



## FINDING YOUR ACADEMIC VOICE

I am going to tell you a secret. When instructors critique the “academic voice” of your paper, what they actually want is for you to ask yourself, “How can I be objective as I demonstrate my knowledge?” This has been a challenge for me throughout graduate school, as I came from a background where I was encouraged to place my style and my voice into my papers. The goal was to be creative, to use descriptive words to illustrate my topic. That style did not go over well as I began to write in APA.

APA (American Psychological Association) formatting is **pretty** specific **and, sometimes, a little funky**. Researchers use it to communicate their findings, and the specific guidelines around formatting, citations, and tone are intended to keep the presentation as objective as possible. Your information, rather than your linguistic ability, is the most important element of the paper. Writing this way is difficult, especially when counseling psychology programs ask for **quite a bit** more reflection and personal experience to be embedded within APA-formatted papers. So, when you submit a paper and are scolded for not having an academic voice, your instructor is **simply** telling you to think about your experience as data to be reported and analyzed.

Now that I am aware of this **little** secret, I focus on using only what is necessary to make my point. Colloquial terms like “quite,” and “pretty” are examples of words that take up space and inject subjectivity. I have highlighted these and other examples in this piece; I could cut them without affecting the information I am trying to share. It will take some practice to use objective language ([some helpful tips!](#)) but reading my paper out loud, as well as adding more neutral terminology to my tool belt, helps me notice when my academic voice is losing to my personal one.

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