

Formal Writing Cheatsheet

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

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?

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)