



Effective Academic Writing in English

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What is the purpose of academic writing?



The purposes of academic writing

- Why am I writing this?
- Surface purpose: _____
- Deeper purpose: _____

Lecture Outline and Objectives

In this lecture, we will:

- ✓ discuss the ways of rendering the academic writing **persuasive**.
- ✓ overview the major genres of medical discourse (abstract, research article, and case report).
- ✓ analyze the samples of medical discourse from *PubMed* database.

Major genres of medical discourse:

ABSTRACT

- Think about the W-word questions below and suggest your answers:
 1. What is an abstract?
 2. Who is an abstract for?
 3. Why write an abstract?
 4. When do we write them?
 5. How long should they be?

ABSTRACT

- *“Most abstracts – and I edited research for 17 years – are bad. Go for originality, but don’t over-claim. You’ve got 300 words to sell this so that people want to find out more”*

Ian McNay, emeritus professor of higher education and management, University of Greenwich (Times Higher Education, 4 September 2014, P. 30)

- **Abstracts are the hardest part of any writing journey,** because they encapsulate the entire message and information of the article/paper/project, often in a single paragraph.
- To write an abstract the writer must have absolute clarity about what it is they wish to say, why they wish to say it and it can best be understood by the readers.



ABSTRACT

- Why am I writing an abstract?
- Surface purpose: _____
- Deeper purpose: _____

ABSTRACT

- **Why am I writing an abstract?**
- **Surface purpose:** to describe my findings in this area.
- **Deeper purpose:** to convince the readers that my presentation is worth visiting the talk/downloading and reading the entire paper (to persuade them to read more than an abstract).

Abstract writing: Audience profile

The reader will scan the abstract under the WIIFM principle:
What's In It For Me?

Always know your audience:

- What the reader *already knows*.
- What the reader *needs to know*: what should be included and what to read first.

What you want the reader to:

- know (e.g., to learn something new)
- think (of something new)
- do (e.g., convince them to attend your presentation at the conference or download and read the entire article).

ABSTRACT

(Adapted from: *How to write a good abstract for a scientific paper or conference presentation* by C. Andrade. *Indian J Psychiatry*. 2011; 53(2): 172–175)

- An **abstract** is a short description of the ***purpose*** of a piece of work, research paper, report etc. It is always at the beginning of a paper.
- Most international, peer-reviewed journals require abstracts to conform to their own, set structure within a word count of 200–250 words. The usual sections are **Background**, **Methods**, **Results**, and **Conclusions**.
- Other headings may be used, e.g., **Introduction** or **Rationale** (in place of **Background**) or **Findings** in place of **Results**.
- Some journals include additional sections: **Objectives** (between **Background** and **Methods**) and **Limitations** (at the end).

ABSTRACT

- - **Background.** This should be the shortest part of the abstract and very briefly outline: what is already known about the subject, related to the paper; and what is not known and thus what the study examined or the paper presents.
- - **Methods.** This should contain enough information to enable the reader to understand what was done and how.
- - **Results.** This is the most important part of the abstract. It will therefore be the longest part and should contain as much detail about the findings as the journal word count permits.
- - **Conclusions.** This section contains the key message of the study, expressed in a few precisely worded sentences. It is customary, but not essential, for the authors to express an opinion about the theoretical or practical implications of the findings, or the importance of their findings for the field.

Contextual use of verb tenses in abstracts

- **The present tense** is appropriate for the Background section of abstracts (“The prevalence of pre-diabetes mellitus and its consequences in patients with heart failure are not known”; “Inflammation plays a pivotal role in the development and progression of diabetic nephropathy (DN)”).
- **The present perfect tense** can also be used in the Introduction section of abstracts (“This method of treatment has been considered inappropriate for these disorders”).
- The actual research (the Methods and Results sections) is written in **the past tense** (“Saliva flow in patients was measured by sialometry”; “We examined clinical outcomes in 8399 patients with heart failure and reduced ejection fraction”).

Major genres of medical discourse:

Research article (RA) (definition by *Swales 1990: 93*)

- RA is a written text, usually limited to a few thousand words, that reports on some investigation carried out by its author or authors.
- In addition, the RA will usually relate the findings within it to those of others, and may also examine issues of theory and/or methodology.
- It is to appear or has appeared in a research journal or, less typically, in an edited book-length collection of papers.

Research article

Before starting writing a RA, you should be able to answer three simple questions:

- What am I writing?
- Why am I writing?
- What is my intended outcome?

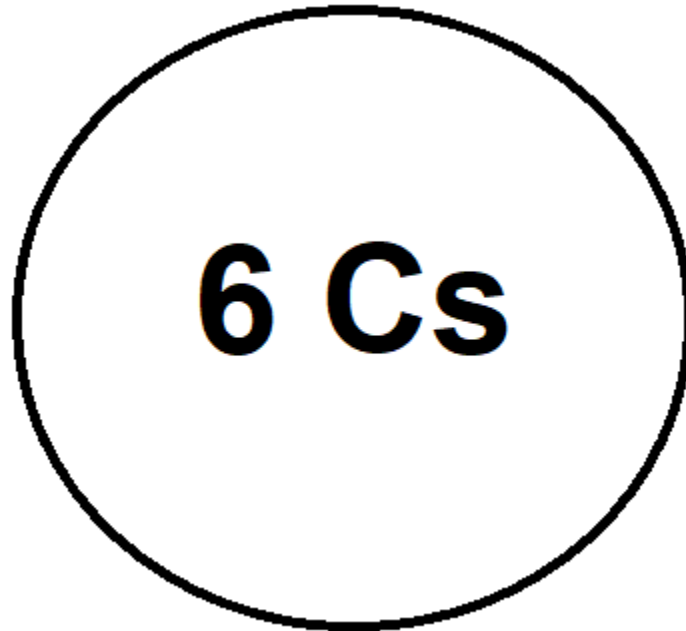
In order to be able to answer these questions, it is reasonable to write a one-sentence **purpose statement** that includes both your surface and deeper purposes.

Research article: the 6 Cs of academic writing

(adapted from *The Researcher Connect* course by British Council)

- There are 6 aspects to look for in written communication. All of them begin with the letter “C”.

What are they?



Research article: the 6 Cs of academic writing

(adapted from *The Researcher Connect* course by British Council)

Written communication should be:

- Clear
- Complete
- Concise
- Coherent
- Courteous
- Correct



The conciseness principle

- Define the precise meaning of conciseness. Write it down.

The conciseness principle

- Now make your definition shorter without losing its idea (up to 7 words).
- For example: Conciseness is –

The ability to express the idea in a short way.

After reduction:

Expressing the idea in a short way.

What did we do to make the sentence shorter? Write down your tips for conciseness.

For example: nouns sound heavy; verbs make it easier to read.

Rules for sentence and paragraph length is RA

- The Institute of Industrial Psychologists in the UK researched the link between readability and sentence length. They asked 100 people to read three sentences once and checked the comprehension levels of each person:

Sentence length	Understanding at one reading
7 words	96 %
17 words	75 %
27 words	4 %

Rules for sentence and paragraph length is RA

- The maximum sentence length should be 20 words.
- The average length of a sentence should be 12-15 words.
- The average paragraph length should be 8 lines for printed sources, and 4 lines for inline sources.

The hourglass metaphor of RA organization

- A commonly used metaphor when trying to describe the organization of RA is the *hourglass* (Hill et al. (1982), Swales (1990: 134)). The hourglass has a wide top and bottom, and a more narrow middle part:
- The idea behind the hourglass model is that a transition is made between the general field of study, to the particular study reported in the article, and then another transition at the end of the article, where a move is made from the findings in the particular study to implications for the general field.

INTRODUCTION

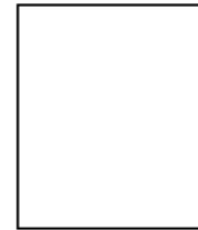


general



particular

PROCEDURE



particular



general

DISCUSSION

Tense choice in RA

Section	Tense	Examples
Introduction	Present simple	<i>Diabetes mellitus <u>is</u> a group of diseases associated with various metabolic disorders, the main feature of which <u>is</u> chronic hyperglycemia due to insufficient insulin action. Its pathogenesis <u>involves</u> both genetic and environmental factors.</i>
Methods	Past simple	<i>We <u>studied</u> the effects of a melatonin-aluminum oxide-polymethylsiloxane complex (complex M) on the expression of apoptosis regulators.</i>
Results	Past simple	<i>Results <u>indicated</u> that the median follow-up in patients with normal HbA_{1c} <u>was</u> 26 months, and it <u>was</u> 27 months in both patients with pre-diabetes mellitus and diabetes mellitus.</i>
Discussion	Present simple	<i>This study <u>has</u> 3 key findings. First, although <u>it is known</u> that the prevalence of diabetes mellitus is high in patients with HF-REF, it <u>seems</u> that both pre-diabetes mellitus and undiagnosed diabetes mellitus <u>are</u> also common in these patients.</i>
Diagrams and figures	Present simple	<i>Table 1 above <u>demonstrates</u> the success of cloning in various animal species. Figure 2 below <u>shows</u> methylation in mouse 2-cell embryos.</i>

Tense choice in RA

Conclusion	A combination of tenses	<i>Recent interventional trials <u>have shown</u> that lifestyle modifications and/or antidiabetic medications <u>have</u> metabolic benefits, such as reducing postpartum diabetes, but these interventions <u>were</u> not as effective as they <u>were</u> in the non-gravid population. Type 2 diabetes mellitus <u>is</u> still rare in childhood and adolescence, but recent reports <u>indicate</u> an increasing prevalence around the world possibly due to increasing prevalence of obesity in children and adolescents. <u>It is becoming</u> increasingly clear that obese children and adolescents with clinical signs of insulin resistance <u>should be screened</u> for type 2 diabetes mellitus.</i>
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Impersonal “it”-constructions

- The “it”-constructions depersonalize text and create an impression of the writer’s distance and objectivity.
- E.g., in *Type 2 diabetes mellitus in children and adolescents* by Thomas Reinehr (*World J Diabetes*. 2013; 4(6): 270–281.):
 - ✓ “**It is well recognized** that insulin resistance to insulin-stimulated glucose uptake is a characteristic finding in patients”;
 - ✓ “**...it is not surprising** that the peak age at presentation of type 2 diabetes mellitus in children coincides with the usual age of mid-puberty”;
 - ✓ “**It is interesting to note** that adipose tissue expanding in the obese state synthesizes and secretes metabolites”;
 - ✓ “**...it is likely** that type 2 DM is a common condition in childhood”;
 - ✓ “**It is unclear** whether foot examinations are important in children”;
 - ✓ “**It is questionable** that the traditional techniques used to optimize glycemic control in patients with type 1 diabetes mellitus are also useful in children”;
 - ✓ “**...it is debatable** whether the most appropriate context for therapy is a pediatric hospital”.

Active/Passive Voice

- The passive is often used in academic writing, as some people consider it to be impersonal and thus more objective (e.g., “the tolerability of this surgical technique was examined”).
- However, passive voice can be imprecise and confusing; it can slow the reader down and disrupt the sentence focus.
- Therefore, it is usually appropriate to use a **good balance** of passive and active forms within academic writing.
- In general, passive voice is used to describe a **process**, the **results** of study, or similar material which is **objective** in nature. Active voice is used to describe **actions**.
- Thus, choice of active/passive voice depends on the context. Clarity of meaning is paramount in medical research. The aim must be to avoid any possibility of confusion in the written and spoken meaning.

Key takeaways:

- Each genre of medical discourse has its own unique features which must be taken into account.
- MCRs are characterized by traditional lexical structures and grammar rules, which must be respected.
- Presenting the research results without consideration of academic norms, grammar and lexical features of the English language can lead to mistakes and misunderstanding, and result in a written work of poor quality.
- In modern MCRs, there is a strong tendency of using Latin terms and terminological collocations, which also requires particular attention in order to avoid misspelling in medical writing.
- Thus, it is crucial for medical professionals to be aware of peculiarities of academic writing in English in order to be understood and acknowledged, and ultimately to succeed in the modern English-speaking world.

Thank you for your attention!

Faleminderit Arigato Thank you Matondo Asante Djakoejeme
Dekuji Koszonom Shukran Tack Danke Xie_Xie Grazie
Hvala Gracias Sukran Dank je Xie_Xie Grazie
Merci Danke Thank you
Biyan **Efharisto** Shukran
Blagodaram Eucharisto Hvala Dziekuje
Takk Multumese Merci Dankie Blagodaria
Grazie Obrigado Xie_Xie iitos Gracias Danke
Shukran Jae Zu Din Pa De Xitot Terimakasih