



Word Choice: Tips for ESL Students

The types of language listed below will help you to determine what types of words and phrases you can use in a formal essay.

- Clichés: Phrases or sentences that have lost meaning through overuse.

Examples: Don't count your chickens before they have hatched.
Let sleeping dogs lie.

These phrases can add colour and life to informal speech; however, in writing, they appear to be substitutes for clear thought.

- Colloquial Language: Casual conversational language that has a wider general acceptance than slang.

Examples: Let's do lunch.
I'm going to get back at him.

Colloquial language is generally acceptable in casual spoken English, but it is unacceptable in formal speaking situations, and in written English.

- Euphemisms: Expressions that soften or obscure the meaning that you wish to convey.

Examples:	a guest of the government	(in jail)
	pre-owned	(used)
	passed away	(died)
	tactical omission	(lie)

Euphemisms are good if they spare someone's feelings, but they are bad if they obscure meaning, or give a positive connotation to something illegal, immoral, or otherwise unacceptable.

- Formal Language: Language of scholarly and technical writing that is characterized by: precise language, complex sentences, and no contractions.

Formal Language is used in oral presentations and public addresses, essays, reports, resumes, and business letters.

- ▶ Informal Language: The language of peer group discussion, newspaper editorials, and certain magazines such as Time or Newsweek.

Examples: I writing in first person
can't using contractions
Why not? using sentence fragments.

- ▶ Jargon: Technical words or phrases that are used in connection with a particular trade or profession.

Examples: downsizing
bottom line

Jargon is good to use within the context in which it was developed, but it becomes difficult to decipher when used outside of its particular context. Be careful to define technical terms when you are addressing an audience outside of your technical specialty.

- ▶ Non-standard Language: Incorrect language.

Examples: anyways
could of
prolly
youse guys

Never use non-standard language in your writing, unless you are quoting someone who has used it. You should also avoid non-standard language in conversation.

- ▶ Redundancy: Often called “wordiness”, this means using several words when one or two will do.

Examples: In my opinion, I think ...
completely new
dead body

Never use redundancies in your written work. They often irritate the reader, and they sometimes make the intended meaning obscure.

- ▶ Slang: Informal language that is specific to a particular group and time period.

Examples groovy
stylin'
wicked

Use slang only in casual conversations with your peers.