

# Language tips for editing your assignment

Here are some language tips for when editing and proofreading your next assignment.

\* Please note: the following examples of citations are in the Harvard style of referencing.

## 1. Using the right tense

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Use the appropriate verb tenses for your purpose and be consistent in your use of them. Review a paragraph from an assignment you are currently working on – what tenses are you using and why?

### Present simple

This is the most common tense used in academic writing (unless you are specifically referring to historical events or past research). It is commonly used to put forward facts and also to describe the work of other authors.

Jones (2015) **suggests** that one of the ways in which productivity in the workplace is increased is through flexible working arrangements. Flexible hours **involves** negotiating tasks and timeframes directly with employees. Managers and employees **work** together to develop suitable start and finishing hours based on the needs of the organisation.

### Present perfect

This tense is used to describe changes between the past or recent past and now. You might use this to refer to recent research in your discipline where you want to emphasise a recent change.

Over the last 10 years, large population increases in urban areas **have led** to significant traffic problems and this **has affected** the ability of businesses to conduct regular working hours (Nelson 2010, p. 35).

### Past simple

This is used to describe a specific historical event or specific research carried out in the past. You might also use this to contrast with more recent research.

Research **conducted** by Smith (2011) **looked** at links between flexibility and productivity. In her research she **conducted** a survey of 200 businesses. These businesses **provided** staff with flexible and set working arrangements. She **compared** flexible working arrangements to set working hours.

## 2. Subject-verb agreement

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Ensure that the right form of the verb is used to match the subject of the sentence. Is the subject singular or plural?

One of the objectives of playing sport is to increase the ability to stay focused on a task.

The purpose of this study is not clear.

There are a number of studies to support this claim.

## 3. Parallel structure

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Parallel structure refers to ensuring that verb forms used within a list-like sentence are consistent with each other. In the following sentence, for example, it is important that each list item has an '-ing' form of the verb.

The marketing process consists of analysing the situation to identify opportunities, formulating a strategy for a value proposition, making tactical decisions, successfully implementing the plan and monitoring results.

## 4. Active or passive?

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Active and passive forms are both used in academic writing. Much will depend on the expectations of your discipline – so look carefully at your readings and how they are used.

Passive forms can be useful when you need to write in a more objective style, for example, you if you need to remove the “I” or “we” when reporting on an activity you have completed. However, in a reflective writing piece you would be more likely to use active forms.

Active: We conducted the survey over a period of 2 months.

Passive: The survey was conducted over a period of 2 months.

When citing other sources, both passive and active forms are used in academic writing, depending on whether you want to emphasise the information (passive) or the author of the information (active). Note how the author’s name is a part of the sentence in the active form.

Passive: It was demonstrated that heart attacks can be caused by high stress (Sturgeon 2016).

Active: Sturgeon (2016) demonstrated that high stress can cause heart attacks.

## 5. Linking phrases

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Use linking or transition words to:

- orientate your reader  
*firstly, secondly, finally*
- connect ideas  
*in addition, furthermore, therefore, however, also*
- show similarity between ideas  
*correspondingly, similarly, in the same way*
- contrast ideas  
*instead, in contrast, in comparison, alternatively, however*

Read more about using linking words in the Deakin Study Support guide to Essay writing.

## 6. Reducing wordy sentences

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Learn to identify where your writing contains too much description or overly complex sentences that obscure the purpose of your communication. Good communication, even of complex ideas, is best embodied by the simplest possible grammatical structures. Think carefully about the purpose of the sentence and ask yourself these questions:

- Could I write a simpler sentence that would still express the same idea?
- Have I repeated any words unnecessarily? Could I remove words that don't add any meaning?  
*very, basically, really, quite*
- Is my text too conversational? Avoid using 'you' – this may be more appropriate for an oral presentation than for a written assignment.  
*... when you think about it.*  
*What I want to tell you about today is really important ...*  
*You know this is crucial for ...*
- Could I replace a longer phrase with a simpler word or phrase?  
*it is crucial that > should*  
*considering the fact that > because*  
*despite the fact that > although*

Here is an example of a wordy sentence in need of an edit:

Moreover and in summary, the reason for this is that certain technological advances in online communication around the world in the twenty-first century have in many ways impacted quite dramatically upon the way we manage time (despite the fact that these technological advances have often come with the promise of saving time).

Here is an edited, more concise version of that sentence:

Recent advances in global online communication have impacted negatively upon our ability to manage time, despite the often repeated promises of saving time.

### Further writing guides for students:

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- [Purdue University Online Writing Lab](#)
- [‘Grammar and style resources’, University of NSW](#)
- [Academic Phrasebank, University of Manchester](#)

Essay writing. (2020). Retrieved 4 December 2020, from [https://www.deakin.edu.au/students/studying/study-support/academic-skills/essay-writing?\\_ga=2.185476715.370898910.1607011402-971353874.1605036262](https://www.deakin.edu.au/students/studying/study-support/academic-skills/essay-writing?_ga=2.185476715.370898910.1607011402-971353874.1605036262)