

# Academic Writing

## Sentence Level

### Use Comprehensive Language

Do not use long, fancy words, which often make your writing needlessly difficult, when small ones will do. Big words (called jargon in some contexts) should only be used if it forms an indispensable part of the technical terminology common to a discipline. The main function should be compression and clarity, not to sound sophisticated. For example, instead of saying:

- "Members of the medical establishment are not presently cognizant of efficacious treatments resulting in the complete elimination of symptomatology in acute viral nasopharyngitis."

Why not simply say:

- "There is no known cure for the common cold."

### Check for Subject-Verb Agreement

Especially in long, complex sentences

- Example: "The **results** of the study **are** significant."

### Avoid Repetition

Whether in terms of the ideas expressed or specific words used, repetition will distract your reader and make them concentrate more on the lack of variety than your message.

### Tense

The use of past tense is one of the key differences between writing in the humanities and sciences.

- In the humanities, the writer is often engaging in a conversation that takes place in the eternal present (unless writing in history)
  - "Shakespeare compares the poet's lover to a summer's day."
- In the sciences, writers see the contribution of any individual as adding progressively to an ordered sequence of investigations. The past tense helps convey a sense of this temporal progression.

## □ Pronoun Usage

Always make sure pronouns have a clear referent. For example, instead of saying, "She sent me three text messages before my mother called to ask where I was," say, "My mother sent me three text message before she called to ask where I was."

### First Person Pronouns (I, We)

- Check with your instructor on what they prefer with regards to first person pronouns.
- If you have been told not to use them, or simply want to reduce them, here are three approaches you can take:

"We interviewed 10 participants."

Use third person

"The researchers interviewed 10 participants."

"I argue that the hypothesis is incorrect."

Use a different subject

"This paper argues that the hypothesis is incorrect."

"I checked the dataset for missing data and outliers."

Use the passive voice

"The dataset was checked for missing data and outliers."

### Avoid the editorial "we"

- Don't use the first person plural to refer to people in general. In academic writing, it's important to be precise about who you are referring to and to avoid broad generalizations. For example:
  - ✗ When we are given more freedom, we can work more effectively.
  - ✓ When employees are given more freedom, they can work more effectively.

### Second Person Pronouns (you)

- Rarely is it appropriate to address the reader directly. Rephrase or use the impersonal pronoun one instead.
  - ✗ To become a lawyer, you must pass the bar exam.
  - ✓ To become a lawyer, one must pass the bar exam.