

Formal vs. informal writing

When writing your extended essay you should use language that is formal and academic in tone. The chart below gives you some idea of the differences between informal and formal essays.

Characteristic	Informal essay (sometimes also called personal or familiar essay)	Formal essay
Author's viewpoint	Usually uses first-person pronoun; directly addresses the reader.	Usually uses third-person pronoun.
Subject/content: Sources of evidence	Frequently drawn from life of the student and everyday events.	More commonly drawn from shared historical events or literature or other forms of knowledge.
Tone	Frequently more personal and subjective; may be ironic, amusing, thoughtful, angry or serious; conversational and casual.	Tends to be removed from the subject and appears to be objective; tends to hold emotions in check and express concerns through strong arguments and powerful rhetorical devices.
Structure	Appears to be more loosely structured.	Follows a structure that focuses on the development of one clear argument at a time to support a clearly stated thesis.
Location of the research purpose/question	May appear anywhere in the essay; may not be explicitly stated.	Stated explicitly, generally located in the first or second paragraph of the essay.
Vocabulary	Everyday words; slang and colloquialisms; contractions; uses "you" and "I".	Technical words according to subject; no slang or contractions; avoids "you" and "I" (the use of "I" in the introduction and conclusion of an essay is permitted but in the body of the essay is best avoided in order to maintain an academic tone).
Purpose	Entertainment; gentle reflection.	Presentation of facts and ideas with critical evaluation, arguing a point and analyzing in detail.

Some examples

The following examples highlight the differences between formal and informal tone.

Language B: English

I decided to write an extended essay on how hip-hop works as protest of the lower classes because I think the music is cool and really gets people dancing, inspiring those people who wouldn't normally think there's any point in being against anything to listen to the message. Being an enthusiastic hip-hop dancer myself, I really wanted to find out some more about this.

This extended essay on how the lyrics of hip-hop developed as a form of protest against a society segregating the working classes is based on the premise of the music having a distinct and energizing rhythm that really inspires people **to move**, thereby reaching out to audiences who wouldn't normally believe in protest, let alone speak out in public. Thus, the music becomes a vehicle for words of protest that can and indeed have changed the world. My own experience with dancing hip-hop at a relatively advanced and skilled level fuelled my desire to research this topic in more depth.

Biology

Biology has always been a passion of mine. Ever since I was searching for frogspawn in my grandparent's pond as a four-year-old and annoying my mum with a battery of jam jars on the window sill in which I was trying to raise tadpoles I have been fascinated with observing nature in detail. Even in English, reading *Death of a Naturalist* by Seamus Heaney, I found myself thinking up an experiment to do with dragonflies and bluebottles. I have a fish tank at home with three different sorts of fish. I've noticed that they all respond differently when I feed them. I'm wondering what else is different in their behaviour so, in this extended essay, I'm going to find out how they react to light.

This extended essay is focused on investigating the phototaxic responses of three different species of fish that occupy different areas of an aquarium: danios (*Danio rerio*), which group near the surface of the water, black skirt tetra (*Gymnocorymbus ternetzi*), which swim in the middle of the tank, and kuhli loach

(*Pangio kuhlii*), which swim near the bottom of the tank. It is anticipated that they will respond differently to light according to their niche within the tank.

The outcome of my investigation could inform the feeding strategy used for different fish as well as highlight the adaptive nature of taxic response in fish. In addition, this essay may help to inspire some fellow students to view their fish with new interest, and consider their own strategies in populating a fish tank.

Psychology

When I go into a supermarket there is always gentle background music playing, although in the clothes shops I like it is always loud pop music. At breakfast my dad likes to listen to Rossini string sonatas, while my little brother has heavy metal on his iPod and will head-bang his way through a bowl of cornflakes. My extended essay is trying to research why people rely on certain types of music to influence their mood and how music is used in this way for advertising. I am not sure if there is a connection and whether the music does affect, for example, people's shopping habits, but it will be interesting to try to find out, especially to see if different peoples' brains are wired differently when it comes to music.

This extended essay intends to investigate whether there is a causal relationship between music listened to and the mood of individuals. Additionally, it will seek to explore whether this relationship is used in advertising to encourage people to spend money.

Dos and don't's: A summary

 Do:	 Don't:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make your writing clear and to the point.• Try linking ideas with these expressions: in addition, nevertheless, on the other hand, by contrast, although, alternatively.• Include some complex sentences in your writing.• Try using semi-colons if you feel confident about using them correctly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Don't use "well" or "you know" or "anyway" or "like I just said" or any phrase that sounds like you are having a friendly chat.• Avoid using "And", "But", "Because" or "So" at the beginning of a sentence.• Keep exclamation marks to a minimum!!!• Words like "nice" and "a lot" have no power. Try to think of more descriptive words, for example "delicious" or "endless".

Here are some exercises you can do to train your awareness of different styles

1. Pick one specific event in your day, such as lunch, hockey training or a French lesson.

Note down some of the details immediately afterwards. Next, write a critical article for the school magazine based on your notes (250 words max), and also an informal email to a friend, containing the same facts.

- In what ways are the two written pieces different, even though they are about the same topic?

2. Pick any article from a broadsheet newspaper, preferably from the financial or world politics sections.

Read it and then write an informal email to a friend explaining the article's main ideas.

- How does the email differ from the article you just read?

3. Choose an example of formal critical writing from the subject area you are writing your extended essay in.

Choose five subject-related technical terms and five examples of sophisticated stylistic phrases and make sure you understand them fully—look them up in a dictionary.

Then write a summary of what you have read in your own words.