

Student Article

A foundation for writing your first academic essay

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There is a feeling of frustration when trying to recall a word, which seems to be close, but unreachable. It seems to happen much more often when it comes to using a second language, in this case, English, especially for academic purposes. One way to deal with this situation is to try to rephrase the whole sentence. Another option is to write the word using simple language and after, use a thesaurus to find a suitably academic synonym. However, there are nuances with nearly every word in the language, so they do not always collocate well and keep the same meaning when put together. Thus, it is not always the most ideal approach. This article will discuss the process of writing an essay and it will focus on how to start writing especially when it is a new experience for a student.

Firstly, this essay will take an in-depth look at the academic writing process in English. The main problem, from the perspective of Russian students, is that we do not write essays at school. We typically write compositions after finishing reading a book, such as the following based on the title "Crime and Punishment" by Dostoevsky:

"What pushed Raskolnikov to kill the old pawnbroker?" Do not worry, this happens right at the beginning of the book, so it is not a spoiler...

Creativity is not expected at school, whereas a good essay in university in the U.K is a combination of one's own thoughts and prior research. Exploring resources for arguments and finding examples for an essay is another thing Russian students are not normally asked to do. All the information and ideas are provided by the teacher. Students are merely expected to show that they have listened. On the contrary, when writing an essay at university in the U.K, every student is expected to provide evidence that they have understood and interacted with information.

Personally, I have two states of mind when I am writing, whether it is in Russian or English. Either I have no idea what I want to say, or my thoughts are too fast for my fingers. Thus, I either agonize over every word and achieve nothing, or turn the paper into messy

ungrammatical notes, which can be understood only by me and needs a general edit. Neither of these situations is very helpful for writing the first couple of essays. This is why, from my observation, many undergraduate students have difficulties writing essays in English.

With experience, it becomes easier to put all thoughts together. As far as I am concerned, the first stage is to unpick the title. Then, you need to make a plan with bullet points and spend some time reading in order to find support and evidence for arguments. The next step is to connect all your ideas and concepts, so your thoughts eventually appear to flow logically. Essentially, this makes it easier for the reader to follow.

Some students find it difficult to start with an introduction, while others struggle to write a conclusion. Thus, it is better to begin with the part you find easiest to start with because you know what you want to say, and use this as a base to develop other thoughts. When your brain has warmed up, writing becomes less intimidating than when you are sitting in front of a blank page. However, it is important to remember that writing an academic essay does not work in the same way as creative writing when the only constraint is imagination; there are a number of conventions and guidelines to make writing truly academic by which I mean developing a clear argument that the reader will be able to follow easily.

The conclusion to be reached can be that the most important aim of a foundation course is to teach us the basic principles of writing an essay and developing our voice. This is because during the first year of university, all students are treated equally, regardless of their nationality and mother tongue. After the preparation in the foundation year, international students should have learned to adjust to the U.K's higher education writing requirements, and may even have an advantage over the native speakers. I am in the process of writing my first academic essay, which is the hardest task for me at this point and I hope I will deal with it the best way I can.

The only way to proceed in writing an essay is to put some words on paper. This can be a problem not only with essay writing, but also with any creative and evaluative pieces of work. Every writer is afraid of being imperfect and that is probably the reason why it is so difficult to make a start. One solution could be simply to write down ideas as they come, and worry about the language later, after finishing the draft. Basically, there is no other way of writing something other than starting.

Another issue for many students is thinking about the word limit; this can simply prevent thoughts developing naturally. On the one hand, it may seem easier to reduce the word count

by editing i.e. replacing longer phrases with shorter synonymous language which take less space and by deleting sentences with the repetitive ideas. On the other hand, if an essay is coherently written, every phrase and sentence is connected to the next and the previous ones, so replacing phrases or getting rid of sentences can break the flow. Thankfully, this problem can be solved upon further editing of the first draft.

In conclusion, writing is quite simply a matter of concentration and putting yourself in a writing mood. If this is achieved, there is nothing to stop you from writing the best work you have ever done. Good luck with your writing, both creative and academic, and remember – at university there is always an essay that you should be working on, so you need to work on making it an enjoyable pursuit.

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Helping Text Flow

Cohesive devices

There should be logical connections between the ideas in a paragraph. These logical connections can be indicated through the organisation and grammar of the text, and sometimes by the use of particular words and phrases.

1. The use of repetition and synonyms.
2. The use of pronouns and other expressions to refer back to what has been said
3. The use of linking expressions

Text A

Infectious diseases remain a major threat to global animal and human health.

Recent examples (1) include the 2002 Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak in the UK, the 2003 global epidemic of SARS and the threat of an influenza pandemic.

The control of **infectious diseases** (2) in animals and humans is a problem that needs to be addressed by scientists, veterinarians, healthcare workers, economists, social scientists and policy makers.

Text B

Unless a patient needing an organ has an identical twin, there will always be immunological differences between the patient and the transplanted organ.

These differences (3) are immediately recognised by the recipient's immune system, and, depending on how closely the donor and recipient were matched, cause a reaction intended to destroy the transplanted organ. **Consequently** (4), transplant patients are placed on drug regimens designed to lessen the immune response against the organ to prevent rejection. **These drugs** (5) reduce the chances of rejection by diminishing the patients' *overall* immune capability.

However (6), this causes the patient to be more susceptible to infection.

Text C

The *Capsicum* family includes a wide variety of peppers ranging from the large sweet peppers to the **fiery** (7) chilli peppers. Chilli peppers derive **their** (8) **hotness** (9) from capsaicin and dihydrocapsaicin (members of the capsaicinoid family), and restaurants specializing in '**hot**' (10) foods owe much to **these molecules of nature** (11). **They** (12) work by interacting with the same receptors in your mouth **that** (13) sense **heat** (14). Excessive amounts of **capsaicin** (15) are toxic because **capsaicin** (16) prevents the production of certain neurotransmitters and affects the function of neuroproteins in the brain. At high enough concentrations, **capsaicin** (17) destroys 'substance P' in the nervous system. **This effect** (18) has now been harnessed for medical use: 'substance P' is associated with the pain suffered by people with, for example, arthritis and inflammatory bowel disease, and application of a cream containing **capsaicin** (19) results in pain relief.

The paragraphs above use a range of cohesive devices to link ideas together

1. **repetition** of words and phrases: (2) (15) (16) (17) (19)
2. the use of **synonyms**: (7) and (10); (9) and (14)
3. the use of '**ellipsis**', i.e. when words are left out because they are understood through what has gone before (1)
4. the use of **pronouns**, including relative pronouns to refer back to nouns (8) (12) (13)
5. Use of **this / these + noun** (occasionally that/those) to refer back to nouns (3) (5) (11) (18)
6. the use of linking words/phrases (4) (6)

Add more examples to the list above from the paragraph below.

The body can defend itself against infection by using two types of immune response, **the innate** (20) and **the adaptive** (21). **The innate immune response** (22) is available to use when we are born and is nonspecific, where nonspecific means **this response** (23) can react against any infection or pathogen. **In contrast** (24), **the adaptive immune response** (25) is specific, meaning that it responds against a specific pathogen. **The adaptive immune response** (26) also has the gift of 'memory', **which** (27) allows **it** (28) to remember any pathogen **it** (29) reacted against in the past and to respond quickly and powerfully if **that pathogen** (30) returns.

(Strelkauskas et al., 2010: 325)

Ways to improve cohesion

- 1) When you refer back to a noun mentioned earlier in the text, consider whether to use a pronoun, for example *it*/*them*, or whether you need to repeat the noun (as seen above) to avoid vagueness or ambiguity.
- 2) Do not be afraid of some repetition to ensure clarity and can be used elegantly.
- 3) If you decide to use a synonym, make sure it really is a synonym! Be very careful with your dictionary use. In English many words are close by not exact synonyms.
- 4) When you refer back to something earlier in the text, think about whether you should use a singular or plural pronoun- e.g. *it* or *them*; *this* or *these*

PARAGRAPH TO ESSAY

Thesis Statement:

- states the main idea or claim of your essay, writers stance
- gives the reader a clear idea of what will be discussed in each paragraph
- is usually the last sentence of the introductory paragraph

Paragraph Format:

Topic Sentence

1. Support

2. Support

3. Support

Concluding Sentence

Supports can include:

- examples
- reasons
- data
- a story
- definitions
- descriptions
- explanations

Consider:

- Linking words to thread ideas together.
- Appropriate tense
- Enriching with relevant adjectives and adverbs.

3 - 5 Paragraph Essay Format	Sources
I. Introductory Paragraph <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - General statement/overarching idea - (such as background information, brief summary or something to get the reader's attention) <p>Narrowing sentence – brings the reader to the essence of your essay</p> <p>- Thesis statement</p>	<p>Note sources as you read and plan: Quote</p> <p>Paraphrase or summary</p>
II. Body Paragraph 1 <p>Topic Sentence</p> <p>A. Support</p> <p>B. Support</p> <p>C. Support</p> <p>(Concluding Sentence, if needed)</p>	
III. Body Paragraph 2 <p>Topic Sentence</p> <p>A. Support</p> <p>B. Support</p> <p>C. Support</p> <p>(Concluding Sentence, if needed)</p>	
IV. Body Paragraph 3 <p>Topic Sentence</p> <p>A. Support</p> <p>B. Support</p> <p>C. Support</p> <p>(Concluding Sentence, if needed)</p>	
V. Concluding Paragraph <p>- Restatement or summary of the main points, suggestions, advice, predictions, final comment(s).</p>	

International Study and Language Institute

Writing an evaluation paragraph

LANGUAGE IN AN EVALUATION

The following kind of language is found in evaluative writing

- ☐ **hypothetical language** (modals, e.g. *may, can, might, could*)
- ☐ **Conditionals** (*if...then...*)
- ☐ **Cautious language** e.g. *it is considered, there seems to be, it is likely that.....etc*

An evaluation in a problem-solution essay should address the following points:

- ☐ What is the best or most effective solution?
- ☐ How sure is the writer that the solution will work? (it may work,.....it could work...if)
- ☐ Will the solution cause more problems?
- ☐ Can the solutions be applied everywhere and to everyone?
- ☐ What else needs to be done?

In an “advantages-disadvantages” or “to what extent” essay , your evaluation paragraph could include the following points:

- ☐ Are there more advantages or disadvantages for each of the factors involved?
- ☐ If there are disadvantages, can they be addressed (solved)? If so, will the solutions work? (*it may address the problem,it could solve this problem, ...if this is implemented, it will...*)
- ☐ What is likely to happen in the future?
- ☐ *If....then....*
- ☐ What does this mean?
- ☐ What else needs to be done?

In a “compare/contrast” essay, your evaluation could include:

- ☐ Are there more similarities or differences?
- ☐ What are the implications/what does this mean?
- ☐ What is likely to happen in the future?

Adapted from University of New England. (n.d). *Academic Skills: Supporting evidence*. Retrieved from <http://www.learninghub.une.edu.au/tlc/aso/aso-online/academic-writing/supporting-evidence.php>

Evaluation paragraph sample

To solve the increasing traffic problem, a number of options need to be evaluated in order to establish how viable each of them is. The first option of building more roads needs to be examined very carefully, as one of the possible effects of further construction is an increase in the volume of traffic, which happened when the motorway around London was built. The second option, that of limiting the number of cars on the road at one time, will not meet with the approval of the general public. The third option, that of providing a more extensive, more efficient and cheaper public transport system, seems to be the most viable one. It would encourage people to leave their cars at home, as they would benefit more from using public transport. So the third option should be examined in more detail in order to establish a new system.

Evaluation paragraph sample

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When evaluating:

- use modal verbs to discuss possible future results
- use the first conditional
- use cautious language

The most effective way I know to improve your writing is to do freewriting exercises regularly. At least three times a week. They are sometimes called "automatic writing," "babbling," or "jabbering" exercises. The idea is simply to write for ten minutes (later on, perhaps fifteen or twenty). Don't stop for anything. Go quickly without rushing. Never stop to look back, to cross something out, to wonder how to spell something, to wonder what word or thought to use, or to think about what you are doing. If you can't think of a word or a spelling, just use a squiggle or else write "I can't think what to say, I can't think what to say" as many times as you want; or repeat the last word you wrote over and over again; or anything else. The only requirement is that you never stop.

What happens to a freewriting exercise is important. It must be a piece of writing which, even if someone else reads it, doesn't send any ripples back to you. It is like writing something and putting it in a bottle in the sea. Freewritings help you by providing no feedback at all. When I assign one, I invite the writer to let me read it, but also tell him to keep it if he prefers.

Here is an example of a fairly coherent exercise (sometimes they are very incoherent, which is fine):

I think I'll write what's on my mind, but the only thing on my mind right now is what to write for ten minutes. I've never done this before and I'm not prepared in any way--the sky is cloudy today, how's that? now I'm afraid I won't be able to think of what to write when I get to the end of the sentence--well, here I am at the end of the sentence--here I am again, again, again, again, at least I'm still writing--Now I ask is there some reason to be happy that I'm still writing--ah yes! Here comes the question again--What am I getting out of this? What point is there in it? It's almost obscene to always ask it but I seem to question everything that way and I was gonna say something else pertaining to that but I got so busy writing down the first part that I forgot what I was leading into. This is kind of fun oh don't stop writing--cars and trucks speeding by somewhere out the window, pens clattering across peoples' papers. The sky is still cloudy--is it symbolic that I should be mentioning it? Huh? I dunno. Maybe I should try colors, blue, red, dirty words--wait a minute--no can't do that, orange, yellow, arm tired, green pink violet magenta lavender red brown black green--now I can't think of any more colors--just about done--relief? maybe.

Freewriting may seem crazy but actually it makes simple sense. Think of the difference between speaking and writing. Writing has the advantage of permitting more editing. But that's its downfall too. Almost everyone interposes a massive and complicated series of editings between the time the words start to be born into consciousness and when they finally come of the end of the pencil or typewriter onto the page. This is partly because schooling makes us obsessed with the "mistakes" we make in writing. Many people constantly think about spelling and grammar as they try to write. I am always thinking about the awkwardness, wordiness, and general mushiness of my natural verbal product as I try to write down words.

But it's not just "mistakes" or "bad writing" we edit as we write. We also edit unacceptable thoughts and feelings, as we do in speaking. In writing there is more time to do it so the editing is heavier: when speaking, there's someone right there waiting for a reply and he'll get bored or think we're crazy if we don't come out with *something*. Most of the time in speaking, we settle for the catch-as-catch-can way in which the words tumble out. In writing, however, there's a chance to try to get them right. But the opportunity to get them right is a terrible burden: you can work for two hours trying to get a paragraph "right" and discover it's not right at all. And then give up.

Editing, *in itself*, is not the problem. Editing is usually necessary if we want to end up with something satisfactory. The problem is that editing goes on *at the same time* as producing. . . .

The main thing about freewriting is that it is *nonediting*. It is an exercise in bringing together the process of producing words and putting them down on the page. Practiced regularly, it undoes the ingrained habit of editing at the same time you are trying to produce. It will make writing less blocked because words will come more easily. . . .

Next time you write, notice how often you stop yourself from writing down something you were going to write down. Or else cross it out after it's been written. "Naturally," you say, "it wasn't any good." But think for a moment about the occasions when you spoke well. Seldom was it because you first got the beginning right. Usually it was a matter of a halting or even a garbled beginning, but you kept going and your speech finally became coherent and even powerful. There is a lesson here for writing: trying to get the beginning just right is a formula for failure--and probably a secret tactic to make yourself give up writing. Make some words, whatever they are, and then grab hold of that line and reel in as hard as you can. Afterwards you can throw away lousy beginnings and make new ones. This is the quickest way to get into good writing.

The habit of compulsive, premature editing doesn't just make writing hard. It also makes writing dead. Your voice is damped out by all the interruptions, changes, and hesitations between the consciousness and the page. In your natural way of producing words there is a sound, a texture, a rhythm--a voice--which is the main source of power in your writing. I don't know how it works, but this voice is the force that will make a reader listen to you. Maybe you don't like your voice; maybe people have made fun of it. But it's the only voice you've got. It's your only source of power. You better get back into it, no matter what you think of it. If you keep writing in it, it may change into something you like better. But if you abandon it, you'll likely never have a voice and never be heard.

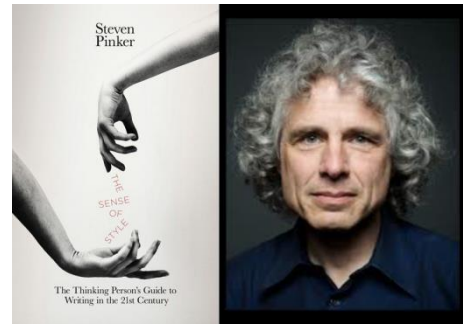
Taken from Writing Without Teachers. New York: Oxford UP, 1973, 1-7.

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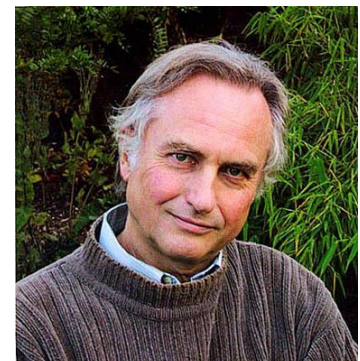
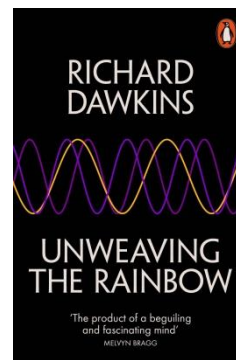
A guide to writing in the classic style

Steven Pinker's book ***The Sense of Style*** gives many examples of good and bad writing. He advocates what he calls Classic Style writing. Here he analyses the first few lines of ***Unweaving the Rainbow*** by Richard Dawkins



We are going to die, and that makes us the lucky ones. Most people are never going to die because they are never going to be born. The potential people who could have been here in my place but who will in fact never see the light of day outnumber the sand grains of Arabia. Certainly those unborn ghosts include greater poets than Keats, scientists greater than Newton. We know this because the set of possible people allowed by our DNA so massively exceeds the set of actual people. In the teeth of these stupefying odds it is you and i, in our ordinariness, that are here.

In the opening lines of Richard Dawkins's *Unweaving the Rainbow*, the uncompromising atheist and tireless advocate of science explains why his worldview does not, as the romantic and the religious fear, extinguish a sense of wonder or an appreciation of life. 'We are going to die, and that



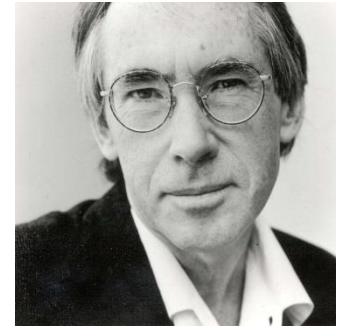
makes us the lucky ones. Good writing starts strong. Not with a cliché ("Since the dawn of time"), not with a banality ("Recently, scholars have been increasingly concerned with the question of . . ."), but with a contentful observation that provokes curiosity. The reader of ***Unweaving the Rainbow*** opens the book and is walloped with a reminder of the most dreadful fact we know, and on its heels a paradoxical elaboration. We're lucky because we'll die? Who wouldn't want to find out how this mystery will be solved? The starkness of the paradox is reinforced by the diction and meter: short, simple words, a stressed monosyllable followed by six iambic feet. *Most people are never going to die.* The resolution to the paradox—that a bad thing, dying, implies a good thing, having lived—is explained with parallel constructions:

never going to die . . never going to be born. The next sentence restates the contrast, also in parallel language, but avoids the tedium of repeating words yet again by juxtaposing familiar idioms that have the same rhythm: *been here in my place ... see the light of day.... the sand grains of Arabia.* A touch of the poetic, better suited to the grandeur that Dawkins seeks to invoke than a colorless adjective like massive or enormous. The expression is snatched from the brink of cliché by its variant wording (sand grains rather than sands) and by its vaguely exotic feel. The phrase *sands of Arabia*, though common in the early nineteenth century, has plunged in popularity ever since, and there is no longer even a place that is commonly called Arabia; we refer to it as Saudi Arabia or the Arabian Peninsula. ' *unborn ghosts*'. A vivid image to convey the abstract notion of a mathematically possible combination of genes, and a wily repurposing of a supernatural concept to advance a naturalistic argument. greater poets than Keats, scientists greater than Newton. Parallel wording is a powerful trope, but after dying and being born, being here in my place and seeing the light of day, enough is enough. To avoid monotony Dawkins inverts the structure of one of the lines in this couplet. The phrase subtly alludes to another meditation on unrealized genius, "*Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest,*" from Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard." *In the teeth of these stupefying odds.* The idiom brings to mind the menacing gape of a predator, reinforcing our gratitude for being alive: to come into existence we narrowly escaped a mortal threat, namely the high odds against it. How high? Every writer faces the challenge of finding a superlative in the English word-hoard that has not been inflated by hyperbole and overuse. *In the teeth of these incredible odds? In the teeth of these awesome odds?* Meh. Dawkins has found a superlative—to render into a stupor, to make stupid—that still has the power to impress. Good writing can flip the way the world is perceived, like the silhouette in psychology textbooks which oscillates between a goblet and two faces. In six sentences Dawkins has flipped the way we think of death, and has stated a rationalist's case for an appreciation of life in words so stirring that many humanists I know have asked that it be read at their funerals"

Pinker, S (2014); The Sense of Style; Penguin; (p13-14)

A speech by Ian McEwan - a famous UK novelist - about Brexit

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/jun/02/ian-mcewan-denialist-confessions-remainer-brexit>



Note the use of parallelism (repetition of grammatical structures which “parallel” each other) in these sections of the speech.

In the current state of Brexit politics, **I** belong to the smallest, saddest, most pessimistic faction. **I’m** a denialist. Almost a year on, and **I’m** still shaking my head in disbelief – not a useful political act. **I** don’t accept this near mystical, emotionally charged decision to leave the EU. **I** don’t, **I** can’t, believe it. **I** reject it.

My faction lives in daily bafflement. How has this happened in a mature parliamentary democracy, this rejection of common sense and good governance? How can it be that in a one-off vote just over a third of the electorate has determined the fate of the nation for the next half century? **That** shameless lies were told in the Brexit cause? **That** an advisory referendum has taken on a binding status? **That** politicians who spoke so recently for the EU now occupy the highest offices in the land and are driving us out. **That** a gang comprising many angry old men, irritable even in victory, are shaping the future of the country against the inclinations of its youth? **That** a handful of billionaires lavishly funded the Brexit campaigns for their own financial interests? **That**, in European Parliament Brexit coordinator Guy Verhofstadt’s words, a catfight within the Tory party got so completely out of hand? That the country, like a depressed teenage self-harmer, takes out a razor to scour a forearm, and now contemplates its own throat?

The Brexit constituency is a broad church. Take a look at the span. It contains on one wing its majority – many decent, concerned people who have made their own decisions derived from anxieties about immigration and the rapid changes it has brought to their localities; **or** they’ve suffered the harsher edges of globalisation; **or** they dream of what they think their country once was. **Passing along the spectrum**, we come to what I would call the Anglican Brexiters – Anglican because they are so close to the atheist remainers one would hardly know the difference. They want a “soft Brexit” – single market, customs union, free movement, European court of justice, big annual contributions – but no agency in shaping EU policy: utterly absurd. Why not be an atheist? **Then we come to** the current orthodoxy, the “hard” caucus of economic suicides, of no customs union, no single market; they dream of instant, multiple trading treaties around the world whose arbitration clauses will miraculously not mandate courts higher than our own.

Moving along fractionally, we arrive among those who would have us “crash out” of the EU without a deal. As we keep journeying, we find ourselves in the company of those who prefer Robespierre’s grisly trope, “enemies of the people” against dissenting voices, and, of course, against the judiciary. **Now we rub shoulders with** those who stare out foreigners in the street, who from behind the safety of their computer screens have threatened rape and murder against remainer activists such as Gina Miller. **Finally we arrive at** the vilest manifestation, those who physically attack people in the street because they speak Polish, those driven by anti-immigrant passion to murder an asylum seeker in the peaceful town of Croydon, or murder a Labour MP because she was making the case for remain. We find ourselves in a new country where it does not seem so very strange for a former leader of the Tory party to speak of war with Spain.

What is academic discourse?

As an undergraduate, you become more aware of a style of presentation that influences your essay writing. Reading academic textbooks and journal articles, attending lectures and being part of a student community has exposed you to a habit of writing that might be termed 'academic discourse'.

An academic discourse contains its own conventions about how to present research, and how to read and respond to research. The problem is that the requirements of academic discourse are often implicit and as a student you are expected to gain a grasp of academic literacy without necessarily being given instruction in how to utilise these conventions of academic writing.

The dissertation represents the culmination of your undergraduate work, and allows you to put into practice the knowledge and skills gained over the past few years. The purpose of the web site is simply to draw attention to the notion of academic writing, or writing for academic purposes, in order that your dissertation efforts are not lessened or compromised by flaws in presentation.

The advice in this section is about observing basic grammatical conventions that typify an academic writing style. It is not about referencing or citation rules, which your department will advise you about, and which you should have already practised when writing course essays. Although your skills in essay writing will progress throughout your studies, through feedback from tutors or peer review, attention to specific points of writing style is often overlooked during the pressures to complete other work. Writing a dissertation is a considerable intellectual exercise, and some time should be spent upon its composition in order to best display your efforts and demonstrate your capabilities as a student.

The process of academic writing

All writing is tailored to an audience, which shares certain conventions of style and grammar. Newspapers represent an obvious example of how one area of writing practice (journalism) can have so many variations in discourse. Without delving into issues of power, representation, or political bias, it is worthwhile noting that academic essays require a certain formality which places the writer in the background, and allows the exposition of a carefully worked argument to come to the fore.

As a student of the social sciences, your dissertation may include statistics, graphs, or other representations of data, and it may include multi-media components as well as text. However, in addition to presenting data, your aim is to persuade the reader that you have understood the processes of research and can present that research in a clear and intelligible manner. Key to this is the need to think of your writing in stages. For example:

- First draft sketches an overview of the dissertation and breaks up the presentation of findings into appropriate chapters.

- Second draft revises your arguments, enhances the exposition of your thesis and begins the check for grammatical ambiguities.
- Third draft corrects punctuation and errors in referencing in accordance with your particular course requirements and, if necessary, re-arranges some of the content.
- Fourth draft clarifies any remaining arguments.

The above is an indication of the possible stages of writing, and merely illustrates the process of reworking your essay, a task which is often avoided, because of the time factor involved, but which is essential if you are to produce a quality dissertation that does justice to your research.

Write clearly, concisely, and try to avoid long, awkward clauses that risk losing the interest or attention of the reader. Your immediate audience will be your peers and tutoring staff, who will be conversant with theories and terminologies specific to your area of study. However, don't rely on a showy display of 'jargon' to hide a poorly structured thesis - again, *clarity of argument* and an *incremental exposition* of the research findings will provide the most accessible means of communicating your work for assessment. You may find it helpful to visualise the process of essay writing as a flow-chart model, which will help to allocate content into an appropriate structure for your first draft.

Understand the structure of paragraphs

A paragraph tends to develop a single idea or unit of meaning and a series of paragraphs form an essay. The dissertation is similar to an extended essay, often combined with other methods of analysis, which builds into an account of a piece of research. An 'academic' style for paragraphs in the dissertation might observe some of the following:

- ***The length of the paragraph.*** Vary the length to avoid monotony; however on average you will probably find that between two to three paragraphs per page (double spacing) is sufficient. Paragraphs offer natural pauses, and very long passages threaten to lose the reader's attention.
- ***Write sentences with clear topics and paragraphs with a clear aim.*** Paragraphs often begin by stating the topic idea, and end by linking back to the overall theme (of the dissertation or chapter section). Keep in mind that the each paragraph has a focus and it is clearly evident in the paragraph. If the dissertation theme is held back and not stated until the reader reaches the end of a chapter, the reader may have lost the focus of why this particular piece of research is crucial to the study. During the stages of rewriting, look for points where the argument has become separated from the main thesis, and if necessary make some of your paragraphs conclude by referring back to this so that it has a clear relationship with the topic.
- ***Write unified paragraphs.*** Use words and phrases to link sentences and paragraphs together, such as *although*, *however*, *in contrast*. These phrases work to imply change, to supplement, or to conclude. Be careful not to use them needlessly in order to fill gaps.
- ***Use alternatives to common words.*** This is a basic principle for all forms of writing, and helps to avoid monotony. The most frequent use of this will be when using pronouns (I, he, she, we, it, they, that) to replace the subject of a sentence. Related

to this is the concept of 'elegant variation', which some view as rhetoric or studied avoidance for the sake of clear exposition. The best approach is to balance your writing with synonyms, but not to avoid repeating terms when they are important to the expression of your argument.

Adopting a suitable writing style

As mentioned earlier, acquiring the ability to write academic essays is a developmental process which improves during the course of your studies. This overlaps with other criteria which mark your passage as a student - your developing subject knowledge and confidence in thinking critically. However, this process of learning is often taken to be implicit, and explicit training in the conventions of academic writing is not usually anticipated as necessary. In order to identify some concepts of academic discourse, it would be useful to look at a few examples and examine some aspects of the underlying grammar.

It is usually easier to identify clear, concise writing by looking at examples of sentences which are confusing and misleading. One key area of difficulty for students, when writing 'academic discourse', is the use of active and passive constructions. Essentially, these aspects of sentence composition affect the ordering of the relationship between the subject, object and verb elements. Passive constructions can often be spotted by noticing the use of the verb 'to be' with the past participle of a transitive verb, as well as the use of multiple prepositions. Here is an example:

'The necessary method *of* identifying the cause *for* the social groupings *to* operate was determined'.

Prepositions are shown in italics, and the sentence concludes with a typical past participle construction; 'was determined'. The above sentence could be written using a more active voice, which places the past participle at the beginning of the sentence and reduces the number of prepositions:

'We analysed the cause of the social groupings with an appropriate method'.

The above example may be extreme, but it highlights some basic grammatical principles which, if followed, help to present academic research lucidly and cogently. For many students, writing under other pressures, spending time converting all passive constructions into active phrases will be excruciating and needless. In fact, there is often a tendency to use passive constructions when the writer is not quite sure of how to express a particular idea or concept, or has only partially conceptualised the principle of research to be discussed (passive constructions can also be used inappropriately as filler to make up word count). Take time to reflect on your key themes and create a flowchart or other schematic aid to guide you through the overall plan of your work (as discussed earlier). This will help concentrate your writing, keep you on track, and minimise the risk of 'over-writing' by compiling loose arguments with too many passive constructions.

There is an important caveat here. Passive constructions are abundant in academic writing, and an essay full of active sentences will not translate into a recognisable

academic essay. As in most things, a considered balance to your writing, and a reflective approach, will aid in communicating your results most effectively.

Some other grammatical issues

This section is a useful overview of grammatical usage and style. It is important to stress that these are not 'rules', nor a prescriptive type of grammar that all academics adhere to, but they are a set of points with which you should be aware of and with which will improve academic discourse:

- **Leave out needless words.** Try to avoid phrases such as 'It can be seen at this point of the enquiry that...' Again, you will find examples of these phrases in journals and textbooks, however for the sake of clarity in your own work it is better to keep a limit on them.
- **Use specific terms rather than abstractions.** Show your mastery of technical concepts relevant to your discipline, but try not to over-complicate the explanations of these terms in relation to your research.
- **Limit the use of adverbs and adjectives.** Control the use of those adjectives which create a sense of vagueness when describing your research findings. Although questions of objectivity/subjectivity are crucial to social science research, evaluation via academic discourse is carried out through the exposition of the research, rather than through qualifying statements.
- **Choose words with precision.** This sounds obvious, but if you are not clear about the choice of words then your dissertation reader may get the impression that you have not thought enough about the topic under discussion.
- **Avoid groups of adjectival nouns.** As with the use of passive constructions, you will see examples of this in academic discourse, however with a little reworking you can eliminate some of the more extreme forms. For example, rather than writing 'media distribution policy examination group', you could write 'group to examine media distribution policy'. The first example might legitimately be a group slogan; however when used in written form it is awkward and may lose the reader's interest.
- **Misplaced modifiers.** These occur in many forms of writing, and derive from our tendency to use such forms in speech, where the meaning is easier to understand through other contexts. Words like *only*, *just*, *nearly*, are often placed into sentences at points that create ambiguity. In academic discourse, their presence creates vagueness and potential confusion. For example, 'We only read the two transcriptions from the police files' could be written as 'We read only the two transcriptions from the police files'. This seems like a minor change, but it makes an important difference in emphasis.
- **Dangling modifiers.** This happens when the modifying phrase improperly modifies part of the sentence. This often happens with participial phrases. For example, 'Reading the reports on global poverty, the conclusions were convincing'. You will probably understand the meaning of this sentence, however it is not exactly clear about the relationship between the two parts, the participial phrase (which starts the sentence) and the modifying phrase. They could be describing different actions. An alternative might be 'Reading the reports on global poverty, we found the conclusions convincing'. This makes explicit the relationship between each part of the sentence.

- ***Squinting modifiers.*** This is due to the adverb's tendency to roam across the sentence. Again, its presence may not radically alter the sentence, although it does create more ambiguity by looking towards different parts of the sentence. For example, 'The theme was discovered often during the initial literature search'. Here, *often* seems to look both ways and creates an uncertain sense of movement across the sentence. A simple way to make *often* modify *discovered* (the intention of the phrase) would be to write 'The theme was often discovered during the initial literature search'.

There are many more points of grammar which identify academic discourse. Remember, if the clarity of your exposition is blunted, then your dissertation will not achieve its full potential in communicating your research. Therefore, be aware of the norms of academic discourse, incorporate them where you can, and be vigilant when writing your dissertation. Try to follow the process of writing in stages, and work through your dissertation at each of these stages by reiterating your argument, presenting your research, and clarifying your interpretations of this research. It was stated at the beginning of this section, the 'rules' of academic discourse are not prescriptions made to curtail your creativity, but rather a set of conventions which situate you as a student within an academic community. Be confident about your own research, write with care, and enjoy this opportunity to present your findings. Good writing cannot make up for inadequate research, but it is important get the most value out of the process of discovery.



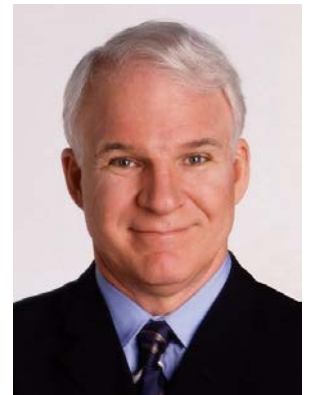
Making your text flow

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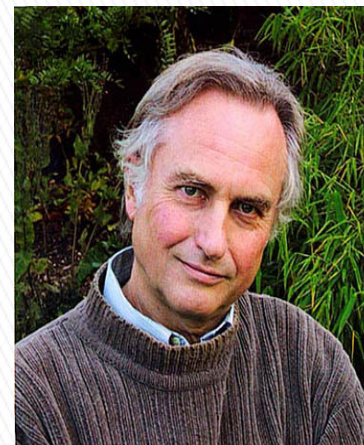
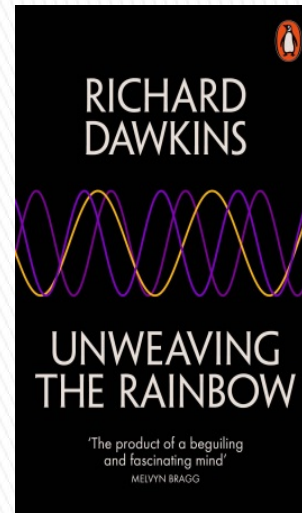


“Some people have a way with words, and
some people have not way” *Steve Martin: Comedian*



Good non-academic writing

We are going to die, and that makes us the lucky ones. Most people are never going to die because they are never going to be born. The potential people who could have been here in my place but who will in fact never see the light of day outnumber the sand grains of Arabia. Certainly those unborn ghosts include greater poets than Keats, scientists greater than Newton. We know this because the set of possible people allowed by our DNA so massively exceeds the set of actual people. In the teeth of these stupefying odds it is you and i, in our ordinariness, that are here.



Good non-academic writing

We are going to die, and that makes us the lucky ones. **Most people** are never going to die because they are never going to be born. **The potential people** who could have been here in my place but who will in fact **never see the light of day** outnumber the sand grains of Arabia. Certainly **those unborn ghosts** include greater poets than Keats, scientists greater than Newton. **We** know this because **the set of possible people** allowed by our DNA so **massively exceeds** the **set of actual people**. In the teeth of these **stupefying odds** it is you and i, in our ordinariness, that are here.

Attention grabbing start!

Follows a **Given→ New** information structure

Uses **parallel grammatical structures** (are never going to...are never going to...greater than...greater than...

Varies vocabulary choice to maintain interest and avoid clichés

Writer and Reader connection



- ▶ What does the reader already know about this topic?
- ▶ What effect do I want to create in the reader's mind?
- ▶ How do readers read? What do they focus on?
- ▶ How can I keep the reader's attention?

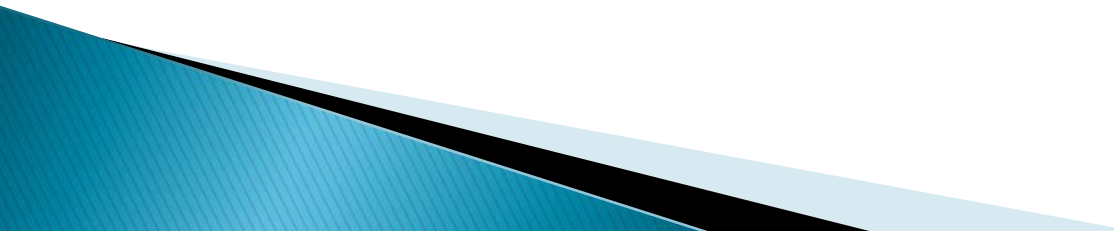
Writer



- ▶ What do I already know about this topic?
- ▶ I hope the text flows and is easy to follow
- ▶ I hope it's logically structured
- ▶ I hope I learn something new and interesting.

Reader

Improving the readability of your writing by making it “flow”

- (a) use a **given → new** structure of information
 - (b) Put **new information** at the start of paragraph topic sentences
 - (c) Avoiding too much **given information** in paragraphs
 - (d) Don't make the reader wait for **new information**
 - (e) Make sure your paragraphs are **logical structured**
- 

What is “given” information and what is “new” information?

- ▶ Given can mean information that the reader can be assumed to know about the topic from general knowledge, subject background or previously given in the text.
- ▶ New can mean information / ideas / facts that the reader is assumed not to already know, or may need to be reminded of. It can also be ideas / data/ knowledge that the writer has produced through research.





Given + New

- ▶ Put information in the order GIVEN → NEW in sentences to build logical and easy to read paragraphs

Which is the **new information** and which is the **known or given information** in these sentences?

1. English, which is the international language of communication, is now studied by 1.1 billion people.
2. English, which is now studied by 1.1 billion people, is the international language of communication.

1. English, which is the international language of communication, is now studied by 1.1 billion people.



2. English, which is now studied by 1.1 billion people, is the international language of communication.



Blue= given information

Red=new information

Sentence 2 puts the new information (studied by 1.2. billion) **before** the given information (international language) which is a little strange.



Avoid putting important information in the middle of a sentence as readers tend to focus on **first and last words in a sentence.**

2 sentences

Which of these pairs of sentences is best and why?

1. I was born in Cork. Cork is the second largest city in Ireland.
2. I was born in Cork. The second largest city in Ireland is Cork.

1. I was born in **Cork**.
2. **Cork** is the second largest city in Ireland.
3. I was born in **Cork**.
4. The second largest city in Ireland is **Cork**.



S1: **Cork** = new information

S2: **Cork** = given information + green = new information

S3: **Cork** = new information

S4: **Green** = new information + **Blue** = given information

Paragraph information order



Geckos, harmless tropical lizards, are extremely fascinating and extraordinary animals. They have very sticky feet that cling to virtually any surface. This characteristic makes it possible for them to rapidly run up vertical walls and along the undersides of horizontal surfaces. In fact, a gecko can support its body mass with a single toe. The secret to this remarkable ability is the presence of an extremely large number of microscopically small hairs on each of their toe pads. When these hairs come into contact with a surface, weak forces of attraction (van der Waals forces) are established between hair molecules and molecules on the surface. The fact that these hairs are so small and so numerous explains why the gecko grips surfaces so tightly. To release its grip, the gecko simply curls up its toes, and peels the hairs away from the surface.



Topic sentence

Geckos, harmless tropical lizards, are extremely fascinating and extraordinary animals. They have very sticky feet that cling to virtually any surface.

Given information

This characteristic makes it possible for them to

The secret to this remarkable ability

When these hairs

The fact that these hairs

To release its grip,

New information

rapidly run up vertical walls and along the undersides of horizontal surfaces. In fact, a gecko can support its body mass with a single toe.

is the presence of an extremely large number of microscopically small hairs on each of their toe pads.

come into contact with a surface, weak forces of attraction (van der Waals forces) are established between hair molecules and molecules on the surface.

are so small and so numerous explains why the gecko grips surfaces so tightly.

the gecko simply curls up its toes, and peels the hairs away from the surface.

Paragraph information order



Geckos, harmless tropical lizards, are extremely fascinating and extraordinary animals. They have very sticky feet that cling to virtually any surface. They are able to rapidly run up vertical walls and along the undersides of horizontal surfaces, thanks to this characteristic. In fact, a gecko can support its body mass with a single toe! The presence of an extremely large number of microscopically small hairs on each of their toe pads is the secret to this remarkable ability. Weak forces of attraction (i.e. van der Waals forces) are established between hair molecules and molecules on the surface when these hairs come into contact with a surface. The fact that these hairs are so small and so numerous explains why the gecko grips surfaces so tightly. The gecko simply curls up its toes, and peels the hairs away from the surface to release its grip.




Topic Sentence

Geckos, harmless tropical lizards, are extremely fascinating and extraordinary animals. They have very sticky feet that cling to virtually any surface.

New information	Given information
They are able to rapidly run up vertical walls and along the undersides of horizontal surfaces,	<u>thanks to this characteristic.</u>
In fact, a gecko can support its body mass with a single toe!	
The presence of an extremely large number of microscopically small hairs on each of their toe pads is the secret to	<u>this remarkable ability.</u>
Weak forces of attraction (i.e. van der Waals forces) are established between hair molecules and molecules on the surface when.....	<u>these hairs</u>
come into contact with a surface.	
The fact that these hairs are so small and so numerous explains why	<u>the gecko grips surfaces so tightly.</u>
The gecko simply curls up its toes, and peels the hairs away from the surface	<u>to release its grip.</u>



Practice: Rewrite the following so that they follow the given→ new structure


1. Cereals are one of the most important staple foods. Wheat, rye, barley, oats, maize, rice, millet and sorghum are the major cereals of the world.
 2. Beer is a fermented alcoholic beverage. Malt and hops are the main ingredients of beer.
 3. A ligament is a resilient but flexible band of tissue that holds two or more bones together at a moveable joint. Movement of bones at a joint is restrained by ligaments and therefore they are important in preventing dislocation.
 4. Chalk is a very fine-grained white rock composed of the fossilised skeletal remains of marine plankton and consisting largely of calcium carbonate. Toothpaste and cosmetics use chalk. However, blackboard 'chalk' is not the same thing. It is made from calcium sulphate.
- 

Answers

1. **Cereals** are one of the most important staple foods. **The major cereals of the world** are wheat, rye, barley, oats, maize, rice, millet and sorghum.
2. **Beer** is a fermented alcoholic beverage. **The main ingredients of beer** are malt and hops.
3. **A ligament** is a resilient but flexible band of tissue that holds two or more bones together at a moveable joint. **Ligaments** restrain movement of bones at a joint and are therefore important in preventing dislocation.
4. **Chalk** is a very fine-grained white rock composed of the fossilised skeletal remains of marine plankton and consisting largely of calcium carbonate. **Chalk** is used to make toothpaste and cosmetics. **It** is not the same thing as blackboard 'chalk', which is actually made from calcium sulphate.

Can I put **new information** at the start of a sentence?
Yes– when starting a new paragraph

Which of these 4 sentences would you choose to be the **topic sentence** in a **new paragraph**?

1. Particularly interesting for researchers in physics is the new feature, named X, for calculating velocity.
 2. Physics now has a new feature, named X, for calculating velocity
 3. Velocity can now be calculated with a new feature, named X, which is particularly interesting for physicists.
 4. X is a new feature for calculating velocity. It is particularly interesting for physicists.
- 

1. Particularly interesting for researchers in physics is the new feature, named X, for calculating velocity.



2. Physics now has a new feature, named X, for calculating velocity



3. Velocity can now be calculated with a new feature, named X, which is particularly interesting for physicists.



4. X is a new feature for calculating velocity. It is particularly interesting for physicists.



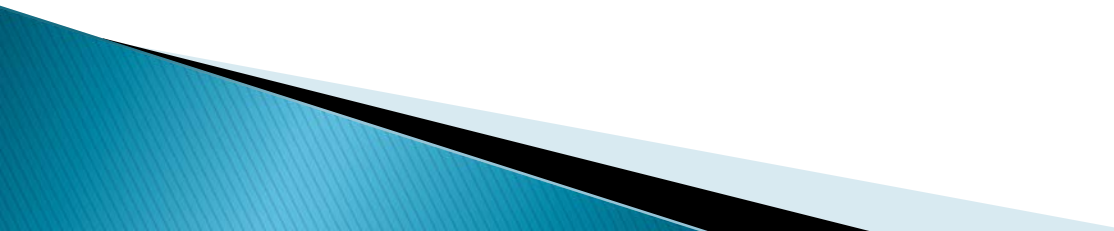


- ▶ Readers tend to focus on the parts of a sentence that come **before and after a full stop** (because of the pause, the space and the capital letter).
- ▶ Thus it can be a good idea to put new information – an “added value” word or phrase– in the first position **in a paragraph opening sentence.** If there is nothing new the reader is encouraged to skim ahead quickly.

Avoid too much known information at the beginning of paragraphs

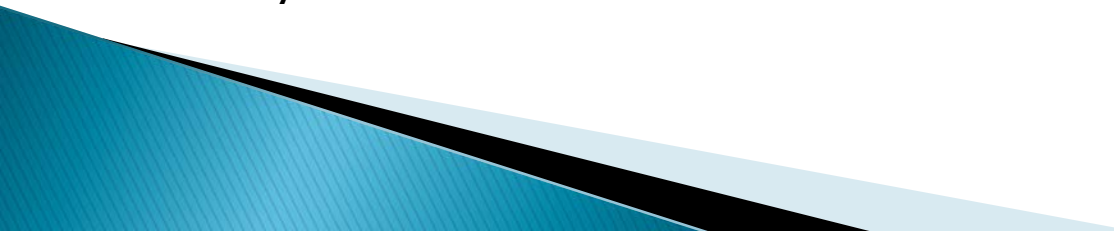
Read the following introduction to a paragraph on digital technology

The last decade has been characterized by advances in device manufacturing. Devices are becoming increasingly miniaturized, powerful, cheap and have become part of our daily lives. Notable examples include smart phones and smart watches equipped with a plethora of sensors, home appliances and general purpose devices such as tablets and ultra-thin notebooks. We are surrounded by all these devices daily in a pervasive way, at home, work and also in public spaces — as anticipated in Weiser's 1991 visionary observation “The most profound technologies are those that disappear?”



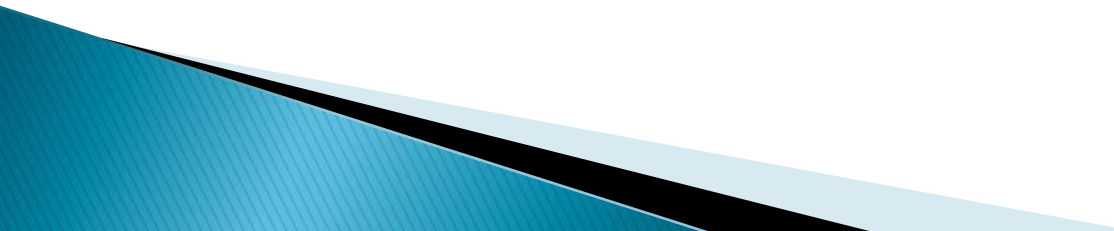
The last decade has been characterized by advances in device manufacturing. Devices are becoming increasingly miniaturized, powerful, cheap and have become part of our daily lives. Notable examples include smart phones and smart watches equipped with a plethora of sensors, home appliances and general purpose devices such as tablets and ultra-thin notebooks. We are surrounded by all these devices daily in a pervasive way, at home, work and also in public spaces — as anticipated in Weiser's 1991 visionary observation “The most profound technologies are those that disappear?” (87)

Problems:

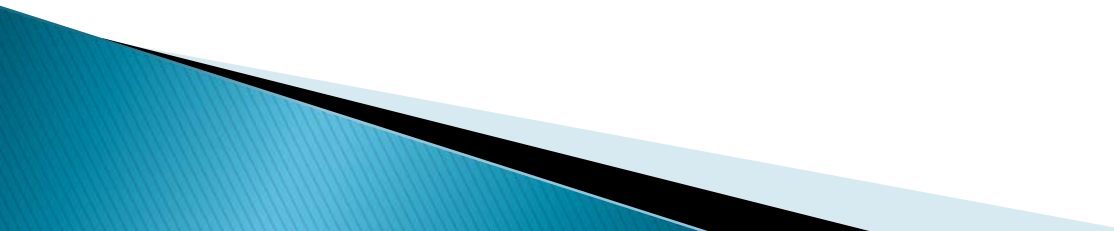
- ▶ The first sentence is too well known– thus it will not catch the reader's attention and will be skimmed.
 - ▶ Too many generic phrases that “add little value” to the text. The reader will probably skim rapidly over much of this paragraph.
 - ▶ The key quotation is hidden at the end of the paragraph– we have to read through too much generally known information before arriving at the key idea.
- 

Version 2

In 1991 Weiser observed that *"The most profound technologies are those that disappear."* In fact, increasingly miniaturized, powerful, and cheap devices have become part of our daily lives, for example smart phones and smart watches, home aid, antes, tablets and ultra-thin notebooks. We are surrounded by all these devices: at home, work and also in public spaces. (58)



Think about how readers read

- ▶ Remember that your readers **will not be reading every word, sentence or paragraph of your paper**. Their eyes will often be skimming across the text and down the lines. Their eyes are waiting to rest on something that attracts their attention. Thus, avoid putting too much known information in paragraphs– particularly at the start of paragraphs.
- 

Be concrete– don't make the reader wait for new information

Compare these two texts:

1. Smart devices may have to manage sensitive information that must be protected against unauthorized diffusion or from malicious attacks. Some notable examples of sensitive information are data concerning the health conditions of a patient or data gathered from caregivers about the status of an elderly person.
2. Smart devices may have to manage sensitive information, for example the health conditions of a patient or data gathered from caregivers on the status of an elderly person. Clearly, such data must be protected against unauthorized diffusion or from malicious attacks.

1. Smart devices may have to manage sensitive information that **must be protected against unauthorized diffusion or from malicious attacks**. Some notable examples of sensitive information are data concerning the health conditions of a patient or data gathered from caregivers about the status of an elderly person. (46)



Reader has to wait to find out exactly what sensitive information is and why it has to be protected.

2. Smart devices may have to manage sensitive information, for example the **health conditions of a patient or data gathered from caregivers on the status of an elderly person**. Clearly, **such data must be protected against unauthorized diffusion or from malicious attacks.** (47)



Tells the readers immediately what sensitive information is, and therefore enables readers to understand why it should be protected. Eliminates a redundant phrase

Recap: To improve text flow and prevent the reader from skimming ahead:

- (a) use a given → new structure of information**
- (b) Put new information at the start of paragraph topic sentences**
- (c) Avoiding too much given information in paragraphs**
- (d) Don't make the reader wait for new information**

Text flow also is helped by logical structuring of information which can make information much easier to follow



Example: Read this short paragraph on memory



Memory can be subdivided into various types: long-term memory, which involves retaining information for over a minute, and short-term memory, in which information is remembered for a minute or less, for example, the memory required to perform a simple calculation such as $5 \times 7 \times 3$. Another type of short-term memory is also recognized: sensory memory, for example we see a video as a continuous scene rather than a series of still images. Research shows sex differences in episodic (i.e. long term) memory: women tend to remember better verbal situations, whereas men have a better recollection of events relating to visuals and space. Long-term memory can be further subdivided into recent memory, which involves new learning, and remote memory. which involves old information.

Example: Read this short paragraph on memory



Memory can be subdivided into various types: **long-term memory**, which involves retaining information for over a minute, and **short-term memory**, in which information is remembered for a minute or less, for example, the memory required to perform a simple calculation such as $5 \times 7 \times 3$. Another type of **short-term memory** is also recognized: sensory memory, for example we see a video as a continuous scene rather than a series of still images. Research shows sex differences in episodic (**i.e. long term**) **memory**: women tend to remember better verbal situations, whereas men have a better recollection of events relating to visuals and space. **Long-term memory** can be further subdivided into recent memory, which involves new learning, and remote memory, which involves old information.

Revised text on memory



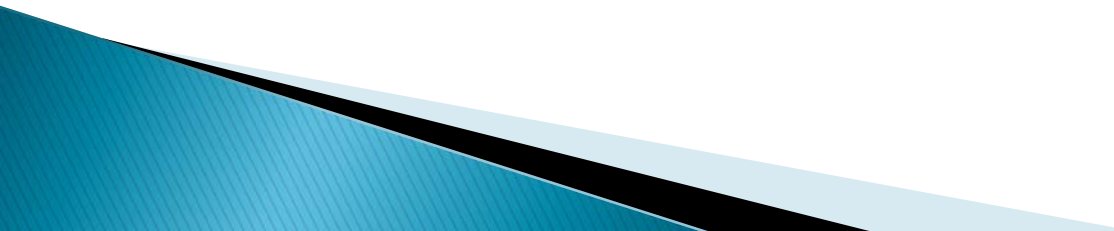
Memory is the capacity to store and recall new information. It can be subdivided into two main types: short-term and long-term. Short-term memory involves remembering information for a minute or less. for example, the memory required to perform a simple calculation such as $5 \times 7 \times 3$. Another type of short-term memory is sensory memory, for example, we see a video as a continuous scene rather than a series of still images. Long-term memory can be further subdivided into recent memory, which involves new learning, and remote memory, which involves old information. Interestingly, research shows sex differences in remote memory: women tend to remember better verbal situations, whereas men have a better recollection of events relating to visuals and space.

Revised text on memory



Memory is the capacity to store and recall new information. It can be subdivided into two main types: **short-term** and **long-term**. **Short-term memory** involves remembering information for a minute or less; for example, the memory required to perform a simple calculation such as $5 \times 7 \times 3$. Another type of **short-term memory** is sensory memory, for example, we see a video as a continuous scene rather than a series of still images. **Long-term memory** can be further subdivided into recent memory, which involves new learning, and remote memory, which involves old information. Interestingly, research shows sex differences in remote memory: women tend to remember better verbal situations, whereas men have a better recollection of events relating to visuals and space.

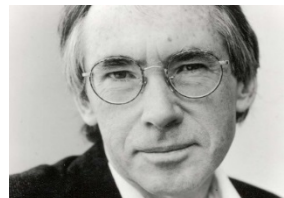
Improving your paragraphs

- ▶ Go back and study the organization of information in your paragraphs
 - ▶ Identify given and new information in sentences. Change the order if needed
 - ▶ Look at how you have linked sentence together (lexical cohesion)
 - ▶ Make your paragraph topic sentences interesting
 - ▶ Eliminate generic phrases (too well known)
 - ▶ Logically structure your writing (like with like)
 - ▶ Notice the tricks that good writers use. Good writers are above all good readers.
- 

A speech by Ian McEwan

In the current state of Brexit politics, **I** belong to the smallest, saddest, most pessimistic faction. **I'm** a denialist. Almost a year on, and **I'm** still shaking my head in disbelief – not a useful political act. **I** don't accept this near mystical, emotionally charged decision to leave the EU. **I** don't, **I** can't, believe it. **I** reject it.

My faction lives in daily bafflement. How has this happened in a mature parliamentary democracy, this rejection of common sense and good governance? How can it be **that** in a one-off vote just over a third of the electorate has determined the fate of the nation for the next half century? **That** shameless lies were told in the Brexit cause? **That** an advisory referendum has taken on a binding status? That politicians who spoke so recently for the EU now occupy the highest offices in the land and are driving us out. **That** a gang comprising many angry old men, irritable even in victory, are shaping the future of the country against the inclinations of its youth? **That** a handful of billionaires lavishly funded the Brexit campaigns for their own financial interests? **That**, in European Parliament Brexit coordinator Guy Verhofstadt's words a catfight within the Tory party got so completely out of hand? That the country, like a depressed teenage self-harmer, takes out a razor to scour a forearm, and now contemplates its own throat?



Adrian Wallwork

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References

Follow the links to more examples of Information flow and some practice exercises.

<http://www.uefap.com/writing/writfram.htm>

Ian McEwan's full speech

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/jun/02/ian-mcewan-denialist-confessions-remainder-brexit>

Using 'signpost' words and phrases

This guide explains the use of words and phrases that connect your ideas into a logical argument and signal to the reader the structure of that argument. It outlines the kinds of connections you can make in your writing, and gives examples of words and phrases that achieve and signal these links.

Related guides: ['Writing an Essay'](#).

What are 'signpost' words?

This is a name commonly given to words or phrases that express a connection between two ideas and make the transition from one point to the next in writing. They can link ideas within a sentence, link two sentences, two paragraphs, or even two parts of the essay together. They help to make writing flow smoothly, without any abrupt, disjointed breaks that leave the reader wondering what your points have to do with one another or what their relevance is.

Signpost words specify how the two ideas are related: for example, whether they are similar ideas, contrasting ideas, or whether one idea adds more detail or a further example to another. They can show that one idea is the result or conclusion of another, or to show the order of the ideas in a sequence. They are a key component in developing your argument showing the **structure** of your argument. They help your reader to follow where your essay is going; hence the term 'signposts'.

To introduce a sequence of points in your argument

Firstly, secondly etc	To begin with	Initially
Then	Next	Subsequently
Finally	Lastly	

- *To **begin with**, this essay will identify the causes of this situation.*
- *These factors will **subsequently** be analysed in detail.*

To cross-reference to other parts of the essay

As noted above / below As stated previously
As is discussed below

- **As noted previously**, a number of scholars have offered a different explanation.
- This development is composed of a number of stages, **as discussed above**.

To add an idea, or more detail

In addition	Additionally	Furthermore
Moreover	Again	and
Also	Similarly	Besides
What is more	Equally	Indeed
Apart from this		

- The issue is, **furthermore**, complicated by external matters.
- **Indeed**, scholars reject this theory as unrealistic.

To give an example

For example,	For instance	To demonstrate
As an illustration/example	To illustrate	

- Certain research methods, **for instance**, surveys and questionnaires, are particularly effective.
- **As an example**, the following quotation could be cited as representative of this viewpoint.

To focus on specifics in more detail

In particular
Specifically

- Such examples, and **in particular** those from the last five years, support the findings of recent research.

To generalise

As a rule	For the most part	Generally
In general	On the whole	In most cases
Usually		

- **In general**, it is true to say that a good understanding of theory is essential.
- The conclusions are, **for the most part**, sound.

To introduce a comparison or further point to support your argument

By the same token	Compared with	In like manner
In comparison with	In the same way	Likewise
Similarly	Whereas	

- **Compared with** the first example, the second seems unconvincing.
- This scholar's argument is **likewise** flawed.

To introduce a contrast or alternative point or section

In contrast	However	Although
Nevertheless	Nonetheless	On the other hand
But	Yet	Alternatively
Conversely	By contrast,	On the contrary

- **Nevertheless**, arguments in favour of the theory must also be considered.
- The case must not, **however**, be overstated.

To introduce a fact or state the obvious

(be careful with these – is your point obvious, or an assumption that needs to be proved?)

After all	Clearly	Naturally
Evidently	Obviously	Of course
It is evident that		

- These claims must, **of course**, be closely examined.
- **Clearly**, popular opinion is against the changes.

To rephrase or explain

In other words	Or rather	That is to say
To put it more simply/in another way		Namely
To be more precise		

- There is only one negative example, **namely**, that of the government.
- The model is not universal. **To be more precise**, it is not applicable in seven per cent of the above cases.

To introduce a reason, result, proof or logical conclusion

Accordingly	As a consequence	As a result
Consequently	Hence	Therefore
Thus	For this reason	Because
Due to	Indeed	In fact
It could be concluded that		

- *The data are incomplete and, **as a consequence**, this interpretation is not convincing.*
- ***Due to** problems of access, research on this topic is scarce.*

To conclude

In conclusion	To sum up	Finally
In short	To conclude	
As this essay has demonstrated		

- ***In conclusion**, it has been demonstrated that the hypothesis is generally supported by the evidence.*

Using Signpost words effectively

The signpost words and phrases can be used at the start of sentences or, in most cases, in the middle or at the end, as demonstrated above. They can be very effective in the first sentence of your paragraph to indicate what the function of that paragraph is in the context of your argument, or in the middle of a paragraph to develop your point.

They should be used with careful thought about their function. Good structure is more than a list of points, connected with signposts such as 'also', 'furthermore', 'in addition', 'the next point'. This may indicate that your argument is becoming descriptive rather than analytical. Be clear what the relationship between your points is. Variation in the kinds of signposts you use can indicate that you are critically analysing the issue and exploring the argument thoroughly, with contrasting views, more detailed development of points, and conclusions drawn.

It is important to use signpost words and phrases accurately, as they can change the meaning of what you write. These two sentences have opposite implications:

The government's stance was resolute. *However*, the negotiations did not succeed.

The government's stance was resolute. *Therefore*, the negotiations did not succeed.

Summary

These 'signpost' words and phrases make connections and transitions between the ideas in your writing. They help to make your argument clear to the reader by pointing out the relationship between your ideas, and where your line of thought is going. They can be used to signal the structure of your essay or the logical connections in your argument. Use them to link ideas within a sentence, or across sentences, paragraphs and sections of your essay.


Want to know more?

If you have any further questions about this topic you can make an appointment to see a **Learning Enhancement Tutor** in the **Student Support Service**, as well as speaking to your lecturer or adviser.

- 📞 Call: 01603 592761
- 💻 Ask: ask.let@uea.ac.uk
- 🖱️ Click: <https://portal.uea.ac.uk/student-support-service/learning-enhancement>

There are many other resources to help you with your studies on our [website](#).

Your comments or suggestions about our resources are very welcome.

	<p>Scan the QR-code with a smartphone app for more resources.</p>	
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