

# Writing & Editing Tips – Grammar and Style

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# 1. SENTENCES

## **NATURAL BUT SERIOUS LANGUAGE –**

- Do not use complex language or expressions just to make your writing "academic".
- Use clear, straightforward language.

# 1. SENTENCES

- **LENGTH OF SENTENCES** - Shorter sentences are better than longer ones. Vary the length of sentences.
- **BE CONCISE** -- Remove unnecessary words or sentences

## Examples:

<b>...used for fuel purposes</b>	<b>...used for fuel</b>
<b>This is a subject that...</b>	<b>This subject...</b>
<b>The reason why is that...</b>	<b>Because...</b>

# Transitions of Ideas in the Paper

- **Transitions between sentences** - Think about sentences **flowing** & connecting from one to the next.
- **Transitions between paragraphs** -- Use transition sentences **to connect** one paragraph to the next.

# Sentence Fragments

Make sure each word group you have punctuated as a sentence contains a grammatically complete thought that can stand alone as a sentence.

- **Incorrect:** Scientists report no human deaths due to excessive caffeine **consumption.** ***Although caffeine does cause convulsions and death in certain animals.***
- **Correct:** Scientists report no human deaths due to excessive caffeine ***consumption, although*** caffeine does cause convulsions and death in certain animals.

# Sentence Pile-Up

Too many equally weighted phrases and clauses.

- **Incorrect:** The meeting was planned for Monday, December 2, but not all of the members were available, so it was rescheduled for the following Friday, and then all the members could attend.
- **Correct:** The meeting, which had been planned for Monday, December 2, was rescheduled for the following Friday so all members could attend.

# Misplaced Modifiers

Place modifiers near the words they describe; be sure the modified words actually appear in the sentence.

- **Incorrect:** **Walking** out of the market, **the apples** fell into the street.  
**Correct:** The apples fell into the street as **we walked out of the market**.
- **Incorrect:** She held the umbrella over **my head** that she **bought yesterday**.  
**Correct:** She held **the umbrella** that she **bought yesterday** over my head.

# Faulty Parallelism

Use grammatically equal sentence parts for two or more items in a series.

- **Incorrect:** The candidate's goals include **winning** the election, a national health program, and the educational system.
- **Correct:** The candidate's goals include **winning** the election, **enacting** a national health program, and **improving** the educational system.

# Use **and /or** at end of list

- Therefore, the cities in China should actively improve the energy structure, promote clean **energy**, try to increase usage amount of natural gas or other clean energy (Li, Sandhu, Angle& Myrick, 1998).

**and**



# Unclear Pronoun Reference

- Be careful when you use:  
**it, they, this, that, these, those, and which**

When you say "**This theory**" or "**that point**" is it clear which theory or point you're referring to?

# Passive vs Active Voice

**Using active voice** increases the power of your writing.

<b>Passive Voice</b>	<b>Active Voice</b>
"the smog of the city"	"the city smog"
"The WeChat was set up by Dr Shao."	"Dr. Shao set up the WeChat"

## 2. USING COMMAS

To indicate relationships among ideas and sentence parts.

See where you would naturally pause.

- If it's a **short pause** you probably need a comma.
- If you don't want your reader to pause, there should not be a comma.

# Omitted Commas

- **Incorrect:** When it comes to **eating people** differ in their tastes.  

- **Correct:** When it comes to **eating, people** differ in their tastes.  


# Unnecessary Commas

- **Unclear:** Field trips are required, in several courses, such as, botany and geology. [3 commas]
- **Clear:** Field trips are required in several courses, such as botany and geology. [1 comma]

# Comma Splices

Do not link two independent clauses with a comma (unless you also use a conjunction: and, or, but, etc.). Use a period or semicolon.

- **Comma splice:** In 1952 Japan's economy was one third that of **France, by** the 1970s it was larger than that of France and Britain combined. 
- **Correct:** In 1952 Japan's economy was one third that **of France.** **By** the late 1970s it was larger than that of France and Britain combined. 

### **3. SOME OTHER PROBLEMS TO AVOID**

## Avoid **First Person** in Formal Writing

**Incorrect:** “**I found** studies that show air pollution is a major problem in many large cities.”

**Correct:** “Studies show that air pollution is a major problem in many large cities.”

# Overuse of the article, **THE**

- In China, PM2.5 is **the** main element that forms **the** hazy weather, Some others are exhaust emissions from industrial production combined with organics.
- In addition, **the** dust in construction sites and traffic compound with some other chemical products causing biochemical reactions to form **the** smog.

# Using Contractions

Example:

Use **was not** instead of **wasn't**.

Use **has not** instead of **hasn't**.

## Between

**Only two** persons, groups, or things are involved

### Example:

Tension grew **between** Exxon-Mobil and the environmental groups.

## Among

**More than two** persons, groups, or things are involved

### Example:

The arctic was divided **among** several countries

# Affect versus Effect

"Effect" is most often a **noun**. (the effect)

"Affect" is almost always a **verb**.

**Incorrect:** The recession had a negative **affect** on sales.

**Correct:** The recession had a negative **effect** on sales.  
(or) The recession **affected** sales negatively.

# Exclamations !!!

Use only after true exclamations or commands

EXAMPLES:

What a wonderful show!

Stop!

# Reminders on Good Style

1. Place yourself in the background.  
Be objective. Avoid the use of “I”
2. Write in a way that comes naturally.

### 3. **Control the need to overwrite intellectually.**

Avoid wordiness and unusual or “fancy” words.

Delete the unnecessary words and sentences.

### 4. **Or to overstate emotionally.**

[Reduce emotional enthusiasm]

5. Resist being **too informal.**

6. And avoid the use of qualifiers.

[such as **rather, very, little, pretty much**]

**7. Explain just enough.**  
[Don't tell all]

**8. Watch for gaps in the logic and in the story of the paper that can affect clarity.**

[Don't assume readers know the topic]

**9. Be clear.**

[the quality of a good style]

**10. Revise.**

# References

- Website used for some of this handout: Writer's Handbook: an editing checklist Writing Center [University of Wisconsin]  
<https://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/CommonErrors.html>
- Strunk and White. *The Elements of Style*. 1979, 2000.  
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