**Academic Writing: Dos and Don’ts**

The main objective of using academic language is to present complex facts in a simple, comprehensible way in order to make them accessible to an expert or interested lay audience. This is done by applying an objective writing style that makes use of simple sentence structures as well as precise and concise vocabulary. Inaccurate and unnecessary paraphrases as well as use of personal language are avoided.

The table below gives an overview of the features of academic writing:

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| **Academic Writing Style** | | |
|  | **To Avoid** | **Recommended** |
| **Syntax** | **Long, nested sentences** | **Short sentences** that contain a maximum of **one thought.** First-degree subordinate clauses at most. A sentence must be comprehensible at first reading. |
| **Lexis** | * **Synonyms** for **technical terms** * **Colloquialisms** (spoken language), **idioms, slang** * **Contractions** (*doesn’t, hasn’t*) * **Unspecific, vague expressions** (*very big, really important, a little bit etc.*) * **Phrasal verbs** (e.g. *look at* 🡪 *examine*) * ***Chapter*** = part of a book | * **Consistent** and **repeated use** of **technical terms**   🡪 Define terms   * **Formal language** (*does not…*) * **Precise** and **concise** language * **Academic** vocabulary (oftenof **Latinate** or **Greek** origin) * ***Section*** = part of a paper |
| **Objectivity** | * ***I*** and ***we*** * ***One****…(One has to consider...)* * **Judgements**: *luckily, surprisingly, impressively* * **Unproven ‘certainties’** or **facts** | * **Impersonal**, **objective** language by using passives and impersonal subjects (*This report focuses on…*) * **Well-founded judgements / opinions** in the **discussion section** of the paper * **Verifiable** statements * **Cautious** or **tentative** language (*seem, appear, indicate, suggest, possibly, could, might*) |
| **Information density** | * **Truisms** (widely known facts not worth mentioning) * **Low density** of information * **Repetitions** * **Fillers** (*of course, naturally, obviously etc.*) * **Long-winded explanations** | * Only **relevant facts** * **High density** of information * **To the point** |

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| **Paragraphs** | Paragraphs which   * cover **several topics** * have **no** **topic focus** * use **no linking**. | * **Well-structured** paragraphs with **one central assertion**. * **Transitions within and across paragraphs** by using linking devices that facilitate the reading process (*on the one hand, … on the other hand, in addition to* etc.) |
| **Numbers and measurements** | * **34’000** * **1,7km** * **16cm** * **83 %** | * **34,000** * **1.7 km** * **16 cm** * **83%** |
| **Tables** | * **No numbering** * **No heading** * **Unclear** or **incomplete** information * Table used as **substitute for** **discussion of data** | * **Clear, concise** **heading** **above** the table  🡪 Information must be clear without having to read the running text. * **Chronological numbering** throughout the text: *Table 1, Table 2…* * **Legend** of **the symbols, colours etc.** used * **Discussion** of the table content **with precise reference** in the running text (*As can be seen in Table 2 …*) |
| **Figures** | * **No numbering** * **No heading** * **Unclear** or **incomplete** information * Used as **substitute for running text** | * **Clear, concise** **heading** **below** the figure 🡪 Information must be clear without having to read the running text. * **Chronological numbering** throughout the text: *Fig. 1,  Fig. 2…* * **Legend** of **the symbols, colours etc.** used * **Discussion** of the figure content **with precise reference** in the running text (*As Fig. 2 illustrates…*) |
| **Equations** | * **No numbering** * **Heading** | * **Chronological numbering** in **round brackets** on the **right side** of the equation:   ………….. (1)   * **No heading** |

For examples of the above, take a look at published academic papers.

**Checklist for Effective Research Papers**

Before you submit your work, check that it includes these features of good academic writing:

**Content**

* Is the title clear and informative?
* Is your work placed in context?
* Is the aim of your study stated clearly?
* Is the theoretical framework outlined?
* Are any research hypotheses stated clearly?
* Have you covered all the points required?
* Has all the material been checked for accuracy?

**Structure**

* Does the structure follow the requirements of the subject?
* Does the introduction outline the importance of the work and provide the necessary background information?
* Does the method section explain what was done and how it was done?
* Does the result section explain what was found?
* Does the discussion section interpret and explain the results?
* Does the discussion show how the results relate to aims/hypotheses set out in the introduction? What about the reliability of the results?
* Does the conclusion summarise the method and results, discuss the implications of the results and suggest improvements in future research?
* Does the reference list include only the references you have actually used?

**Format**

* Is the format appropriate for the discipline and the task?
* Have you followed the guidelines set out by your instructor (length of paper, referencing system)?
* Are the headings uniform and spaced consistently?
* Are the figures, tables and diagrams clearly labelled and appropriately placed?
* Have you referred to all the figures, diagrams and graphs you have included?
* Is data in graphs or tables also explained in words and analysed?
* Have all illustrations and figures taken from someone else’s work been cited   
  correctly?
* Has every idea taken from or inspired by someone else’s work been acknowledged   
  with a reference?

**Style**

* Is the writing clear, concise and objective?
* Is the writing fluent?
* Have you checked that you have not used emotive language such as *'This is a really exciting result.'*?
* Have you made sure that you have not used colloquial language such as *'We got these answers….'* or used contractions (*‘It’s important…’*)?
* Have you demonstrated your understanding of the sources you have used?

**Grammar, spelling and punctuation**

* Is the grammar correct?
* Are the tenses used appropriately?
* Are all the words spelled correctly and consistently so?
* Are upper-/lowercase letters used consistently?
* Are punctuation marks used correctly?

**Useful Links for Writing Research Papers in English**

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| **General** | * [www.uefap.com/writing/writfram.htm](http://www.uefap.com/writing/writfram.htm) (extensive guide) * <https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/purdue_owl.html> (Purdue online writing lab) |
| **Phrases & vocabulary** | * [www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/](http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/) (phrases for the various sections of a report or paper, see menu at the top and left of website, highly recommended!) * [www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/describing-quantities](http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/describing-quantities) (phrases to describe quantities) * [www.eliteediting.com.au/50-linking-words-to-use-in-academic-writing/](http://www.eliteediting.com.au/50-linking-words-to-use-in-academic-writing/) (linking expressions) * <http://cc.oulu.fi/~smac/TRW/commonverb_handout.htm> (verbs typically used in reports) |
| **Grammar & tenses** | * <http://cc.oulu.fi/~smac/TRW/tense_handout.htm> (tenses) * <https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/punctuation/index.html> (commas etc.) * <https://ucalgary.ca/student-services/student-success/writing-support#collapse939131191> (grammar, punctuation, see bottom of website) |
| **Referencing** | * <http://libraryguides.vu.edu.au/ieeereferencing/gettingstarted> (IEEE) |
| **Translator** | * [www.deepl.com/translator](http://www.deepl.com/translator) (quite reliable for formal writing, but always check!) |