



Academic Writing II – 10 Golden Rules

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10 Golden Rules for Academic Writing



1. The end-focus technique
2. The KISS rule
3. Process writing
4. Logical thinking
5. Inform vs. impress
6. Passive vs. active voice
7. Enlarge your vocabulary
8. Grammar mistakes
9. Citations vs. references
10. Academic editing



The golden rule 1:

The end-focus technique



Basic background information: who, where, when (how? why?) appear early

The final position is the most important.

Does the most vital word -- the “what” word -- a key adjective or substantive, end each clause and sentence

=> to lead, even to drag you into what comes next?

Does the ending let you predict how the next sentence will begin?



Such behavior is nowadays unacceptable. The police would arrest anyone who did this.

Such behavior is unacceptable, nowadays. In 1700, however, cats suffered treatment we consider cruel. (Continue ...)

Nowadays, no one accepts such behavior. Tormenting animals is, in adults, at least, a symptom of a psychiatric problem. (Continue ...)

Unacceptable behavior nowadays includes mistreatment of animals. Cats, for example, used to be tormented for public amusement. Modern amusements are far more gentle. (Continue ...)

It has been shown by previous research that an active role in the X-process is played by substance Y (Cao 1999), which was found in this study to be greatly increased in the infants with this disease. (36 words)

Research has shown that, in infants with this disease, substance Y, which plays an active role in the X process (Cao 1999), greatly increased. (22 words)

We found that substance Y, which in infants with this disease plays an active role in the X process (Cao 1999), increased greatly. (21 words)

In infants with this disease, substance Y, which plays an active role in the X process (Cao 1999), increased greatly. (18 words!)



"By all means, marry. If you get a good wife, you'll become happy; if you get a bad one, you'll become a philosopher." -- Socrates

"Being powerful is like being a lady. If you have to tell people you are, you aren't." -- Margaret Thatcher

"...it doesn't matter how you get knocked down in life because that's going to happen. All that matters is you gotta get up. " -- Ben Affleck



The golden rule 2:

The KISS rule



Keep It Short and Simple



“Short and Simple” means more powerful

“Veni, vidi, vici”

“Citius, Altius, Fortius”



The golden rule 3:

Process writing



Write the first draft

Never translate.

Pour out your thoughts in the language of speech.

Write short, simple sentences in simple words.

Write “long”: Produce a 1,000-word text that will end as 600 words.

Use common verbs such as “to be / have / get / see / find out.”

Let yourself use the spoken forms “there is / are / was / were.”

Allow yourself passive voice

Avoid trying to organize your thoughts well.



In later drafts ...

Use your shortest sentences for your strongest statements. (“Everyone died.”)

Cut out every word that performs no task.

“There is / are X” => “X exists / occurs / appears / arises”

Avoid synonym-collection as a way to avoid repetition. Choose and use one term.

Replace most simple rough-draft verbs

“to be / have / get” => “determine / detect / assess / confirm / evaluate / characterize”



For elegance and formality

"get" => "receive?" "become?"

"like" => "such as"

"big" => "large / great"?

"too" => "also / as well"

"not" is weak.

Substitute negatives such as: "no/none/never",
prefixes such as "un- / in- / non-",
or negative words: "fail", "lack", "insufficient".

Convert most verbs from passive to active voice.

Avoid ending sentences with passives.

Change some passive verbs into adjectives

Change the verb itself



The golden rule 4:

Logical thinking



Sections:

Introduction=>MM=>Results=>**Discussion=>Introduction**

Did you answer the research question/hypothesis you formulated?

Start with what you ended

End with what you are going to do next

Paragraphs:

From general to specific

One statement comes up with at least **three reasons**/explanations

Sentences:

Linkages between sentences, e.g., therefore/thus/however/while/such/...

Flowchart/Schematic diagram/picture

not necessary but, in case you cannot describe clearly



The golden rule 5:

Inform vs. impress



Clarity/Readability/Non-ambiguity

Writers should aim “to inform, not to impress.”

The **Anglo-American** writer **leads readers** by the hand through the text.
The **Chinese writer**, in contrast, **expects the reader** to find his own way.

Suggestions:

Make the strategy of your text clear, not implicit.

Refer immediately to all the main items involved.

Make your main point clearly and early.

Make the text talk about the text itself.



The golden rule 6:

Change passive to active voice



The use of the active rather than the passive, could be encouraged
Why not let the data speak? (with inanimate agents)
In active voice, stronger and shorter

172 British secondary schools
45% encouraged to use the active voice, 42% passive
55 journals in the biological and physical sciences
Only two still required use of the passive

Single authors should avoid “We”. They may sound like the Queen of England.



The golden rule 7:

Enlarge your vocabulary



Your own research field supplies enough substantives.

Try to increase your stock of verbs.

Although your first draft needs only basic verbs ("to be / have / get / find out"), upgrade these later to specific verbs that fit each idea expressed.

Verbs are muscular: They move ideas along. Always, however, check connotations in an English-English dictionary, especially if you like synonym dictionaries with rare words.



to look at

obSERVE
 view + / reVIEW +
 perCEIVE
 reGARD
 appROACH +
 Be aWARE of
 STUDy +

to compare

conTRAST +
 match +
 CHARacterize
 apPROXimate
 reLATE
 CORrelate +
 asSOciate +
 differENTIate
 disTINGuish

to be finding out

learn
 see
 search +
 surVEY, (SURvey +)
 inSPECT
 inQUIRE
 QUERy +
 ascerTAIN
 exPLORE
 inVESTigate
 iDENTify
 aGREE
 probe +
 deTECT
 unCOVER
 deTERmine
 asSESS
 ANalyze (anALysis!)
 CALculate

to balance

eVALuate
 conSIDer
 SPECulate
 deCIDE
 conCLUDE
 acKNOWledge
 ADvocate +
 deFEND
 conCEDE

to test

disCERN
 check +
 conFIRM
 solve
 FALsify
 enSURE
 esTABlish
 subSTANTiate
 VERify

to show

INDicate
 sugGEST
 DEMonstrate
 point out
 exHIBit +
 reVEAL
 disCLOSE
 disPLAY +
 ILLUstrate
 exEMplify
 make EVIDent
 conTRAST
 inFORM
 COMment on
 affIRM
 asSERT
 TESTify (to)
 inTERpret
 deFINE



- "ImPLY" and "impliCAtion" are common & safe,
- but "IMplicate" always implies blame or guilt.
- Beware of prove, but DISprove is ok.
- Try "Answer +" -> "reply + / respond"; "Give" -> "provide / supPLY + / FURnish."
- Use "consist" for ingredients (cake), "contain" for contents (bucket).
- "Include" may not refer to 100% in the group.
- For 100%: "X comprised 10 Y / was comprised of 10 Y."
- Upgrade spoken-English "There is / was / were X" to "X exists / occurs / appears / arises," noting that the meanings of these verbs do differ, for instance: "exists permanently, occurs regularly, appears suddenly, arises theoretically."
- Three handy words when all else fails are forms of regard / involve / concern, as in "Regarding / In regards to this issue," "It involved effort / involved 9 cows," "The problem concerned X / Concerning this issue"



The golden rule 8:

Correct grammar mistakes



Common problems of non-native speakers:

Effects of mother tongue

Translation rather than writing

Present vs. past tense:

Literature review,
Material and methods,
Results,
Discussion,

it depends
past tense
past tense
it depends

Singular vs. Plural:

The structure of sentence:

Article usage:

Verbs/Nouns
Where is the verb?
a/an/the



The golden rule 9:

Right citations and references



Tips for literature review: Web of Science, Google Scholar, Research Gate, H index, citations

Where should you cite? Do you really need that reference?

Why earlier studies important? Why recent studies matter?

Harvard vs. Vancouver style, the EndNote tool

Introduction vs. Discussion

The Results section? None!

Double check references before submission



The golden rule 10:

Academic editing



Accept total responsibility for being clear.

- Is your MM clear? Half of comments come from the MM section!
- Did you answer/test your research question/hypothesis? No? rejection!

The greatest sin is ambiguity.

- New theory, methodology, results
- Applications of new tech.? It depends...
- Do not promise too much

Never translate. Avoid to write a long sentence, e.g., more than three lines.

Trust your ear. Change oral language to formal writing.

Edit your draft as a reviewer/an editor. Careful editing will shorten your texts.



The secret of writing skills:

Practice, Practice, and Practice



- Elsevier, 2007. How to Write a World Class Paper. Elsevier Author Workshop. 205 pp.
- Ethics Toolkit from Elsevier: https://researcheracademy.elsevier.com/uploads/2018-02/ethics_a5_booklet_update260617_web.pdf
- Norris, C.B., 2005. Academic Writing in English. Language Services. University of Helsinki. 70 pp.
- Online Research Ethics Course:
https://ori.hhs.gov/education/products/montana_round1/research_ethics.html
- Swales, J.M., Feak, C.B., 1994. Academic Writing for Graduate Students -- Essential Tasks and Skills. The University of Michigan Press. 253 pp.
- Weissberg, R., and Buker, S. 1990. Writing up research: experimental research report writing for students of English. Prentice Hall, Inc. 202 pp.