

Tone and Diction

When writing, you always choose a **tone**, which *The McGraw-Hill Workbook* defines as “the style, manner, or ‘feel’ of your writing, whether it is formal or informal, serious or humorous, sympathetic or sarcastic, positive or negative.” Tone is often also affected by your **diction**, or word choice. Diction can further be broken down into the following categories:

1. Standard English (language generally seen in a college textbook),
2. Colloquial English (language with certain expressions or phrases that speakers and readers would understand but that are outside Standard English),
3. Slang (language understood, especially by specific generations, but not usually accepted in formal situations),
4. Dialect (language used within certain ethnic groups, social groups, or geographic locations),
5. Academic training or job jargon (language learned through specific training).

Examples:

Slang

Inappropriate: When the faculty realized the university’s new budget had no funds designated for AIDS research, **they got ticked off** and sent a petition to the board.

Appropriate: When the faculty realized that the university’s new budget had no funds designated for AIDS research, **they became incensed** and sent a petition to the board.

Dialect

Inappropriate: “I **bake-a da** bread!” Geno said proudly.

Appropriate: “I **bake the** bread!” Geno said proudly **in an Italian accent**.

Jargon and Technical Terms

Inappropriate: Doing discovery for the Lancaster case, two **paras** overlooked some **deps**.

Appropriate: Preparing for the Lancaster case, two **paralegals** overlooked some **depositions**.

Old-Fashioned or Foreign Terms

Inappropriate: She appeared onstage **sans** makeup, **affrighting** the fashion designers and stunning the **hoi polloi** with her natural **savoir faire**.

Appropriate: She appeared onstage **without** makeup, **challenging** the fashion designers and stunning the **crowd** with her natural **grace**.

NOTE: These tips for avoiding inappropriate usage are meant to be considered when creating general academic writing. When creating other types of writing, like a short story or a technical document, you can and should use more specific types of diction.

Practice Exercises:

Try rewriting the following exercises to remove slang, old-fashioned or foreign terms, jargon, or inappropriate dialect.

1. Nouvelle cuisine continues to be popular with Yuppies who can afford to spend thirty dollars for a three course meal that can fit on a Ritz cracker.

2. People used to leave restaurants feeling stuffed, often carrying home doggy bags full of red meat for their kiddies' lunchboxes.

3. Paranoid about cholesterol and calories, today's diners shun traditional fare in favor of lighter dishes with less salt and more pizzazz.

4. Today a meat n' potatoes kind of guy has to find an Italian or Mexican spot to scoop up any menus showing real food.

5. But even here, the nutrition Nazis have scored some points, and you can find yourself staring at veggie tacos and lasagna light.

Possible choices for rewording: 1) "Nouvelle cuisine," "Yuppie," "fit on a Ritz cracker" 2) "doggy bags," "kiddies" 3) "pizzazz" 4) "meat n' potatoes kind of guy," "scoop up" 5) "nutrition Nazis"