

## UNIT 4

### ACADEMIC WRITING

The focus of this unit is on improving your writing skills. The theoretical background provided in this unit forms the basis of any academic or professional written compositions. We will look at the general writing process, structure of an academic text, appropriate style and tone application, and common paragraph patterns that will help structure your paragraphs appropriately.

As you work through this unit's content, consider the following:

- *What can you practically do that will immediately improve your writing skills?*
- *How would your writing style differ when writing a WhatsApp message to your friend versus a WhatsApp message to your lecturer?*

Please note: you will be expected to refer to the textbook, the Communication Handbook, for further reading, self study as well as additional exercises.

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon completion of this unit, you should be able to:

- Apply the conventions of structuring academic texts;
- Develop cohesion and coherence, by means of linking ideas and paragraphs in written texts;
- Apply strategies for paraphrasing written texts;
- Execute the process of planning, drafting, revising, editing and proofreading written work.

#### 1. THE WRITING PROCESS

The writing process can be divided into four stages:

1. The planning stage involves collecting relevant material.
2. The drafting stage involves composing the first version of the document.

3. The revision stage requires a critical assessment of the first draft, resulting in the making of changes.
4. The editing stage requires the checking of the document for spelling, punctuation, and grammatical errors.

## 2. STRUCTURE OF AN ACADEMIC TEXT

When writing academically, it is of paramount importance to pay attention to introduction of an academic text, the body as well as the conclusion. All these sections of an academic text play an important role. They will be discussed in detail.

### 2.1. Introduction

The introduction plays a special role in the academic essay, and it demands much of your attention as a writer. A good introduction should identify your topic, provide essential context, and indicate your particular focus in the essay. It also needs to engage your readers' interest.

#### How do I write an interesting, effective introduction?

Consider these strategies for capturing your readers' attention:

1. Find a **statistic** that illustrates the seriousness of the problem you will address.
2. Quote an **expert**.
3. Mention a **common misperception** that your paper will argue against.
4. Give some **background information** necessary for understanding the essay.
5. In a science paper, **explain key scientific concepts** and refer to relevant literature.
6. In a more technical paper, **define a term that is possibly unfamiliar** to your audience but is central to understanding the essay.

In fleshing out your introduction, you will want to **avoid some common pitfalls**:

1. Do not **provide dictionary definitions**, especially of words your audience already knows.
2. Do not **repeat the assignment specifications** using the lecturer's wording.

3. Do not give **details and in-depth explanations** that really belong in your body paragraphs. You can usually postpone background material to the body of the essay.

## 2.2. Body

Every paragraph you write should follow the principles listed below:

1. The paragraph **must contain a topic sentence**.
2. All remaining sentences should **support and develop the topic sentence**.
3. **Only one main idea** should be developed in a paragraph.
4. The sentences should flow **smoothly and logically**.
5. A concluding sentence may be added but is not essential.

Paragraph word length can and should vary. However, be aware that paragraphs that are too long can be hard to read, and that paragraphs that are too short look ‘choppy’ and can read like a list. To be more specific, a one sentence paragraph is usually too short, and writing only two paragraphs on one A4 page indicates that those paragraphs may be too long. There is no fixed rule about the number of sentences that should make up a paragraph. What is important is that the paragraph only develops one main idea. This is this factor which should be the primary determinant of paragraph length. When you need to say something else, start a new paragraph.

### 2.2.1. Paragraph structure

Now, let’s look at paragraph structure in more detail.

Think of a paragraph as having two, or possibly three sections:

**1. A topic sentence:** this states the main topic of the paragraph and the controlling idea.

For the writer, a topic sentence makes it easier to stay on topic and develop the main idea without getting off track. For the reader, topic sentences announce what the paragraph will be about and demonstrate how different paragraphs and ideas are connected to each other.

A topic sentence generally appears early in a body paragraph (often the first or second sentence) and controls the paragraph. Everything that follows in the paragraph needs to relate to the topic sentence.

**2. Supporting sentences:** they either explain or prove the topic sentence. Supporting sentences usually have one of the following functions:

- they provide specific and factual details;
- they explain important terms;
- they support the point made in the topic sentence, often with a quotation or a paraphrase;
- give examples to illustrate the point made in the topic sentence;

Let us use a sandwich as a paragraph; the topic sentence and concluding sentence are the bread: they mirror each other and hold it together. The supporting sentences are the 'filling'. Without them there is no paragraph.

It is essential that your supporting sentences stay on topic and clearly relate to the main idea of the topic sentence. If your supporting sentences are irrelevant or off-topic, your paragraph will not be strong and may be unclear.

**3. Concluding sentences:** they signal the end of the paragraph and leave the reader with important points to remember, but are often unnecessary. Concluding sentences link one paragraph to the next and provide another device for helping you ensure that your text is cohesive. While not all paragraphs include a concluding sentence, you should always consider whether one is appropriate.

Concluding sentences have **two crucial roles** in paragraph writing.

They draw together the information you have presented to elaborate your controlling idea by:

- Summarising the points you have made;
- Repeating words or phrases (or synonyms for them) from the topic sentence;
- Using linking words that indicate that conclusions are being drawn, for example, *therefore*, *thus*, *resulting*.

They often link the current paragraph to the following paragraph. They may anticipate the topic sentence of the next paragraph by:

- Introducing a word/phrase or new concept which will then be picked up in the topic sentence of the next paragraph;

- Using words or phrases that point ahead, for example, *the following*, *another*, *other*.

### **Writing the topic sentence**

When writing the topic sentence, try to state the main point of the paragraph as clearly and as accurately as possible. Do not make the topic sentence too general or too specific.

**Too general :** *Studying overseas was deemed to be very difficult.*

**Too specific :** *Studying overseas was deemed to be very difficult for 63% of the people surveyed who cited a range of difficulties including homesickness, loneliness, difficulty making Australian friends, changes to diets, health problems, weight gain, and difficulties with money and jobs.*

The topic is best placed at or near the start of the sentence. The topic should not be a pronoun (he, she, his, this, it) as starting with a pronoun often makes the focus of the paragraph unclear.

The controlling idea ‘controls’ everything else in the paragraph; it indicates what you want to say about the topic.

*Studying overseas was deemed to be very difficult...*

In this case, do not talk about such things as the benefits of studying overseas, or statistics about the overseas student population. If you want to do this, start a new paragraph.

### **2.2.2. Characteristics of a Paragraph**

A well-constructed paragraph has the following characteristics:

- Unity (one main idea)
- Effective developments of the main idea
- Coherence (linking between sentences)

A well-structured text consists of paragraphs that display:

- Cohesion (linking between paragraphs)

#### **2.2.2.1. Unity**

A good paragraph reflects **unity of thought**. In other words, a paragraph should contain **only one main**. This main or controlling idea is presented in what is known as the topic sentence, which, in business writing, is often the first sentence of the paragraph. The topic sentence, then, presents the idea (the limited subject matter) about which the paragraph is to be written.

#### **2.2.2.2. Paragraph development**

The controlling idea, presented in the topic sentence, must be fully developed, or explained. The explanation takes the form of supporting statements or sentences. Some of these supporting statements will be more important than others. However, they must all relate to the controlling idea expressed in the topic sentence.

The controlling idea can be developed in the following ways:

- *By giving details or reasons. The topic sentence is supported by **supplying facts**.*

A well-constructed paragraph is always planned. First, the writer decides on the main idea to be expressed in the paragraph. This idea is then formulated in a topic sentence. Once the writer is satisfied with the topic sentence, he or she then develops the main idea by means of supporting sentences. Finally, the writer checks that each sentence flows smoothly into the next. Any sentence that disturbs the flow is moved or rewritten.

- *By giving illustrations or examples. The main idea is made concrete by means of **examples**.*

The discipline of hours of sustained study is not easy. Distractions, like the beat of favourite music, friends' voices raised in laughter, or the distance bounce of a ball somehow seem to soften even the strongest resolve. Then you have to concentrate on the rewards: the coveted cap and gown, the promise of a bright future and the smile of pride on a parent's face.

- *By diving and classifying. The topic is divided into its **constituent parts**.*

Communicators share meaning with one another by using codes. These codes can be divided into verbal and non-verbal codes. Verbal codes, which can take both spoken and written forms, are the hundreds of different languages that human being use to communicate with one another. Non-verbal codes, refer, for example to body language, pictures, and graphics and sign language.

- *By comparing and contrasting. Concepts or items are **compared**.*

An academic education is different from a technical education. Students following an academic route are equipped with theoretical knowledge. Students receiving technical training begin with a theoretical foundation, but the emphasis is on the practical application of skills. In an academic programme, students choose subjects from the range of subjects offered to make up their degree courses. In a technical education, however, because of the career focus, courses are designed, in consultation with industry, and combined in career-orientated programme, the students then register for this programme.

- *By giving causes and effects. The **reason(s) giving rise to the result(s)** is (are) given.*

Many students find the freedom offered by student life difficult to cope with. They spend a great deal of time exploring the sporting and social activities available at their institution, and too little time exploring facilities such as the library. Too late, they realise the value of regular, disciplined study. The result is disappointing academic progress.

Paragraphs do not always follow a single method of development. Writers sometimes prefer to use a combination two or even three methods. The paragraph above, for example answers the question posed by the topic sentence by giving details and also by showing cause and effect.

#### **2.2.2.3. Coherence**

A paragraph is coherent when its sentences are arranged in such a way that their relationship to one another and to the topic sentence is clear to the reader.

Coherence can be achieved by **adopting the strategy** outlined below.

#### **Sentence order**

Arrange your sentences in the sequence that you will best communicate your message to the reader. Possibilities to consider are to use:

- Descending or ascending order of importance, or
- Time order

Here is an example of a paragraph with sentences arranged in an ascending order of importance:

#### *Order of importance*

Students greet the end of year vacation with great enthusiasm. The first priority is usually to catch up on sleep. Then they need to pick up the threads of their social life, often rather

neglected because of exam pressure. Finally, this is the ideal time to solve the perennial student problem of a shortage of funds by landing a well-paying vacation job.

Note: writers will prioritise differently, depending on their individual needs and perception.

Use transitional expressions - link or signpost words that guide your reader through the text by providing clear signals of what to expect.

Here are some examples of transitional expressions and the meanings conveyed.

Furthermore, moreover, also, in addition- a similar point comes next

Conversely, on the other hand, however, - a different or opposite view is next.

#### 2.2.2.4. Cohesion

Cohesion refers to **paragraph function as a unit** within a larger piece of writing. A good writer therefore uses **transitions** between paragraphs in order to ensure cohesion, in other words, that thoughts flow smoothly from paragraph to paragraph.

Embarking on a course of study at a university is an opportunity for *personal growth in a number of different dimensions*. By taking advantage of the range of activities on offer, students develop intellectually and socially and also in the sporting and cultural arenas.

The *primary purpose* of a tertiary education is *intellectual development*. Involvement in the academic life of your institution through attending lectures and seminars, engaging in debates and discussion with the lecturers and peers, and undertaking self-study through use of the library and online resources hones your intellectual skills. When you embark on a career, the critical thinking faculties acquired during your studies enable you to adapt to a variety of situations in the workplace and in your personal life.

*Just as important* as intellectual development is *social growth*. Meeting and interacting with students from a wide range of backgrounds teaches valuable social skills and enriches your life. This enrichment stems not only from the formation of new friendships but also from open mindedness and understanding that grow from exposure to different cultures, lifestyle, and points of view. Moreover, the relaxed social setting in which these contacts take place provide contrast with a break from the discipline of academic study.

*A third dimension is the sporting/cultural dimension*. Depending on your individual taste and talent, you can participate in various sporting activities or you can decide to focus on cultural activities by, for example, joining a choir or a debating society. These activities



provide further opportunities to meet and work with others, as well as leading to the acquisition of group skills.

The *three dimensions*, being complementary, feed into and support one another. Wise students attempt to include all three to obtain maximum benefit from their period of study.

**Note: The links between paragraphs have been italicised.**

#### 2.2.2.4.1. Linking/Signpost Words

The table below will give you examples of how to link sentences and how to transition between paragraphs.

The art of signposting is using key words and phrases to point the reader in the right directions whilst making connections between ideas and arguments. Here are some connectives which will prove invaluable in your own writing. You may have your own favourites. They are divided into ten categories.

<b>Adding</b>	<b>Building on the last section</b>	<b>Concluding</b>	<b>Contrast</b>	<b>Examples</b>
also, and, as well (as), besides, furthermore, in addition, similarly	having established that, if so, in order to, in that/this case, moreover, so, that/which, implies, then	in conclusion, in summary, to conclude, to recap, to summarize	all the same, by way of contrast, despite that; however, in contrast, instead, nevertheless, nonetheless, on the other hand	as an illustration exemplifying this for example for instance
<b>Giving reasons</b>	<b>List</b>	<b>Refining</b>	<b>Reformulating an idea</b>	<b>Result</b>
Because, because of, due to, for this reason, therefore	firstly, secondly, ... finally first and foremost most importantly	effectively, this suggests, in essence, more precisely, more specifically to make this explicit	Again, alternatively/an alternative I, s in other words, on the other hand, or, rather,	Accordingly, as a result, consequently, for this reason, hence, so, then, therefore

### **2.3. Conclusion**

An academic paper should end with a well-constructed conclusion. The conclusion is somewhat similar to the introduction. You restate your aims and objectives and summarize your main findings and evidence. You can usually do this in one paragraph with three main key points, and one strong take-home message. You should not present any new arguments in your conclusion. Remember, the conclusion is the last part of the essay that your reader will see, so spend some time writing the conclusion so that you can end on a high note.

#### **Some general advice about conclusions**

1. A conclusion is not merely a summary of your points or a re-statement of your essay. If you wish to summarize – and often you must – do so in fresh language. Remind the reader of how the evidence you have presented has contributed to your essay.
2. Broaden your focus a bit at the end of the essay. A good last sentence leaves your reader with something to think about, a concept in some way illuminated by what you have written in the paper.
3. For most essays, one well-developed paragraph is sufficient for a conclusion. In some cases, a two-or-three paragraph conclusion may be appropriate. As with introductions, the length of the conclusion should reflect the length of the essay.

#### **How do I write an interesting, effective conclusion?**

The following strategies may help you move beyond merely summarising the key points of your essay:

1. If your essay deals with a contemporary problem, warn readers of the possible consequences of not attending to the problem.
2. Recommend a specific course of action.
3. Use an apt quotation or expert opinion to lend authority to the conclusion you have reached.
4. Give a startling statistic or fact to drive home the ultimate point of your paper.
5. Return to an anecdote, example, or quotation that you introduced in your introduction, but add further insight that derives from the body of your essay.

6. In a science or social science paper, mention worthwhile avenues for future research on your topic.

### 3. PARAPHRASING TECHNIQUES

When you write a paraphrase, you **restate other's ideas in your own words**. That is, you write the meaning of the author's ideas. You use some of the author's key terms, but you use many of your **own words and sentence structures**. You include in-text citation which will be taught by personnel from the Library.

An effective paraphrase includes **more than one** of the following techniques. If you use only one of these techniques when paraphrasing, you have not paraphrased effectively.

#### 1. Change a word from one part of speech to another

Original: Medical professor John Swanson says that global changes are influencing **the spread of diseases**.

Paraphrase: According to John Swanson, a professor of medicine, changes across the globe are causing **diseases to spread**.

#### 2. Use synonyms

Original: The South African government **declared** that the AIDS crisis poses a national security **threat**. The announcement followed an intelligence report that found **high rates** of HIV infection could lead to widespread **political destabilization**.

Paraphrase: The government of South Africa **announced** that AIDS could **harm** the nation's security. The government warned the population after an important governmental study concluded that **political problems** could result from **large numbers** of people infected with HIV.

#### 3. Change numbers and percentages to different forms

Original: Minority groups in the United States have been hit hardest by the epidemic. African Americans, who make up 13 percent of the U.S. population, accounted for 46 percent of the AIDS cases diagnosed in 1998.

Paraphrase: The AIDS epidemic has mostly affected minorities in the United States. For example, in 1998, less than 15 percent of the total population was African, but almost half of the people diagnosed with AIDS in the United States that year were African America.

**4. Change word order: this might include changing from active to passive voice or moving modifiers to different positions.**

Original: Angier (2001: 72) reported that **malaria kills more than one million people annually**, the overwhelming majority of them children in sub-Saharan Africa.

Paraphrase: Every year, **more than a million people are killed by malaria**, and most of the victims are children who live in sub-Saharan Africa (Angier, 2001: 72).

**5. Use different definition structures**

Original: **Lyme disease is an inflammatory disease caused by a bacterium transmitted by ticks** (small bloodsucking arachnids that attach themselves to larger animals). The disease is usually characterized by a rash followed by flu-like symptoms, including fever, joint pain, and headache.

Paraphrase: **Lyme disease-a disease that causes swelling and redness-is caused by a bacterium carried by a small arachnid known as a tick**. The ticks attach to and suck the blood of animals and humans, transferring some of the Lyme disease bacteria into their hosts and causing symptoms similar to the flu.

**6. Use different attribution signals**

Original: “That’s because there are so many different ways the diseases could have arrived,” veterinarian Mark Walters declared in his recent book, *Six Modern Plagues*.

Paraphrase: According to Mark Walters, a veterinarian who wrote *Six Modern Plagues*, the disease could have arrived in numerous ways.

**7. Change the sentence structure and use different connecting words**

Original: Although only about one-tenth of the world’s population lives there, sub-Saharan Africa remains the hardest hit region, accounting for 72 percent of the people infected with HIV during 2000.

Paraphrase: Approximately 10 percent of the world’s population resides in sub-Saharan Africa. However, this area of the world has the highest percentage of AIDS-related illnesses. In fact, in 2000, almost three-fourths of the population had the HIV virus.

Caution: When paraphrasing, **do not change key terms or proper nouns**.

Original: In the north eastern United States, people are building homes on the edge of woods, where ticks that carry Lyme disease hitch rides on deer. In addition, in Africa, hunters bring back the meat of animals that scientists think may transmit Ebola, a usually fatal disease that causes massive haemorrhaging in its victims.

Paraphrase: In the United States, residential areas are being built near wooded areas in the northeast. These areas are also the homes of ticks carrying Lyme disease. Also, according to scientists, hunters in Africa kill animals that may carry the Ebola virus (an often fatal virus that causes massive haemorrhaging).

#### 4. STYLE OF WRITING

Style may be defined **as the way in which a text is written for a specific purpose and a specific audience**. Keep your style consistent in tone and diction by carefully choosing the patterns of writing and vocabulary that best serve your purpose. Be specific and concrete and avoid wordiness.

The most common distinction is the level of formality. The range of styles based on level of formality is high formal, formal, consultative, casual, and intimate.

1. A **high formal** style is characterised by:

- Very formal word choice (unfamiliar words)
- Long and complex sentences
- Long paragraphs

##### Example

*It has been noted by the Personnel Department that the need for a course in telephone etiquette should be regarded as of high priority by our organisation in the immediate future.*

2. A **formal** style is characterised by:

- Simple but formal word choice
- Complete but short sentences
- Short paragraphs
- No contractions such as *you're* or *I'll*

##### Example

*The Personnel Department is aware of the need for training in telephone techniques.*

*This training should be a high priority.*

3. A **consultative** style is characterised by

- Simple, casual word choice
- Short and complete sentences
- Use of personal pronouns *we*, *you*, and *I*
- Use of contractions, e.g. *We've decided...*

#### Example

*We, in the Personnel Department feel that there's a need for training in telephone techniques.*

*We think this training is very important.*

4. A **casual** style

- is conversational
- is more suited to speaking
- may use incomplete sentences
- may use abbreviations

#### Example

*My Department thinks workers should be taught how to use the telephone. It's very important!*

5. An **intimate** style

- is not appropriate in the professional environment
- is used by people who know each other well
- uses incomplete sentences
- uses informal words

#### Example

*Hi there! We've no clue how to answer the phone. Must learn, don't you think?*

### **Differences between formal and informal styles of writing**

The following provides comparative examples of the two styles:

#### **Formal language makes use of complex sentence structures**

*The bridge was completed in 2001, which resulted in a positive political move that united two countries.* = **Formal**

*In 2001, the bridge was built. This was good politically. Two countries united.* = **Informal**

### **Formal language does not use contractions**

*When considering staffing in hospitals in the future, it is difficult not to be concerned.* = **Formal**

*When considering staffing in hospitals in the future, it's difficult not to be concerned.* = **Informal**

### **Formal language is objective**

There is little doubt/It is clear that the issue of global warming will be the primary concern at the webinar. = **Formal**

I think/believe that the issue of global warming will be the primary concern at the webinar. = **Informal**

### **Formal language does not use colloquialisms (language which is common to spoken English)**

*The Minister of COPTA, Dr Nkosazaza Dlamini-Zuma, expressed her concern when she viewed the most recent report from the press.* = **Formal**

*COPTA's minister, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma totally flipped out when she read the latest report from the press.* = **Informal**

### **Formal language focuses more on vocabulary choice**

*The research assistant investigated the incident and reported to him the following day.* = **Formal**

*The research assistant checked out the incident and got back to him the next day.* = **Informal**

### **Formal language makes use of the discipline specific vocabulary**

*Bacteria thrive in unhygienic and warm conditions.* = **Formal**

*Germs grow well in dirty and warm temperatures.* = **Informal**

#### **SELF STUDY**

Refer to chapter 8 for further reading on the following:

- Register or level of formality
- Clarity
- Conciseness
- Tone

## 5. DOs & DON'Ts OF ACADEMIC WRITING

The following is a chart that supplies the standard **DOs** and **DON'Ts** of academic writing at university. Some of these points may vary depending on the writing style and the departmental guidelines. Always check for style guides before starting the writing process to ensure that there are no additional style requirements or variations in preference.

What not to do	What to do
Do not use slang, jargon, colloquialisms, or sexist language.	Use formal language.
Do not use shortened verb forms (contractions) such as <i>they're</i> , <i>isn't</i> , <i>can't</i> .	Use formal language.
Do not use shortened verb forms (contractions) such as <i>they're</i> , <i>isn't</i> , <i>can't</i> .	Use the full verb form instead, e.g. they are, is not, cannot.
Do not use common vocabulary, such as <i>have got</i> , <i>a lot</i> , <i>nice</i> , <i>the other thing</i> .	Make more formal vocabulary choices,  <i>e.g. have found, a great deal, attractive/ advantageous, the other issue/problem/notion/idea/topic etc..</i>
Do not use conversational opening phrases, such as <i>Well</i> , <i>you see</i> , <i>Yes.../ Let's move on</i> .	Leave out conversational phrases. Use appropriate connectors and introductory phrases.
Do not write <i>I think</i> - especially not at the beginning of a sentence, i.e. <i>I think James (2008) believes that global warming will...</i>	Leave out <i>I think</i> , e.g. <i>James (2008) believes that global warming will...</i>
Do not use personal pronouns e.g. <i>I</i> , <i>you</i> , <i>we</i> (unless specifically	Be non-personal, e.g. <b><i>It</i></b> <i>should be possible for everyone to compete.</i>



required), i.e. do not write <i>We think that you should be able to compete.</i>	
Do not use sweeping generalisations	State main ideas clearly and concisely in your own words in topic sentences.
Do not use bullet points or lists, unless it is in a report.	Use complete sentences and link these into logical paragraphs.
Avoid making assumptions or giving your opinion (unless specifically asked).	Be objective.
Do not plagiarize.	Provide references whenever you say something that is not your own.
Do not take for granted that the spell check on your computer is accurate or will spot all spelling mistakes, since for example, your spell check will not pick up on <i>whether</i> vs <i>weather</i> .	Check spelling, grammar, and punctuation etcetera.  Proofread and use a dictionary.  Ask somebody to proofread your text for you.
Do not pose (direct) questions in the running text, that is, do not write, for instance <i>Can carbon emissions be reduced?</i>	Convert questions into statements, for example: <i>The possibility of carbon emissions being reduced is questionable.</i>
Do not mix words and numbers unsystematically.	Use words for numbers nine and below and numbers for 10 and above.

### 5.1. Avoid These Aspects Of Informal English

The use of clichés is not appropriate in academic writing. These are phrases such as 'at the end of the day' or 'in the nick of time.' Instead of this you might write finally or at the critical moment.

Avoid casual everyday words such as really, okay and maybe.

Generally avoid "phrasal verbs" (get off, get away with, put in): instead, use one word equivalents.

Avoid common but vague words and phrases such as get, nice, thing. Your writing needs to be more precise.

Avoid overuse of brackets; don't use exclamation marks or dashes; avoid direct questions; don't use etc., e.g., i.e. and viz.

Always use capital letters appropriately and never use the type of language used in texting.

## **5.2. Structure Your Writing Carefully**

Make sure you write in complete sentences.

Divide your writing up into paragraphs.

Use connecting and signalling words and phrases to make your writing explicit and easy to follow.

Check your grammar and spelling carefully.

## **5.3. Make Your Writing Formal And Impersonal**

Avoid too much personal language (I, my, we etc). Some tutors prefer you to avoid it completely.

Never use emotive language; be objective rather than subjective.

Avoid being too dogmatic and making sweeping generalisations. It is usually best to use some sort of "hedging" language and to qualify statements that you make. You should consistently use evidence from your source reading to back up what you are saying and reference this correctly.

Avoid sexist language, such as chairman, mankind. Don't refer to "the doctor" as he; instead, Make the subject plural and refer to them as *they*. Avoid he/she, herself/himself etc.

## **5.4. Hedging/Avoiding Commitment**

In order to put some distance between what you're writing and yourself as writer, to be cautious rather than assertive, you should:

Avoid overuse of first person pronouns (I, we, my, our)

Use impersonal subjects instead (It is believed that ..., it can be argued that ...)

Use passive verbs to avoid stating the 'doer' (Tests have been conducted instead of I conducted tests)

Use hedging words and phrases such as This suggests..., It is possible that..., It can be claimed that....

### Exercise 1: Avoiding two word verbs

Rewrite the following sentences, replacing the informal two-word verb with a more formal equivalent.

1. A primary education system was **set up** throughout Ireland as early as 1831.....
2. This will **cut down** the amount of drug required and so the cost of treatment.  
.....
3. The material amenities of life have **gone up** in Western society.....
4. The press reflected the living culture of the people; it could influence opinion and reinforce existing attitudes but it did not **come up with** new forms of entertainment.....
5. Thus, he should have **looked into** how the patient has coped previously.....
6. The aggregate of outstanding balances **went up and down** quite violently.....
7. The court thinks it just and equitable to **give back** the property.....
8. Dieters often feel that they should totally **get rid of** high-fat and high-sugar foods.....
9. Thus when a Gallic bishop in 576 converted the local Jewish community to Christianity, those who **turned down** baptism were expelled from the city.....

### Exercise 2: Gender-Neutral Language Exercise

Which of these is acceptable?

Each student should leave his key at the desk before leaving.

Acceptable Unacceptable

1. Students should leave their keys at the desk before leaving.

Acceptable Unacceptable

2. Each student should leave their key at the desk before leaving.

Acceptable Unacceptable

3. Each student should leave his or her key at the desk before leaving.

Acceptable Unacceptable

### Exercise 3

1. Write a paragraph of not more than 10 sentences in which you express your opinion on the topic below:

***The decline of face-to-face communication due to online communication***

Do you agree with the statement?

Start your paragraph with an appropriate topic sentence.

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2. One of the aspects in formal writing is the ability to write concisely; that is, avoiding using irrelevant material.

Rewrite the following sentences **eliminating unnecessary words**.

- a) The student heard with his own two ears that the test was going to be postponed to the end of the month of September.

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b) We are open 7 days a week as well as Saturdays and Sundays.

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c) I do not know whether he will return back in time to help and assist us with this project.

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3. Identify and underline the informal aspects of informal English that should be avoided in academic writing from the sentences below and quote examples. Do not rewrite or correct the sentences.

3.1. People never thought I would marry that man because he is different from me, but you know what they say “opposites attract”.

3.2. I was not planning on doing this; he put me up to it.

### **ADDITIONAL EXERCISES**

Refer to chapter 8 (written communication) for these additional exercises:

1. Test your knowledge
2. Application