

General Writing 1

Clarity and Conciseness

What to call me

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Share-ill



Grad Writing vs. Publishing

As a grad student you are thinking about your ideas all the time and how to demonstrate what you know and not so much about how you are saying it.

But when writing for journals or papers, you have to think of style and language – the most important things – **how** to say something.

What do you know?

Academic English-speaking readers prefer seeing

- a. Direct sentences
- b. Beautiful vocabulary
- c. Passive voice sentences (*It is recommended that...* instead of *We recommend*)

What do you know?

Academic English-speaking readers prefer seeing

- a. **Direct sentences – clear, concise, key ideas first**
- b. Beautiful vocabulary
- c. Passive voice sentences (*It is recommended that...* instead of *We recommend*)

What do you know?

The main point in written and verbal communication is generally stated

- a. in the middle of the paper- after the background.
- b. at the end, after you have stated your main points and reasons
- c. at the beginning, before the background and details

Direct Approach

The main point in written and verbal communication is generally stated

- a. in the middle of the paper-- after the background.
- b. at the end, after you have stated your main points and reasons
- c. at the beginning, before the background and details

What do you know?

English writing has several key characteristics. What characteristics generally represent the “English academic style” of writing?

Formal language

Thorough or detailed

Large vocabulary

Persuasive or convincing sentences

Direct statements without embedded meaning

Long explanations and background information

High-level descriptions that only the most sophisticated in your field would understand

Characteristics

Formal language **sophisticated language**

Thorough or detailed **specific, detailed**

Large vocabulary **field-specific vocabulary**

Persuasive, convincing sentences **What is strong evidence
for your field/readers?**

Direct statements

Long explanations and background information **generally no**

High-level descriptions that only the most sophisticated in
your field would understand **generally no**

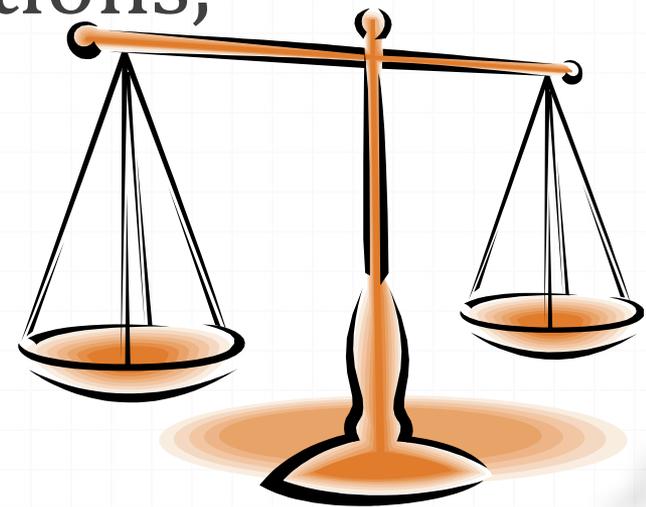
Have you been influenced by traditional Turkish style?

- It can have a very loose structure, and several thesis statements are possible
- Thesis statements may appear at the end
- It has more embedded meaning
- It is more beautiful and more creative

Two most important concepts

Efficiency: concise, direct, formal,
but not beautiful words

Clarity: clear explanations with
enough examples, connections,
necessary detail



Conciseness

Writing 7000 words is far more
difficult than 12,000 words

Professional (and especially published) writing means

- o Conciseness
- o Limitations
- o Precise expressions
- o Limited space to express yourself

“The audience is more critical, and it’s more difficult to publish than to pass your dissertation because there are many more factors involved.”

Conciseness: Reduce Wordiness and Beautiful Words

How has the writer reduced the wordiness?

1. The administration is responsible for soliciting, collecting and distributing graduate research grants so that graduate students have the ability to find employment by doing research projects.

Change to: The administration solicits, collects, and distributes graduate research grants to employ graduate students.

Reduce Wordiness

2. I write to you to let you know about our new grant distribution policy that has been discussed and decided upon.

Change to: We have decided upon a new grant distribution policy.

3. A new rod is necessary to insert into the machine.

Change to: A new rod must be inserted into the machine. (or) Insert a new rod into the machine

Reduce Wordiness

4. Fluoride has been banned for use in AC units. This has lessened the ozone layer's depletion.

Change to: Fluoride has been banned for use in AC units, lessening the ozone layer's depletion.

5. The financial analyst who dealt with finances tried to determine the outcome of the market which was very unpredictable.

Change to: The financial analyst tried to determine the outcome of the unpredictable market.

What can you reduce or change?

Exercise 1: Reduce wordiness

1. It is true that the exact meaning of this originality requirement varies from country to country, but in the common law tradition such as in the United States, very few artistic merits are required.
2. However, there are more and more problems in obtaining these patents. First of all, it is expensive and costly to secure patent protection.

Possible answers Ex. 1

1. The meaning of this originality requirement varies by country, but in the common law tradition such as in the United States, very few artistic merits are required.
2. However, there are increasing problems in obtaining these patents because it is expensive to secure patent protection. (discuss and then add the second point...) There are also problems...

Reduce Wordiness

Exercise 2. Reduce wordiness

1. Each product on the market has a limited period of time of life.
2. You may be interested to learn that there are a number of references in the literature citing support for this research study.
3. The reason why we had a disaster is because in the month of April the project team did not cooperate together to come to a consensus of opinion on the necessary requirements for the procedure.
4. This is to let you know that you should use the department's 50XX account number for the purpose of purchasing miscellaneous items.

Possible Answers Ex. 2

1. Products have a limited lifespan/shelf-life.
2. A number of literature references support this research study.
3. We had a disaster because in April the project team reached no consensus on the requirements.
4. Please use the department's 50XX account to purchase miscellaneous items.

How would you reduce wordiness and extra info?

Exercise 3. Reduce wordiness

Now I want to talk about the first activity, which was really interesting. The teacher asked all the students to come to the front of the class and make two lines. She broke the students up into two groups of five based on their first languages. She didn't want to have two people with the same L1. So, students had to stand in two lines facing each other (let's call them line A and line B). Then she explained the task and gave instructions to students. Basically, each person had to talk about his/her weekend for about three minutes.

Possible answer Ex. 3

The first activity was really (quite) interesting. The teacher asked students to form two lines of five facing each other based on their first languages, so no pair had the same L1. The teacher asked students to discuss their weekend activities for about three minutes.

Other ways to create a concise or formal style

1. Avoid -ing endings, if possible

For nurturing social benefits, it is imperative to protect the design.

To nurture social benefits, it is imperative to protect the design.

2. Avoid 2 words for similar concepts

First, I considered and examined these variables....

To nurture social benefits, it is imperative to protect the design legally and properly.

First and foremost it is important to...

Little by little,...

More and more..

One by one

3. Use strong adjective + noun

Exercise 4. Change to strong adjective + noun (and other problems)

Many **tools of intellectual property** can be used to protect a design, and designers need to choose **the proper one** based on the characteristics of **his** design and the type of protection **they** want to secure.

Possible Answer Ex. 4

Many intellectual property tools can be used to protect a design, and designers need to choose the proper tool based on the design characteristics and the protection type they want to secure.

4. Avoid extra “fillers” and extra words

Among the subcategories of intellectual property, the domain of copyright is **basically** the protection of literary and artistic work.

Actual, basically, essentially...(take out)

It can be said that... It is considered that...

In order to study English → To study English

To be able to respond → To respond

There have been numerous studies that have →

Numerous studies have...

One more consideration

Take out:

As mentioned above

As mentioned earlier

As stated above

Of course, you have mentioned it in a previous section. We expect repetition.

Balance between concise and clarity

You must be concise, but use clear examples and explanations.

“My own writing is too compact; it is difficult to get all thought processes on paper, connectors are necessary. And I saw this because reviewers seemed to miss points I was trying to make, points I had to explain, to expand on.”

Clarity: Put Major Points First

Abstracts: Summary of all main points

The purpose of this research is...

The results show that...

This study contributes to the field...

Introductions

Essays: thesis statements at the end of the introduction

Research paper: Gap statement (Few studies have focused on)

New sections (headings)

One-two sentence summary of the section

Each paragraph

Topic sentences

Sentences: Put key points at the beginning of the sentences.(frontload)

Putting key ideas first

What is the key idea here?

Considering that the subject area of copyright covers broad creative work and that design overlaps with the majority of the artistic activities delineated in the categories, designs are naturally subject to copyright protection.

Putting key ideas first

Designs are naturally subject to copyright protection, considering that the subject area of copyright covers broad creative work and that design overlaps with the majority of the artistic activities delineated in the categories.

Dear Sir:

My name is Lisong Li. I am from China. I am a student at Tsinghua University and will graduate next year with a degree in Mechanical Engineering. I have been looking at your Ph.D. program in Mechanical Engineering at your university. I would like to receive more information about your program. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Lisong Li

1. What is the main message of this email?
2. Where would an American audience expect to find this message?
3. What details would an American audience want added or deleted in this email?

Rewritten

Dear Admissions (or Head of XX Department):

I am interested in your Ph.D. program in Mechanical Engineering, and would like to receive more information about (be specific).

I will finish my MS degree in Mechanical Engineering next year from Tsinghua University in China.

Can you email this information so I can begin the application process by May 30? Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Lisong Li

How does this writer make key ideas clear? (Intro)

This study examines cross-cultural communication strategies used by Chinese and American participants. (clear, direct, specific topic sentence)

As relations between the United States and China grow increasingly closer, more interactions between Americans and Chinese are seen in business as well as in informal situations. (clear background of the problem)

Middle sentences with frontloading and transitions

In addition, the past several years have seen the number of Chinese students studying in the United States increasing dramatically requiring more verbal interaction between students of the two cultures. Examining the communication problems that may occur between these two groups includes not only language differences but also the different framing strategies used for group discussions. For example, Chinese participants report that Americans promptly begin and end a group discussion while the Chinese participants may want to talk about procedural matters before discussion begins. In addition, when giving reasons for a point, Americans often frame their reasons as “one, two, three” while Chinese participants often frame their reasons as “storytelling.” (more details and examples of the problem to highlight the importance of this issue)

Last sentence

Understanding communication characteristics, expectations and motivations of participants *(key point of the research)* from different cultures may help us understand the differences and predict potential points of conflict.

(motivation and significance of the results)

Other techniques

1. *Omit or reduce the amount of less important information.*
2. *Use dependent clauses to subordinate less important information.*

Weak: During the past century, major strides have been made in the discovery of new drugs (*Obvious fact as background*). These discoveries have led to amazing changes in the quality of people's lives. (*Obvious fact as background*) More potent and effective new drugs are urgently needed. (*Key point*).

Improved: Although major strides have been made in the discovery of new drugs leading to amazing changes in the quality of people's lives (*subordinating the background*) more potent and effective new drugs are urgently needed. (*Key point*). OR,

More potent and effective new drugs are urgently needed (*key point first*) even though major strides have been made in the discovery of new drugs leading to amazing changes in the quality of people's lives

Key ideas first

3. Tell readers what information is important (or less important). For example,

The most important finding of this study is....

One of the most important findings of our study is....

The most unusual aspect of ... is....

There were no important changes in....

Surprisingly/Interestingly/Most significantly, we found...

Of particular interest is the finding related to...

4. Repeat important information (in different sections)

Key ideas first

5. *Avoid overusing weak references:* “it is considered that...,” “it is important to note that...,” “it has been suggested that...” “It can be said that..” or similar phrases that take the focus away from the message.

It has been considered that this method assesses explicit memory (Bauer, 1995; Mandler, 1990; Meltzoff, 1990; Bauer & Mandler, 1992).

Change to: This method has been used to assess explicit memory.... OR

Several researchers have used this method to assess explicit memory... OR

This method assesses explicit memory.

Preview lists

6. *Use preview lists at the beginning of a report or section:*

Joe Smith has written extensively about demutualization in the Journal of Business. He suggests that there are four main reasons why a mutual insurer would demutualize: access to capital, organizational flexibility, avoidance of the income tax setback, and aligning the interests of managers with those of shareholders.

Preview lists

6. *Use preview lists at the beginning of a report or section:*

Joe Smith has written extensively about demutualization in the Journal of Business. He suggests that there are four main reasons why a mutual insurer would demutualize: 1) access to capital, 2) organizational flexibility, 3) avoidance of the income tax setback, and 4) aligning the interests of managers with those of shareholders.

Clarity: Precise and specific

Avoid words that are not precise and specific

- o Soon
- o Recently

ADD clarity with

- o Specific numbers
- o Examples
- o Descriptive words
- o Appropriate adjectives: *quite* aggressive, *somewhat* aggressive, *rather* aggressive
- o Precise verbs: *conducted* research vs. *did* research;
generated a report vs. *wrote* a report

Clarity: Repetition of key words

What is a key word in your paper?

Use the SAME word throughout the paper.

Nouns: same word

Verbs, adjectives, adverbs: vary

Making your writing parallel

Parallel numbers 1.5 or 1½?

Parallel headings (style, font...)

Consistent spelling: British or American

Consistent capitalization of the same word

Somewhat consistent paragraph length

Parallel verbs

The machine was used to stretch, frame, and form the material.

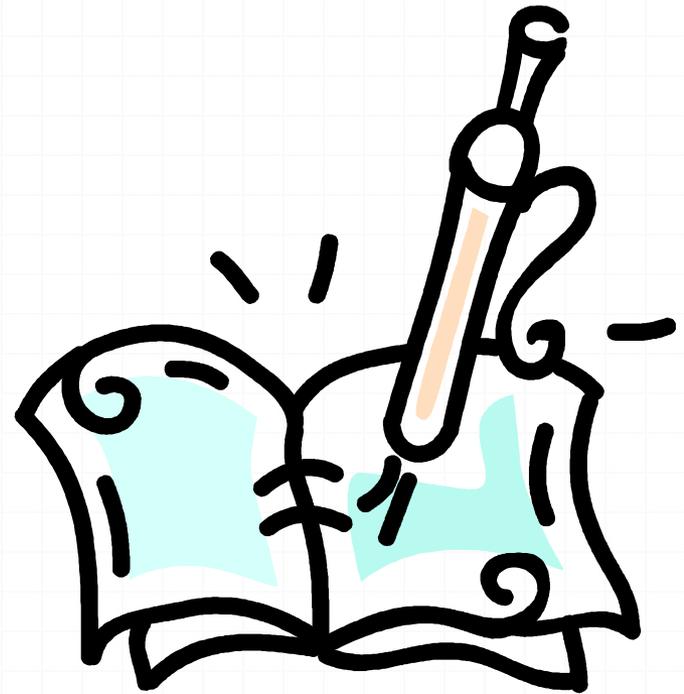
Notice the parallel structures

1. After the test, the pipettes were washed, rewashed and air-dried.
2. The contestants reported that they liked to argue, to exchange insults, and to invent details in order to win their cases.
3. Every day several tasks dominate the inmates' time: eating, exercising, working menial jobs, and sleeping.
4. It may seem to casual observers that all people desire some form of recognition, that no one wants to be isolated, and that a healthy society must stimulate communication between its members.
5. Either we grow or we diminish; we never stay the same.

Style

What is the typical length of a sentence in academic English?

- a. 10 words
- b. 25 words
- c. 40 words



Style

What is the typical length of a sentence in academic English?

- a. 10 words
- b. 25 words or less**
- c. 40 words

Topic sentences – slightly shorter

Explanation sentences – slightly longer

Sentences: 25 words or less

Exercise 5. Sentence length

In the U.S. and other developed countries, McGinnis (2003) points out that there has been a marginal decrease over the decades of membership in community groups, labor unions, parent-teacher associates, traditional women's group, youth organizations and world health organizations which has led to democratic disarray because the community has a declining lack of interest in communal participation.

Possible Answer Ex. 5

In the U.S. and other developed countries, McGinnis (2003) points out that there has been a marginal decrease over the decades of membership in community groups. *(key topic – 25 words)* These groups include labor unions, parent-teacher associates, traditional women's group, youth organizations and world health organizations. This decline has led to democratic disarray because the community has a declining lack of interest in communal participation. *(explanation)*

Reduce length and wordiness

Exercise 6. Compare the two versions. What has changed?

In academic life, writing has special importance as it is an active skill in the evaluation of the actual language competence of language learners. Yet, the students who study in English Language Departments are not trained enough in composing activities during their high school education since they are accepted to the universities by taking a general test (YDS) in which there are grammar, translation, reading comprehension and some organization questions in paragraphs, but there are no active skills such as writing and speaking skills.

Writing has special importance in academics as (since) it is an active skill in evaluating the language competence of language learners. However, English Language Department students are not well trained in composing activities during their high school education. They are accepted to universities based on a general test (YDS) in which there are only questions related to grammar, translation, reading comprehension and some paragraph organization, but there are no active skills such as writing and speaking skills.

Use of “in my opinion”

Avoid statements with “*in my opinion*” or “*I think*” or “*I believe*”

In my opinion the research results reflect....

Change to: The research results reflect...

(Statements you write without attribution – citation – ARE your opinion or your idea)

There are four indicators of.... **(my idea)**

Holt (2008) describes four indicators of...**(someone else’s idea)**

Use of “you” or “your”

To obtain a copyright of your design works, the only requirement is to be *original*.

Avoid using *you* unless you are writing instructions. Even in instructions, you can often avoid the use of *you*.

1. It is important that you examine.... or You should examine....

Change to: Examine....

2. In Japan, it is difficult to get into an excellent university. You need to study at least 4 hours after school every night.

Change to: In Japan...students need to study at least....

3. You can see from the results in Figure 1....

**Change to: As shown in Figure 1,
(possibly) As can be seen in Figure 1...**

Use of “I” or “My”

Depends on several factors:

Field:

Social Science may approve

Science and Engineering generally no because you almost always do research as a team. Often uses “**our** work”...

Business is likely to encourage it

Professor:

Some professors encourage it for individual work

Journal:

Very traditional journals strongly discourage it.

If you are uncertain, avoid it by using the passive voice.

Use of “the”

Rule 1

Every singular, countable noun needs a determiner=
the, a/an, this, one, each, my...

Singular, countable nouns = level, method, technique,
approach, strategy....

Exceptions:

possessive = Sheryl's seminar

Sometimes names of theories and most proper nouns;
grounded theory, game theory, stakeholder theory

Rule/Guideline 2

Most “of phrases” have “the”

the theory of relativity

the population of this city

the purpose of this seminar

What’s the difference here?

the indicator of this problem

an indicator of this problem

Guideline 3

Generalizations (general truths) are commonly plural, generic nouns or noncount nouns = NO ARTICLE.

Students at this university must speak English.

Germs are everywhere.

Engineering is a large faculty here.

How to improve: Examine an introduction in your field

Analyze writing in your field.

1. How has the writer made the ideas clear?
2. Underline key phrases that are clear and concise.
3. How has the writer been concise – taking out unnecessary words and information?