

Understanding Writing Styles: Disciplinary Differences

Introductory writing and English classes may focus on writing well in English classes, but they do not focus on the correct writing styles for other disciplines. The specific type of writing in history is not the same as the type of writing in biology. The only way to understand what each disciplinary writing style entails is to begin to write in it. However, this page gives a brief explanation and summarization of the differences and key details of each writing style.

Natural Sciences

- Natural scientists generally write to describe their observations and to hypothesize
- Audiences are usually very specialized and narrow; the author can include descriptive and complicated nouns
- Includes
 - Lengthy titles
 - Quantitative writing and reasoning
 - “We” pronouns, when needed
 - Sections that separate the sections of the paper, commonly IMRAD format

Social Sciences

- Social scientists tend to write in a straightforward manner instead of the complex manner of the natural sciences
- Leans more towards English writing style rather than biological writing style, etc.
- Includes:
 - Sections, such as Introduction, Thesis, Plan, Argument, and Conclusions
 - A thesis, which is the most essential aspect of the paper
 - Tone directed towards a less specialized audience, often towards peers

Example disciplines:

1. Sociology
2. Psychology
3. Public and International affairs

Humanities

- Departments in Humanities have more variability in their writing styles than natural sciences and social sciences because the disciplines are so varied.
- However, certain things are emphasized in all departments in the Humanities.
- Includes:
 - A narrow and simple focus that can be broadened over the course of the paper with sources and analysis
 - Usually involves an argument of some sort: thesis, evidence, counter-evidence, and conclusion
 - Proper documentation; it must include references, citations, and a proper works cited
 - A good sense of grammar and spelling so that the writing is legible to instructors and peers

Example disciplines:

1. Philosophy
2. English
3. History
4. Religion

Business and Professional Writing

- Places emphasis on important ideas to lead the reader to the key points of the document
- Often contains specialized language that only coworkers or business associates understand; the writing is most often not directed toward the public
- Includes:
 - An understanding of audience
 - Shorter sentences and simpler sentence structure
 - Point of view of the company (or other group) instead of a first-person voice

Example uses:

1. Memo writing
2. Press releases
3. Resumes

Works Cited

<http://pages.uoregon.edu/ddusseau/101/199/style.html>
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