

□ Formalism (Academic Definition)

Formalism refers to the excessive focus on academic structure, presentation, and stylistic conventions — often at the expense of substance, originality, or clarity.

□ Key Features

- **Strict adherence to format** (e.g., IMRaD structure, citation style, abstract templating) regardless of whether it adds value.
- **Overuse of jargon** to sound authoritative rather than to explain.
- **Obsessive referencing** to appear well-read while avoiding saying anything new.
- **Superficial methodological sections** inserted to meet reviewer expectations without real critical analysis.
- **Aesthetic polish** used to compensate for conceptual emptiness.

□ In Practice

A paper filled with technically correct language, beautiful figures, and perfectly structured sections — yet lacking a clear question, hypothesis, or contribution.

⚠ Why It Matters

Formalism:

- Rewards **style over insight**.
- Shields **unoriginal or mediocre work** from scrutiny.
- Encourages **careerism**, where researchers aim to publish “correctly” instead of meaningfully.
- Creates **barriers to interdisciplinary or outsider contributions**.

□ Related Terms

- [Mediocrity](#)
- [Academic Theater](#)
- [Unoriginal](#)
- [Careerism](#)
- [Factory-Made Science](#)

Bottom line: *Formalism is the art of looking academic without necessarily being meaningful — a well-dressed void in the guise of scholarship.*

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Last update: **2025/06/15 20:36**

