

How to improve your Academic Writing-Language Rules

In Academic Writing you should:

- **follow the rules of grammar**
- **use correct punctuation**
- **try to avoid common sentence structure mistakes**
- **make the correct word choice**

in order to make your writing

- **clearer**
- **more fluent**
- **more convincing**

Also as in every kind of writing

- **leave plenty of time for editing (text correction, condensation, modification)**
- **proofreading (checking for mistakes)**

Punctuation

- Punctuation plays an important in academic writing
- There are rules of punctuation that have to be followed

Capitalization

- Correct Capitalization is essential in Academic Writing

Sentence Structure

- Basic word error rules in English require a subject to be followed by a verb
- Try to avoid common sentence structure mistakes

Verbs

- Subject-verb agreement is important to make it clear who or what is doing an action
- Make sure you use tenses correctly and consistently

Word choice

There are some types of words that students often misuse or confuse

- | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| • Articles | • Conjunctions |
| • Prepositions | • Commonly confused words |
| • Pronouns | |

Punctuation

- Punctuation **signals** the structure of a text
- It tells us **not only where one idea ends and another begins**, but also **which idea is more important and how it relates to other ideas**
- The **wrong punctuation**, then, **signals the wrong relationship between ideas, confusing your reader**

Symbols and typographic conventions

.	full stop	X.X	decimal point (2.2: two point two)
,	comma	*	asterisk
?	question mark	()	parentheses (or round brackets)
!	exclamation mark	[]	square brackets (or box brackets)
:	colon	{ }	curly brackets
;	semi-colon	°	degrees (40°: forty degrees)
“ ”	double quotation marks	%	per cent
‘ ’	single quotation marks	&	and (also called ‘ampersand’)
’	apostrophe	©	copyright
-	hyphen	<	less than
—	dash	>	greater than
+	plus	@	at
—	minus	✓	tick

×	multiplied by (2 × 2: two multiplied by two)	X	cross
÷	divided by (6 ÷ 2: six divided by two)	X_X	underscore (ann_hobbs: ann underscore hobbs)
=	equals		
/	forward slash	\	back slash

Commas (,)

Commas are used to split up different parts of a sentence, and when used correctly they bring clarity and flow to your writing. They're probably the most common piece of punctuation in English, which means that they're often the most misused.

When to use a comma

	• Incorrect	• Correct
Introducing a sentence	Additionally the project was delayed.	Additionally, the project was delayed.
Separating a nonrestrictive clause	Matilda who was unloved by her family escaped from reality by reading.	Matilda, who was unloved by her family, escaped from reality by reading.
Joining independent clauses with a coordinating conjunction	Oysters are considered a luxury product so they are expensive.	Oysters are considered a luxury product, so they are expensive.

Semicolons (;)

A semicolon can be used to connect two closely related independent clauses (parts of a sentence that could also stand as separate sentences).

Example

My car broke down this morning; it's being fixed at the mechanic's garage now.

Colons (:))

A colon can be used to introduce **words, phrases, lists of items, explanations,** and **elaborations**. It can also be used to introduce a quotation.

- She asked for only one thing: understanding.
- The researchers found something unexpected: a dramatically lowered risk of heart disease.
- My garden has four kinds of flowers: daffodils, tulips, roses, and chrysanthemums.
- Though some of my colleagues disagree, I stand by my opinion: catering to current market trends alone won't ensure the long-term success of the company.
- The teacher shouted at the students: "Don't talk when I am speaking!"

Quotation marks ("")

Quotation marks (also known as speech marks, quotes or inverted commas) are used to set off direct speech and quotations.

In academic writing, you need to **use quotation marks when you quote a source**.

Example: "If you can't find spring, you make it", (Elytis, 1968)

Single vs double quotation marks

There are two types of quotation marks: 'single' and "double". Which one to choose generally depends on whether you are using American or British English

US English

- She said that this model is "the best there is."

UK English

- She said that this model is 'the best there is'.

Double quotation marks can also be acceptable in UK English, provided you are consistent throughout the text. APA style requires double quotations.

Apostrophes ('))

Apostrophes have two main uses:

- Indicating possession (e.g. *The **student's** paper/The **students'** paper*)
- Indicating a contraction (e.g. *She's writing a paper*)

Contractions should be avoided in academic writing,

e.g. *She is writing a paper*(correct) - *She's writing a paper*(incorrect)

- possessive apostrophes are used in all types of writing.
- Make sure to use them correctly, especially when dealing with plurals and abbreviations.

Use a possessive apostrophe...

• With singular nouns	This study examines the company's efforts to expand. I highly recommend Sharon's salon.
• With plural nouns	My parents' support was essential. The crowd's applause could be heard for miles.
• With abbreviations and acronyms	In the last quarter, BP's profits dropped. UOWM's

Don't use an apostrophe...

• To pluralize nouns	The results are surprising. Remember what happened three Christmases ago?
• To pluralize acronyms	Several NGOs were present at the conference. We can identify the following KPIs .
• To pluralize decades	The 1920s was a golden age for art. During the 2010s politics slid into confusion.
• With possessive pronouns	The cobra reared its head. Whose snake is that?

Em dashes and en dashes (— vs -)

There are two types of dash. The en dash is approximately the length of the letter *n*, and the em dash the length of the letter *m*.

- The shorter **en dash** (–) is used to mark ranges.

e.g. The company had a successful 2018–2019 fiscal year.

- The longer **em dash** (—) is used to separate extra information or mark a break in a sentence.

e.g. Some years ago—never mind how long precisely—I thought I would sail about a little and see the world.

There was no arguing with her—she was set in her opinion.

Hyphens (-)

Hyphens have many functions, but their main role is to link words (or parts of words). They most commonly appear with:

- compound adjectives **e.g. well-respected**
- phrasal verbs being used as nouns **e.g. break in / break-in**
- after some prefixes

e.g. sub-station(BrE)/substation(AmE)

non-metallic(BrE)/ nonmetallic(AmE)

Parentheses ()

Parentheses are used to add extra information in a sentence. In academic writing, they are most often used to convey

- technical information such as equations
- to introduce acronyms e.g. CAD (Computer Assisted Design)
- for in-text-citations e.g. (Papadopoulos, 1999)

Question marks (?)

Normally you should avoid using questions in your formal or academic writing.

Some tips for questions and question marks

- Avoid rhetorical questions
- Avoid genuine but unnecessary questions

Capitalization rules

In English, a capital letter is used for the first word of a sentence and for all proper nouns (words that name a specific person, place, organization, or thing).

In some cases, capitalization is also required for the first word in a quotation and the first word after a colon.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capitalize 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't capitalize
People	Names (and words derived from them); nationalities; titles when used as part of a name <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the works of Aristotle • a Freudian psychoanalyst • the Brazilian actor • the lecture of Dr Savvidis 	Occupations; titles when not used as part of a name <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the magazine's managing editor • an elderly professor • the left-wing senator
Places	Names of specific continents, countries, states, cities, regions, monuments and landmarks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • South America • the West Coast of the US • the Eiffel Tower • the River Thames 	Directions and general areas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • head north • the west of the city • the longest river in the world
Times	Days of the week and months of the year; historical eras and named events; holidays <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a Monday in July • the Middle Ages • the Napoleonic Wars • Christmas Day 	Centuries, decades, seasons <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an eighteenth-century painting • the fashion of the fifties • a summer vacation
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizations, companies and brand names • Religions and deities • Planets • Languages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Animal and plant species • Elements • Minerals • Theories and models • Medical conditions