



Written language vs spoken language

Here is an example of the same idea written in a formal style, and in a less formal style as a spoken text.



Read the two texts and see if you can note any differences in the table below:

Written text	Spoken text
In general, the Green and White Papers successfully highlight the government's well-placed concern for equity towards the unemployed, and propose practical recommendations which are likely to lessen the problem of mass unemployment such as the training wage.	So, generally speaking, the Green and White Papers are successful because they show that the government cares about equity towards the unemployed. Also, they've come up with recommendations that are practical — what I mean by this is that their recommendations are likely to help without the problem of mass unemployment. For example, they recommended the training wage, which is a good way of trying to deal with the problem of unemployment.

Written text

Spoken text

The following image and table highlights some of the differences:

Written text	Spoken text
<p>In general, the Green and White Papers successfully highlight the government's well-placed concern for equity towards the unemployed, and propose practical recommendations which are likely to lessen the problem of mass unemployment such as the training wage.</p>	<p>So, generally speaking, the Green and White Papers are successful because they show that the government cares about equity towards the unemployed. Also, they've come up with recommendations that are practical — what I mean by this is that their recommendations are likely to help without the problem of mass unemployment. For example, they recommended the training wage, which is a good way of trying to deal with the problem of unemployment.</p>

The diagram includes several callout boxes pointing to specific features in the text:

- Sentence connectors:** Points to 'In general' in the written text and 'So, generally speaking' in the spoken text.
- Formal vs informal vocabulary:** Points to 'highlight' and 'concern' in the written text, and 'show' and 'cares' in the spoken text.
- Repetition:** Points to 'recommendations' in both the written and spoken texts.
- First-person:** Points to 'I' in the spoken text.

Written text	Spoken text
→ Shorter	→ Longer
→ 1 long sentence	→ 3 shorter sentences
→ Formal language e.g. 'highlight'; 'concern'	→ Less formal language e.g. 'show'; 'cares about'
→ Written in the third person only (e.g. 'It, they')	→ Uses the first person occasionally (e.g. 'I, me, we')
	→ Uses more sentence connectors
	→ Uses repetition to aid understanding

Summary

- Spoken text is more informal and longer than written text, and uses more words and more sentences.
- Spoken sentences also tend to be shorter than those found in essays.
- The first person (I, me, we, etc.) is more acceptable in speech than in most academic writing, and signposting words like 'also', 'next', and 'for example' are used more often than in written work.
- Some level of informality is acceptable, although judge carefully and don't use slang, rude words, or words unfamiliar to your audience.
- Take care to explain any unusual or new words, and provide a visual of the spelling or meaning of any unfamiliar words and phrases.

Adapted from Inglis, M. (2007). *Unistep. Academic skills guide* (4th ed.). Sydney, Australia.