

Academic English: Writing a Research Article

Social and Behavioural Sciences

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- Arts, Humanities and Law (Catherine Verguts, in collaboration with Marilyn Michels)
- (Bioscience) Engineering (Leen De Boom and Katrien L. B. Deroey)
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A teacher's manual is available upon request.

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EXERCISES

INTRODUCTION: YOU AS A WRITER

Exercise 1

First, answer these questions individually. Then discuss in groups.

1. What type of texts have you written so far (e.g. research articles, letters and emails, scholarly assignments and progress reports)? What type of text will you be writing in the near future?
2. What is your attitude towards writing (negative – neutral – positive)? Do you know why? What exactly do you (dis)like about writing?
3. What have you been praised for or criticized for in the past as a writer?
4. What do you think are the main differences between writing in your mother tongue and in English?
5. What would you like to learn about writing research articles? In other words, what do you expect from this course?

Session aims

- Writing in a sufficiently formal register
 - Adopting an impersonal style
 - Writing clearly and concisely
 - Structuring paragraphs and sentences
 - Clarifying the relationship between points

 - Language focus: Relative clauses
-



To achieve fluent academic discourse, your text needs the correct tone, conciseness and a good flow. These three criteria will be discussed in more detail in this unit.

1.1. Managing Tone

A. Formality

Exercise 1

What makes the following text too informal? Make at least three suggestions to create a more formal style.

(1) What is the purpose of performance management (PM)? **(2)** When we search the literature which exists on HRM, we find that till recently performance management was defined as the key process by which organizations set goals, determine standards, assign and evaluate work, and distribute rewards (Fletcher, 2001). **(3)** But, as far as we know, all of this happened in a structured, formal way. **(4)** In this research note, we are going to show you the importance of informal PM, by looking at some relevant more recent research studies. **(5)** We'll go beyond the formal aspects of PM and take into account that informal aspects can be a lot more relevant (e.g. the relevance of feedback/appraisal, leadership, the purpose of PM, feedback-seeking behaviour, etc.). **(6)** On top of this, we'll try to further work on the relevant implications of PM for future managerial decisions and future research.

Formality is achieved by:

Formal vocabulary

- ✓ Avoid colloquial vocabulary (words and expressions used in everyday spoken language);
- ✓ Limit the use of run on expressions such as 'and so forth' and 'etc.'

Formal grammatical constructions

- ✓ Do not contract words;
- ✓ Be careful about using imperatives and direct questions;
- ✓ Replace phrasal verbs by single-word verbs (exercise 2);
- ✓ Place adverbs with the verb (exercise 3);
- ✓ Write in a more impersonal style (exercise 4).



Reference section: Formal vocabulary and grammar

Exercise 2

A. Choose a verb from the list to replace the less formal words in bold. You may need to make other changes so that the sentences are still grammatical.

attribute	enhance	persist in	explore
incorporate into	enable	arise	implement
concern	dedicated to		

1. This strong claim **is about** the intention behind these artifacts.
2. Covering this period **makes it possible** to study the early school-to-work transition.
3. The *Medieval Mystery* author specifically **gives** one or more symbolic meaning to each element discussed.
4. Some art historians have recognized the problems that **come** from associating objects with meaning.
5. Depending on how, when, and why they are **put into practice**, Western ideas can be a powerful positive force in societies where skeptics might assume that they would have no positive effect.
6. In this wonderfully fruitful period, feminists have been able to **carry on with** their tradition of collaboration across paradigms.

7. First, caring labor and domestic labor are vital parts of any economic system and should be **made a part of** the analysis from the beginning.
8. The July 2002 issue of *Feminist Economics* **is about** issues of “gender, color, caste, and class”.
9. Cervone, Shadel, Smith, and Fiori (2006) present a compelling case that advances in personality science can **make** coherence in the study of self-regulation **better**.
10. We have **looked at** people’s efficacy and control beliefs about each project.

B. Find five words in task 2 A which are American spelling.

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____



Reference section: British and American spelling



Language focus: Adverbial position

In academic writing, single adverbs tend to be placed with the verb (midposition). Compare these examples:

- ✓ School teachers commonly **blame** the poor quality of university teaching, citing factors such as large first-year lectures and the widespread use of inexperienced postgraduate tutors.
- ✓ It **will** inevitably **have been influenced** by the way in which the Iraqi regime was engaged in a sustained programme to try to deceive UN inspectors.
- ✓ Macroeconomic studies **have** strongly **suggested** that there are different consumption characteristics of both across societies.

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- ✓ Macroeconomic studies **have** strongly **suggested** that there are different consumption characteristics of both across societies.

- ✓ These data **are** generally consistent with the results of the logistic analyses which assume that age and social relationships are continuous variables, linearly related to mortality.



Reference section: Adverbial position

Exercise 3

Find a single adverb to replace the words in bold and place it with the verb.

1. **As a rule**, observers who share this view attribute Islamist terrorism to one or more factors.
2. **It appears that** the existence of multi-judge panels adds to the perception that such courts are more likely to be trustworthy.
3. **In essence**, the logic is the same in the panel-decision model.
4. **In effect**, Priest's model is "precedent-free" because of the constancy of the parameter.
5. This suggests that the introduction of random drug testing would increase the perceived certainty of apprehension among this group of cannabis users **in a successful manner**.
6. **Before that**, deterrent effects had been shown to be stronger among offending populations than non-offending populations.
7. In addition to meeting these criteria, information on participation is required **as well**.
8. However, **more and more** feminist writers have recognized that a Marxist approach is often inadequate in explaining female subordination.
9. Part II of this paper describes **in only a couple of paragraphs** the laws of the U.S. that pertain to agricultural biotechnology.

B. Impersonal style



Academic style is typically depersonalized: most fields favour a style in which the personal author disappears behind arguments and analysis.

Exercise 4

Discuss the use of personal pronouns in research articles using the leading questions below. These examples can help you in your discussion.

- ✓ Since most readers of this review can be expected to be familiar with earlier editions of the text, **I** will summarize the differences between the new edition and the second.
- ✓ As **we** will see in chapter 6, ego-identity is probably involved in all or most emotions.
- ✓ In fields where imperatives were present in the main text (five out of ten), **we** recorded interviews with the authors of one of the articles.
- ✓ **We** defined obesity as a Body Mass Index score of 1.64 or greater (95th percentile).
- ✓ **We** have discovered that there are human strengths that act as buffers against mental illness, such as courage, future-mindedness, and optimism.
- ✓ We especially **acknowledge** our editor for his enthusiastic advocacy and stoic patience.

1. Are first person pronouns 'I' and 'we' used in research articles in your field?
2. If they are, in which parts of the article and for which purposes are they used?
3. If they are not, how is their use avoided?



Reference section: Personal pronouns

C. Conciseness



Do not clutter your writing with unnecessary words and repetitions, as this reduces the impact of your message. Delete superfluous words and repetitions and replace wordy formulations.

Compare:

- ✗ The present paper has made available many of the aspects you can use if you want to compare and contrast domain analysis approaches.
- ✓ This paper presents criteria for comparing and contrasting domain analysis approaches.



Reference section: Improving conciseness

Exercise 5

A. Increase conciseness by replacing the words in bold by another word or a pronoun.

1. Dealing with Work Stress and Strain: Is the Perception of Support **of higher Importance** than its Use?
2. This will **bring more clarity in** the relationships between group cohesiveness and performance.
3. This problem is complicated by **the fact that** the acoustic structure of speech differs across different languages.
4. However, **in view of the fact that** a 1993 *Los Angeles Times* poll showed that 63% of Asian Americans in Los Angeles reported discrimination, actual prevalence rates were probably underestimated.
5. From Table 2 **it can be concluded that there is** a very strong positive correlation between smoking and use of alcohol.

6. The drawbacks of this method need to be **taken into consideration**.
7. In the preface, the intended audience for the book is given and the reader discovers that this has changed radically from **the audience** of the earlier editions.

B. Increase conciseness in these sentences.

1. The substantive relevance of attrition modeling comes from the fact that an increase in retention of just one percentage point may result in substantial profit increases.
2. It is assumed that competence integrates the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of practice.
3. There is the possibility that the effects of feedback are underestimated.
4. The application of this classification to a large body of rumours collected during the month of September, 1942, illustrates its value as a descriptive tool.

1.2. Enhancing flow



Your text, paragraphs and sentences should be structured and connected so that your account is easy to follow, clear and logical. This is mainly achieved by:

- Structuring paragraphs and sentences
- Clarifying the relationship between points

A. Structuring paragraphs and sentences

Exercise 6

Look at these paragraphs.

- Are they well organized? Do they have one clear topic?
- How would you change the text to enhance the flow?

Paragraph 1

(1) Like many other European countries, Belgium has a strong policy of incentives for homeownership. **(2)** Tax relief on mortgage payments encourages the acquisition of property. **(3)** Homeownership is culturally accepted, and can be seen as a mechanism for saving for old age (Costa-Font et al., 2009). **(4)** Homeownership for elderly entails some disadvantages. **(5)** Some authors suggest that older people who own a house are asset rich, but income poor (Hancock, 1998). **(6)** Owning a house means having some wealth, but it is quite difficult for the elderly to convert this wealth into cash. **(7)** A study in Australia showed that reverse mortgages, where elderly borrow against the value of their homes, improved their economic well-being. **(8)** This was certainly the case for very elderly single females with a significant housing property (Ong, 2008).

Paragraph 2

(1) Hospital Physician Relationships (HPRs) are an important area of academic research and a main concern of hospital executives, given their impact on the financial success, the quality of provided care and cost-effec-

tive health care delivery. **(2)** In a governmental attempt of improving health care delivery, providers are confronted with pressure to simultaneously contain cost and improve health care quality. **(3)** This has led to the increased importance of HPRs and has instigated debates of the mechanisms for governing this relationship. **(4)** The complex issues related to this debate are reviewed from a theoretical, empirical and conceptual view. **(5)** Priorities for future research are formulated. **(6)** The theoretical frameworks discussed include Agency Theory and Social Exchange Theory. **(7)** Previous empirical research on HPRs is limited and only few studies show the overall picture of governance mechanisms, including both economic and non-economic integration strategies. **(8)** This paper attempts to melt economically and socially related antecedents into a single model. **(9)** This conceptual model indicates that to govern HPRs effectively, more attention should be paid to both economic and non-economic integration strategies and their interaction. **(10)** In addition, more emphasis should be put on financial risk sharing, information and knowledge asymmetry between the medical staff, hospital management and trust. **(11)** The model is developed to inspire future research and to offer several directions for future research.



Each paragraph should have one clear main point, expressed in a **topic sentence**. The topic sentence is typically, but not always, the first sentence of the paragraph. Stating the main topic of your paragraph and staying within its scope enables your readers to follow your argumentation, and is therefore especially important in argumentative and analytical texts.

Exercise 7

Identify the organizational patterns in these four paragraphs.

Paragraph 1

(1) There are two formal ways to conceptualize careers. **(2)** On the one hand, one can treat them as realizations of stochastic processes. **(3)** On this argument, some sort of underlying process exists with certain kinds of

parameters. (4) These parameters may be determining causes, such as an individual's race or education, or they may be preferences that dictate an individual's choices. (5) This stochastic view sees the career as a realization: a career is simply the list of results that the underlying process throws up over succeeding time periods. (6) It is, in that sense, an accident rather than a pattern, an appearance rather than a reality. (7) On the other hand, [...]

Paragraph 2

(1) Education plays a central role in modern labor markets. (2) Hundreds of studies in many different countries and time periods have confirmed that better-educated individuals earn higher wages, experience less unemployment, and work in more prestigious occupations than their less-educated counterparts. (3) Despite the overwhelming evidence of a positive correlation between education and labor market status, social scientists have been cautious to draw strong inferences about the causal effect of schooling. (4) In the absence of experimental evidence, it is very difficult to know whether the higher earnings observed for better-educated workers are caused by their higher education, or whether individuals with greater earning capacity have chosen to acquire more schooling.

Paragraph 3

(1) Invariably linked with this principle of authority is the idea of a *hierarchy* of power relationships. (2) This association between hierarchy and authority is exemplified in Haller's theory that authority is the base of sovereignty, and that sovereignty arises from the natural superiority of one over another. (3) It is reasoned that equals will not obey equals. (4) Hence sovereignty can only be exercised in a state of inequality where the stronger rules. (5) For Haller this represented a universal law of nature—even among the birds of the air and the beasts of the forest the stronger always rules. (6) This assumption of a hierarchy of authority relationships is not only general in traditional European doctrines of sovereignty but also in contemporary conceptions of “popular sovereignty.”