



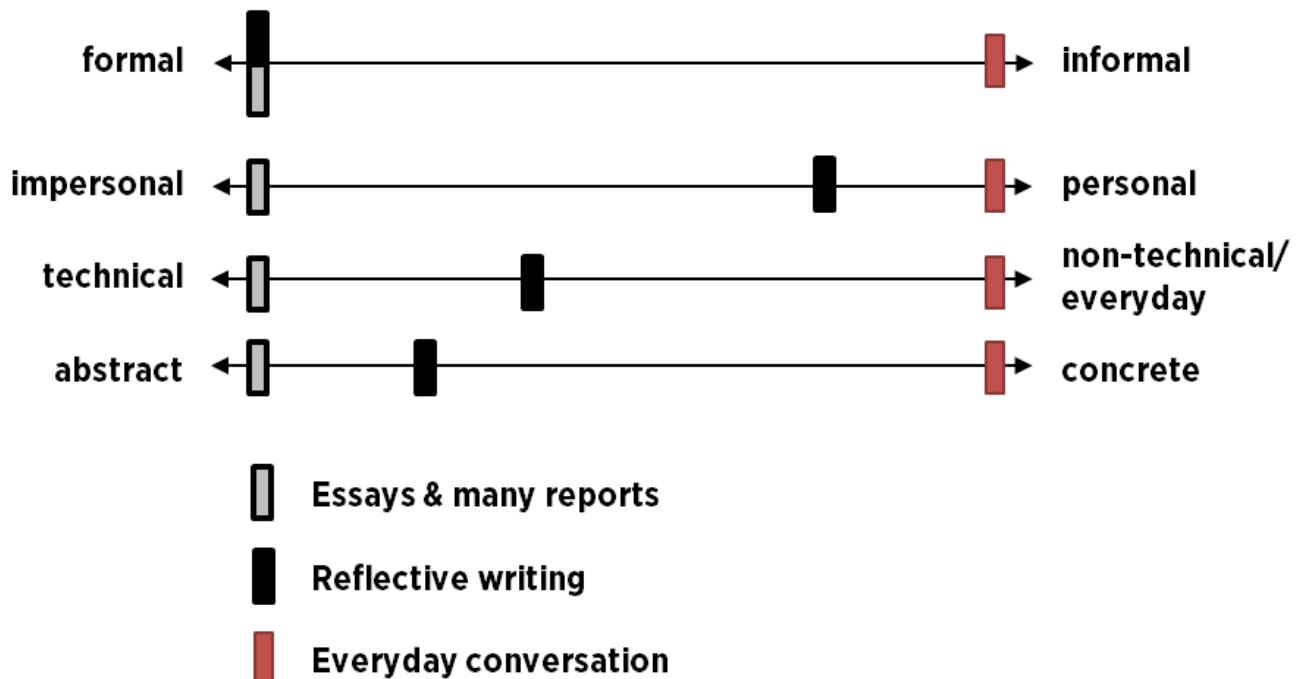
Tone / register

Tone or register refers to the way grammar, words, and expressions are selected for a piece of writing to make it appropriate for its intended context.

Think of the language choices you might make if you were trying to explain to a child how a car works, or why people get sick. Then think of how you might explain the same thing to a fellow student, or to your lecturer. You would most likely make very different choices in the different contexts.

The tone or register of a piece of academic writing will therefore depend on what kind of writing you're being asked to do. Check out our [Writing section](#) on essays, reports, case studies and reflective writing for specific details about the kind of tone you should aim for.

In general, you can think of the tone of a piece of academic writing in terms of four features: formality, impersonality (or objectivity), technicality, and abstractness. You could imagine these as sliding scales, like the ones on a sound mixing desk where you change the levels depending on what inputs you have and what space you're in.



Each kind of text has its own 'setting'. Essays and reports tend to be more formal, impersonal, technical, and abstract. At the other end of the spectrum, everyday conversation tends to be more informal, personal, non-technical, and concrete. Reflective writing sits somewhere in between: it still needs to be formal and reasonably technical and abstract, but should be more personal than an essay because you're reflecting on your personal experience.