

Writing Guide



Assignment writing

Mechanics of writing

Helpful tips for writing styles

Contents

Assignment Writing.....	4
Paragraph Structure.....	8
Sentence Structure	5
Sentence Fragments	6
Writing Skills: Mechanics of Writing.....	9
Comma	9
Comma Fault.....	10
Colon	11
Semi Colon	12
Apostrophe	13
Capitals.....	14
Parts of Speech	16
Nouns	16
Proper nouns/ Common nouns.	16
Singular nouns/ Plural nouns.....	16
Countable nouns/uncountable nouns	16
Countable nouns/uncountable nouns, and articles.	17
Pronouns.....	17
Adjectives.....	19
Order of Adjectives	19
Prepositions	19
Verbs	20
Adverbs	20
Conjunctions	20
Sentence Starters, Transitional and Other Useful Words	21
Paraphrasing	25
10 Easy ways to improve your writing.....	21
1. Understand the difference between written and spoken language	21
2. Use parallel structure.....	21
3. Be consistent in your use of tenses	21
4. Ensure subject-verb agreement.....	22

5. Avoid dangling (unrelated) participles	22
6. Avoid sentence fragments	22
7. Avoid comma fault/run-on sentences	23
8. Use the comma correctly, especially in the following ways:	24
9. Use clear language	25
10. Use the correct word.....	25
References	27

Assignment Writing

- The information in this guide outlines some important academic writing conventions. Information regarding a tutor's specific preference or expectation relating to presentation of your work should be sought from the tutor.
- Clarification of points in this guide can be sought from Academic Learning Advisors. To make an appointment, ask at the library desk or complete the electronic form on the Library and Learning Services website.

Sentence Structure

1. In academic writing, sentences begin with a capital letter and end with a full stop (.) or a question mark (?)
2. Each sentence must:
be able to stand alone and make sense on its own.
3. Each sentence has:
a **subject**: This is the person or thing that the sentence is about. And,
a **predicate**: This is what is said about the subject.
This part must have at least one **verb** (doing word).

Subject	Predicate
The book	<i>arrived</i> in the mail today.
He	<i>bought</i> a new car yesterday.
Mary and John	<i>went</i> on a camping holiday in the South Island.
Operators of machines	<i>should be given</i> further training.
The room	<i>had been cleaned</i> recently.
Moving house	<i>can be</i> very stressful.
Collecting wood for the fire	<i>took</i> a long time.
Looking after the animals	<i>was</i> Jane's responsibility.
Dancing	<i>is</i> good for the soul.

The above sentences are called **simple sentences**.
(They contain only one verb each). The verbs in the sentences above are in italics.

Ask yourself these questions to determine whether a group of words is a sentence:

1. Do the words make sense on their own?
2. Are the words a complete thought?
3. Does the sentence begin with a capital letter and end with either a full stop or a question mark?
4. Finally, ask yourself: Are the grammar and punctuation correct?

Sentence Fragments

Sentence fragments are incomplete sentences. They are often pieces of sentences that have been separated from the main clause by a full stop. The fragments do not make sense on their own.

There are two main types of sentence fragments:

1. The fragment has no **subject** or *verb*

- Running down the street.

Who is running down the street? We need to add a **subject** and an *auxiliary* (helping) *verb*, to make the fragment into a complete sentence.

Correction: The **child** *was* running down the street.

2. The fragment adds extra information to the main sentence and often begins with **which**; it has a subject and a verb but does not make sense on its own. Sometimes, just the **punctuation** needs to be changed and a **capital** letter put into **lower** case.

- The student had misunderstood the question and needed to rewrite her assignment. **Which** is why she was not at the party on Saturday night.

Correction: The student misunderstood the question and needed to rewrite her assignment, **which** is why she was not at the party on Saturday night.

3. When the concert had finished and the applause had died away. **Everyone** hurried out of the theatre and climbed into the waiting buses.

Correction: When the concert had finished and the applause had died away, **everyone** hurried out of the theatre and climbed into the waiting buses.

Do not separate the relative clause, the dependent clause, from the main clause. See complex sentences, relative clause p. 6.

Make your writing more interesting for the reader by using a variety of sentence structures.

A **compound sentence** is one in which two or more simple sentences (independent clauses) are joined together, using a “joining word” (i.e. a conjunction).

For example:

- My daughter *is coming* home today, **and** the two boys *will arrive* tomorrow.
- Drivers *think* cyclists *are* a menace on the roads, **but** cyclists *think* drivers *don't give* them enough room.

If the conjunction (joining word) is taken away, the sentences on either side still make sense.

For example:

- My daughter *is coming* home today. The two boys *will arrive* tomorrow.
- Drivers *think* cyclists *are* a menace on the roads. Cyclists *think* drivers *do not give* them enough room.

See conjunctions p. 23.

A **complex sentence** has:

- **an independent clause** (i.e. a simple sentence) and
- **one or more subordinate/dependent clauses**. Dependent clauses give extra information.

Both the independent and the dependent clauses have subjects and *verbs* but one is a complete thought and the other one is not.

The **independent clause** is a **complete thought**; the dependent clause is dependent on the rest of the sentence for meaning.

For example:

- The old man, *who was looking very ill*, limped slowly along the footpath.
- *Although they are bad for me*, I love eating chips.
- I love eating chips, *although they are bad for me*.

Relative Clauses are dependent clauses. They are sometimes called subordinate clauses.

Relative clauses:

- Start with the relative pronouns (that, which, whose, where, when);
- Are most often used to give extra information about, define or identify, the noun that precedes them.

Use:	Who/whom/whose:	for people
	Which:	things
	That:	people, things
	When:	time
	Where:	place

Put the extra information after the relative pronoun.

Paragraph Structure

A paragraph is a **unit of thought**, not of length. It is a series of sentences about a single topic or idea. All the sentences in a paragraph must relate to this idea.

- The **first sentence** of a paragraph is called **the topic sentence**. Its purpose is to introduce the reader to the main idea of the paragraph.
- The sentences that follow the topic sentence **then explain, develop, and illustrate** the main idea. These supporting sentences must follow a logical order of development. If the topic or idea changes, then a new paragraph should be started.
- Clearly show the beginning of a paragraph by indenting five spaces **or** by double-double spacing between paragraphs. The visual division between paragraphs helps the reader to understand the structure of the writing and therefore to process the ideas more easily.

There are no set rules about paragraph length. A paragraph is seldom only one sentence, because you cannot develop an idea in one sentence.

Writing Skills: Mechanics of Writing

Punctuation helps the reader to make sense of what has been written. When we speak, we use not only words but also body language, voice tone and emphasis, and pauses to convey our message. When we write, on the other hand, we need to use punctuation marks to help the reader understand our meaning.

This resource will consider the following writing skills:

- **Comma**
- **Comma fault**
- **Colon**
- **Semi colon**
- **Apostrophe**
- **Capitals**

Comma

Use the comma to separate ideas in a sentence, in order to make the meaning clearer:

1. When joining two sentences with a **conjunction**

For example:

- The sun was shining, so we went to the river.
- The new intake of students was large, so the group was divided into two classes.

2. When adding extra information to the basic sentence

For example:

a) **At the beginning**

- Yesterday morning, I went for a bike ride.
- In conclusion, the survey demonstrated students make good use of the library.

b) **In the middle**

- The woman, who was feeling tired, went home.
- The student, who came from Europe, adjusted quickly to the New Zealand academic culture.

c) **At the end**

The student searched for hours without success, becoming increasingly desperate.

3. When listing a series of items

For example:

- A pen, lined paper, and a calculator were required for the exam.
- For their exams the students needed a fine tipped red pen, extra paper for diagrams, and a scientific calculator.

4. To introduce a quotation

For example:

According to Winston Churchill, “To improve is to change, so to be perfect is to have changed often.”

Comma Fault

Comma fault (also known as comma splice and run-on sentence) refers to the joining of two sentences by a comma instead of a full stop.

For example:

- ✘ Please let me know if you can help in this matter, I would appreciate your reply as soon as possible.
- ✔ Please let me know if you can help in this matter. I would appreciate your reply as soon as possible.

Each group of words is a complete sentence and therefore needs to be separated by a full stop.

Sentences can be **joined** together using a **comma** and a **conjunction** (linking word), such as and, but, or, nor, so, yet, because, although.

For example:

- It was a beautiful day, so we went to the beach.
- I went to town yesterday, but I did not buy anything.

When two sentences are closely related or reflect each other, they can be separated by a semi colon, instead of a full stop.

For example:

- ✘ Drivers think cyclists are a menace on the roads, cyclists think drivers do not give them enough room.
- ✔ Drivers think cyclists are a menace on the roads; cyclists think drivers do not give them enough room.

NB. The group of words on either side of the semi colon must be able to stand alone as a sentence.

Colon

Colons can be used to:

1. Introduce a list:

For example:

- For the practicum course, you are required to bring the following: chef's jacket, recipe instructions, and all ingredients.

2. Introduce a quotation:

For example:

- Copus (2009) comments: "Clear writing is inextricably linked to clear thinking" (p. vii). (Note: A comma can also introduce a direct quotation).

3. Expand an idea:

For example:

- Both parties agreed on the final result: There would be increased participation in meetings by all those involved.

4. Add emphasis. The colon acts like a pointer:

For example:

Compare the following sentences:

- "He started the business because he wanted money.
- He started the business for one reason: money" (Bailey Jr, 1990, p. 59).

Note: a colon can point to a single word, a list, to another sentence, or to a series of sentences or paragraphs.

NB. When a sentence follows a colon, start the sentence with a capital.

Semi Colon

The semi colon has two main uses:

1. **Join** two complete sentences that are closely connected in meaning:

For example:

- Cats are independent creatures; dogs require more looking after.
- The class was divided into two groups; the intake of first years was larger than expected.

2. **Listing** complex items that contain commas:

For example:

- Research material can include the following: journals from the library, and from databases; hard copy, and online books; and relevant information from a practicum experience.
- Before going on a road trip north, you should check your car's oil and water, which may need topping up; the tyre pressure, including that of the spare tyre; road conditions and availability, for example, the Taupo Road; and your emergency supplies, which should include a torch that works, a first aid kit, and warm clothing and blankets.
- **Note:** Bailey Jr (1990) notes that a semi colon separates "equal grammatical units" (e.g. an "independent clause from another independent clause", or "a phrase from a phrase...")(p. 62).
- Do not use a semicolon to separate unequal grammatical units, for instance an independent clause from a dependent clause.

In Bailey's words: "Think of the semicolon as a kind of 'pivot': one idea is on this side of the semicolon; another idea is on that side of it. And on each side of the pivot point is an equal grammatical unit" (1990, p. 62).

Apostrophe

The apostrophe has two main uses:

1. **Contraction**, to show that letters have been left out of a word.

Didn't = did not	doesn't = does not
it's = it is	wasn't = was not
who's = who is	can't = cannot
I'll = I will	isn't = is not

NB. Contractions are not used in academic writing.

2. **Possession**, to show that something belongs to someone or something.
The apostrophe always comes directly after the name of the owner of the object, followed by what they own.

Steps:

1. Ask yourself , “Who does the object belong to?”
2. Add an’s after the owner’s name.
3. If the owner’s name ends in s just add an ‘.

For example

1. Who does the computer belong to?
2. The computer belongs to Christine.
3. Add an’s after the owner’s name: Christine’s computer.

For example

- a student’s essay = the essay belongs to a student
- next week’s timetable = the timetable belonging to next week
- the students’ pens = the pens belong to the students
- the people’s leader = leader of (belonging to) the people

NB. Do not use the apostrophe with personal pronouns: his, hers, its, theirs, yours, ours

For example:

- The work is yours.
- That house is theirs.
- The book is missing its cover.

Do not use an apostrophe with adjectives:

For example:

- assignment instructions
- lecture notes

Acronym plurals and dates do not take an apostrophe:

For example:

DHBs, FAQs, 1930s, 30s.

Resist the temptation to use an apostrophe whenever you see an s.

Capitals

Use capitals for the following:

1. The first letter of the first word of a sentence.

For example

- The woman entered the room.

2. The pronoun I.

For example

- John and I are going to class.

3. Acronyms, which are formed from the first letters of words.

BNZ USA FBI EIT AIDS YMCA WHO

For example

- **EIT** is an acronym for Eastern Institute of Technology.
- The **W**orld **H**ealth **O**rganisation = **WHO**

4. All proper nouns, which include the names of people and their titles, specific places and organisations, and the names of months and days.

Dr Mary Jones, Napier, France, the White House, Tuesday, Students' Association.

5. Headings

Follow the APA guidelines for where (and when) to put capitals in headings.
APA specifies heading styles for up to five levels of headings. (APA, 2012, pp. 62-63).

Heading format, according to the APA, is as follows:

Level 1 Heading

(centred, bold, title case)

Level 2 Heading

(left aligned, bold, title case)

Level 3 heading.

(indented, bold, sentence case, full stop)

Level 4 heading.

(indented, bold, italicised, sentence case, full stop)

Level 5 heading.

(indented, italicised, sentence style case, full stop)

6. When a sentence follows a colon:

Both parties agreed on the final result: There would be increased participation in meetings by all those involved.

Parts of Speech

Nouns

The number of nouns in the English language is enormous.

Nouns are “**name**” words; a noun can be the name of a place, person, thing, period of time, feeling, or idea.

Examples of nouns: EIT, Taradale; Mary, man, child; computer, pencil; day, month, year, morning, afternoon, evening; kindness, beauty; communism..

Proper nouns/ Common nouns

Nouns are either proper and are **capitalised** (e.g. World Health Organisation, Einstein, Napier) or common (e.g. pencil, empathy).

Common nouns are **not capitalised**, unless they are used at the beginning of a sentence.

Singular nouns/ Plural nouns

Some nouns change when they are plural.

In the singular (e.g. book, child) In the plural (e.g. books, children)

Some nouns do not change in the plural form

Examples include: sheep, music.

Countable nouns/uncountable nouns

Nouns with a plural form can be counted; they are **countable nouns**

For example:

- one book or two books.

Nouns without a plural form are **uncountable nouns**

For example:

- you cannot say two sheeps or two musics.

Some nouns are uncountable in English but are often countable in other languages.

For example:

advice	furniture	weather	information
traffic	news	bread	behaviour

Countable nouns/uncountable nouns, and articles

The three articles in English are **a, an, the**

All three articles can be used before singular countable nouns

For example:

- a book, the book.
- I have a few jobs to do.
- an egg, an organisation, the egg, the organisation.

The may also be used before an uncountable noun, e.g. **The** traffic is heavy. **The** rice is cooked.

How do you know which article to use?

A and **an** are **indefinite** articles. This means that if, for example, I ask you for a pen it could be any pen. I am not referring to a particular one.

However, if I ask for the pen, both of us know which pen is being referred to.

The is a **definite** article.

Note that **an** is used (instead of **a**) before a noun beginning with a vowel i.e. **a, e, i, o, u**.

Pronouns

(pro = for – Latin)

A pronoun stands in place of a noun or nouns.

Note also, that when using a pronoun in place of a person's name, it must be clear to whom you are referring.

For example:

- The tutor told him that **he** was a good writer. The tutor told the student that **he**, the student, was a good writer.

Subject pronouns are used if the pronoun is the subject of the sentence:

For example:

- **I, we, you, he, she, it, they.**

Object pronouns are used if the pronoun is not the subject, but the object of the sentence:

For example:

- **her, him, it, me, them, us, and you.**
- The supervisor gave **me** the Health and Safety policy to read.
- The supervisor gave the Health and Safety policy to **me**.

Examples of **indefinite pronouns** (used to refer to general or indefinite person(s) or thing(s): **all, any, both, each, everyone, few, many, neither, none, nothing, several, some** and **somebody**).

For example:

- **Each** student needs to get real about deadlines and demands.
- **Something** isn't making sense.
- **All** of the students completed their course.

Some pronouns give information about who owns something.

They are named **possessive pronouns: hers, his, mine, ours, theirs, and yours**.

For example:

- **His** research was thorough and his methodology good.

Some pronouns introduce a part of a sentence (a clause) that describes, or gives extra information about, the noun that precedes it.

These pronouns are relative pronouns; they start a relative clause:

Use:	
who/whom/whose	for people
which	for things
that	for people or things
when	time
where	place

For example:

- I stood **where** you could see me.
- The judge, **who** spoke first, asked for silence.

This, that, these and those are also pronouns

For example:

- **That** is a good idea.
- **These** books belong to EIT.

Note that in **academic writing the personal pronouns** - I, you, we, me, our, us- are **not normally used** unless the assignment is reflective and calls for personal experience.

Adjectives

These **describe/modify/give more information** about a noun. They usually precede a noun but can come afterwards.

For example:

- a **disappointing** article/ the article was **disappointing**.

Adjectives can describe:	For Example:
Number (describe quantity)	1,2,3
Qualities/opinion	kind, thoughtful, credible
Size	large, small
Age	old
Shape	square
Colour	red
Purpose or quality	usually, occasionally
Origin or material	New Zealand manufacturer fleece blanket

Order of Adjectives

Academic English does not use many adjectives at a time, but note that there is an order to the adjectives in English:

Number/quality or opinion/size/age/shape/ colour/ origin/material /purpose or qualifier.

For example:

- ✗ I have large two textbooks.
- ✓ I have two large text books.

Prepositions

These link nouns/pronouns to other words in a sentence. Prepositions go before the noun or pronoun.

Examples of prepositions:

to, with, near, of, at, from, under, during, through

For example:

- He hid **under** the desk.
- EIT is **near** a bus stop.

Summary	
Nouns	Naming words
Pronouns	Used in place of nouns
Adjectives	Qualify nouns and pronouns
Verbs	Describe what the noun is doing
Adverbs	Modify verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs
Conjunctions	Link words together
Prepositions	Used before a noun or pronoun
Articles	Used before nouns

Verbs

These are **action** words/**doing** words. These words tell what the noun is doing.

Examples:	
write	I write a lot.
dance	They dance well.
talk	We talk about the news.
remember	Do you remember that?
love	I love learning.
hit	The hammer hits the nail.

Verbs give an idea of time. Verbs can be: in the present/now time; in future time or in past time.

For example:

- I write...(present time); I wrote...(past time); I will write...(future time).

Adverbs

Adverbs **describe/modify/give more information** about verbs, other adverbs and adjectives, to add detail to sentences. Adverbs often end in **-ly**.

For example:

- The year passed **quickly**.
- The course was **unnecessarily** long.
- She went **outside**.
- He ran **fast**.

Conjunctions

These link words, or parts of sentences and prevent “choppiness”. They are useful for linking parts of sentences together for more streamlined writing.

Examples of conjunctions

Coordinating conjunctions join equal grammatical structures together.

FANBOYS

- F:** for
- A:** and
- N:** nor
- B:** but
- O:** or
- Y:** yet
- S:** so

Correlative Conjunctions are conjunctions which are word pairs:

- Either/or
- Neither/nor
- not only/but also

Subordinating Conjunctions join independent and dependent clauses. (Note: See Sentences)

These can be used to signal cause and effect, contrast or some other kind of relationship between the clauses.

after	before	lest	then	whereas
although	because	now that	though	wherever
as long as	by the time	once		whether or not
as much as	even if	only	unless	while
as soon as	even though	only if	until	
as though	in order that	provided that	when	in case
since	whenever	in the event that	supposing that	where

For example (note the use of commas):

- The library remained open until late, although it was holiday time.
- Although it was holiday time, the library remained open until late.

Sentence Starters, Transitional and Other Useful Words

To introduce		
This essay discusses ...	... is explored ...	... is defined ...
The definition of ... will be given	... is briefly outlined ...	... is explored ...
The issue focused on ...	... is demonstrated ...	... is included ...
In this essay ...	... is explained ...	... are identified ...
The key aspect discussed ...	... are presented ...	... is justified ...
Views on ... range from ...	... is evaluated ...	... is examined ...
The central theme ...	... is described ...	... is analysed ...
Emphasised are ...	... is explained and illustrated with examples ...	

To conclude		
In summary, ...	To review, ...	In conclusion, ...
In brief, ...	To summarise, ...	To sum up, ...
To conclude, ...	Thus, ...	Hence, ...
It has been shown that ...	In short, ...	

To compare and contrast		
Similarly, ...	In the same way ...	Likewise, ...
In comparison ...	Complementary to this ...	Then again, ...
However, ...	This is in contrast to ...	In contrast, ...
And yet ...	Nevertheless, ...	Conversely, ...
On the contrary, ...	On the other hand, ...	Notwithstanding ...
Whereas ...	In contrast to ...	That aside, ...
While this is the case ...	... disputes ...	Despite this, ...

To add ideas		
Also, ...	Equally important ...	Subsequently, ...
Furthermore, ...	Moreover, ...	As well as ...
Next ...	Another essential point ...	Additionally, ...
More importantly, ...	In the same way ...	Another ...
Then, ...	In addition, ...	Besides ...
Then again, ...	Firstly, ... secondly, ... thirdly, ... finally, ...	To elaborate, ...

To present uncommon or rare ideas		
Seldom . . .	Few . . .	Not many . . .
A few . . .	. . . is uncommon	. . . is scarce . . .
Rarely . . .	. . . is rare . . .	. . . is unusual . . .

To present common or widespread ideas		
Numerous . . .	Many . . .	More than . . .
Several . . .	Almost all . . .	The majority . . .
Most . . .	Commonly . . .	Significant . . .
. . . is prevalent . . .	. . . is usual . . .	Usually . . .

To present inconclusive ideas		
Perhaps . . .	. . . may be . . .	. . . might be . . .
There is limited evidence for . . .	. . . is debated . . .	. . . is possibly . . .
. . . could . . .	. . . may include . . .	

To give examples		
For example, . . .	. . . as can be seen in . . .	. . . supports . . .
An illustration of . . .	. . . as demonstrated by . . .	. . . is observed . . .
Specifically, . . .	. . . is shown . . .	. . . exemplifies . . .
Such as . . .	As an example . . .	To illustrate, . . .
For instance, . . .		

To show relationship or outcome		
Therefore . . .	As a result . . .	For that reason . . .
Hence, . . .	Otherwise, . . .	Consequently, . . .
The evidence suggests/shows . . .	It can be seen that . . .	With regard to . . .
After examining . . .	These factors contribute to . . .	It is apparent that . . .
Considering . . . it can be concluded that . . .	Subsequently, . . .	The effect is . . .
The outcome is . . .	The result . . .	The correlation . . .
The relationship . . .	The link . . .	the convergence . . .
The connection . . .	. . . interacts with . . .	Both . . .
. . . affects . . .	Thus it is . . .	. . . causes . . .
. . . influences . . .	. . . predicts . . .	. . . leads to . . .
. . . informs . . .	. . . presupposes	. . . emphasises
. . . demonstrates . . .	. . . impacts on . . .	. . . supports . . .

To present prior or background ideas		
In the past, ...	Historically, ...	Traditionally, ...
Customarily, ...	Beforehand, ...	Originally, ...
Prior to this, ...	Earlier, ...	Formerly, ...
Previously, ...	Over time, ...	At the time of ...
Conventionally, ...	Foundational to this is ...	In earlier ...
Initially, ...	At first, ...	Recently ...
Until now, ...	The traditional interpretation ...	

To present others' ideas		
According to ...	Based on the findings of ... it can be argued ...	... proposed that ...
As explained by ...	... states that ...	... claims that ...
However, ... stated that ...	... suggested ...	... concluded that ...
Similarly, ... stated that ...	... for example, ...	... agreed that ...
Based on the ideas of ...	... defined ... as ...	... relates ...
As identified by ...	... disputed that ...	... contrasts ...
With regard to ... argued that ...	... concluded that ...	... confirmed that ...
... argues ...	... highlights ...	... demonstrates ...
... found that ...	... identifies ...	... wrote that ...
... demonstrated ...	... also ...	... reported ...
... pointed out that ...	... maintained that ...	... hypothesised that ...
... expressed the opinion that ...	... also mentioned ...	... asserts that ...
... identified ...	... goes on to state/suggest	... emphasises
... challenges the idea ...	... showed that ...	... explored the idea ...

Paraphrasing

Definition:

The same thought but in different words.

Purpose

- to make clear the meaning of a passage;
- to show understanding of a passage by using your own words and sentence structures; and
- to avoid using direct quotations.

How to paraphrase

- read the passage until you have a sense of the meaning and understand the passage;
- identify the main idea;
- look up the meaning of unfamiliar words;
- break up long sentences into shorter ones;
- restate the whole passage; do not just replace some words with synonyms;
- check back with the original – have you captured the meaning; and
- Note down the reference details.

Some tips

- Keep it simple.
- You can start by using the author's name in the sentence: *Wylde (2010) states that...* or by using different sentence starters: *The issue focuses on...*

A good paraphrase

- conveys the same ideas as the original;
- uses mostly different words with a different sentence structure;
- is relevant to your work;
- is linked to the rest of the text; and
- is referenced.

10 Easy ways to improve your writing

If you would like clarification of any of these writing tips, please make an appointment to see an Academic Learning Advisor.

1. Understand the difference between written and spoken language

When we speak, we use not only words but also body language, voice tone and emphasis, and pauses to convey our message. In contrast, when we write, we need to use clear language with the correct grammar and punctuation to help the reader understand our meaning.

2. Use parallel structure

When you start a sentence using a certain grammatical structure, you must keep to that same structure throughout the sentence.

X I love eating pizza, reading thrillers, and to ride my bike.
Correction: ✓ I love **eating** pizza, **reading** thrillers, and **riding** my bike.

X The students learned that the timetable had changed and about the different classroom.
Correction: ✓ The students learned **that** the timetable had changed and **that** they would be in a different classroom.

3. Be consistent in your use of tenses

Do not move between the past and present tense.

X I **stayed** up all night finishing my assignment, and then Susan **gives** us all an extension.
Correction: ✓ I **stayed** up all night finishing my assignment, and then Susan **gave** us all an extension.

X The student **gives** an amazing performance and **collapsed** on the floor.
Correction: ✓ The student **gave** an amazing performance and **collapsed** on the floor.
OR The student **gives** an amazing performance and **collapses** on the floor.

4. Ensure subject-verb agreement

The subject and verb in a sentence must agree in number.

X The box of books have arrived.

The subject of the sentence is **box**, which is singular, so the verb must be singular too.

Correction: ✓ The box of books **has** arrived.

X Sue and her sister grows potatoes.

The subject of the sentence is **plural**, two people, so the verb must be plural also.

Correction: ✓ Sue and her sister **grow** potatoes

5. Avoid dangling (unrelated) participles

The present participle is the –ing form of the verb (e.g. laughing) and the past participle usually ends in –ed (e.g. laughed).

When you use participles, you must make it clear the words to which they relate.

X Lying on the sofa reading a book, the back door opened silently.

Can a door lie on the sofa reading a book?

Correction: ✓ While Jane was lying on the sofa reading a book, the back door opened silently.

6. Avoid sentence fragments

Sentence fragments are incomplete sentences. They are often pieces of sentences that have been separated from the rest of the sentence by a full stop. Fragments do not make sense on their own.

There are two main types of sentence fragments:

1. The fragment has no subject or verb.

X Running down the street.

Who is running down the street? We need to add a **subject** and an *auxiliary* (helping) *verb*, to make the fragment into a complete sentence.

Correction: ✓ The **child** was running down the street.

2. The fragment adds extra information to the main sentence and often begins with **which**; it has a subject and a verb but does not make sense on its own. Sometimes, just the **punctuation** needs to be changed and a **capital** letter put into **lower case**.

X The student had misunderstood the question and needed to rewrite her assignment. **Which** is why she was not at the party on Saturday night.

Correction: ✓ The student had misunderstood the question and needed to rewrite her assignment, **which** is why she was not at the party on Saturday night.

X When the concert had finished and the applause had died away. **Everyone** hurried out of the theatre and climbed into the waiting buses.

Correction: ✓ When the concert had finished and the applause had died away, **everyone** hurried out of the theatre and climbed into the waiting buses.

7. Avoid comma fault/run-on sentences

Comma fault (also known as comma splice and run-on sentence) refers to the joining of two sentences by a comma, instead of using a full stop.

X We look forward to seeing you, this will be an excellent opportunity to share ideas on teaching and learning.

Correction: ✓ We look forward to seeing you. This will be an excellent opportunity to share ideas on teaching and learning.

X Please let me know if you can help in this matter, I would appreciate your reply as soon as possible.

Correction: ✓ Please let me know if you can help in this matter. I would appreciate your reply as soon as possible.

NB: Each group of words is a complete sentence and therefore needs to be separated by a full stop.

- Sentences can be joined together using a comma and a conjunction (linking word), such as

and, but, or, nor, so, yet, because, although, e.g.

It was a beautiful day, **so** we went to the beach.

I went to town yesterday, **but** I didn't buy anything.

- When two sentences are closely related or reflect each other, they can also be joined together by a semicolon, instead of using a full stop.

X I find writing essays difficult, this is because I usually leave them to the last minute.

Correction: ✓ I find writing essays difficult; this is because I usually leave them to the last minute.

X Drivers think cyclists are a menace on the roads, cyclists think drivers don't give them enough room.

Correction: ✓ Drivers think cyclists are a menace on the roads; cyclists think drivers don't give them enough room.

NB: The group of words on either side of the semicolon must be able to stand alone as a sentence. Remember, before the words **however** and **therefore**, you must use a semicolon or a full stop.

8. Use the comma correctly, especially in the following ways:

- After an introductory word or group of words :

However, the line of argument is clear and consistent.

When he had finished his assignment, David watched a DVD.

In 1969, man landed on the moon for the first time.

- Between the two parts of a compound sentence (one in which two or more simple sentences are joined together):

Drivers think cyclists are a menace on the **road**, **but** cyclists think drivers don't give them enough room.

Women live longer than **men**, **and** they visit the doctor more often.

The tutor gave the students a month to complete their **assignments**, **yet** many had not finished by the due date.

9. Use clear language

Be careful using the following pronouns: **it**, **they**, and **this**.

- X Education is essential for all children, and financial stability is important for everyone. The Government should provide **it**.

What should the Government provide, education or financial stability?

Correction: ✓ The Government should provide both of these essentials.

- X The boss asked the workers to tidy up before the visitors arrived, so that **they** would enjoy the experience.

Who would enjoy the experience, the workers or the visitors?

Correction: ✓ The boss asked the workers to tidy up before the visitors arrived, so that the visitors would enjoy the experience.

- X Rob worked hard and achieved his degree, supported throughout by his wife. This has led to his gaining a new job in the farming sector.

What has led to the new job: hard work, achieving a degree, or his wife's support?

Correction: ✓ Rob worked hard and achieved his degree, supported throughout by his wife. All three factors have led to his gaining a new job in the farming sector.

10. Use the correct word

- **Your** means *belonging to you*, e.g., **Your** slip is showing.
- **You're** is a contraction of *you are*, e.g., **You're** a genius.
- **Whose** means *belonging to whom*, e.g., **Whose** car has its lights on?
- **Who's** is a contraction of *who is*, e.g., **Who's** going to make the coffee?

- **Their** means *belonging to them*, e.g., **Their** car was stolen last night. **Their** is NEVER followed by *is, are, was, were, will, should, would, or could*.
- **There** is used before the above words, e.g., **There** was an earthquake this morning. **There** often refers to a *place*, e.g., John lives **there**.
- **They're** is a contraction of *they are*, e.g., They're coming for dinner.
- **Its** means *belonging to it*, e.g., The cat ate **its** dinner.
- **It's** is a contraction of *it is* or *it has*, e.g., **It's** a beautiful day. **It's** been done.
- **Being** is a present participle and follows *is, are, was, and were*, e.g., She **was being** silly.
- **Been** is a past participle and follows *has* or *have*, e.g., They **have been** well taught.
- **Where** is to do with *place*, e.g., Home is **where** I can relax.
- **Were** is the past plural of the verb 'to be', e.g., The children **were** cheerful and relaxed.
- **We're** is a contraction of *we are*, e.g., We're now living in Otaki.
- **Affect** is a *verb*, meaning to influence or cause to change, e.g., Rain **affects** my mood.
- **Effect** is a *noun*, meaning the influence or the result, e.g., The **effect** of divorce on children can be huge.
- **Lose** is a *verb*, meaning to be unable to find something or to have something taken away, e.g., I often **lose** my car keys. I may **lose** my job.
- **Loose** is an *adjective*, meaning not firmly held or fixed in place, not fitting closely, e.g., These trousers are the wrong size for me as they are too **loose**.

A comprehensive list of easily confused words can be found at www.grammar-monster.com

References

- Bailey Jr., E.P. (2009). *The plain English approach to business writing*. New York, N.Y: Oxford University Press.
- Copus, J. (2009). *Brilliant writing tips for students*. Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dykstra, P.D. (2006). *An easy guide to writing*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Emerson, L. (2005). *Writing guidelines for business students* (3rd ed.). Melbourne, Australia: Thomson/Dunmore Press.
- Goalcast. (2017). Top 24 Winston Churchill quotes to inspire you to never surrender. Retrieved from <https://www.goalcast.com/2017/06/20/top-24-winston-churchill-quotes-to-inspire-you-to-never-surrender/>
- Manalo, E., Wont-Toi, G., & Bartlett-Trafford, J. (2009). *The business of writing: Written communication skills for business students* (3rd ed.). Auckland, New Zealand: Pearson Education.
- Murphy, E. M. (1989). *Effective writing: Plain English at work*. Melbourne, Australia: Pitman.
- Murphy, R. (1985). *English grammar in use: A self-study reference and practice book for intermediate students*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Pronouns. (2008). Retrieved from <http://www.factmonster.com/ipka/A0885483.html>
- Purdue OWL. (2011). Sentence fragments. Retrieved from https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/purdue_owl.html
- Shoebottom, P. (2012). A guide to learning English. Retrieved from <http://esl.fis.edu/grammar/rules/article.htm>
- Silyn-Roberts, H. (1996). *Writing for science: A practical handbook for science, engineering and technology students*. Auckland, New Zealand: Longman.

University of Reading. (n.d.). Punctuation. Retrieved from

[http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/studyadvice/ Studyresources/Writing/stapunctuation](http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/studyadvice/Studyresources/Writing/stapunctuation).