

Linguistics Writing Workshop Series

(Academics: They're just like us!)

7 December 2022



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Why might you want to be a good writer?

- In the short term:
 - achieve good marks on your writing assignments
 - receive better feedback from your module leaders/advisors
 - work more efficiently and effectively
- In the long term:
 - transferable soft skill that is invaluable regardless of your job
 - become a better thinker

But here's the “problem”...

- There isn't really a definitive writing guide or formula that will solve all of your problems.
 - Academic writing is a genre all on its own that requires practice
 - Your writing style will evolve from imitating good writing and avoiding bad writing
- Having a writing style suggests that it is personalized to you
 - The reductionist might ask “then is there such a thing as ‘bad writing’?”
 - The answer is still ‘yes’!

So what are we doing here today?

1. Discuss the goals of academic writing
2. The (Tentative) Writing Process
3. Advice from SELLL staff
4. Your School's Resources
5. Future writing workshops: the benefits of peer-reviewing

Most writing assignments ask you to:

- Organize your thoughts
- Communicate effectively, clearly, concisely, fluently
- Get others interested, and maintain that interest
- Be persuasive
- Digest and re-communicate information
- Think creatively
- Read/learn critically
- Evaluate your own work critically
- ...and to do all this in your writing.

The fundamental goal of academic writing

- ... it to **communicate** to an audience
 - and that audience can be just you, everyone on the planet, or any number of people in between.
 - Practically, your audience is the person who is evaluating/ marking your assignment.
- ...and, perhaps most importantly, to **persuade**.
 - Even when writing about Science, you're still trying to convince your reader on a particular position (e.g. for or against a hypothesis).
 - Instead of text from a book, data from your experiment.

Your readers should be able to
come to the same conclusions when presented with the same evidence

The Importance of Having a Through-Line



- Overarching structure which the individual points you make along the way fit into
 - Usually in the form of a research question
- You're leading the reading down a particular path/logical progression
 - Have a roadmap
 - Each point that you make should build on your previous point
 - Check back often on your readers, remind them of your through line

IF YOU INSIST: THE (TENTATIVE) WRITING PROCESS

Writing as a process:

- Step 1: Gather your data
 - Literature review
 - Data analysis
- Step 2: Invent
 - What is your through line? What do you want to convince your readers of?
- Step 3: Compose
 - Word Vomit
- Step 4: Revise
 - ex. Peer Review

Organize your thoughts

- What is your topic?
- What is the context of this topic?
- What is the main thing you want to show?
- What do you need to do to convince someone that your main point is right?
- What is the evidence against you?
- What unanswered questions do you have left over?
- Make an outline of where these different pieces fit in relation to each other.

Write!

- Think of your very first draft as a “brain dump”: Get everything out of your head and onto the page. [Refer to later slide]
- Writing is a recursive process: you should expect to re-visit all your sentences, paragraphs, and thoughts.
- As you write, you will find unexpected problems and have new ideas. Go with them!
- Once all your thoughts are on the page, go back and structure them, refine them, make them clearer, more concise, etc.

Writing the Paper

- You're leading the reader through your paper. So be sure to check back with the reader with reminders of your thesis/the argument that you are making/will soon make.
 - Road map for the paper.
- Concrete examples! Give sample sentences, contexts, etc.
 - Don't be afraid to use pictures to illustrate your point.
- Conclusion should briefly reiterating the main claims and create a lasting impression on the reader.

Transitions and flow

- As you write, guide the reader through your paper.
 - As we have seen so far...
 - We now have enough evidence to suggest that...
- Every paragraph should be necessary and should be a logical next step from the previous paragraph.
- Use transitions wisely:
 - But, however, nevertheless, on the other hand, yet...
 - First, second, third, next, then...
 - Indeed, in fact, of course...
 - Accordingly, consequently, therefore...
 - For example, for instance, as can be seen...
 - Additionally, also, moreover, equally important...
 - Likewise, similarly, in the same way...

Read your own writing—critically

- When you have finished a draft, try to evaluate your paper the way an outsider would, in the same way you read your sources.
- Do you make any unsupported claims?
- Are there missing pieces of the argument?
- Are there passages that are confusing?
- Do you find the paper compelling/interesting?
- Do you acknowledge and address counter-arguments?
- Does the paper flow logically and smoothly?

Revise

- Re-write and expand in necessary areas.
- If necessary, check more sources and add information.
- Make sure your thesis statement is still faithful to your paper (and vice versa).
- Once you've fixed various pieces, read it from the beginning and make sure if flows, transitions logically, etc.
- Edit accordingly, and repeat the process from the beginning.

ADVICE FROM YOUR SELL TEACHERS

Common mistakes in students' writing

Block direct quotations are not ideal. Paraphrase!

It is always better to paraphrase what you read (with a citation, of course), to show that you understand it. The risk with direct quotation is that you don't show that you have understood what you have read and sometimes it also isn't clear what the quotation means in relation to the argument in your essay.

Writing in a super high register

It's okay to use "The author says...", especially if words like "insinuate" is not part of your everyday speech.

Platitudinous openings

e.g. "language is spoken all over the world"

Instead, state your aims clearly and concisely. ("This essay will..." or "I will...")

Misgendering authors!

If you don't know for sure, use "they".

Avoid Personal/Historical Tangents. Focus on current perspectives.

The tendency to try and take the reader on your "journey", rather than showing them the destination. Things like "I became interested in this topic because..." or variations thereof.

This includes things like historical tangents in many cases (e.g., trying to trace the entire history of language deprivation before getting to your specific context). Unless the essay's aims specifically include historical overview, try to focus on current perspectives.

Avoid these phrases!

It's important to note...

The fact that...
Obviously,...

The study argued/
investigated/found...

In their paper titled “The link between [...]”, published in 2021, Nguyen and Pearl say that...

The experiment/
author proved...

- Some rules of writing are “hackable” (more later)
 - best to follow them at first until you can modify them to fit your style
- But some things are best avoided
 - for good reason!

Our “Bad” Writing Habits

Curse of Knowledge

“It's easy to forget that one's personal knowledge and experience are not universal. So... always ask yourself why you know something you've written—and if the answer is 'I'm from there', or 'I've read it', or 'we've covered it in class' etc., find a citation for it.”

Avoiding Passive Voice and Personal Pronouns

“I still struggle to use “I” in a paper I am writing myself! I try to avoid using the passive all the time, but I need to work at getting more comfortable saying “I found” rather than something like “it was found that” or “we found”!”

Not Citing in Parallel to Writing

“I often don't cite as I write; not knowing stuff off the top of my head, I try to get into a flow and throw things like (CITATIONS) into the text and then go back and fill these in from my library later, revising as necessary.”

Distraction/Procrastination

“I find it hard to get into writing and get distracted easily. Changing venue can help me; realistically, just getting any words down also leads to more words.”

Chaotic Word Vomit

“Spending too much time editing first drafts. Half that text will end in the graveyard anyway. Too many hours wasted editing stuff that never sees the light of day.”

“I write too much when I get on a roll and end up cutting it later; this is arguably wasted effort.”

Agatha Christie Mode

“...not telling the reader what is going to happen in the essay but resolving everything in a flourish at the end. Not helpful for a reader as they can't tell what is important as they read – so these days I work really hard on setting up the structure and outlining what the argument will do at the outset.”

“I tend to get into too much detail too fast. Knowing how to “set a scene”, but in a very targeted, concise way, is a real skill.” 19

“Too many semi-colons.”

For instance, four-year-olds (like adults) can interpret *wh*-dependencies like “*How did the boy say he hurt himself?*” with *how* modifying the embedded clause verb *hurt*; so, the *wh*-question can be interpreted as asking about how the boy hurt himself. Children as young as four are also sensitive to the difference between the possible interpretations of “*How did the mom learn what to bake?*” The preferred interpretation has *how* modifying the main clause verb *learn* (i.e., a possible answer is “from a recipe book”); the strongly dispreferred interpretation has *how* modifying the embedded clause verb *bake* (i.e., a possible answer would be “in a glass dish”).

As another example, four-year-olds across SES are sensitive to the difference between the possible interpretations of “*What is Jane drawing a monkey that is drinking milk with?*” The preferred interpretation has *what* linked to a position outside the relative clause (“*What is Jane drawing [a monkey that is drinking milk] with _what?*”), with a possible answer of what Jane is drawing with (e.g., “a pencil”); the strongly dispreferred interpretation has *what* linked to a position inside the relative clause (“*What is Jane drawing [a monkey that is drinking milk with _what]*?”), with a possible answer of what the monkey is drinking with (e.g., “a straw”).

So, developmental outcomes by age four across SES are similar with respect to preferred and dispreferred interpretations for certain *wh*-dependencies; these interpretations rest on children being sensitive to how preferred (or dispreferred) the different *wh*-dependencies themselves are. These developmental outcome similarities suggest that input differences across SES for these types of *wh*-dependency knowledge should not be developmentally meaningful.

“Your sentences are TOO long.”

2.4.1 Selection of Included Studies

Twelve experimental studies were included in this synthesis of experimental studies. Selection of studies was based on the following criteria: (i) they tested English-speaking children; (ii) they are experimental studies (rather than spontaneous production studies); (iii) they tested long verbal *be*-passives; (iv) they did not include experimental manipulations that are predicted to increase children’s accuracy rates (e.g., repetition of test sentences, Deen et al. (2018)); and (v) they report the specific verbs that were tested in their study.³³

Several types of information were extracted from the synthesis of these twelve studies: (i) the verbs used as stimuli (Table 2.5), and (ii) children’s performance on verbal passives for those verbs at the different ages that were tested.^{34,35}

Because I am concerned with children’s behavior on the long verbal passive for different verbs, I do not differentiate studies that used different kinds of comprehension methods (e.g., Truth Value Judgment Tasks, picture-selections, etc.) and the successes and failures of children’s performance were accepted regardless of methodology as long as the inclusion criteria for experimental studies was maintained. Furthermore, any benefit or hindrance to children’s perfor-

Tips/tricks for becoming a better writer

Outline your paper; bullet points are your friends

Use Word like a whiz

Use headings to help with structure and coherence

Learn to touch type

Read what you write out loud.

Imitate the writing style of others (but don't plagiarize)

PRACTICE

Sometimes it's okay to not write the Introduction first

Don't compare your writing speech to others

Struggling to put words on paper?

Keep in mind:

- Think of your very first draft as a “brain dump”: Get everything out of your head and onto the page.
- Writing is a recursive process: you should expect to re-visit all your sentences, paragraphs, and thoughts.
- As you write, you will find unexpected problems and have new ideas. Go with them!

Actionable things that you can do:

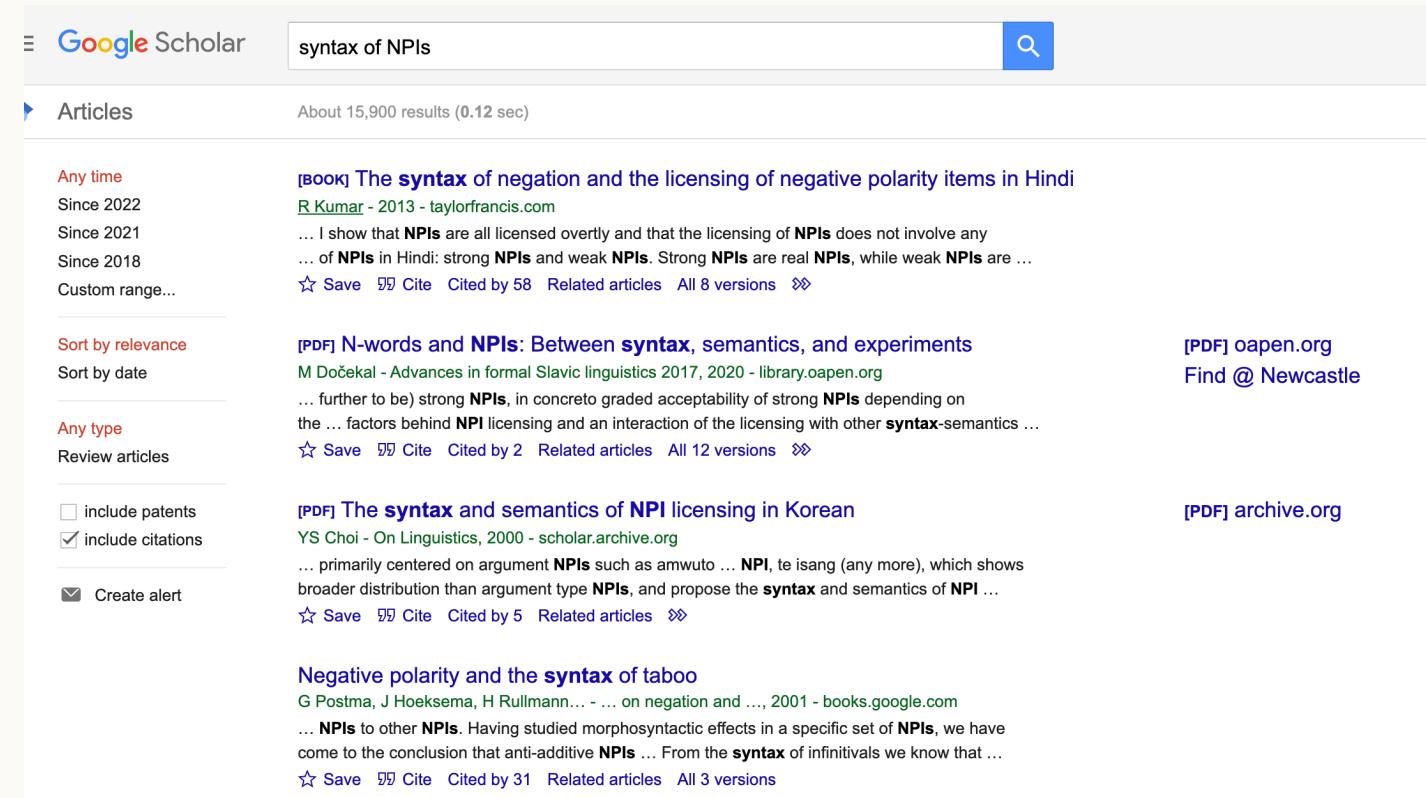
- Speech-to-text
- Learn how to touch-type
- “Word vomit”
- Talking to a friend
- Change your scenery

MAXIMIZE YOUR SCHOOL'S RESOURCES

Have you heard of Google Scholar?

Google Scholar is your best friend.

- ▶ Find papers related to your topic of interest
 - ▶ Find related articles
- ▶ Restrict the publication date
- ▶ Get access to the papers (through the library or otherwise)
- ▶ Formatted citations



The screenshot shows a Google Scholar search results page for the query "syntax of NPIs". The search bar at the top contains the query. Below it, a sidebar on the left provides filtering options: "Any time" (with dropdowns for "Since 2022", "Since 2021", "Since 2018", and "Custom range..."), "Sort by relevance" (with "Sort by date" as an alternative), "Any type" (with "Review articles" selected), and checkboxes for "include patents" (unchecked) and "include citations" (checked). A "Create alert" button is also present. The main content area displays three search results:

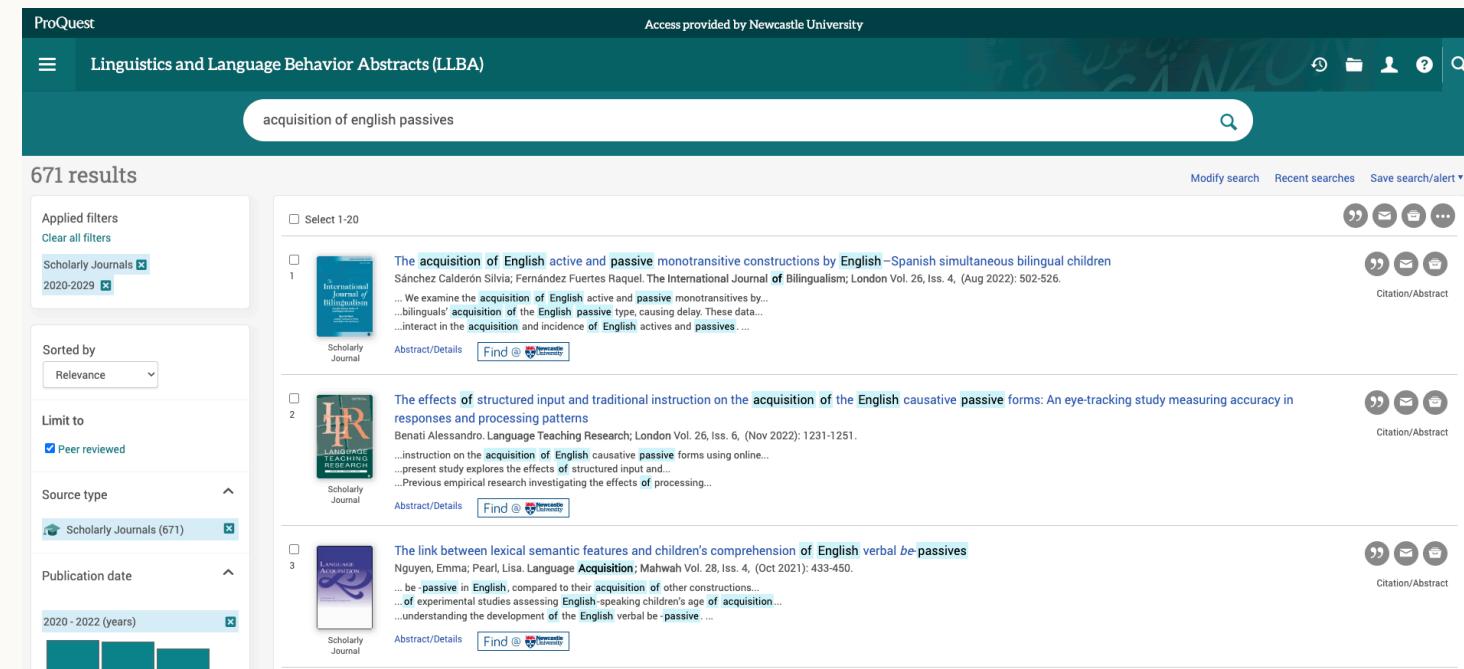
- [book] The syntax of negation and the licensing of negative polarity items in Hindi**
R Kumar - 2013 - taylorfrancis.com
... I show that **NPIs** are all licensed overtly and that the licensing of **NPIs** does not involve any ... of **NPIs** in Hindi: strong **NPIs** and weak **NPIs**. Strong **NPIs** are real **NPIs**, while weak **NPIs** are ...
☆ Save ⚡ Cite Cited by 58 Related articles All 8 versions ☰
- [PDF] N-words and NPIs: Between syntax, semantics, and experiments**
M Dočekal - Advances in formal Slavic linguistics 2017, 2020 - library.oapen.org
... further to be) strong **NPIs**, in concreto graded acceptability of strong **NPIs** depending on the ... factors behind **NPI** licensing and an interaction of the licensing with other **syntax-semantics** ...
☆ Save ⚡ Cite Cited by 2 Related articles All 12 versions ☰
- [PDF] The syntax and semantics of NPI licensing in Korean**
YS Choi - On Linguistics, 2000 - scholar.archive.org
... primarily centered on argument **NPIs** such as amwuto ... **NPI**, te isang (any more), which shows broader distribution than argument type **NPIs**, and propose the **syntax** and semantics of **NPI** ...
☆ Save ⚡ Cite Cited by 5 Related articles All 5 versions ☰
- Negative polarity and the syntax of taboo**
G Postma, J Hoeksema, H Rullmann... - ... on negation and ..., 2001 - books.google.com
... **NPIs** to other **NPIs**. Having studied morphosyntactic effects in a specific set of **NPIs**, we have come to the conclusion that anti-additive **NPIs** ... From the **syntax** of infinitivals we know that ...
☆ Save ⚡ Cite Cited by 31 Related articles All 3 versions ☰

On the right side of the results, there are links to "Find @ Newcastle" and "archive.org".

What about ProQuest?

ProQuest is also your best friend.

- ▶ Paid access through NU
- ▶ Find papers related to your topic of interest
 - ▶ Find related articles
- ▶ Restrict the publication date
- ▶ Get access to the papers
- ▶ Formatted citations



The screenshot shows the ProQuest search interface for the Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts (LLBA) database. The search term 'acquisition of english passives' is entered in the search bar. The results page displays 671 items. On the left, there are filters for 'Applied filters' (Scholarly Journals, 2020-2029), 'Sorted by' (Relevance), 'Limit to' (Peer reviewed), 'Source type' (Scholarly Journals), and 'Publication date' (2020 - 2022). The main area shows three search results:

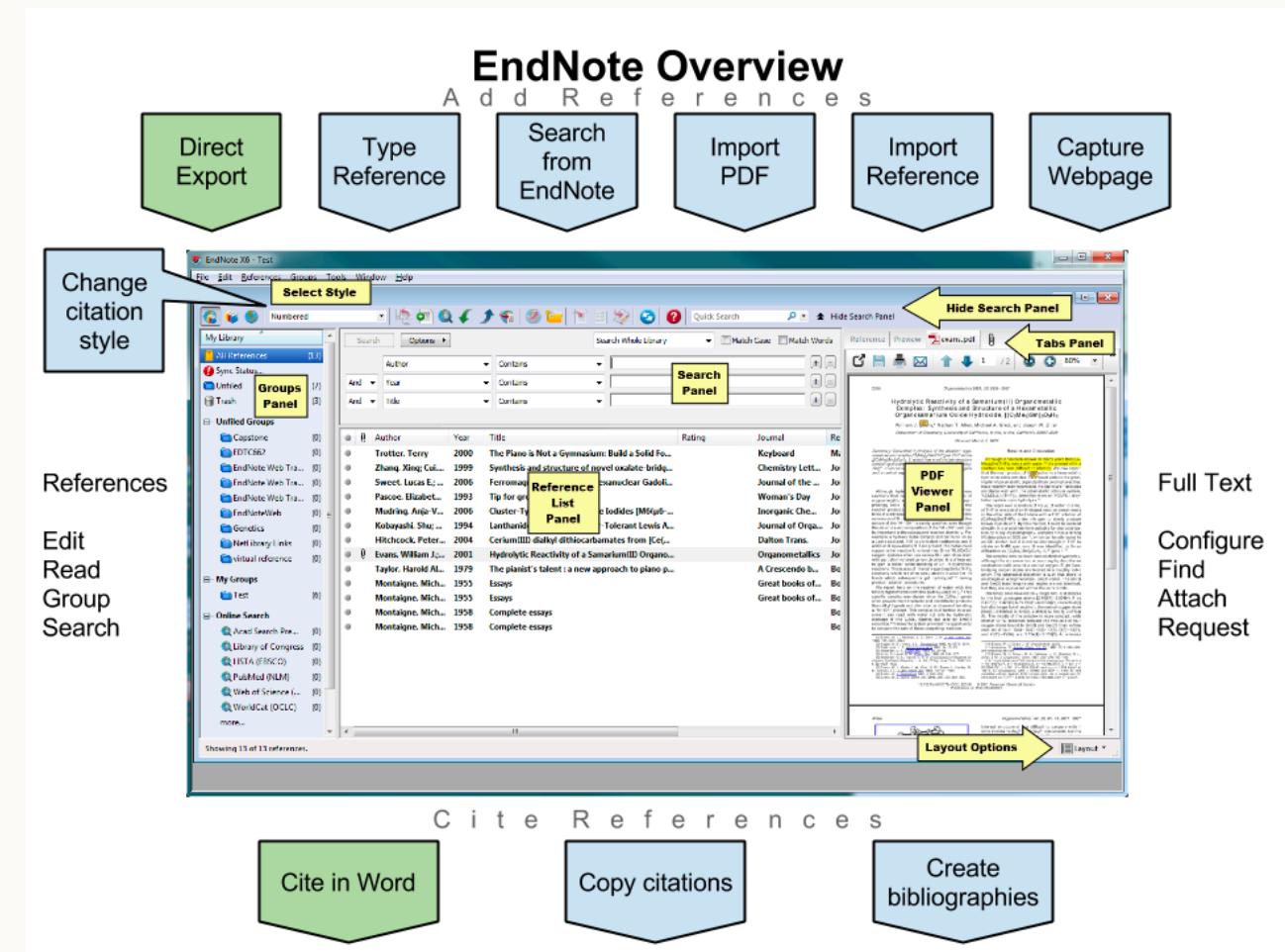
- The acquisition of English active and passive monotransitive constructions by English–Spanish simultaneous bilingual children**
Sánchez Calderón Silvia; Fernández Fuentes Raquel. *The International Journal of Bilingualism*; London Vol. 26, Iss. 4, (Aug 2022): 502-526.
Abstract/Details [Find @ Newcastle University](#)
- The effects of structured input and traditional instruction on the acquisition of the English causative passive forms: An eye-tracking study measuring accuracy in responses and processing patterns**
Benati Alessandro. *Language Teaching Research*; London Vol. 26, Iss. 6, (Nov 2022): 1231-1251.
Abstract/Details [Find @ Newcastle University](#)
- The link between lexical semantic features and children's comprehension of English verbal be-passives**
Nguyen, Emma; Pearl, Lisa. *Language Acquisition*; Mahwah Vol. 28, Iss. 4, (Oct 2021): 433-450.
Abstract/Details [Find @ Newcastle University](#)

Each result includes a thumbnail of the journal cover, the title, authors, journal name, volume, issue, and page numbers, along with links to abstract/details and find at Newcastle University. There are also citation/abstract icons for each result.

Reference Managers

EndNote will help you reign in the chaos.

- ▶ Store, organize, and cite references
- ▶ Creates bibliographies
- ▶ Integrated into Word
 - ▶ Cite as you write



Repository of Previous Students' Essays

ELLDR has great examples of writing from students like you.

- ▶ Examples of UG dissertations written by alumni
 - ▶ good source of imitable writing styles
- ▶ Table of Contents give a good idea of how to structure a long essay
 - ▶ scalable for your purposes



Welcome

ELLDR ('ɛldər or /'ɛldə/) is the Excellent Language & Linguistics Dissertation Repository, from Newcastle University.

Browse papers from each year using the pages on the left/in the menu.

Each year, supervisors and a select committee review dissertations submitted by final year students in English Language (Q302), Linguistics (Q100) and Linguistics and foreign language degrees (Q1+). Based on this review, a selection of dissertations are nominated for inclusion in ELLDR. This is a pre-print repository, which achieves several key aims:

1. **Providing an outlet for excellent student work.** Our students produce some incredible research in collaboration with staff as part of their dissertations. Without ELLDR, this work is mostly left out of the primary literature. ELLDR provides a home for this work where it is publicly accessible and citable, allowing it to become part of the primary literature.

Royal Literary Fund Fellows

SELLL Literary Fellows are here to help you.



Royal Literary Fund

Home Helping Writers **Education** Resources Showcase

Fellowship Scheme Universities Fellows Consultants Reading Round Bridge

RLF Fellowship Scheme

The Royal Literary Fund Fellowship scheme was set up to place professional writers in higher education institutions to offer writing support to all students as Writing Fellows.

The principal aim of the Fellow's work is to foster good writing practice across disciplines and media. Each post is hosted by a particular department, which may be an academic department/faculty (either in Arts or Sciences) or a central department such as learning development.

- ▶ Fellows whose job is to assist you in your writing
 - ▶ Feedback on structure and style
- ▶ Caution: They might not be able to give Lang/Ling-specific advice
 - ▶ Still helpful becoming a better writer

FUTURE WORKSHOPS: PEER-REVIEW

What is peer-reviewing?

Reading and providing feedback on each other's work

- “I don't want other people to see my bad writing!”
 - This exercise is often done anonymously so your peers won't necessarily know that you wrote it.
 - One of the ways to become a better writer is knowing when and how to ask for help. If this is a skill that you wish to improve your writing, this is one way to gain that help.
- “How can I give feedback when I don't know anything about their topic?”
 - The goal of writing remains the same: to communicate a certain narrative. Your job is to assess whether the narrative was clearly written or point out areas for improvement.
- “What can I possibly learn from this exercise?”
 - It is a lot easier to identify writing flaws in work that is not your own. This is an opportunity for you to reflect on your own writing (e.g. things that you also do, writing techniques that you wish to adopt, etc.)

Goals of Peer-Review Workshops

- Reviewing vs. copy-editing
 - Reviewing: explore ideas, weigh evidence, test a thesis, assess organization
 - Copy-editing: grammar and spelling housekeeping
- When you get your reviews back, you remain in charge of your own paper.
 - Consider all the advice you get.
 - Decide which advice you want to accept vs. reject

How to be a good peer-reviewer

- Be respectful. This is a safe space where you can improve your own writing as well as help others
- Be critical. Ask yourself: How is this paper different from other non-student papers that I have read?
- Ask follow-up questions. Be specific with what confused you or what made sense to you.
- Read the whole paper once to get a sense of the structure of the paper and the arguments made. Then, sum up the paper in one or two sentences, using your own words. (E.g., In this paper, the author argues for ... using evidence that includes)

Doing a Peer-Review Exercise

- **Introduction:** Is the introduction clear and consistent with the rest of the paper?
- **Create an outline:** Number every paragraph after the introduction. For each paragraph you have numbered, say in one sentence what the main point of the paragraph is.
- **Structure:** Given the outline that you just made, is the paper clearly organized? Does each paragraph make a relevant point that is distinct from what has already been covered?
- **Evidence:** Does the author present compelling evidence in favor of their position? Does the author address relevant counter-evidence, and do they do so in a satisfying way?
- **Clarity/Style:** Did you find distracting punctuation, spelling, or word usage problems? Circle them in the paper itself and then identify (here) any recurring problems you detect. If you find awkward or confusing sentences, identify them in the paper and try to explain why they don't make sense to you. Is the tone of the essay formal enough?
- **Conclusion:** Does the paper have a compelling and well-supported conclusion?
- **Resources:** Does the author clearly identify their sources? Is proper in-text and reference format used?

Good Luck!

Maybe I'll see you in the Spring



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