechnya, Sri Lanka, and many other countries around the world.) Also avoid the use of the ellipsis (…).
3. **Avoid absolutes**, such as “all,” “every,” “none,” “never,” “always.” These words leave you no “wriggle room”: they commit you to a position or a statement that allows for not even one exception. This includes superlatives (“the most dangerous,” “the biggest topic,” and other such extremes.) In general, don’t exaggerate the importance of an example or argument. This includes “X is becoming more and more Y in recent years,” unless you have *evidence* that a problem is truly becoming more serious.
4. **Avoid informal vocabulary**, including “a lot of,” “lots of,” “tons of” and “really.” Especially, avoid such informal terms and phrases as “gonna” and “wanna.” In addition, “such as” usually works better than “like.” In addition, avoid vague words such as “things” and “stuff.”
5. **Avoid using idioms and proverbs**. They will not make you sound learnèd and well read; they will make you sound unoriginal and too informal.
6. **Avoid using phrasal verbs**. (Phrasal verbs are essentially idioms.) There is always a verb that has the same meaning; use it. Example: instead of “look up to,” use “admire.”
7. **Avoid contractions** such as “isn’t,” “aren’t,” “can’t, and “it’s.” Spell all the words completely. You can use acronyms such as UN and WHO as long as you spell them out in full the first time you use them (United Nations (UN) and World Health Organization (WHO)).
8. **Avoid questions**. Instead of asking and answering, state your point directly. *Example:* How do parents influence their children beyond just passing on their genes? They serve as role models for their children. In addition to passing on their genes, parents influence their children by being role models.
9. Never write a one-sentence paragraph.
10. Avoid introductions that resemble magazine writing. A “hook” is unnecessary.
11. **Avoid unnecessary adverbs of intensity** (e.g., *really*, *very, definitely*, and *absolutely*) **and such phrases as** *without a doubt*, *beyond a doubt*, *there can be no doubt*).
12. **Be very cautious in your use of the verb “proves.”** It is a rare study that *proves* anything. Studies show correlations, suggest avenues for further research, and add to the general store of knowledge.
13. “**Research” is not countable.** Pieces of research are called “studies”, not “researches.”
14. **Avoid “mentions.”** Mentions is a weak verb. There is almost always a more suitable choice.
15. **Avoid “people.”** Specify. E.g. *researchers, experts in the field, Russian pole vaulters,* or *men.*