

The Art of English Academic Writing

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Pity the reader

“I don’t really care whether you get this or not. That’s not my problem but yours.”

“Dear reader, I greatly appreciate your interest and sincerely invite you to come along on an interesting and worthwhile journey.”

-> It’s not the readers fault if they don’t understand your text



Rule of Thumb: Write clearly!

Don't be afraid to write in a clear, straightforward, and easily comprehensible style without overly complicated sentence

Prefer the verb

“The lack of knowledge about local conditions precluded determination of committee action effectiveness in fund allocation to those areas in greatest need of assistance.”

“Since the review board lacked sufficient knowledge about local conditions, it could not determine how effectively the committee had allocated fund to areas that most needed assistance.”

Prefer the verb

“A convergence of East and West German employment trajectories could be occurring for two reasons.”

Better:

“There are two reasons why East and West Germany employment trajectories may converge.”

Prefer the verb

“To obtain the division of the material into two equal parts, we chose to...”

“The evaluation of our approach will have to be done in further projects”

“We divide the material into two equal parts by...” or

“To divide the material into two equal parts, we chose to...”

“Our approach will have to be evaluate in further projects.”



Rule of Thumb: Who does what?

When designing a sentence, think of and decide on the (strong) verb first. Avoid being noun-heavy.

Default to active voice

The partner > broke > the agreement.

Actor (subject) > action > object of the action (object)

The agreement < was broken < by the partners.

Object of the action (subject) < action < actor (object)

-> Self mention (e.g. “In our study...”, “We investigated...”) is highly recommended

Default to active voice

- Only if you have a reason, use passive (e.g. definition, general statement)

“Human rights are considered to be universal.”

“Research is based on a systematic methodology.”



Rule of Thumb: Prefer active voice

You should generally prefer the use of active voice unless you have good reason to choose passive voice instead.

How to create flow? Choreographing sentences

- One or two pieces of information
- Keep it short and limited to the words you actually need
- From known to new information

→ Read it out loud to test its if it's good

How to create flow? Choreographing sentences

“Research that uses numbers in collecting and interpreting data is **quantitative research**. **Quantitative research** employs two primary **methods**. These **methods** are experimental studies and quantitative descriptive **studies**. **Both of them** rely on five basic principles: reliability, validity, randomization, probability, and the null hypothesis.”

“**Quantitative research** uses numbers in collecting and interpreting data. Experimental **studies** and quantitative descriptive **studies** are the two primary **methods** of **quantitative research**. Five basic concepts are fundamental to quantitative research **methodology**: reliability, validity, randomization, probability and the null hypothesis.”



Rule of Thumb: From known to new information

Present information in a linear order. Start a sentence by picking up on known and working toward new information. Repeat this pattern from sentence to sentence.

How to create flow? Choreographing sentences

- One or two pieces of information
- Keep it short and limited to the words you actually need
- From known to new information
- Avoid frontal overload

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How to create flow? Choreographing sentences

“The evidence of the question of the causes of apathy in cases other than those of the control group is insufficient to justify any conclusion.”

“There is insufficient evidence on the question of the causes other than those of the control group to justify any conclusion.”

“A direct relationship in diabetic patients between hyperglycemia and morbidity and mortality has been established”

“ In diabetic patients, a direct relationship between hyperglycemia and morbidity and mortality has been established”



Rule of Thumb: Avoid frontal overload

Design your sentences such as the verb (predict) appear early in the sentence and move lengthy and complex components toward the end of the sentence.

How to create flow? Choreographing sentences

- One or two pieces of information
- Keep it short and limited to the words you actually need
- From known to new information
- Avoid frontal overload
- Keep things connected

→ Read it out loud to test its if it's good

How to create flow? Choreographing sentences

- Repeat the term in question
- same family (e.g. criticism/criticize(critic))
- same word field (e.g. investigation/study/survey)
- Transitional terms (e.g. however, consequently, furthermore)



Rule of Thumb: Keep things connected

Guide the reader through the text by building bridges from sentence to sentence using connecting elements.

How to create flow? Choreographing paragraphs

- Topic

→ Economics makes a distinction between public and private goods.

- Support/Elaboration

→ One of the key aspects defining public goods is that others cannot be excluded from consuming their benefits, whereas such exclusion is possible in the case of private goods.

- Conclusion

→ This crucial difference in the nature of private and public goods makes public goods susceptible to free-rider problems.

How to create flow? Choreographing paragraphs

- Use advance organizers, e.g.
 - Our article is divided into five sections...
 - We begin with..
 - In four steps we will examine
- Use sign posts, e.g.
 - Having discussed X, we can now turn to Y
 - At this point the question raised in Hypothesis 1 can be ...
 - As we have seen, ...



Rule of Thumb: Mind the composition of your paragraphs

Compose your paragraphs around the main thought that you seek to communicate. Keep the three-tier pattern of the topic sentence, elaborating sentence and concluding sentence in mind. And don't forget the connectors, advance organizers and sign posts along the way.



- Write clearly and pity the reader
- Prefer the verb
- Avoid passive voice
- From known to new information
- Avoid frontal overload
- Keep things connected
- Mind the composition of your paragraphs

