



ACADEMIC WRITING IN ENGLISH: STYLE, USAGE, AND CONVENTIONS

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Convention #1: Neutrality

- ▶ Regardless of your passion for a topic, it is better to use neutral language
 - ▷ “Environmental sustainability is the most important issue in the world today.” ← Too exaggerated.
 - ▷ “Discussions about environmental sustainability are becoming more prominent in scientific discourse.” ← Better and more neutral.

Convention #2: Medium Certainty

- ▶ Express ideas with “medium certainty.”
Do not use language that is too strong or weak.
 - ▷ “Recycling bins will stop all littering from occurring.” ← Too strongly worded.
 - ▷ “The presence of a recycling bin is usually associated with decreased littering.” ← “Usually” lends this medium certainty.
 - ▷ Other medium certainty words include: “probably, will, should, usually, likely”

Convention #3: Critical Thinking

- ▶ Instructors for academic writing expect critical thinking
 - ▶ Carefully consider your topic and ask questions
 - ▶ Do not believe something solely because of its author
 - ▶ Instructors want you to express your own thoughts and opinions on a topic

Convention #4: Clarity

- ▶ Clearly express your perspective or argument
 - ▶ The title of your essay should state your opinion
 - ▶ Bad: “Littering on Campus”
 - ▶ Better: “Littering on Campus: Strategies for Increasing Access to Recycling Facilities
 - ▶ State your argument in concrete terms
 - ▶ Provide background on unfamiliar topics

Usage: Count Nouns

- ▶ “**Research** shows that this chemical can be dangerous.”
- ▶ “**Studies** show that this chemical can be dangerous.”
- ▶ Research is a **noncount noun**
 - ▷ Does not have distinctly separate parts.
 - ▷ Examples: Research, milk, ice, grass
 - ▷ Can only count non-count nouns if you use a quantifier, such as “one blade of grass,” “two glasses of milk.”
- ▶ Studies is a **count noun**
 - ▷ Refers to separate individuals or things
 - ▷ Examples: a study, a doctor, a book, a tree; two studies, five doctors

Usage: Indefinite Articles (*a* and *an*)

- ▶ Indefinite articles (*a* and *an*) refer to nouns which your reader does not personally know or have exposure to.
 - ▷ *a* should be used before a consonant sound (a car) and *an* before a vowel sound (an uncle)
 - ▷ Do not use indefinite articles with plural count nouns or with noncount nouns (a study, **NOT a research**)
- ▶ I need a new car.
 - ▷ Hypothetical car, not referring to a specific car.
- ▶ I saw a car that I liked at the dealer, but it was too expensive.
 - ▷ Refers to a specific car, but the reader would not personally know which specific car is being referred to.

Usage: Definite Articles (the)

- ▶ Definite articles (*the*) refer to specific, individual nouns
 - ▷ Used with both count and noncount nouns whose identity is already known by both writer and reader.
- ▶ Let's meet at the fountain in front of Sanford Hall.
 - ▷ The sentence is referring to a specific individual fountain that is identified in the sentence.
- ▶ She asked him to shut the door when he left her office.
 - ▷ Subject expects her audience to know that she is referring to the specific door in her office.
- ▶ The President of the United State is expect to visit Africa in October.
 - ▷ There is only one President at a time, so it is understood that the sentence is referring to that particular individual.

Style: Sentence Clauses

- ▶ Sentences can be constructed of multiple clauses that are joined with conjunctions.
 - ▷ Conjunctions include: “and, but, for, nor, or, so, yet”

Style: Sentence Clauses, Coordination

- ▶ Coordination involves connecting two separate but equally important clauses together.
 - ▷ “The students recycled their plastic bottles, and their campus was suddenly free of litter.”
 - ▷ “The environment is a vast, complex system, but it is prone to disruption from human activity.”
- ▶ Each clause could stand as its own sentence, but by combining them you reveal a relationship between the two ideas.

Style: Sentence Clauses, Subordination

- ▶ Subordination is similar, but it lets you distinguish between major points and minor points of information.
 - ▷ “The recycling center was a new facility that had been funded by taxes from the past ten years.
 - ▷ “Although the recycling facility was new, it was not conveniently located for use in the community.
- ▶ Only one clause can stand as a separate sentence, and that contains the most important point of information.

Grammar: Gendered Pronouns

- ▶ For a male, one could use the pronouns: he, him, or his
 - ▷ John was bored, so he walked around his town.

- ▶ For a female noun, one should use the pronouns she or her
 - ▷ Sarah was tired, so she decided that it was time for her to sleep.

Grammar: Verb Tense

- ▶ Try to avoid shifting verb tenses within individual sentences or paragraphs.
 - ▷ A few countries produce almost all of the world's illegal drugs, but addiction affected many countries.
 - ▷ A few countries produce almost all of the world's illegal drugs, but addiction affects many countries.



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