**Level up your writing**

Are you ready for university writing? This exercise is designed to help you write clearly through correcting errors made by other students. We have included some common mistakes that make us smile or groan.

Category: Writing

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**Video explainer**

You have got to university so you are probably pretty good at writing already, but sometimes focusing on new psychology content can distract you from the basics of grammar. It’s upsetting when a student has clearly done lots of research but written it up poorly. I’m often thinking ‘I can guess what they wanted to say but they haven’t actually said it so I can’t give them the marks’.

Hear what some of my colleagues think about writing:

Ben “I always feel a little sad when I start reading and essay and see a student who struggles with their writing… on one hand, I want to be able give them the benefit of the doubt and give them credit for the learning they have done. But on the other I know that someone who writes poorly is often hard to distinguish from someone who hasn’t quite grasped the ideas or has mixed them up.”

Some else: “when I’m tired at the end of a long stack of essays it’s hard not to interpret spelling mistakes and grammar errors as a lack of effort… they are so easily caught using Word’s grammar checker or online tools like chatgpt or grammarly that I never quite understand how they slip though”.

And another: “If someone’s applying for a job with me then they must be able to write clearly. If I have to check what they have written and correct it, that’s extra work for me”.

Me again: I want you to write clearly and concisely so you can really show off the work that you are going to put into your essays and reports. This task will help you avoid some common mistakes and signpost the different sources of help for improving your writing as you progress through the course.

**Marking students’ work**

These sentences include common mistakes from students’ coursework. Can you explain what the problem with the sentence is and write a correct version that fixes it? We have done the first one for you. Copy and paste the text below into a document, fill in the blanks, then upload it for feedback.

1. The researchers found evidence of life on Mars, they also found pigs on Jupiter.   
   Problem: Need to use a full stop to separate two different ideas.  
   Re-written: The researchers found evidence of life on Mars. They also found pigs on Jupiter.
2. Each child was seated at a table on which there was a display of ten faces.  
   Problem:  
   Re-written:
3. The results for both experiments showed that hedgehogs scored 77% and wombats scored 62%.  
   Problem:  
   Re-written:
4. Seventy marmosets partook in the study.   
   Problem:  
   Re-written:
5. The participants were half male and half female.   
   Problem:  
   Re-written:
6. There was no affect of rain on mood. However, mood was effected by videos of kittens.   
   Problem:  
   Re-written:
7. The results of this experiment showed that children in the sweets and caffeine condition performed better than children in the lettuce and broccoli condition.   
   Problem:  
   Re-written:
8. A total of 71 people were used in this study.   
   Problem:  
   Re-written:
9. Questionnaires were completed by four participants.   
   Problem:  
   Re-written:

**Feedback on marking task**

1. Use a full stop before starting a new point. If you are not sure where one idea ends and a new one starts, try reading your work aloud. Put full stops at the points where you naturally pause for breath.   
   *The researchers found evidence of life on Mars. They also found pigs on Jupiter.*
2. Rewrite concisely using the active voice (someone did something, rather than something was done to someone)  
   *Each child viewed (a display of) ten faces.* (‘a display of’ might be useful to convey that the 10 faces were shown at the same time)
3. Remove unnecessary phrase ‘The results showed that’ – simply state the results:   
   *In both experiments, hedgehogs scored 77% and wombats scored 62%*.
4. Use the correct term. Seventy marmosets maybe partook in a dainty tea with cucumber sandwiches, but *seventy marmosets took part in the study*.
5. ‘The participants were half male and half female’. Rephrase to remove ambiguity: *Half the participants were male and half were female.*
6. Affect and effect were the wrong way around. *There was no effect of rain on mood. However, mood was affected by videos of kittens.*These words are used a lot in psychology, so it is important to get them right. Usually, affect is used as a verb meaning to alter or make a difference to, and effect is used as a noun meaning a result. The acronym RAVEN helps to get them the right way round: Remember: Affect Verb, Effect Noun. (To make things more confusing, psychologists also use ‘affect’ as a noun meaning mood or emotion, for example ‘Low affect is a symptom of depression’.)
7. State the results: *Children in the sweets and caffeine condition performed better than children in the lettuce and broccoli condition*.
8. Be nice (researchers don’t ‘use’ people): *A total of 71 people took part in this study*.
9. Active voice: *Four human participants completed questionnaires*.

**Extension** This exercise is just one step to becoming an effective writer. Have a look at at least one other sources of support in this list:

Support is available through Student Learning Support <https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/services/student-learning> and includes:

* The Writing Café
* Royal Literary Fund Writing Fellows
* Peer Assisted Learning Scheme or PALS
* And don’t forget Word’s useful spelling and grammar checks.

Psychology uses a style guide published by the American Psychological Association. ‘APA style’ helps writers to convey scientific ideas clearly and precisely. It covers the ways to cite and reference evidence and elements of phrasing and grammar that constitute good writing style. Help on APA style is available through these online resources as well as from your tutor:

* Purdue Online Writing Lab: https://owl.purdue.edu
* APA Academic Writer Tutorial https://extras.apa.org/apastyle/basics-7e/#/lessons/cn3Cb6ANDrUSP9p-iF74eaXCwYJfJJV-