

We typically speak more than we write at school and at work. People who speak English share a common language; however, English has numerous dialects which vary from one social, ethnic, or regional group to another. These dialects often have unique vocabulary and expressions, distinctive pronunciation, and different grammatical patterns than Standard English.

Standard Written English is most widely understood around the world because of its consistency. It is the accepted and expected form of writing used in business, media, government, professional and academic writing. It may be slightly different or quite different from the spoken English we tend to use or the informal writing we do.

If you speak a non-Standard English dialect, you will likely use some of the same vocabulary and grammatical patterns in your writing. Using non-Standard English in academic or professional writing will be perceived as incorrect and unprofessional.

The level of language usage depends on who you are speaking or writing to (the audience) and the situation (the purpose). Informal English may be fine for speaking, but it is not appropriate for professional communication.

Standard English includes four levels of usage:

Formal – for important business and academic purposes, no contractions, no slang, varied sentence patterns.

Informal – ordinary words, less complex sentence structure, contractions, uses *you*

Technical – specialized words not familiar to a general audience; often includes jargon (vocabulary understood by a particular group i.e., police, nurses, computer programmers)

Colloquial/Slang – informal, everyday spoken expressions (i.e. stuff, things, guys); not precise enough for academic or professional writing

Most of the writing you will do at college will be in the formal form of Standard English using the rules of English grammar, punctuation, word choice, spelling, tone, and referencing.

Common errors in Standard Written English include errors with verb form and use, use of idiomatic expressions and slang, incorrect capitalization, wordiness, and misused synonyms.

Compare the following short paragraphs. Can you find the Standard English errors in the first paragraph and see how much clearer the message is in the second?

Non-Standard English:

Since the beginning of time, people have busy lives and want to find hurried, expedient and bargain basement alternatives for breakfast. According to a website 46% of Canadians don't have time for breakfast. The instant-Toast machine solved all your dreams and give you toast in the blink of an eye

Standard English:

People have busy lives, and they want to find quick, convenient and inexpensive ways to prepare meals, especially breakfast. 46% of Canadians report that they do not have time for breakfast (Statistics Canada, 2018). Our Instant-Toast machine can solve this problem by giving you and your family toast in only seconds.

References

- Hacker, D. (1994). *The Bedford handbook for writers* (4th ed.). Macmillan Learning.
- Hult, D.A., Huckin, T.N., Burgoyne, D.A., & Gooding, R. (2005). *The new century handbook* (3rd Canadian ed.). Pearson.