

much room for the writer's own tone and voice, as these passages on the same topic show:

More formal

Responsibility for the widespread problem of obesity among Americans depends on the person or group describing the problem and proposing a solution. Some people believe the cause lies with individuals who make poor eating choices for themselves and parents who feed unhealthy foods to their children. Others take strong issue with the food industry, citing food manufacturers and fast-food chains that create and advertise food that is high in sugar, fat, and sodium. Still others place responsibility on American society as a whole for preferring a sedentary lifestyle centered on screen-based activities such as watching television and using computers for video games and social interaction.

Less formal

Who or what is to blame for the obesity epidemic depends on who is talking and what they want to do about the problem. Some people blame eaters for making bad choices and parents for feeding their kids unhealthy foods. Others demonize food manufacturers and fast-food chains for creating and advertising sugary, fatty, and sodium-loaded food. Still others point to Americans generally for spending too much time in front of screens watching TV, playing video games, or going on Facebook.

As different as they are, both examples illustrate several common features of academic language:

- It follows the conventions of standard American English for grammar and usage. These conventions are described in guides to the dialect, such as this handbook.
- It uses a standard vocabulary, not one that only some groups understand, such as slang, an ethnic dialect, or another language. (See 3 pp. 156–59 for more on specialized vocabularies.)
- It does not use the informality of everyday speech, texting, and instant messaging, including incomplete sentences, slang, no capital letters, and shortened spellings (*u* for *you*, *b4* for *before*, *thru* for *through*, and so on). (See 3 p. 157–58 for more on these forms.)
- It generally uses the third person (*he, she, it, they*). The first person *I* is sometimes appropriate to express personal opinions, but academic writers tend to avoid it and make conclusions speak for themselves. The first-person *we* can connect with readers

Drawn-out phrasing, such as widespread problem of obesity among Americans.

More complicated sentence structures, such as take strong issue with the food industry, citing food manufacturers and fast-food chains that create and advertise...

More formal vocabulary: responsibility, children, television.

Less complicated sentence structures, such as demonize food manufacturers and fast-food chains for creating and advertising...

More informal phrasing, such as obesity epidemic.

More informal vocabulary: blame, kids, TV.

Punctuation

Spelling and Mechanics

Clarity and Style

Sentence Parts and Patterns