

# Rock Valley College

THE WRITING CENTER  
(815) 921-2370 | [RockValleyCollege.edu/WritingCenter](http://RockValleyCollege.edu/WritingCenter)



## INFORMAL ENGLISH

*Use language that is appropriate for the situation*

When writing a paper, you will need to consider what type of language is most appropriate for the assignment genre. For narrative or personal experience essays, you might be able to use informal, or conversational, English. However, the majority of college-level classes will require **formal, or academic, English**. Formal English can be difficult because we often write the way we talk. When editing, focus on avoiding informal language by following these guidelines:

**Avoid Contractions:** This article *doesn't* use descriptive terms.

- Contractions create a more conversational tone since we often use them when speaking.
  - Write out the full words instead. For example, "This article *does not* use descriptive terms."

**Avoid Slang:** This article discusses *all the bad stuff* happening in the world.

- Use a thesaurus to find stronger and clearer terms, or think about how you can be more specific.
  - We need to replace "*all the bad stuff*" with specific examples of what is going wrong. For example, "This article discusses the *harmful effects of climate change* on a global scale."



**Avoid the First and Second Person:** *I* want *you* to understand that this problem is ongoing.

- The first person (I, me, my, we, our, us) and second person (you, your) create an informal tone.
  - Rephrase "I" and "you" statements to write more formally. By rewording the sentence, we can eliminate these conversational words. For example, "Understanding that the problem is ongoing will help to foster solutions."

**Avoid Generalizations:** *All* video games are a waste of time.

- Using absolute terms like *all*, *none*, or *every* create informal generalizations.
  - Use more specific, qualified language instead. For example, “*Mario Party 970* has *little* educational value” –OR– “*The majority of video games* have *less educational value than they should.*”

**Avoid Uncited Information:** The New York City crime rate increased by *10%* over the last three years.

- Explain where you found information to generate a formal tone and emphasize your credibility.
  - Cite the author or source you consulted. For example, “According to Mike Smith, a writer for *The New York Times*, the New York City crime rate increased by 10% over the last three years (A14).”

The use of formal English in your writing reflects the fact that you are now a scholar. It also takes into account that your audience will likely be your classmates and professors, who are scholars as well. Using formal language in your paper will allow you to practice for much of the writing you will need to do in the future. Whether you intend to continue on in your education or simply need to write an email to your boss or colleague, you will need to use formal English to encourage your reader to take your work and your words seriously.

Category: **Grammar & Mechanics, Editing & Revision**  
Resource: Upswing Writing Lab  
Created: CJ 3/30/2021  
Revised: ER 6/5/2021

