Writing Centre

Academic Tone for Formal Writing

"Tone" refers to the writer's *voice* in a written work (the specific way that you sound). A "formal tone" is often used in research papers and reports, and typically includes **writing objectively**, **using precise language** and **specifics**, and **avoiding conversational phrasing**. The tone you use depends on the audience you're writing for, which is why a formal tone is typically used for academic and professional audiences.

First person point of view may also be used for some formal academic assignments, such as a reflection. However, in this case, the point of view is the only aspect that changes; other characteristics of a formal tone still apply. Be sure to consult with your instructor about the use of "I".

The basics to avoid (unless directed otherwise by your instructor):
- Second person point of view (*you*, *your*, etc.)
- Sentences that begin with "and" or "because"
- Contractions (*can't*, *won't*)
- Informal speech or "slang" (words used by people with common interests or experiences such as *shook*, *dude*, etc.)

Specifically avoid or rephrase:
1) Conversational language: common words or phrases in conversational language (*kind of*, *anyways*, *a bunch*, *really*, etc.)

   Replace imprecise amounts with descriptive language (*many*, *several*, *majority*, etc.)
   Replace conversational phrasing with formal transitions (*in fact*, *essentially*, *somewhat*, etc.)

2) Generalizations and clichés: figurative expressions that have been overused (*beat around the bush*, *the ball is in your court*, etc.)

   Replace with specific phrasing and precise language (*on the other hand*, *typically*, *since this happened*, etc.)

3) Informal or "flowery" adjectives (*amazing*, *incredible*, *unbelievable*, *wonderful*, etc.)

   Replace by using sentence structure or word choice to convey the impact these words carry.

4) Phrasal or two-part verbs (*set up*, *get there*, etc.)

   Replace with one-part verbs with the same meaning (*get there* becomes *arrive*)

Where does YOUR voice fit?
It can feel difficult to incorporate your own voice when there are so many writing "rules". You can incorporate your unique style or voice in the syntax, word choice, and conclusions you draw in your analysis. *How* you weave together your arguments and the experts (resources) you include to support your arguments also represent your perspective. Your reader wants to know what *you* have to say in your own words!