Tips for Writing

Use this cheat sheet to recognize things to avoid when writing formal documents.

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| **Avoid** | **Replace with** |
| The ampersand symbol: & | The word “and” |
| Yeah | Yes |
| Slang words and colloquialisms, such as “cool” and “dude” (see additional colloquialisms cheat sheet below) | More formal language |
| Contractions, e.g. “can’t,” “don’t,” “won’t,” etc. | The words’ full forms: “cannot” for “can’t,” “do not” for “don’t” |
| Personal pronouns: “You should sleep eight hours each night”; “I think Professor James is correct.” | Impersonal pronouns: “One should sleep eight hours each night”; “Professor James is correct.” |
| Starting a sentence with coordinating conjunctions (“and,” “so,” “but,” “or”) | Compound sentences or transitional adverbs, such as “additionally,” “therefore,” “alternatively,” and “nevertheless” |
| Clichés or overused phrases (“as strong as an ox,” “as pretty as a picture,” “bought for a song,” etc.) | Literal descriptions |
| Starting a letter or document by giving commands or telling what the paper will discuss (“This paper is going to talk about global warming.”) | An intro to your topic: “Global warming can now be described as a 21st century problem.” |
| Vague words, such as “a few,” “enough,” or “a little” | More specific descriptions. How many is a few, or how much is enough? |

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| **Colloquial Word/Phrase** | **More Formal Alternative** |
| Anybody | Anyone |
| Because | As |
| Big | Large or great |
| Fellow | Person |
| For sure | With certainty |
| Get | Receive; understand (depending on usage) |
| Got | Have |
| Introduce | Present |
| Kind of/sort of | Type of |
| Let | Allow, permit |
| Ma’am | Madam |
| Most | Almost |
| On the other hand | Conversely, by contrast |
| So | Because, very (depending on usage) |