

Academic Writing Tips

- I. Markers' Perspective
- II. Writing considerations
- III. Activity
- IV. Q&A



Markers' Perspective

What do Markers (and Readers in General) Look For?

- Understanding of the problem
- Completion and cohesion of the project
- Knowledge of the literature
- Critical evaluation of previous work
- Critical evaluation of own work
- Depth and novelty of work

Average Time Spent

- 30 min to 2h depending on the assignment

Key Initial Considerations

- Language/writing quality and comprehensibility
- Assignment/text structure

0: poor, 3: fair, 4: good, 5: excellent

0	1	2	3	4	5
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Writing Tips

Does Language Feature in Markers' Feedback?

- Academic writing is highly standardised
- The simpler the better!
- 'Loser's games' vs. 'Winner's games'

Examples of feedback on language/writing?

- "The writing in the dissertation is clear enough to understand but in places the English is not in the academic style"
- ...with informal language like...
- "The English descriptions of the work are often unclear and more importantly many descriptions should have been much more precise, but leave the reader guessing as to precisely what was done"

General Tips for Writing

It is a process

- Start early and iterate – writing is a process!
- Don't waste time on getting the language right in the first draft – leave that for the proofreading stage.
- Write and exercise frequently
- Keep it focused: Ask “What does my reader need to hear about?” (not “What should I write about?”)
 - Can you state the research question and its answer in a sentence or two?
 - Keep polishing off your research question, as it defines the focus and relevance of your article

Three tips to improve the clarity in your writing

1. Eliminate unnecessary wording and repetition
2. Use conventional terms and notations

Eliminate Unnecessary Wording

Eliminate empty words or phrases

- *There seems to be* some evidence to suggest ...
- **Better:** Some evidence suggests...

Delete unnecessary qualifiers

- Because *a great many* of the words in this sentence are *basically* unnecessary, it would *really* be *a very good idea* to edit *somewhat* for conciseness.
- **Better:** Because many of the words in this sentence are unnecessary, we should edit it.

Avoid unnecessary nominalization

- Regular reviews of online content *should be scheduled*.
- **Better:** Online content should be reviewed regularly.

Use Conventional Terms and Notations

Greek Letters	Common Usages
Αα Alpha	α : Constant in regression/statistics; $y = \alpha + \beta x + \epsilon$; also type I error
Ββ Beta	β : Coefficient in regression/statistics, often subscripted to indicate different coefficients; $y = \alpha + \beta_1 x_1 + \beta_2 x_2 + \epsilon$; also type II error; related: $1 - \beta$ is called the "power" of a statistical test
Γγ Gamma	Γ : A particular statistical distribution; also used to denote a game.
Δδ Delta	Δ : Means "change" or "difference", as in the equation of a line's slope: $\frac{\Delta y}{\Delta x} = \frac{y_1 - y_2}{x_1 - x_2}$. δ : Known in game theory as the "discount parameter" and is used for repeated games. ϵ : "Error term" in regression/statistics; more generally used to denote an arbitrarily small, positive number.
Εε Epsilon	This version of epsilon is used in set theory to mean "belongs to" or "is in the set of": $x \in X$; similarly used to indicate the range of a parameter: $x \in [0, 1]$. " $x \notin \mathcal{O}$ " means "the element x does not belong to the empty set".
Ζζ Zeta	
Ηη Eta	
Θθ Theta	θ : The fixed probability of success parameter in a Binomial Distribution and related distributions.
ϑ (Script Theta)	
Ιι Iota	
Κκ Kappa	
Λλ Lambda	$\lambda = n\theta$: Parameter in the Poisson Distribution.
Μμ Mu	μ : In statistics, the mean of a distribution. In game theory, often used as the probability of belief.
Νν Nu	
Ξξ Xi	
Οο Omicron	
Ππ Pi	Π : Product symbol, as in $\prod_{i=1}^6$. π : Mathematical constant (3.14159...); also used in game theory to denote an actor's belief as a probability.
Ρρ Rho	ρ : Correlation coefficient in some statistical analyses.
Σσ Sigma	Σ : Summation symbol, as in $\sum_{i=1}^6 i = 12$. σ : Standard Deviation of a distribution; also used to denote an actor's mixed strategy. σ^2 : Variance of a distribution.

<https://www.unm.edu/~ckbutler/ps541/MathNotation.pdf>

The Academic Word List

Headword	Sublist	Related word forms
analyse	1	analysed, analyser, analysers, analyses, analysing, analysis, analyst, analysts, analytic, analytical, analytically, analyze, analyzed, analyzes, analyzing
approach	1	approachable, approached, approaches, approaching, unapproachable
area	1	areas
assess	1	assessable, assessed, assesses, assessing, assessment, assessments, reassess, reassessed, reassessing, reassessment, unassessed
assume	1	assumed, assumes, assuming, assumption, assumptions
authority	1	authoritative, authorities
available	1	availability, unavailable
benefit	1	beneficial, beneficiaries, beneficiary, benefited, benefitting, benefits
concept	1	conception, concepts, conceptual, conceptualisation, conceptualise, conceptualised, conceptualises, conceptualising, conceptually
consist	1	consisted, consistency, consistent, consistently, consisting, consists, inconsistencies, inconsistency, inconsistent
constitute	1	constituencies, constituency, constituent, constituents, constituted, constitutes, constituting, constitution, constitutional, constitutionally, constitutions, constitutive, unconstitutional
context	1	contexts, contextual, contextualise, contextualised, contextualising, contextualize, contextualized, contextualizing, uncontextualised, uncontextualized
contract	1	contracted, contracting, contractor, contractors, contracts
create	1	created, creates, creating, creation, creations, creative, creatively, creativity, creator, creators, recreate, recreated, recreates, recreating
data	1	
define	1	definable, defined, defines, defining, definition, definitions, redefine, redefined, redefines, redefining, undefined
derive	1	derivation, derivations, derivative, derivatives, derived, derives, deriving
distribute	1	distributed, distributing, distribution, distributional, distributions, distributive, distributor, distributors, redistribute, redistributed, redistributes, redistributing, redistribution
economy	1	economic, economical, economically, economics, economies, economist, economists, uneconomical

<https://www.eapfoundation.com/vocab/academic/awllists/>

GENERAL LANGUAGE FUNCTIONS

- Being cautious
- Being critical
- Classifying and listing
- Compare and contrast
- Defining terms
- Describing trends
- Describing quantities
- Explaining causality
- Giving examples
- Signalling transition
- Writing about the past

An enhanced and expanded version of PHRASEBANK is available in PDF or Kindle format:



ABOUT PHRASEBANK

Describing quantities

The language for writing about quantities can be a complex area for non-native speakers because there are many combinations of short grammar words, such as prepositions and pronouns, and these can easily be confused. Many of the phrases given below also contain approximators such as: *nearly, approximately, over half, less than, just over*.

Describing fractions

Over half of those surveyed indicated that ...
Nearly half of the respondents (48%) agreed that ...
Approximately half of those surveyed did not comment on ...
Less than a third of those who responded (32%) indicated that ...
 The number of first marriages in the United Kingdom fell by *nearly two-fifths*.
 Of the 148 patients who completed the questionnaire, *just over half* indicated that ...

Well over	More than	Just over	Many more than
Around	Almost	As many as	Approximately
Just under	Less than	Fewer than	Well under
half	a third	a quarter	
of those surveyed	of the respondents	of those who responded	agreed that ...

<https://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/being-critical/>

Academic Support 'Internal'

English Language Education

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/english-language-teaching/in-session-courses/elsis>

Courses for Postgraduate Students

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/english-language-teaching/in-session-courses/elsis/elsis-courses-pgt>

Grammar for Academic Writing

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/english-language-teaching/in-session-courses/elsis/elsis-courses-pgt/grammar-for-academic-writing>

Institute for Academic Development (IAD)

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/institute-academic-development>

IAD Open Workshops

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/institute-academic-development/postgraduate/taught/courses-events>



Academic Support 'External'

Purdue Online Writing Lab

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/purdue_owl.html

Using English for Academic Purposes

<http://www.uefap.net/>

Academic Word list

<https://www.eapfoundation.com/vocab/academic/awllists/>

Duke Graduate School Scientific Writing

<https://sites.duke.edu/scientificwriting/lesson-1-subjects-and-actions/>

Academic Phrase Bank

<https://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/being-critical/>



- Quick activity to work on either individually or in pairs
- Match the concepts with their definitions (and examples)
- [Link to exercise](#)



Thank you!