

EVOKE: Tips for Elevating Your Academic Writing

Verbs

Cross out every *to have, to get, to be, to use, and to do*. Instead, use vivid verbs like *bolster, buttress, highlight, illuminate, magnify, advance, expand, stabilize, endorse, augment, and discredit*.

Think in terms of architecture or debating.

Model Writers

Read the scholarly and professional writing in your field. Pay attention to vocabulary level, ways of phrasing ideas, commonly used rhetorical strategies, key studies/research/presentations, and figures of speech.

Avoid clichés

Do not use them. Just don't.

Instead, say what you mean in a clear, simple expression.

Find original ideas in odd places

You can find inspiration far away (figuratively and literally) from the subject you need to write about. Go for a walk around campus and pay attention to details you usually ignore. Check out a book from the library—that one you've been meaning to read for ages. Wander through the art gallery and look closely at the pieces. Say hello to a person in the hallway and ask him/her how the day is going. Take a nap and record your dreams after waking.

It's just a conversation

Performing low-stakes PRELIMINARY research can be very inspiring. Find two critics or researchers writing on the same topic who react to each other's work. How do they interact? What did they miss? What could they expand? How do their bibliographies compare? Are they both in the same field? How do their fields overlap, if not?

Make a mistake on purpose

Sometimes you can get away with it if you are demonstrating an important point about language or to attempting to better relate to your audience. Think about it: when you speak in your own voice, do you ever use incorrect grammar (subject-verb agreement, unclear pronoun reference, mixed-up subjective/objective case, etc.) in an effort to be silly or to better connect with someone? Examples: "Me and him are going to the store. We are fixin' to shake a leg."

Writers sometimes speak more informally in order to make a rhetorical point. For example, literary/language theorists concerned with identity politics sometimes write using incorrect or informal terms in order to make argumentative points about who owns language and how language is used in power dynamics.

Try a little subtle humor

Not too much. Juuuuuust a little bit. Poking fun at yourself can be just as effective, remember.