



Handout 1

A FRAMEWORK FOR IDENTIFYING 'FORMAL' TONE: AS USED IN MUCH JOURNALISTIC WRITING

A framework for identifying 'formal' tone

Use of precise, unemotional language	e.g. 'Television audiences continue to value public service broadcasting. Industry research indicates that four in five (76%) of people who watch any public service channel claim to be very satisfied. This is broadly in line with results seen in 2011 (80%).'
Citing of credible sources	e.g. 'The Public Relations Institute of Australia states that when a company reflects a good reputation, it is seen as a desirable employment opportunity.'
Neutral expression	e.g. 'Despite general consensus about the need for all companies to employ public relations experts, new research suggests otherwise.'
Passive structure which creates distance	e.g. 'Little is known about' 'Reports have not been confirmed'
Use of formal technical terms and expressions	'Aggregated viewing share', 'Stakeholder engagement', 'A breach of Occupational Health and Safety regulations'
No abbreviations or short forms	e.g. 'It is' (not it's), 'do not' (not don't), 'For example' (not e.g.), 'and so forth' (not i.e.).

Note that this contrasts with an informal tone such as that used by magazine journalists, activist campaigners, writers of gossip columns, and advertisers who often use 'informal writing' to engage their readers. For example:

Use of an informal tone

Use of 'you'	'If you are thinking of postgraduate study, talk to the student hotline.'
Use of rhetorical questions and exclamations	'Sick and tired of study? Come to the student party!'
Use of sensational and generalised claims	'Thousands of people can't be wrong'
Use of short forms	'it's', 'you're', 'OK'
Use of slang or clichés	'It's as easy as ABC!' 'It's a bargain!'
Use of emotional language and sensational headlines	'In a shocking revelation, teen star accused agent of blackmail'