



How to write an A-grade essay

Learn how to write an A-Grade essay with our essential guide to researching, organizing, drafting and editing academic writing.

Designed for both students writing essays and academic researchers who want to write in an informative, readable and clear style. >

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Student

Welcome

We’ve written this guide for students and researchers to improve writing standards. The guide explains how to research, organize, write and edit your next essay or research paper.

Researching your essay means collecting, reading and researching the most relevant sources of material. Once you have gathered your material, you need to select the most relevant to answer your specific essay question. With well-researched information, you can now organize it for the readers benefit. To help the reader, you need to avoid the typical, long-winded abstract or introduction typically found in most academic writing. You should start with the key findings first and then develop your arguments with supporting evidence.

The most difficult part of this guide to follow is to write in a clear, concise and readable style. Good writers use short sentences, active verbs, specific information and a natural language. They cut out every redundant word and replace complex words with simpler words to produce a clear, concise and readable document. Most academic writing fails to follow this advice.



We recommend you use [StyleWriter](#), our copy-editing software, to show you how to edit your essay or research paper into a clear, concise and readable style. The program measures your writing style, shows you where and how to edit each sentence into a clear style. We recommend you use the free, 14-day trial available at our [Editor Software website](#) to review essays you’ve already written and your next essay. Using [StyleWriter](#) to edit your essays will highlight your poor writing habits and show you how to write in the clearest style. If you want to continue using StyleWriter to edit your essays or research papers, contact us for details of educational discounts for individuals and campus-wide licenses.

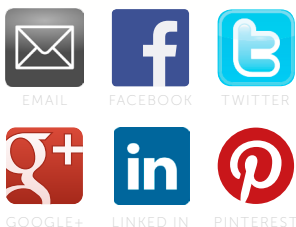
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Universities and colleges can endorse and distribute this guide to all students and academic staff to encourage improved academic writing standards. Contact me for more details.

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Know your essay subject

You must learn to write essays from an excess of knowledge. Go to lectures, read up on the subject in the library, look up the latest academic papers and thoroughly immerse yourself in the essay subject before writing. Without this work to find out the information, you cannot write an essay with authority and command of your essay subject matter.

Here are some tips to help you when you gather this information.

▶ Collect more information than you will use

Although your research will give you a mass of information, you must use only the information that answers the question set. You will probably collect a hundred facts, read a dozen opinions and review three or four of the most recent academic discussions of the subject. However, to answer the question set, you must cut this information down to the key facts, most pertinent opinions and perhaps refer to only the most relevant discussion papers.

▶ Read primary sources first

If you were writing an essay on the Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, you could not write a good one without first reading the play. Too often, students ignore the primary source of material. If you are writing an essay on Rousseau's philosophy, there's no excuse for not reading the original source contract rather than a critique of Rousseau's writings. Studying the primary sources of information let you assess other information written on the subject.



Use a systematic way of taking notes

You need to have a method of note-taking. No matter how you record the information, cards, notebook or in a computer database, bear the following in mind.

▶ Use a one-word or two-word key to each note.

This lets you sort them later and group related information together.

▶ Distinguish between primary and secondary sources.

An example of a primary source would be Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*. A secondary source would be a critique of *Das Kapital* by another author.

▶ Distinguish between facts and opinions.

You must base your essay around facts. Without key facts you cannot present your arguments or assess other people's opinions.

▶ Look out for the ten key facts that are the backbone to your essay.

What information documents the subject and develops the ideas and arguments you are going to use?

▶ Look for quotable quotes.

Too often, lazy students quote chunks of text from documents, rather than selecting the most important thought or view in fewer words.

▶ Don't write out extracts word for word.

Your notes are notes—not a copy of the words in the reference books.

▶ Keep a record of all information sources.

A record of each information source:

- ▶ Lets you find your source research material quickly.
- ▶ Helps you write up footnotes and reference lists.

Without key facts you cannot present your arguments or assess other people's opinions



Don't use your introduction as a warm-up — make it direct, relevant and impressive so it sets the tone for the rest of the essay

Structure your essay to help your reader

All documents need a start, a middle and an end. Traditionally, we think of the introduction, body and conclusion as the key parts of an essay. Logically, this helps us set the context for the essay (introduction), present the facts and develop the arguments (body) and summarize the main points or the answer to the question set (conclusion).

Writing an essay — introduction

This introduces the main idea of your essay and draws the reader into the subject. A good introduction gets to the heart of the subject and captures the interest of the reader. It should:

- Summarize the issues to show an understanding of the question.
- Look at the issues raised by the question.
- Outline the main issues you intend presenting.
- Present the method of research or experiment.
- Summarize the essay.
- Answer the question set.

Most students write poor introductions that needlessly repeat information and turn off the reader with too much background information. If you want to gain a top grade for your essay, you have to start strongly and gain your reader's attention immediately. This means concentrating on either writing a powerful summary of the essay or directly answering the question set.

In trying to gain the reader's attention, you do not need to say anything controversial or mind-blowing. All you need to do is concentrate on writing the most relevant information.

Don't write a mystery novel

Putting a powerful summary or directly answering the question set at the start of the essay lets your reader assess the information and arguments as you present them. The standard student essay presents information, opinions and arguments, but does not tell the reader what they mean until the end. This turns an essay into a mystery novel with the illuminating conclusion only apparent as the reader turns the last page. Avoid this temptation and spill the beans. By letting your reader know your conclusions at the beginning of the essay, he or she can assess and evaluate the evidence as you present it.

Make your introduction factual

Too often, students write a warm-up first paragraph. Phrases such as: *The purpose of the essay is to examine the various contributory factors leading to ...* or *In this essay I shall examine the methodology used to assess ...* usually give little information. Such phrases could introduce any essay and do not present any information. For example:

WEAK OPENING PARAGRAPH

ORIGINAL

The purpose of this essay is to examine the effect of Einstein's theories in the historical context of accepted propositions and laws of motion and the effect these theories had on current thinking in the field of physics. In so doing, the author will show that despite opposition to Einstein's theories when first published, these were indeed special works that reshaped current thinking to replace the ideas propounded by Galileo and Newton. even to the point of its destruction.

STRONGER OPENING PARAGRAPH

REDRAFT

Einstein's Theory of Special Relativity and Theory of General Relativity reshaped the world of physics by contradicting the existing laws of motion proposed by Galileo and developed by Newton. Although Einstein faced great opposition when proposing his theories, his work reshaped the thinking of future generations of physicists.

Use the journalistic technique of basing your information around the **Five-Ws** in writing: **Who, What, When, Where** and **Why**. These will help you keep to solid information.

Remember, don't use your introduction as a warm-up — make it direct, relevant and impressive so it sets the tone for the rest of the essay.

Use the journalistic technique of basing your information around the Five-Ws in writing: **Who, What, When, Where** and **Why**

Writing an essay body

This consists of supporting paragraphs, logically arranged to develop your main ideas. List the points you wish to develop, place each point in its own paragraph, and expand on each point with supporting facts, details and examples. Each paragraph should:

- clearly present the relevant information,
- discuss and evaluate information and opinions, and
- develop an argument based on the information and a review of opinions.

This is 80–90 percent of the essay and must satisfy the reader’s appetite. To do this, the body of the essay must reflect solid research, show a clear understanding of the subject, and develop your points logically.

Writing an essay conclusion

The conclusion draws together the ideas and information presented in the essay. It summarizes or restates the main idea, argument or findings.

The conclusion often:

- gives a clear answer or restatement of the answer to the central question,
- summarizes the main points in the essay,
- repeats the key information and arguments, and
- points out what the evidence suggests.

The conclusion is vital. It is the last impression the reader has of the essay. Use it well, making sure your essay doesn’t fizzle out. Make it a strong statement, confidently answering the question, summarizing the position, and reviewing the topic. If you are in doubt what to put in the conclusion, think about the key information or argument the essay has presented and repeat it in a short, direct form.



Don't fall into the trap of writing all you know about the subject

Answer the essay question

Make sure that you answer the question when writing an essay. If you are asked to assess, describe or discuss make sure you do assess, describe or discuss the essay question. When you look at the question set, concentrate on the key verb. For example:

| QUESTION | MEANING |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Analyze | Break down into main ideas and discuss, examine or interpret the proposition. |
| Compare | Examine and identify similarities and differences, but concentrate on similarities. |
| Contrast | Examine differences and explain their relevance. |
| Compare & Contrast | Examine both similarities and differences. |
| Criticize | Analyze and evaluate the subject critically, looking for weak points in the proposition. You may need to come to a judgment or conclusion based on your analysis and evaluation. |
| Define | Describe, explain and set the limits of the proposition. |
| Describe | Give a precise picture of the characteristics and qualities of the subject. |
| Discuss | Debate the pros and cons of the issue in the question, paying particular attention to areas of controversy or conflict. |
| Evaluate | Assess the proposition by looking at the information and expert opinion. Come to your own conclusions based on the evidence that supports the proposition. |

| | |
|------------------|---|
| Use | Use examples, analogies, and comparisons to explain the proposition. |
| Interpret | Explain the meaning of the proposition, commenting on its effect and describing its relationship to data. Give examples. Evaluate its validity. |
| Outline | Describe main ideas, characteristics, information or events. |
| Prove | Support with facts to agree with the proposition. |
| State | Produce the exact information asked. |
| Summarize | Give a brief account, concentrating of the conclusions reached from the proposition. |
| Trace | Describe and analyze the order of events or progress. |

▶ WARNING: Don't fall into the trap of writing all you know about the subject
— 70 percent will be irrelevant and will not earn you any marks. You'll also find the irrelevant material detracts from the essential information contained in the essay.

Show your analytical skills

Unlike the compositions you wrote at school, you are no longer just presenting information. Most college essays are argumentative essays and you must show your analytical skills. In order to write a persuasive essay you still need to collect and present your information. But you must also work out implications, assess its relevance, judge the results, evaluate the evidence, criticize and debate the essay topic. You'll find you need to critically research propositions to decide if the evidence justifies the conclusions or if you need to question the assumptions underlying a new theory. In other words, you must show that you can think clearly and reason logically.

In most subjects, your tutors are not looking for the correct answer. If you are discussing an issue or describing an historical event, there's no one way of answering or one line of reasoning to follow. You may even disagree with the conventionally accepted view on a subject — although in doing so, you should assess and deal with opposing views.

Your tutors may agree or disagree with the views you present, but they should not mark you down for taking a standpoint. Disagreement will not result in a poor grade, writing a bad essay will. Whatever line you argue, you will gain a good grade if you back it up with firm evidence, logical reasoning and sound arguments.

**You must show
that you can think
clearly and reason
logically**

Most students write to impress the tutor with a learned tone that's old-fashioned and full of stylistic problems

Write in a Clear Style

Many students fall into the trap of writing in an unnatural style. They mistakenly feel they should adopt an academic air, resulting in a dull, long-winded and boring essay. They write to impress the tutor with a learned tone that's old-fashioned and full of stylistic problems.

Does this sound like your first experience writing a college essay? You look at the question set, go to the library and photocopy sheets of material on the subject, spend hours anguishing over the subject, write a formal, academic-sounding essay to impress the tutor with your newly gained knowledge. You count your words and find you've only drafted 2,200 of the required 3,000-word minimum. So you go over your paper, adding some quotations, expanding your points and padding out your style to get to the all-important word count. The result is a C-grade at best. Why? Because you have fallen into the classic errors of most students:

- ▶ You are writing to impress the tutor rather than express your information and ideas.
- ▶ You think academic-sounding prose means good marks.
- ▶ You are confusing length with quality.

Your tutor wants a clear and concise style so he or she can concentrate on the facts and arguments. Here is the difference between the styles:

ACADEMIC STYLE

ORIGINAL

The experiments were conducted in order to determine the lowest possible temperature at which a reaction could occur. It was shown that 30 degrees Fahrenheit was the lowest ambient temperature necessary for the chemical to change from a solid to a liquid state.

CLEAR STYLE

REDRAFT

The experiments show heating the chemical to 30 degrees Fahrenheit consistently caused it to melt.



ACADEMIC STYLE

ORIGINAL

The preliminary analysis of the results that were first gathered showed to a certain degree there was a propensity of consumers' expenditure to decrease by a greater percentage than the increase in price differentials. Subsequent research of data collected over a significant time period lessened the consistency of this finding unless there were exceptional circumstances.

The best writing style shows the author is on top of the subject, understands its meaning and writes about it with confidence

CLEAR STYLE

REDRAFT

The first two surveys showed consumers cut spending by an average of 12 percent for every 10 percent rise in prices. Six follow-up surveys found that unless there was scarcity or rationing, consumers continued to be price sensitive.

The best writing style shows the author is on top of the subject, understands its meaning and writes about it with confidence. The best writing does not need ways to dress up ideas in a complicated or abstract style. Good writers use short sentences, active verbs, specific information and a natural language. They use examples and analogies to make writing varied, interesting and memorable. They cut out every redundant word and replace complex words with simpler words to produce a clear, concise and readable document.



If there's one piece of advice on writing style you should follow, it's to use active verbs throughout your essays

Use active verbs

Using active verbs is essential if you want to write with a direct authoritative style. Instead of using the impersonal passive verbs and third person viewpoint, you should write with strong, active verbs.

Almost every authority on writing encourages you to use active verbs. Here's some typical advice to authors publishing research papers for The American Society for Testing Materials.

"As most everyone has agreed for some time now, use the third person in a paper not only adds nothing to scientific objectivity, it renders the paper gutless and lifeless ... Scientists of the 19th century such as Darwin and Huxley wrote sensibly and clearly in the first person and turned out some very respectable prose. Let us begin anew ... use active verbs."

Look at these examples:

PASSIVE:

ORIGINAL

An improvement in quality has been made leading to the decision being taken to raise the standard test so a higher mark means the same success rate being accepted. (29 WORDS)

ACTIVE:

REDRAFT

As quality improved, the standard test rose, leading to a higher standard mark to gain the same acceptable success rate. (20 WORDS)

Notice the passive example sounds academic but takes an extra nine words to say the same information. It is no more objective than the alternative with active verbs. Although we naturally speak with active verbs, even when discussing academic subjects, the traditional academic writing style litters writing with unnecessary passive verbs. Any sentence can be either active or passive. It is your choice as the author.

Here's another example:

PASSIVE:

ORIGINAL

Most writers know that copying another's work word for word without giving the author credit is considered plagiarism. But it is often assumed that this practice is considered cheating only when long paragraphs are involved – paragraphs or whole pages. An honest paraphrase, however, is one in which the ideas of the source are stated in the writer's own words. (59 WORDS)

ACTIVE:

REDRAFT

Most writers know that copying another's work word for word without giving the author credit is plagiarism. But they assume this is cheating only when they copy long paragraphs or whole pages. An honest paraphrase, however, is one written in the writer's own words. (44 WORDS)

Whatever the subject of the essay, you can write with active verbs to make your writing style more direct, clear and forceful. If there's one piece of advice on writing style you should follow, it's to use active verbs throughout your essays.

Keep your essay sentence length under control

Sentence length is crucial to good essay writing. Almost everything written by good writers has an average sentence length between 15 and 20 words. This does not mean writing every sentence the same length. Good writers naturally vary the length and rhythm of their sentences. They balance longer sentences with shorter ones, but they keep their average sentence length below 20 words.

Follow this advice:

- ▶ keep your average sentence length between 15 to 20 words,
- ▶ cut down long sentences, and
- ▶ vary the length of your sentences

An average of between 15 to 20 words for essays and research papers helps produce a clear and readable style. It's the same average as well-respected publications such as *New Scientist* or the *Economist* consistently produce. Below 15 words and there's a danger your writing will become too choppy and disjointed. As you go above the 20-word average, your document becomes more difficult to read. An average sentence length of 25 words is far too high.

Here's an example of a 102-word paragraph with an average sentence length 34 words.

ORIGINAL

ORIGINAL

At first, Einstein faced great opposition when he came up with his radical new theory because the previous laws of motion proposed by Galileo and expanded upon by Newton had remained valid for over two hundred years. By mathematically manipulating these previous laws of motion, physicists in the nineteenth century were able to explain such phenomena as the flow of the ocean, the orbits of planets around the sun, the fall of rocks, and the random behavior of molecules in gases. However, it would not be long before the cement in the foundation of Newtonian and Galilean physics would begin to crumble.

SENTENCE LENGTHS: 37, 44, 21 = 102

AVERAGE = 34



REDRAFT

REDRAFT

Einstein faced great opposition with his radical theory. By mathematically manipulating these laws of motion, nineteenth-century physicists explained the flow of the ocean, the orbits of planets around the sun, the fall of rocks, and the random behavior of molecules in gases. The previous laws of motion, proposed by Galileo and expanded by Newton had remained valid for over two hundred years. However, soon the cement in the foundation of Newtonian and Galilean physics would crumble.

SENTENCE LENGTH: 8, 34, 20, 14 = 76

AVERAGE = 19

An average of
between 15 to 20
words for essays
and research
papers helps
produce a clear
and readable style

Make sure you do not allow long sentences — over 40 words — to creep into your writing style. Most academic writing contains too many long, even mammoth sentences. Faced with long sentences, readers often give up halfway through or forget the start of the sentence by the time they reach the end. The more words in a sentence, the harder it becomes to understand. By comparison, it's difficult to write an unclear sentence if it is short. Edit long sentences by cutting out wasted words or by breaking them into two or more shorter sentences.

Finally, you need to vary your sentences. A sentence length average of 18 words is fine, but if 90 percent of your sentences are 16, 17, 18 or 19 words long, your style will lack variety and interest. You should balance longer sentences, say up to 35 words with shorter sentences, some under five words, some phrased as direct questions, and still get an average sentence length of between 15 to 20 words.



Replacing complex words with shorter, everyday words helps make your essay easier to read

Use simple words rather than complex words when writing an essay

Keep your writing style simple. Follow the standard rule in all editing: prefer the simpler word to the complex word. This means writing extra or more rather than additional; help rather than assistance; use rather than utilize. Although you might need specialist or technical words, depending on your subject, you should choose the simpler word instead of the more difficult word whenever you can.

Your essay should be both interesting and also easy to read. You can make your essay read much better if you cut down on heavy words. The traditional advice is to cut down on three-syllable and four-syllable words.

Take this example:

EXAMPLE

This **demonstrates** an **understanding** of the history, **diversity** and **commonality** of the peoples of the nation, the **reality** of human **interdependence**, the need for global **cooperation**, and a **multicultural perspective**.

A more readable style, would be:

EXAMPLE

This shows we understand why history and common beliefs in each nation matters as across the world, people need to work together and respect their different cultural backgrounds.

Breaking the habit of using heavy-sounding words and replacing them with shorter, everyday words helps make the essay easier to read and encourages you to explain your ideas in more specific terms.

Avoid jargon when writing an essay

You should always write an essay to show your understanding of the subject. There's a great temptation to pepper your essay with the impressive sounding vocabulary of experts. Look out for the overuse of noun phrases, acronyms and abbreviations, non-words and unnecessary specialist language in essays. Here's an example showing how bad it can get.

EXAMPLE OF ACADEMIC GOBBLEDYGOOK

EXAMPLE

In situationist projects, the methods of instrumental science are inverted and replaced with a disturbing desire to make people suffer in order to experience the sensual, essentially alienated, narcissistic aspects of modern life. The poetics of weathering, mortality, etc, became, in situationist practice, as reactionary nihilist lament upon the death of reciprocity between individual and common creativity.

We can all recognize this as impressive-sounding nonsense. However, there's a difficult line to draw here. Does this mean you should avoid technical language? No. You can and need to use technical terms. Here's an example with the technical terms highlighted.

EXAMPLE

HIV is now becoming increasingly under control. However, the solution has been to treat patients with toxic drugs. The first effective drug was AZT, leading to a new class of drugs known as nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors. The drug invented at Yale — d4T is in the same class as AZT.

Patients received a cocktail of AZT and d4T and a protease inhibitor in a treatment called highly active antiretroviral therapy or Haart for short. This treatment does not rid the body of the virus but simply keeps the viral load low and stop it damaging the immune system. Because the virus mutates quickly if the dosage is not high enough, the patients must take the drugs at the right time in the correct quantity or there is a danger the virus in the body will develop resistance. The challenge for the pharmaceutical industry is to develop new drugs to match the threat of the mutating virus.



Tutors will not give high grades to essays they cannot fathom or have to work at to understand

To a non-medical person, the words highlighted in red would be jargon. But here the writer sensibly uses accepted medical terms to describe the information. HIV, AZT and d4T are acceptable because HIV is now universally recognized, AZT is a well-known medical drug and d4T is a product name. The phrases nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors, protease inhibitor and highly active antiretroviral therapy are not jargon, but the precise terms. The phrases, viral load, immune system and mutating virus are all acceptable medical terms. However, what makes these all these terms acceptable, are three overriding considerations.

- The reader, the tutor, has an understanding of medical terms.
- The writer is not using these phrases to impress, but to explain and describe.
- The style of the rest of the paragraph is specific and clear, with short sentences, active verbs and no wasted words.

There's a great temptation in essays to show off your knowledge, leading to a stilted and abstract academic style.

EXAMPLE OF ABSTRACT ACADEMIC STYLE

EXAMPLE

Conceptualizing the multiple relations into which they enter, and which they mediate, through Serres' notion of the parasite, the manifold and complex shifts between the semiotic and the material, the intersubjective and the interobjective (and permutations thereof), and the broader implications of this analysis for the theorization of the object will be explored.

It certainly sounds impressive. You'll find many academic experts write this way. You study what they have to say, but find it hard work to understand just what points they are trying to make. The result is usually the same. You have to dismiss the ideas because you cannot draw them out of the author's complex style. The author, no matter how good his or her ideas, has failed to communicate.

It's the same for tutors reading 30 essays. They are not going to award you a high mark because it sounds impressive if they cannot understand what you are saying. Tutors will not give high grades to essays they cannot fathom or have to work at to understand. They will give you a high mark for good information, well-reasoned ideas, presented in the clearest style.

Avoid abstract terms when writing an essay — be as specific as you can

Develop the skill of writing in specifics

You must constantly fight against your style becoming too abstract or difficult to read. You can do this by making your information specific, keeping your sentences under control, using active verbs and giving examples. Here's a typical example:

EXAMPLE

This **demonstrates** an **understanding** of the history, **diversity** and **commonality** of the peoples of the nation, the **reality** of human **interdependence**, the need for global **cooperation**, and a **multicultural perspective**.

Guard against this style and try to develop the skill of writing in specifics. What does diversity and commonality of peoples mean? What is the reality of human interdependence? What does the writer mean by global cooperation? Every reader will have a different idea of what multicultural perspective means.

Whatever your subject, edit your writing to keep your style as clear as possible. Here's an example from an engineering student describing the need to limit the transfer of data during naval combat.

ORIGINAL

All combat **systems** installed on ships and fighters must have a working **limiter device**. The limiter device regulates the **direct interface** pilots have with their ships. Without such regulation, ships **systems** as well as the ship's pilot would overload each other with massive amounts of **data transfer**. When in normal **operation** the **limiter device** keeps the ship-pilot **interfaces to a suitable level**. In rare cases of emergency, the **limiter** can be set to allow **hyper accelerated interfacing**. Any ship running with an **open-ended limiter** will have **multiplied abilities** but will take constant damage even to the point of its destruction.

REDRAFT

All ships and fighters must have a working limiter to control communication during combat. This regulates the communication to stop vast amounts of data swamping either the pilot's combat screens or the ship's command center. In an emergency, the limiter can allow either the pilot or the ship to transmit more information. But without a limit on transferring combat data, there is an ever-present danger of the enemy succeeding in destroying the ship the fighters are defending.

Although the redraft has to use the word limiter twice, cutting down on words such as device, interface and system and non-specific phrases such as hyper accelerated interfacing, open-ended limiter and multiplied abilities, the style becomes clearer and more readable without loss of content.



Each time you define another abbreviation, you set a memory test for your reader

Keep abbreviations under control

The conventional advice when using abbreviations in your essay is to write them out in full with the abbreviated form you intend to use later in the text. Although this is better than no explanation, these defined abbreviations are often the ones to avoid. Each time you define another abbreviation, you set a memory test for your reader. We have tested this by asking people to read a two-page document with two abbreviations explained on the first page. When they turned the page and read the abbreviations, we asked them what they stood for. Only one person got one correct answer — a 95% failure rate. When writing an essay, keep your abbreviations under control.

Here are the rules for using abbreviations when writing an essay:

- 1 Use the abbreviation without explanation, if everyone knows its meaning.
 - IBM, USA, Washington DC, BMW, PhD

Note: avoid using an abbreviation if it's commonly understood as one term and you mean another. For example, do not use PC for politically correct or for Privy Council as most people think of it as meaning personal computer.

- 2 Use the shortened word form to avoid most abbreviation:
 - Kennedy Space Center becomes Center on the second use — not KSC
-

- 3 Use the ten to twenty most common and understood abbreviations in your field without explanation to an audience (your tutor) you know is familiar with them. Prefer the full form and the shortened word form when writing to wider audiences.
-

- 4 Use common sense. If the abbreviation is the better shortened form and causes no problems for any of your readers, use it freely.
-

- 5 Limit your use of shortened forms to two or three in any document, no matter what its length.
-

- 6 If you use a word processor, use your spelling checker to find acronyms and abbreviations — it constantly reminds you not to overuse them.
-

So, when you draft your essay, use Accident Data Recorder shorten it to Recorder rather than ADR when you use it later. Write alt in the full form of altitude, prefer satellite communications rather than sat comms and sea level to SL. You'll find no one misses your shortened forms and your writing style will sound more natural.



Avoid padding in your essay

Make your writing style much stronger by making every word count

Make your writing style much stronger by making every word count. Every word in your sentence, paragraph and document must earn its place. When you edit your document, assume you can delete around 20 percent of the words. Here's an example, where the original 84-word paragraph becomes 40 per cent shorter by cutting out wasted words.

ORIGINAL

ORIGINAL

Some people are predicting, because of the length of Internet calls and the amount of bandwidth the calls take, that one day in the not so distant future, the entire telephone network, or at least a great portion of it, will cease to function, and all telephone calls will fail to connect. This idea is referred to by some as the "Gridlock Theory." Others advise that steps can be taken to avoid such a disaster, such as upgrading telephone lines and limiting Internet use. (84 WORDS)

REDRAFT

REDRAFT

Many predict gridlock on the Internet as telephone networks collapse under the weight of higher traffic outstripping available bandwidth. Others believe measures such as upgrading telephone lines and limiting Internet use can avoid the disaster Gridlock Theory suggests. (48 WORDS)

Two key writing techniques can help you cut out padding.

1. Write most of your sentences in the 'Who-Does-What' order.

Using the **Who-Does-What** order means starting the sentence with the main subject, followed by a strong active verb. For example:

PADDED:

ORIGINAL

This idea is referred to by scientists as the Gridlock Theory. (11 WORDS)

The Who-Does-What order will cut out wasted words and encourage you to write your sentences with active verbs

The **Who-Does-What** order places scientists first, followed by the verb refer. This shortens the sentence to:

CONCISE:

REDRAFT

Scientists refer to this as Gridlock Theory. (7 WORDS)

The **Who-Does-What** order will cut out wasted words and encourage you to write your sentences with active verbs.

2. Write with specific nouns and action verbs close together.

This technique takes the idea of **Who-Does-What** rule one step further. You may have noticed the **Who-Does-What** technique encourages you to start your sentence with the main noun and follow it with the most important verb.

Nouns (the **scientist, oxygen**) are the content and verbs (**proved, leaked**) the actions in your writing. Adjectives add to or describe the content (the **difficult** experiment) and adverbs qualify the actions (the **thoroughly** reworked experiment). The other parts of the sentence glue together the nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs. Let's take a simple example:

EXAMPLE

Lawson quickly criticized Lovell because of his unscientific investigation into the pollution in the river.

NOUNS: LAWSON, LOVELL, INVESTIGATION, POLLUTION, RIVER

VERB: CRITICIZED

ADVERBS: QUICKLY

ADJECTIVES: UNSCIENTIFIC

GLUE: BECAUSE OF HIS, INTO THE, IN THE

The key words for meaning are the nouns and the verb. We can write: **Lawson criticized Lovell's investigation [of] river pollution.** The meaning is in the nouns (content) and verbs (action). Although you need adverbs and adjectives for more description — we turned the noun **river** into an adjective (river pollution), they are not essential. The words of least meaning are the glue words — those present to hold the other parts of speech together in a coherent sentence.



To write a strong style you must keep use specific nouns and action verbs close together

To write a strong style you must keep specific nouns and action verbs close together. This means cutting the glue words and questioning whether you need the qualifying adjectives and adverbs. If you need adverbs or adjectives, you must place them next to the words they qualify. This changes our original 15-word sentence to eight words.

ORIGINAL

Lawson quickly criticized Lovell because of his unscientific investigation into the pollution in the river.

REDRAFT

Lawson criticized Lovell's unscientific investigation of river pollution.

The quickest way to learn this technique is to cut the glue words cementing your nouns and verbs together and placing any necessary adjectives and adverbs close to the words they qualify. Look how many words we can cut from this sentence:

ORIGINAL

What I propose to do, therefore, is to identify the equivalent conditions in the two experiments and then go on to explain the reasons for the importance of these conditions. (30 WORDS)

REDRAFT

I propose to identify the equivalent conditions in both experiments and explain their importance. (14 WORDS)

The redraft packs the nouns and verbs together and cuts out redundant words.



Think of your
topic sentences
as the headline to
each paragraph

Use topic sentences when writing an essay

Writing topic sentences at the start of each paragraph helps your reader get to the crux of your message immediately. The topic sentences in your essay contain the key information with every other sentence explaining or adding to the topic sentence. If a sentence does not develop from the topic sentence, you should move it or cut it out.

Think of your topic sentences as the headline to each paragraph, announcing the new point you want to make.

ORIGINAL

When it comes to new products, few businesses are more perilous than making civil aircraft. Aircraft can cost millions to develop. Boeing gambled the company when it launched the 747, spending \$2 billion on the project, 2.5 times the value of the firm. Twice as big and efficient as anything else in the air, the jumbo has earned the Seattle company \$20 billion in profit since they first flew, 30 years ago almost to the day.

By writing the main point in the first sentence, your reader quickly gets the message. The supporting facts and views follow logically from the first topic sentence.

Link your essay ideas and paragraphs

Make sure that each sentence flows logically. The traditional way to do this when writing an essay is to use connecting words or phrases, often conjunctions (linking words) such as 'although', 'because', 'so', 'moreover', or 'therefore'. In this way, you build your logic and arguments. These connections come in simple and complex forms.

Simple connections

also, although, and, as, because, but, despite, first, however, if, next, now, second, then, therefore, third, until

Although we sometimes need words to show the logic and connection between sentences and paragraphs, many connecting words make your style more complex and academic than necessary. For example:

Complex connections

accordingly, as you are aware, consequently, for this reason, furthermore, hence, in addition, inasmuch as, likewise, more specifically, moreover, nevertheless, nonetheless

Here's a comprehensive list of connections. Try to limit yourself to the simple connections shown in black. Try to avoid those shown in red as they detract from a clear, concise style.

| TYPE | SIMPLE — RECOMMENDED | COMPLEX — AVOID |
|-------------------|--|--|
| Addition | again, and, besides, finally, first, next, second, then, third | further, furthermore, in addition, in addition to, lastly, moreover |
| Comparison | after all, against, although, but, by comparison, compared to, however, in contrast, meanwhile, where, yet | although this may be true, balanced against this, conversely, in the meantime, nevertheless, nonetheless, on the contrary, on the other hand, vis-à-vis, whereas |
| Conclusion | therefore, in conclusion, in summary, to conclude, to summarize | accordingly, as a result, as has been shown, consequently, thus |
| Emphasis | always, forever, naturally, never | absolutely, certainly, definitely, emphatically, extremely, in fact, indeed, obviously, positively, undeniably |
| Example | for example, for instance, such as, that is | e.g., i.e., in this case, in this situation, on this occasion |
| Exception | despite, however, sometimes | in spite of, nevertheless, of |
| Proof | because, besides, if | evidently, for the same reason, furthermore, in fact, indeed, moreover, obviously |
| Sequence | after, afterward, afterwards, before, finally, first, following, later, next, now, previously, soon, then, therefore | and so forth, at this point, at this time, concurrently, consequently, hence, subsequently, thus |
| Time | after, afterward, afterwards, and then, finally, first, formerly, immediately, later, next, previously, second, soon, then | firstly, secondly, thereafter, thirdly |

Look at this example with too many complex connecting words or phrases. Don't you think the style looks false and unnatural?

ORIGINAL

ORIGINAL

Although this may be true, Krammer argues growth in the economy depends mainly on higher government spending. Accordingly, he argues that direct investment, whatever its source leads to growth. Indeed, Krammer states that the circulation of money in the economy is the key consideration when forecasting growth, that is to say, how the government controls interest rates, government debt. This is despite the fact that most economists believe the picture is more complex. Consequently, James and Proctor, in Issue 95 of *New Economics*, dismiss Krammer's views as "failing to look at all traditional growth theory," and thus failing to explain historical growth when government spending was low or negative.

REDRAFT

REDRAFT

But, Krammer argues growth in the economy depends mainly on higher government spending. He argues that direct investment, whatever its source leads to growth. Krammer states that the circulation of money in the economy is the key consideration when forecasting growth — how the government controls interest rates and government debt. Most economists believe the picture is more complex. James and Proctor, in Issue 95 of *New Economics*, dismiss Krammer's views as "failing to look at all traditional growth theory," and therefore failing to explain historical growth when government spending was low or negative.

Use the connections to make sure your reader can follow the flow of information, ideas and arguments within sentences, from sentence to sentence and between paragraphs. But don't let too many connections creep into your writing and keep to the simple ones recommended.



**Good writing
uses specific
information the
reader can picture**

Use examples in your essay to explain difficult points

Good writing uses specific information the reader can picture. Drawing examples, illustrations or analogies into your essay writing makes it more interesting, readable and stylish. Look at the following paragraph.

EXAMPLE

For their surface area, insects weigh very little. A beetle, falling from a high altitude, quickly achieves terminal velocity: air resistance prevents it from falling very fast, and, after alighting on the ground, it will walk away, apparently none the worse for the experience. The same is true of small mammals. A mouse can be dropped down a thousand-foot mine shaft and, if the ground is soft, will arrive dazed but essentially unharmed.

The specific and visual examples of a beetle falling to the ground or a mouse dropped down a thousand-foot mine shaft conjure up vivid pictures in the reader's mind. This is the opposite style to so much academic writing. Use examples to explain difficult information, abstract ideas and theories. You'll soon see power they have to make your essay stand out as a model of clarity and clear thinking.

Use quotations in your essay writing

Your essay should reflect wide reading and solid research. You can show this by working short, specific and relevant quotations from experts. When you quote material in your essay, make sure it:

- ▶ is relevant to the point you are making,
- ▶ advances the argument or point you are making,
- ▶ is short,
- ▶ flows with the text of the message, and
- ▶ has a proper reference either as a footnote or in your bibliography.

Edit your essay draft

Editing your draft is an important last stage in writing your essay. Editing lets you check, cut, simplify, polish, review, change and proofread your work. Good essay editing can turn a B-Grade essay into an A-Grade essay — indeed — it's often the difference between the grades.

Here's an example of editing an essay. The redraft uses the ideas of clear writing you have just read. You'll see most editing cuts wasted words to put the student's ideas into sharper focus making the writing style clearer and more authoritative.

ORIGINAL:

ORIGINAL

Many authors receive their inspiration for writing their literature from outside sources. The idea for a story could come from family, personal experiences, history, or even their own creativity. For authors that choose to write a book based on historical events, the inspiration might come from their particular viewpoint on the event that they want to dramatize. George Orwell and Charles Dickens wrote *Animal Farm* and *A Tale of Two Cities*, respectively, to express their disillusionment with society and human nature. *Animal Farm*, written in 1944, is a book that tells the animal fable of a farm in which the farm animals revolt against their human masters. It is an example of social criticism in literature in which Orwell satirized the events in Russia after the Bolshevik Revolution. *A Tale of Two Cities* also typifies this kind of literature. Besides the central theme of love, is another prevalent theme, that of a revolution gone bad. He shows us that, unfortunately, human nature causes us to be vengeful and, for some of us, overly ambitious. Both these books are similar in that both describe how, even with the best of intentions, our ambitions get the best of us. Both authors also demonstrate that violence and the Machiavellian attitude of "the ends justifying the means" are deplorable.

(215 WORDS)



REDRAFT:

REDRAFT

Authors may gain inspiration from history – where they describe, interpret and dramatize it from their own viewpoint. Both George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* and Charles Dickens’ *Tale of Two Cities* express their disillusionment with society and human nature. Orwell wrote *Animal Farm* in 1944 as a social criticism and satirical comment on the Bolshevik Revolution – showing farm animals revolting against their human masters. Dickens’ *Tale of Two Cities* uses the French Revolution to show how human nature is vengeful and often too ambitious. Both books describe how our ambitions get the best of us and that violence and the Machiavellian attitude of the “the ends justifying the means” are deplorable.

(110 WORDS)

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