

How is writing different from speaking?

*'If we spoke as we write, we should find no one to listen.
If we wrote as we speak, we should find no one to read.'*

T. S. Eliot

A Reflection

How is language used differently in speaking and writing?

- Write 'S' for words to use in spoken and 'W' for those to use in written English.

um S then ____ I mean ____ consequently ____ er ____ L8R ____

B Contextualization

What are the key differences between speaking and writing?

- By analyzing the 'spoken' text and the 'written' text below, both of which focus on the same subject matter, complete the column on the right.

Spoken text: Speaking is [pause] er something we learn without really thinking about it [volume drops] usually from our mums and dads, but writing is something we really have to think about. It is [pause] um an expertise not everybody has. [intonation rises] Understand? Let me put it another way. Loads of people still can't write [points finger]. Now.

Written text: Speaking is a skill which we develop subconsciously (usually from our parents). Writing, however, has to be consciously developed. It is an expertise which, surprisingly, many people still do not possess. This is true even in the 21st century!

| Question | Speaking | Writing |
|--|--|--|
| How is the skill acquired? | Natural, unconscious process, usually from parents. | Conscious, time-intensive process, mainly at school. |
| How is the language joined together? | Simple LINKING DEVICES (e.g., <i>and/but</i>). | |
| How formal is the grammar? | Flexible. | |
| How can extra meaning be communicated? | E.g., BODY LANGUAGE , including HAND MOVEMENTS . | |
| How is emphasis created? | Changes in volume/tone. | |
| Is variety possible? | Different accents acceptable. | |
| How do you interact with the audience? | Audience is often known; can clarify meaning instantly. | |
| Can you change what you said? | No – you cannot delete speech. | |

C Analysis

What are the different uses of language in speaking and writing?

In terms of language, speaking and writing differ in two main ways: the **method of delivery** and **level of formality**.

Method of delivery

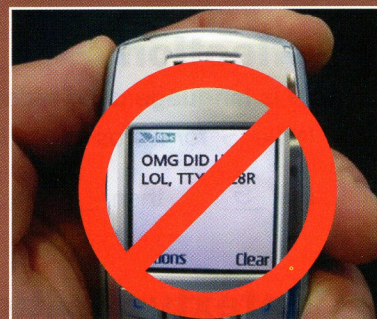
Speech is immediate and usually unplanned. As such, we need to gain time for thinking and we use fillers such as *um*, *er* and *I mean*. Writing can be edited and rewritten many times. Therefore, it has no need for such words.

Level of formality

Three historic languages have, in particular, given academic English the vocabulary which it has today: **ANGLO-SAXON**, **FRENCH** and **LATIN**. Words from the first are everyday words that are more likely to be found in speech (e.g., *then*). However, words from French and especially Latin are often a feature of writing (e.g., *consequently*).

Note: Text English

Text English – the abbreviated type of language which is often found in text messages and e-mails (and on Facebook and Twitter) – is unacceptable in academic writing. Although it is technically ‘writing’, many of its features are closer to speaking.



What are the major differences between speaking and writing?

How is the skill acquired?

As children, we acquire spoken language naturally, when we are exposed to the language of those around us, such as our parents. Writing, however, is a much more difficult skill to learn. The process is more complicated and takes a long time. This is why writing is often considered more important and prestigious. When learning writing in a second language, the process is even more difficult – so do not worry about your problems with English!

How is the language joined together?

Spoken language tends to use simpler forms of linking words (e.g., *and*, *but*), whereas written language typically uses more complex forms (e.g., *however*, *therefore*).

- Speaking: *But writing is something ...*
- Writing: *Writing, however, has ...*

How formal is the grammar?

Grammar has more flexibility in speech than in writing. In the majority of writing, you are expected to use full sentences which are ‘grammatically correct’ (i.e., every sentence must have a subject and a verb). In speech, this is not always necessary.

- Speaking: *Now.*
- Writing: *This is true even in the 21st century!*

How can extra meaning be communicated?

There are many ways to communicate your meaning in speech without using language (e.g., **BODY LANGUAGE**). Obviously, in writing, these techniques are not available. This means that your writing has to be as specific and clear as possible. In the example below, the writer has to use particular words (*surprisingly*) and punctuation (an exclamation mark – !) to do the same job as pointing a finger for emphasis.

- Speaking: Loads of people still can't write [*points finger*].
- Writing: It is an expertise which, surprisingly, many people still do not possess. This is true even in the 21st century!

How can specific emphasis be created?

In speech, there are a range of effects by which we can indicate **EMPHASIS**. These include:

- **VOLUME** (e.g., soft/loud)
- **PITCH/TONE** (e.g., rising/falling)
- **TEMPO** (e.g., slowly/quickly)

| Speech | Writing |
|-------------------|------------|
| Voice gets louder | ! |
| Tone rises | ? |
| Pitch/voice drops | () or ... |
| Shorter pause | , |
| Longer pause | . or ; |

In writing, we have to use punctuation to perform the same role. A brief comparison of the two media is presented in the table. The example below is from the text.

- Speaking: ... [*volume drops*] usually from our mums and dads ...
- Writing: (*usually from our parents*).

Is variety possible?

Spoken language varies greatly from region to region. Indeed, two speakers of the same language may find it very difficult to understand each other. To take the example of the word *about*: its written form does not change, but it can be said in different ways. For example, someone from London would typically pronounce the word as /ə'baʊt/ (to rhyme with 'shout'); a Glaswegian might pronounce it /ə'bu:t/ (to rhyme with 'flute'). Writing, on the other hand, is more standardized. Different types of English (e.g., **AMERICAN ENGLISH** and **BRITISH ENGLISH**) only have very small differences in spelling.

How do you interact with the audience?

When speaking, we almost always know who we are speaking to. In writing, however, our words might be read by anyone. Our audience, therefore, has to be considered more carefully beforehand, and **VAGUENESS** and **AMBIGUITY** must be avoided. In addition, when writing you only have one opportunity to make yourself understood, whereas in speaking you can explain yourself as many times as necessary. Here, the speaker is able to rephrase what they have just said, so that the other person can understand.

- Speaking: [*intonation rises*] Understand? Let me put it another way.

Can you change what you said?

Once something has been said, it has been said. It cannot be 'deleted' (though of course it can be clarified). In writing, texts can be edited and redrafted as often as necessary. In this example, the speaker tries twice to pronounce this difficult word correctly. When writing, however, he or she can look the word up in a dictionary, or use spellcheck, to get it right first time.

- Speaking: It is ... an expar- expertise ...

D**Activation**

The sentences below are all examples of spoken English. Rewrite them to make them more typical of written English.

1. 'Speaking and writing are really really different skills ... um ... there are three ways this is true – how they're learnt, what they contain, and how they're done.'

2. 'It's clear, isn't it, that yer grammar has gotta be better in writing.'

3. 'The main differences in speaking and writing [*intonation rises*]? Difficult question.'

4. 'Things don't really change in writing, wherever you are, but in speaking they can change loads.'

E**Personalization**

- In your mother tongue, discuss an academic subject with a friend.

- Record this conversation.
- Following this, write a short summary (c. 100 words) on the same topic.
- Compare the recording and the written summary, and identify the differences between the two.

- Review some of your previous writing. Does it sound more like speech? Can you identify any words which should not be there? In particular, you may want to check for:

- the influence of **TEXT ENGLISH**
- sentences which are not grammatically correct
- repetition of the same language
- informal linking words

F**Extension**

- Step 21 focuses on strategies for increasing the **FORMALITY** of your language – a crucial difference between speaking and writing.
- Step 43 analyzes punctuation – a skill specifically required for writing as opposed to speaking.
- Unit J (Steps 46–50) looks in detail at the issue of **PROOFREADING**, and how you can ensure your final written text avoids some of the problems listed above.