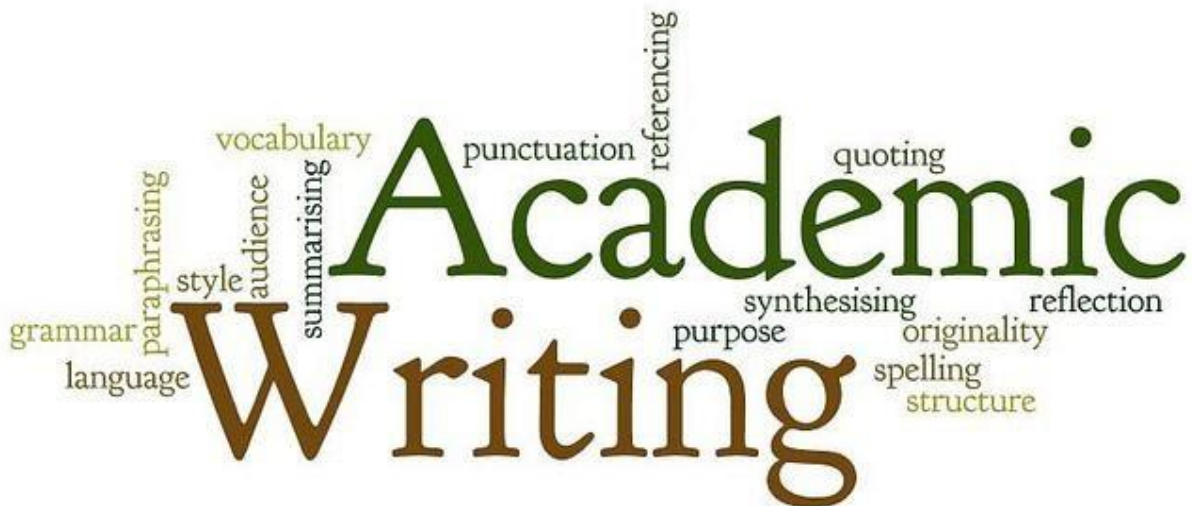


## Introduction

This unit will introduce you to the basic elements of academic writing. Understanding what academic writing entails is highly important in the writing process. Academic writing can be understood as a continuous process of forming and refining ideas. Writing about scholarly knowledge requires that you do some reading, after which you will reformulate ideas in your own words into an appropriate academic piece. Getting started can be daunting, especially if you do not have strategies to ease you into the process. The hallmarks of academic writing are well-represented in the word cloud below:

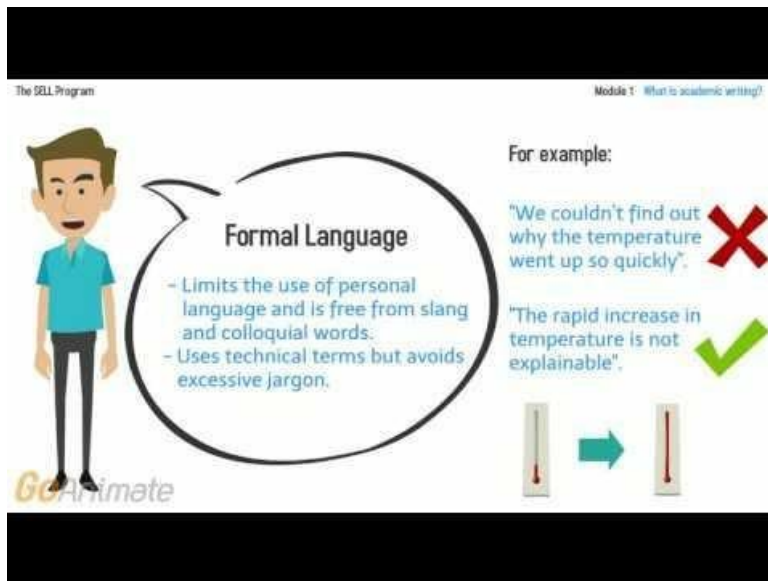


Before we continue, it is necessary to point out some of the most important features of writing that will be covered in some of the units that are available to you in this organisation. Academic writing usually takes place in a specific **style**, which is formal, objective, precise, concise and structured. In this way, academic writing is not free, instead a set of expectations define how the writing must be composed and executed. In a unit title “Summarising” we explain how you should go about identifying the central and supporting ideas of text in order to understand it better.

The ability to **summarise** will stand you in good stead when you begin to write academically. In a similar vein, **paraphrasing** is a skill you will use routinely when you embark on academic writing. **Referencing** is an essential attribute of academic writing, because all academic knowledge integrates the knowledge produced by other academic writers. When we use the views of other writers, by **quoting** or paraphrasing their words, we have to acknowledge their contributions to our work. If we don't we are committing academic fraud, which is also referred to as plagiarism.

Lastly, academic writing often entails argumentation, persuasion, and discussion. When this is done right our work will naturally retain a great sense of **originality**, which is important in our attempt to distinguish our thoughts, views, and opinions from those of other people.

In the following video, you will see that academic writing is characterised by 6 features. While you are watching this video take note of what you consider to be the most difficult aspect of academic writing:



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=254dy15s0Lc>

## Learning Content

It is clear that academic writing is quite strict the limitations it places on us and it is defined by a variety of specific expectations. The ThoughtCo website explains it as follows: "Academic writing is characterized by evidence-based arguments, precise word choice, logical organization, and an impersonal tone. Though sometimes thought of as long-winded or inaccessible, strong academic writing is quite the opposite: It informs, analyses, and persuades in a straightforward manner and enables the reader to engage critically in a scholarly dialogue."

Based on this definition alone one would be forgiven for thinking of academic writing as daunting or intimidating. We hope that the courses we offer in this "On the Go SOS" organisation will help you learn some of the basic skills you need to develop into confident writers.

The ThoughtCo website lists the following characteristics of academic writing. It:

1. Is clear and limited in Focus,
2. Is logically structured,
3. Relies on evidence-based arguments,
4. Adopts an objective and impersonal tone.

As if this isn't scary enough, the ThoughtCo website encourages us to avoid the following mistakes:

**Wordiness:** We are expected to write in a concise manner, which means that we need to use a few words as we possibly can to convey our thoughts and present our evidence-based arguments.

**A vague or missing thesis statement:** It turns out that one of the biggest mistakes we can make is to present the main idea of our writing in a way that is not clear and immediately evident. Often we present weak thesis statements when we haven't prepared our writing in advance. For this reason planning is very important.

**Informal language:** Using SMS language, contractions (can't, don't, I'm, wouldn't), slang or even vernacular words is seen as un-academic. While we can understand why LOL or LMAO shouldn't be used in academic language it is not always clear why we can't use, for example, isiZulu words in our academic language. Unfortunately the reason for this is that languages like isiZulu have not been developed into academic languages. This does not mean isiZulu is not suitable for academic work, instead it means that we have not invested money and resources into developing it into an academic language.

**Description without analysis:** This is problematic because merely describing something does not allow our views, impressions and opinions to be expressed. Analysis is a skill that reveals how we think through problems.

**Failing to cite sources:** This has already been discussed in the introduction. Failing to cite sources is academic fraud and you should never use another writer's words without acknowledging them. It is stealing. Imagine if CardiB stole a song from Sho Madjozi and told everyone it was her! It will be dishonest and will prevent Sho Madjozi's genius from being celebrated.

For more information on these characteristics follow this link to the ThoughtCo website:  
<https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-academic-writing-1689052>. 30 April 2020

Watch the following video for more on academic writing:



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MyTLosz6aHA>

## Summary

In this unit we introduced you to academic writing and explain what sets it apart from everyday language. We have designed a variety of other units that will guide and assist you in developing some of the skill you need to excel as academic writers.