**Formality and Register**

**ACTIVITY**

* This activity has been designed by taking a paragraph from an AS level essay in Health and Social Care that was written in an extremely unplanned, informal style, and rewriting that paragraph to eliminate these unplanned features and to incorporate features that are more appropriate for A level essay writing. This has been done in three stages.
* The goal of the activity is to encourage students to think about the tone and style of a piece of writing and how that is connected to the audience and context. The order that we have used to consider these paragraphs is N-E-S-B, moving from least to most ‘academic’ as that was a goal (and the context) for the original assignment.
* Once the students have organised the paragraphs from 1 – 4, elicit their orders and reasons from them, and have a class/group discussion using the following questions as a guide:
  1. Which paragraph do you like the most?
  2. Which one is closest to your writing style?
  3. Which one is most suitable for A level (or your context) writing?
  4. Do the paragraphs change as they go from 1 – 4? In what ways?
* Adapt this activity for your class by choosing a particularly strong or weak example of writing (a sentence or a paragraph, usually) in your subject. Identify the features of tone and style that make this writing particularly (in)appropriate for your subject and for your purpose and list them on the table provided. Using these features, rewrite the sentence or the paragraph 2-3 times with varying levels of appropriateness. Give students the paragraphs to order and then discuss, following the activity as above.
* There are multiple ways of organising the paragraphs and there is no definitive right answer, although the students may want and expect one – the important element is whether the organising principle (for example length of text, readers’ preference, subjective/objective tone, etc) is reasonable and consistently applied. It is crucial to note and discuss that the most ‘formal’ of these paragraphs may not be the most suitable for the students’ purposes, and might actually be inappropriate for much of the writing they do. It is also important to note that each subject area and each purpose will have its own conventions of formality and that our example may not translate across all subjects. Formality doesn’t always equal suitability.
* This activity was designed and created by the Queen Mary Thinking Writing programme. This resource, and others, can be found at their website: http://www.thinkingwriting.qmul.ac.uk

Example A

**Paragraph B**

‘Self concept’ refers to how individuals describe and judge themselves and also how they perceive themselves to be described and judged by others. Adolescence is a key period in the development of an individual’s self concept.

**Paragraph S**

Self concept is an idea of how an individual sees and evaluates themselves and how other people see and evaluate them too. Adolescence is the key time in developing self concept because it is the time when individuals identify who they are and try to understand themselves as people.

**Paragraph E**

Self concept is an idea about yourself: it is how you describe yourself and also how others see or describe you. It is evaluating yourself as a person, and seeing how you are as well as what others think of you. Adolescence is the key time in your life; this is when you are developing your self concept, identifying and trying to understand how you are as a person.

**Paragraph N**

Self concept is an idea about yourself and it’s how you describe yourself and also how others see you or describe you. It’s evaluating your self as a person and seeing how you are and also what others think of you. Adolescence is the key time in your life, this is when you are developing your self concept, so you are now identifying and trying to understand how you are as a person.

(Adapted from the activity on the Thinking Writing website: http://www.thinkingwriting.qmul.ac.uk)

Example B (from Music technology)

**Paragraph B**

Analogue synthesisers come in many form factors but the two most common are: modular/semi-modular systems or integrated all-in-one systems such as the Roland SH-09. Both integrated and modular synthesisers use the same electronic signal processing technology, but modular synthesisers are expandable - more modules can be added. Modular synthesisers are composed of many different electronic units that have inputs and outputs for each section. The modules are connected by patch leads and the output signal of one module is fed into the input of another module, which alters the electronic signal. An integrated synthesiser is not expandable and most often does not require patch cables to route the electronic signals to the different internal module.

**Paragraph S**

Analogue synthesisers come in a number of different types. The two people buy most often are: modular/semi-modular systems or integrated all-in-one systems such as the Roland SH-09. The integrated and modular synthesisers are made with the same kind of technology using electronic signals, but the modular synthesisers can be expanded by adding more modules. Modular synthesisers are made of a huge number of different electronic units and have inputs and outputs for each section. The modules are joined together by patch leads and the output signal of one module is put into the input of another module, and this changes the electronic signal. It is not possible to expand an integrated synthesiser and it doesn’t usually need patch cables to send the electronic signals to the different internal module.

**Paragraph E**

There are many different kinds of analogue synthesisers. The two you find around most often are: modular/semi-modular systems or integrated all-in-one systems e.g. the Roland SH-09. The integrated and modular synthesisers are made with the same kind of technology using electronic signals, but you can make the modular synthesisers bigger if you put in more modules. Modular synthesisers have a huge number of different electronic parts and they’ve got inputs and outputs for each bit. You can join the modules together with patch leads and you can take the output signal of one module and put it into the input of another module, and if you do this it changes the electronic signal. But you can’t make an integrated synthesiser bigger and you don’t usually need patch cables to send the electronic signals to the different internal module.

**Paragraph N**

There are lots of different kinds of analogue synthesisers. The two you get most often are: modular/semi-modular systems or integrated all-in-one systems like the Roland SH-09. The integrated and modular synthesisers are made in the same way with electronic signals, but you can make the modular synthesisers bigger and you can put in more modules. Modular synthesisers have loads of different electronic parts and they’ve got inputs for each bit and outputs for each bit. You can stick the modules together with patch leads and you can take the output signal of one module and you can put it into the input of another module, and if you do this it changes the electronic signal. But you can’t make an integrated synthesiser bigger and you don’t usually need patch cables if you want to send the electronic signals to the different internal module.

(Contributed by Sue Henderson-Kabakova to the Tower Hamlets booklet ‘Writing it Right’)

## FORMALITY CONTINUUM

**Informal Formal**

## What makes writing more or less formal?



Activity from the Thinking Writing website: http://www.thinkingwriting.qmul.ac.uk

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| How can I make my writing sound more formal? As we have seen when looking at the formality continuum, there are a number of techniques that can be used to move your writing from the less formal to the more formal. informal formal   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | Less formal | More formal | Examples of how to move along the continuum | | Uses many contractions | Uses few / no contractions | Their real motive isn’t to help them win the war ... Their real motive is not to help them win the war ...  There’s a coil (inductor) attached to the speaker cone ... There is a coil (inductor) attached to the speaker cone ... | | Uses 1st and 2nd person pronouns (e.g. I, you, we) | Uses 3rd person pronouns (e.g. he, she, it, one, they)  Uses neutral nouns  Uses passive constructions  Uses impersonal constructions | We are individuals and we should be considered as ... People are individuals and they should be considered as ...  I feel captivated by ... The viewer is captivated by ...  The props in Act 1 are important as they give us an impression ... The props in Act 1 are important as they give the audience an impression ...  When you press ‘Play’, ... When ‘Play’ is pressed, ...  We should not take time for granted ... Time should not be taken for granted ...  This photograph reminds me of ... This photograph is reminiscent of ...  I can tell from her movements that she is happy. It is evident from her movements that she is happy. | | Uses little specialised vocabulary | Uses key specialised vocabulary | One of the causes of heart attacks is the number of fatty substances ... One of the causes of coronary heart disease is the number of lipids ... | | Uses informal non-specialised vocabulary | Uses more formal non-specialised vocabulary | One of the biggest forms of malnutrition today... One of the most prevalent types of malnutrition today ...  Collectivisation in Russia involved taking the land from the peasants and giving it all to the state. Collectivisation in Russia involved expropriating land from the peasants and transferring ownership to the state.  The seizure of grain by violent officials that followed ... the subsequent seizure of grain by violent officials... | | Uses ‘and’ a lot | Uses a variety of connectives and linking techniques | Parsons is a Functionalist and so is Murdock and they both believe that the family is very important and that is why ... Parsons and Murdock, both Functionalists, believe that the family is very important, which is why ... | | Uses a lot of repetition | Uses little repetition | There are many specialist input devices for disabled users. One of the specialist input devices is the foot mouse. The foot mouse ... There are many specialist input devices for disabled users; one of these is the foot mouse, which ... | | Uses very little nominalisation | Uses nominalisation where appropriate | Mrs. Thatcher refers to ... Mrs. Thatcher’s reference to ...  This could represent the author realising that he is able to ... This could represent the author’s realisation of his ability to ... | |