INFORMALITY:
Writing’s Most Casual Error
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Informal language is a common error, whether a writer is a novice or a seasoned compositionist. Informal language can be loosely defined as writing like we speak. Language is most effective when it suits your audience and subject. In an academic setting, papers generally require some degree of formality. Listed below are some helpful tips to help you eliminate informal language in your writing.

Remove Contractions
In contractions the missing letters of words are replaced by an apostrophe. Contractions represent the way that we frequently join words together when we casually speak. In papers try to:
- Change “can’t” to “cannot,” “isn’t” to “is not,” and “won’t” to “will not,” etc.

Remove First and Second Person
Try to speak in Third Person when possible because it emphasizes the subject of the sentence and sounds more academic. Also, writing in third person will help you to reduce inserting your personal opinions into your writing. To change your paper to third person, try to:
- Remove “I” and “you”
- Write sentences that use “he/she” or “one.” Make sure that you pay attention to subject/pronoun agreement. For example, refer to the “reader” or “he/she” but do not use “they” unless you are talking about more than one person.

Think about Voice and Audience
Academic writing should not sound like you do when you are talking to your friends at a party.
- Watch out for conversational/slang words like “hook up,” “this sucks,” “pissed off” and “bangin’”
- Also be careful of using informal versions of words. Change words like “kids” and “guys” to “children” and “males/men”
- Try to make your paper as structured as possible by paying attention to the organization. Make sure that you have a clear thesis, topic sentences at the beginning of each paragraph, and a conclusion.
- Watch out for negatives: change “ain’t” to “has/have/did not.” Be careful here to avoid double negatives in sentences.

Subject/Verb Agreement and Tense
Watch out for third person subject/verb agreement. Third person singular is the only time you should add an “s” to the end of verbs. Change a sentence like “He drive to the movies” to “He drives to the movies.” Otherwise, it is grammatically correct to not have an “s” at the end of the verb, as in “I/You/They/We drive to the movies.”
- Past tense: Change “He been married” to “He has been married” OR, “He was married.”
- Future tense: Change “He gonna get married” to “He is going to get married.”
- Present: Change “She be working all the time” to “She works all the time.”

Some information taken from www.une.edu.au/langnet.aave.htm#grammar-hce and Diana Hacker’s A Writer’s Reference