

# University of St. Gallen

## Doctoral Seminar

### Writing Research Papers and Dissertations

#### \*\*\*COURSE DOCUMENTATION\*\*\*

1. Useful Resources	3
2. The “Ideal” Text	4
3. Be Concise	5
4. Principles of Composition	6
5. The Writing Process	7–9
6. Enhancing Readability	10–12
7. Sentence Patterns	13
8. Punctuation Rules	14–15
9. Selected Language Topics	16–23
10. Writing Abstracts	24–26
11. Editing Checklist	27–28

The basic assumption behind this course documentation is:

*Writers equipped with solid  
editorial skills write with  
greater confidence and  
produce more readable texts.*



*This course aims to  
develop those editorial skills.*

## 1. USEFUL RESOURCES

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### Academic Writing

“Writing Clearly and Concisely,” *APA Manual*, pp. 61–86.

Adrian Wallwork, *English for Writing Research Papers* (Springer, 2011).

### Language Reference

Academic phrases and expressions: [www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk](http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk)

(Wallwork’s *English for Writing Research Papers* also contains useful phrases for academic writing)

*Oxford Collocations Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009): an indispensable working tool for “knowing which words work together—and sound more natural”

Michael Swan, *Practical English Usage* (3rd ed., fully revised, 2005): provides indispensable reference for almost all language problems

### Style Manuals

*Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA)*, 6th ed. (2010).

*The Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th ed. (2002).

## 2. THE “IDEAL” TEXT

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An “ideal” piece of academic writing consists of:

### 1. Topic-Comment Paragraphs

This book discusses ...
Specifically, it ...

This chapter discusses ...
Specifically, it ...

Etc.

### 2. Short paragraphs (max. 4–8 sentences per paragraph)

### 3. Short, active, reader-centered sentences (max. 25 words per sentence)

### 3. BE CONCISE

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It is widely accepted that English prefers short paragraphs and sentences over long ones. This presents many non-native writers of English with a serious challenge. The following sections provide various robust principles for producing short and crisp expository writing pleasing to the English ear.

#### **What the experts say:**

“Make the paragraph the main unit of composition; use the topic-comment device to structure your paragraphs” (Strunk and White, *The Elements of Style*, 21).

“Short words and short sentences are easier to comprehend than are long ones” (*APA Manual*, 67).

“In his book, *The Effective Communicator*, John Adair reports that [...] only about 4% understand a 27-word sentence first time around, especially if it is poorly punctuated” (Wallwork, *English for Writing Research Papers*, 33).

“In the world of academic writing, I think you should aim for an upper limit of around 25 words a sentence” (Ibid., 35).

***Concision can be achieved by knowing***

***1. how to produce short, active sentences***

***2. how to edit one’s writing for length***

## 4. PRINCIPLES OF COMPOSITION

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- ✓ Write to specification: Know what the target text requires (see page 6)
- ✓ Make the paragraph the main unit of composition (see page 7)
- ✓ “Topic, comment”: Use the topic-comment device to structure paragraphs and to create coherence (see page 7)
- ✓ One topic per paragraph
- ✓ Begin each paragraph with a topic sentence (i.e., controlling idea)
- ✓ Develop the topic sentence in a comment (i.e., supporting ideas = evidence, examples, etc.)
- ✓ One idea per sentence
- ✓ Write short, active sentences to make your ideas reader-centered.
- ✓ Use the relevant punctuation rules to control sentence length and hence meaning (see pages 13–14).
- ✓ Read your paper aloud to someone to check for coherence (“flow”) and reader-centeredness. Or have someone read your material aloud to you.
- ✓ Edit your first version for structure, sentence length, clarity, and continuity (see pages 26–27).
- ✓ Proofread for spelling and punctuation (ibid.).

## 5. THE WRITING PROCESS

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### 3.1. Preparing to Write

# WRITE TO SPECIFICATION

Before you start writing, answer these questions:

- 1. Which type of text am I going to produce? Is it an abstract, a journal article, a conference paper, a monograph, a doctoral dissertation, etc.?*
- 2. What are the main parts of the target text (e.g., Introduction, Method, Results, Discussion, Conclusion, References, Appendices, etc.)?*
- 3. In which order should these parts appear?*
- 4. How much detail is permitted? Is there a word limit?*
- 5. Which stylistic and formal requirements do I need to follow? Are footnotes permitted? What about the first person? Etc.*

### 3.2. Paragraph Organisation

==> MAKE THE **TOPIC-COMMENT PARAGRAPH**<sup>1</sup> THE UNIT OF COMPOSITION

Part	Generic phrases	Comments
<b>TOPIC</b> (= controlling idea)	<i>This paragraph discusses</i> ....	All subsequent ideas must relate to the idea introduced in the topic sentence.
<b>COMMENT</b> (= supporting ideas, evidence)	<i>Specifically, ...</i>	The meaning of the topic sentence made clearer, explained or expanded by giving illustrations or specific instances, by discussing its implications or consequences, etc.
Concluding idea	<i>In conclusion, ...</i>	The final sentence either emphasises the thought of the topic sentence or states some important consequence.

The **topic-comment structure** enables the effective organisation of evidence paragraphs. The basic rule: **one controlling or main idea per paragraph**. This idea should be summarised in an initial topic sentence. The controlling idea should thereafter be developed in the rest of the paragraph through supporting statements, such as relevant comments, details, examples, explanations, definitions, or research data.

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<sup>1</sup> The topic-comment structure was first introduced by William Strunk in his now-classic *The Elements of Style* (1918; reprinted countless times ever since). This method of text organisation is taught throughout the English-speaking world.

### 3.3. How to Produce a First Version:

1. Research and take notes on your research question.<sup>2</sup>
2. Outline your table of contents.
3. Based on this outline, write a brief statement that defines the logic running through your text.
4. Create a detailed inventory of each chapter and section: *Which main topic does each chapter/section discuss? Which evidence does each chapter/section present? What are the findings of each chapter/section?*
4. Open a Word file, copy-paste topic-comment paragraphs into the file, and fill in the generic phrases shown in the model paragraph:

<i><b>This paper/section/paragraph discusses ...<sup>3</sup></b></i>
<i><b>Specifically, it ...</b></i>

5. Transfer your inventorised contents (Step 4) into the generic topic-comment paragraphs.
6. Now arrange your ideas, examples, evidence in the best possible order within each comment.
7. Write up your notes into complete sentences.

<sup>2</sup> Here is a helpful note-taking template:

<i>This article / book discusses ...</i> <i>Its main argument(s) is/are ...</i> <i>Its principal findings are ...</i> <i>What interested me most when I read it is ...</i> <i>What I didn't really understand is ...</i> <i>I agree / disagree with the author about: ...</i> <i>Passages I consider worth referring to / quoting in my own work (and why): ...</i>
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<sup>3</sup> If you are writing a dissertation, the corresponding generic phrases are: *This book/dissertation/study discusses ... // Specifically, it ...*

## 6. ENHANCING READABILITY

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### Key Principles

1. Write shorter sentences by avoiding long introductory clauses and by proceeding quickly to the subject of your sentence.<sup>4</sup>
2. Make subjects short and concrete, ideally naming the actor performing the action expressed by the verb that follows.
3. Name the main characters and use verbs to name their actions.
4. Do not split subjects and verbs.
5. Place key actions in verbs, not in nouns.
6. Place old or familiar information at the beginning of a sentence, new or unfamiliar information at the end.
7. Favour the active voice.<sup>5</sup>

### PRINCIPLE 1: Avoid long introductory clauses

Most readers find long introductory clauses difficult to process because it leaves them wondering what the subject of the sentence is.

### Writing and revision tips:

1. Start most sentences directly with their subjects
2. Use introductory phrases and clauses sparingly
3. Revise long introductory phrases and subordinate clauses into their own independent sentences

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<sup>4</sup> As discussed in class, the following sequence of clauses is easier to read: independent clause + dependent clause.

<sup>5</sup> These principles for writing effective sentences and thereby enhancing readability are adapted from *The Chicago Manual of Style* (16th ed., 2010), Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style: A Style Guide for Writers* (1918, 2000), and Wallwork's *English for Writing Research Papers* (2011). For bibliographical details, see page 2. For sample sentences, see the materials discussed in sessions 1–2.

## **PRINCIPLE 2: Make subjects short and concrete**

Most readers tend to judge a sentence to be readable when the subject of its verb names the main character in a few concrete words. Ideally the character is also the “doer” of the action expressed by the verb that follows.

### **Writing and revision tips:**

To repair sentences with long, abstract subjects, revise in three steps

1. Identify the main character in the sentence.
2. Find its key action. If this action is buried in an abstract noun, make it a verb.
3. Make the main character the subject of that new verb.

## **PRINCIPLE 3: Name the main characters and use verbs to name their actions**

Most readers want subjects to name the main characters in our story, ideally concrete characters, and specific verbs to name their key actions.

### **Writing and revision tips:**

1. Make the main characters grammatical subjects of explicit verbs.

## **PRINCIPLE 4: Do not split subjects and verbs**

Most readers want to reach the main verb quickly, so avoid interrupting subjects and verbs with more than a word or two.

### **Writing and revision tips:**

1. Move the interrupting clause to the beginning or end of its sentence, depending on whether it connects more closely with the sentence before or after.
2. When in doubt, place it at the end.

### **PRINCIPLE 5: Place key actions in verbs, not in nouns**

Most readers want to get to a verb quickly, but they also want that verb to express a key action. So avoid using an empty verb such as “have,” “do,” “make,” or “be” to introduce an action buried in an abstract noun. Make the noun a verb.

#### **Writing and revision tips:**

1. Express actions in verbs to make sentences more direct.

### **PRINCIPLE 6: Place old information first, new information at the end.**

Most readers understand a sentence more readily when they grasp its subject easily, and the easiest subject to grasp is not just short and concrete, but familiar.

#### **Writing and revision tips:**

1. Place old information before new.
2. Ensure that familiar information introduces unfamiliar information to create “flow.”

### **PRINCIPLE 7: Favour the active voice**

Basically, it is wise to avoid passive verbs, since they force us to produce sentences that contradict the above principles. Most readers prefer a subject that is short, concrete, and familiar, regardless of its following verb. So choose active or passive depending on which provides the right kind of subject: short, concrete, and familiar.<sup>6</sup>

#### **Writing and revision tips:**

1. Choose active or passive, depending on which provides the right kind of subject: short, concrete, and familiar.
2. If you are uncertain whether to use the passive, have someone read your sentence back to you. If they stumble or seem to drone, choose an active variant.

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<sup>6</sup> For details on the passive, see page 20.

## 7. SENTENCE PATTERNS

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Wallwork (2013:33) identifies four types of sentences:

1. **Simple** (subject + verb + object): *I finished my paper yesterday. I sent it to the journal.*
2. **Compound** (two simple sentences joined by a conjunction, e.g., and, because): *I finished my paper and I sent it to the journal.*
3. **Complex** (a simple sentence split by an intervening subordinate clause): *My paper, which I have taken two months to write, was accepted by the journal.*
4. **Compound + complex**: *My paper, which had taken two months to write, was rejected by the journal because the referees said it made no contribution to the current state of research (29 words).*

### What the expert says:

“The simpler the sentence, the easier it is for the reader to understand. This does not mean writing sentences containing only five or six words. But it does mean being aware that the last type of sentence (compound + complex) should not be used too often and should have a limit of generally not more than 30 words. If it is over 30 words, there is a chance that the reader will have to read it twice in order to fully understand it” (Wallwork 2013:33).

## 8. PUNCTUATION RULES

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### Pattern 1: Simple sentence [independent clause]

*Doctors are concerned about the rising death rate from asthma.*

**Rule:** Place a full-stop at the end of a simple sentence (independent clause).

### Pattern 2: Compound sentence (using coordinating conjunctions)

[independent clause ... coordinating conjunction ... independent clause ]

Coordinating conjunctions: **and, but, for, or, nor, so, yet**

*Doctors are concerned about the rising death rate from asthma, but they don't know the reasons for it.*

**Rule:** Place a comma before *and* or *but* (and before other coordinating conjunctions) introducing an independent clause. (No comma is needed if two independent sentences have the same subject.)

### Pattern 3: Compound sentence

[independent clause ... independent clause ]

a) *Doctors are concerned about the rising death rate from asthma. They don't know the reasons for it.*

b) *Doctors are concerned about the rising death rate from asthma; they don't know the reasons for it.*

**Rules:** (a) Separate independent clauses either with a full-stop or with a semi-colon. (b) Use a semi-colon to indicate that the ideas expressed by two independent clauses are closely related. (c) Do not join independent clauses by a comma.

### Pattern 4: Compound sentence (using independent markers)

[independent clause ... independent marker ... independent clause]

Examples of independent markers: **therefore, moreover, thus, consequently, however, also**

a) *Doctors are concerned about the rising death rate from asthma. Therefore, they have called for more research into its causes.*

b) *Doctors are concerned about the rising death rate from asthma; therefore, they have called for more research into its causes.*

- c) *Doctors are concerned about the rising death rate from asthma; they have therefore called for more research into its causes.*

**Rules:** (a) Place either a full-stop or a semi-colon at the end of the first independent clause.

(b) Place a comma after the independent marker introducing the second independent clause.<sup>7</sup>

### **Pattern 5: Complex sentence**

**[dependent marker + dependent clause ... independent clause]**

Dependent markers: **because, before, since, while, although, if, until, when, then, after, as**

*Because doctors are concerned about the rising death rate from asthma, they have called for more research into its causes.*

**Rule:** Place a comma after a dependent clause if it is followed by an independent clause.

### **Pattern 6: Complex sentence**

**[independent clause ... dependent marker + dependent clause]**

*Doctors are concerned about the rising death rate from asthma because it is a common, treatable disease.*

**Rule:** Do not place a comma after an independent clauses if it is followed by a dependent clause.

### **Pattern 7: Complex sentence**

**[first part of an independent clause ... commenting clause or phrase ... rest of the independent clause]**

*Many doctors, including both pediatricians and general practitioners, are concerned about the rising death rate from asthma.*

**Rule:** Place a non-essential clause between commas.

### **Pattern 8: Complex sentence**

**[first part of an independent clause ... defining clause or phrase ... rest of the independent clause]**

*Many doctors who are concerned about the rising death rate from asthma have called for more research into its causes.*

**Rule:** Do not place an essential clause between commas.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Use the “serial comma” between elements (including before *and* and *or*) in a series of three or more items (the height, width, or depth; in a study by Stacy, Newcomb, and Bentler).

## 9. SELECTED LANGUAGE TOPICS

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### 1. Editorial *we*

“For clarity, restrict your use of *we* to refer only to yourself and your coauthors (use *I* if you are the sole author of the paper). Broader uses of *we* may leave your readers wondering to whom you are referring” (*APA Manual*, 69).

### THE FIRST PERSON SINGULAR<sup>9</sup>

1. Avoid beginning too many sentences with *I think* or *I believe* (or the formal equivalent, *in my opinion*). Academic readers assume that you think and believe what you write, so there is no need to claim so explicitly.
2. Avoid narrating your research: *First, I consulted ..., then I examined ...*. Academic readers care less about the story of your research than about its results.
3. Use the first person occasionally to soften the dogmatic edge of a statement.
4. Use the first person when the subject of a verb naming an action is unique to you as the writer of your argument. Verbs referring to such actions typically appear in introductions (*I show / argue / prove / claim that X ...*) and in conclusions (*I have demonstrated / concluded that Y ...*).

Note: Researchers seldom use the first person for an action that others must repeat to replicate the reported research. Such words include *divide*, *measure*, *weigh*, *examine*, and so on:

I calculated the coefficient of X.

The coefficient of X was calculated.

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<sup>8</sup> On punctuation in general and for details on punctuating so-called “relative clauses,” see Swan, *Practical English Usage*. For an exhaustive overview of punctuation rules, see *The Chicago Manual of Style*, pp. 305–344.

<sup>9</sup> The first person can be used comfortably (1) to state an argument (“I argue that ...”), (2) to outline procedure (“I proceed in three steps: ...”), (3) to announce a conclusion (“Based on the research, I conclude that ...”), (4) to acknowledge the contributions of others to one’s work (“I wish to thank ...”). Nevertheless, it is wise to check the relevant journal guidelines whether the first person is permitted, perhaps even encouraged, or not.

## 2. Relative pronouns (*APA Manual*, 6th ed., 83)

Relative clauses are one type of dependent clause (see page 12).

### **That versus which**

*The materials that worked well in the first experiment were used in the second experiment.*

#### **that = restrictive/essential:**

*The cards that worked well in the first experiment were not useful in the second experiment. [Only those cards that worked well in the first experiment were not useful in the second.]*

#### **which = non-restrictive/non-essential:**

*The cards, which worked well in the first experiment, were not useful in the second experiment. [The second experiment was not appropriate for the cards.]*

## 3. Parallel construction (*APA Manual*, 84–86)

*CORRECT: The results show that such changes could be made without affecting error rate and that latencies continued to decrease over time.*

*INCORRECT: The results show that such changes could be made without affecting error rate and latencies continued to decrease over time.*

**=>> With coordinating conjunctions used in pairs (between ... and, both ... and, neither ... nor, either ... or, not only ... but also), place the first conjunction immediately before the first part of the parallelism:**

***Between ... and***

*CORRECT: We recorded the difference between the performance of subjects who completed the first task and the performance of those who completed the second task.*

*INCORRECT: We recorded the difference between the performance of subjects who completed the first task and the second task.*

*CORRECT: between 2.5 and 4.0 years of age*

*INCORRECT: between 2.5–4.0 years of age*

***Both ... and***

*CORRECT: The names were difficult both to pronounce and to spell.*

*INCORRECT: The names were both difficult to pronounce and spell.*

**=>> Never use *both* with *as well as***

*CORRECT: The names were difficult to pronounce as well as to spell.*

*INCORRECT: The names were difficult both to pronounce as well as to spell.*

***Neither ... nor***

*CORRECT: Neither the responses to the auditory stimuli nor the responses to the tactile stimuli were repeated.*

*INCORRECT: Neither the responses to the auditory stimuli nor to the tactile stimuli were repeated.*

***Either ... or***

*CORRECT: The respondents either gave the worst answer or gave the best answer.*

*CORRECT: The respondents gave either the worst answer or the best answer.*

*INCORRECT: The respondents either gave the worst answer or the best answer.*

***Not only ... but also***

*CORRECT: It is surprising not only that pencil-and-paper scores predicted this result but also that all other predictors were less accurate.*

*INCORRECT: It is not only surprising that pencil-and-paper scores predicted this result but also that all other predictors were less accurate.*

**==>> Elements in a series should also be parallel in form**

*CORRECT: The participants were told to make themselves comfortable, to read the instructions, and to ask about anything they did not understand.*

*INCORRECT: The participants were told to make themselves comfortable, to read the instructions, and that they should ask about anything they did not understand.*

**4. Subject and Verb Agreement**

**With words that indicate portions—*percent, fraction, part, majority, some, all, none,* etc.—look at the noun in the *of* phrase (i.e., the object of the preposition) to determine whether to use a singular or plural verb. If the object of the preposition is singular, use a singular verb. If the object is plural, use a plural verb.**

*Fifty percent of the pie has disappeared. (Pie is the object of the preposition of)*

*Fifty percent of the pies have disappeared.*

*One-third of the city is employed.*

*One third of the people are unemployed.*

## 5. The Passive

Using the passive is not a matter of coincidence or intuition, but the result of a well-reasoned process. The passive is used in the following cases:

(1) **When the doer of the action is indefinite, unimportant, or unknown:**

Fax machines are no longer considered a luxury in home offices.

No other problems were reported.

(2) **When the result of the activity is more important than the doer:**

These statistics are drawn from thirty field tests.

(3) **When a message is unpleasant:**

Three hundred workers were made redundant, and dividend payments were cut.

However, the passive is wordy, and its use can create stumbling blocks for readers:

It has been determined that ... [Who determined it?]

It has been alleged that ... [Who made the allegation?]

For the sake of clarity and concision, “strong” writers prefer the active voice and reserve the passive for one of the above purposes. Note, though, that a passive construction can provide readers with a welcome relief from a barrage of active sentences.

## 6. Using Tenses in Academic Writing

Part	Action	Tense
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Describing general background context, i.e., what is already known about the subject (e.g., <i>Persistence is an attribute valued by many</i>)</li> </ul>	Present Simple
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Describing how the problem has been approached from the past until the present (e.g., <i>Persistence has often been studied in terms of ...</i>)</li> </ul>	Present Perfect
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Defining the scope of the present study (e.g., <i>This study looks at the period 1975–1985</i>)</li> </ul>	Present Simple (or Future) <sup>10</sup>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Outlining main argument and research questions (e.g., <i>I argue that ...</i>)</li> </ul>	Present Simple (or Future)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Describing the theory and methods used (e.g., <i>The methods used in this study include ...</i>)</li> </ul>	Present Simple
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Outlining procedure and explain sequence of chapters (e.g., <i>This study is divided into five chapters: chapter 1 examines ...; ...</i>)</li> </ul>	Present Simple
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Discussing contribution of paper or book to scholarship (e.g., <i>This study breaks new ground by ...</i>)</li> </ul>	Present Simple
<b>LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Introducing the literature review (e.g., <i>In the literature, there are several examples of ...; Many different approaches have been proposed ...</i>)</li> </ul>	Present Simple or Present Perfect
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Referring to ongoing research, i.e., when authors are still investigating a particular field (e.g., <i>Since 1998, there have been many attempts to establish a new index ...</i>)</li> </ul>	Present Perfect
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Referring to research started and</li> </ul>	Past Simple <sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Wallwork (2011: 203-04) notes that the present now tends to be favoured over the future.

<sup>11</sup> According to Wallwork (212), the simple past must be used when:

- the year of publication is stated within the main sentence (i.e., not just in brackets)
- you mention specific pieces of research
- you state the exact date when something was written, proven, etc.

	<p>completed in the past (e.g., <i>The first approaches used ...; This problem was first analysed by ... / X first analysed this problem; Evans studied the differences between ...</i>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Describing how a system, method, procedure, etc. functions (e.g., <i>Smith and Jones developed a new system ... . In their system, two languages are / were compared from the perspective of ...</i>)</li> <li>▪ Discussing or referring to previously published laws, theorems, definitions, proofs, etc. (e.g., <i>The Bayle theorem states that ...</i>)</li> </ul>	<p>Past Simple or Present Simple<sup>12</sup></p> <p>Present Simple</p>
<b>METHODS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Describing research activities that were undertaken in the past (e.g., <i>Our empirical investigation focused on ... ; Participants were chosen from ...; Materials were obtained in accordance with ...</i>)</li> <li>▪ Referring to methods used by other researchers (e.g., <i>The X-method is described at length in ...</i>)</li> </ul>	<p>Past Simple using the passive form<sup>13</sup></p> <p>Present Simple</p>
<b>RESULTS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reporting findings and results (i.e., what you found before you started writing the paper; e.g., <i>The care model was seen as a credible approach to ...</i>)</li> </ul>	<p>Past Simple</p>
<b>DISCUSSION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Discussing the implications of your findings and results (e.g., <i>The attitudinal information from the present survey shows that ...</i>)</li> <li>▪ Discussing your recommendations (e.g., <i>These</i></li> </ul>	<p>Present Simple<sup>14</sup></p> <p>Present Simple</p>

<sup>12</sup> The present simple (*two languages are compared*) underlines that Smith and Jones are still using their system and/or that it is still valid. The past simple (*were compared*) implies that their system is no longer used and/or that it was “a step in this road of research that has subsequently been superseded” (Wallwork: 213). See the general remarks above, p. 17.

<sup>13</sup> The passive focuses on what was done rather than who did it. See p. 16.

<sup>14</sup> Should I use the active or passive in the Discussion? “Passive sentences do not reveal the author of the action and so the reader will not understand if you are referring to your findings or another researcher's. So to avoid ambiguity, where possible use active sentences” (Wallwork: 251). Example: “In 2011, it was suggested that complex sentences could also lead to high levels of stress for the reader (Carter: 36). Wallwork comments: “The passive form [*it was suggested*] means that the reader is not sure until the end of the sentence if it was you or another author. A long literature review or Discussion full of sentences like this is very heavy and annoying for the reader” (Ibid.)

	<p><i>results create a positive impression and suggest that ... should be promoted)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Discussing how your research could be continued (e.g., <i>Further research is needed to confirm ...</i>)</li> </ul>	Present Simple (possibly Future)
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reminding the reader of the topic and key questions (e.g., <i>This paper has studied ...</i>)</li> <li>▪ Distinguishing between what you did during the research (Past Simple) and what you did during the writing up of the research (Present Perfect) Example: “<i>This study has described a method to ... This method was used ...</i>”</li> </ul>	Present perfect  Past Simple vs. Present Perfect <sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> By contrast, the present simple is correct in the Abstract or Introduction: *This study describes a method ...*

## 10. WRITING ABSTRACTS

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### 1. Definition

Abstracts are stand-alone representations of textual content data or information resources.<sup>16</sup>

### 2. What to include

1. **Objectives and scope (purpose):** State the aim or purpose of the paper.
2. **Background:** Describe the contents in general terms.
3. **Methodology:** State how the data were collected or the research conducted, what the data sources were, and how data were handled or analyzed.
4. **Results:** State the main research results.
5. **Conclusions:** State which conclusions may be drawn from the results.

### 3. Do not include:

1. General introductory matter that occurs in the resource.
2. Historical summaries and background information known to the envisaged audience.
3. Supplementary information which is easily obtained elsewhere or which is more appropriately described in a separate field.
4. Uses of the data. An abstract should discuss what the data are about, not what the data are used for, unless specific uses are key to understanding the data.
5. Extraneous information and terminology which are not supportive of the significant content of the resource. Such extraneous information inhibits effective retrieval in a free-text search, and makes it more difficult for users to quickly scan the abstract for key information. *Abstracts are not dumping grounds for miscellaneous information.*

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<sup>16</sup> See further *APA Publication Manual*, 6th ed., 25–27. For a detailed discussion of the various types of abstracts, see Wallwork (2011: 177–193).

### 3. Notes on Style

1. **Create “flow”**: the reader should be able to read the text at one go, without having to shuttle back and forth to check arguments or assumptions.

Beware: Since you are very familiar with the subject, you will not be able to objectively determine whether your text has “flow.”

*Tip: Either have someone else read the text for you with “flow” in mind or read it aloud to someone else.*

2. **Use short sentences**: The shorter, the better.
3. **Avoid long sentences** and the restraintful hedges typical of articles.

It appears to be the case that ---> *It appears that ...*

The paper advances arguments for the idea that ---> *The paper argues that ...*

4. **Be clear and concise**. Explain abbreviations at their first occurrence.
5. **No future tense**: The abstract should look as if the paper is written!
6. **Avoid adverbs and adjectives (as they increase the word count)**

An important and interesting result from previous research in this area shows that ...

---> Previous research shows that ...

7. **Avoid identifying yourself all too obviously**.

As I have shown in Freckletweeter (1996a, 1996b, 1996c, 1997a, 1997b, in press, forthcoming a,b) ...

---> Freckletweeter (1996) shows that ...

#### 4. Sample Abstract

##### *Usability and User-Centered Theory for 21<sup>st</sup> Century OWLs*

By Dana Lynn Driscoll, H. Allen Brizee, Michael Salvo, and Morgan Sousa from *The Handbook of Research on Virtual Workplaces and the New Nature of Business Practices*. Eds. Kirk St. Amant and Pavel Zemlansky. Hershey, PA: Idea Group Publishing, 2008.

This article presents results of usability research conducted on the Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL). The Purdue OWL is an information-rich educational website that provides free writing resources to users worldwide. Researchers conducted two generations of usability tests. In the first test, participants were asked to navigate the OWL and answer questions. Results of the first test and user-centered scholarship indicated that a more user-centered focus would improve usability. The second test asked participants to answer writing-related questions using both the OWL website and a user-centered OWL prototype. Participants took significantly less time to find information using the prototype and reported a more positive response to the user-centered prototype than the original OWL. Researchers conclude that a user-centered website is more effective and can be a model for information-rich online resources. Researchers also conclude that usability research can be a productive source of ideas, underscoring the need for participatory invention.

## 11. EDITING CHECKLIST

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### 1. EDIT FOR STRUCTURE

#### Major Sections (Chapters):

1. *Will my reader understand the sequence and logic of my chapters?*
2. *Have I written a strong introduction?*—Does my introduction orient the reader to my paper's content, approach, and purpose? Does my introduction compel the reader to continue reading?
3. *Does my conclusion (or results section) show the reader that I have accomplished what I set out to do in my paper (or book)?*

#### Paragraphs:

1. *Does each paragraph have a topic sentence?*
2. *Is the topic flow consistent within each paragraph?*—Check whether my sentences tell the story or disguise it by focusing on some other topic.
3. *Are the transitions between sentences and paragraphs coherent?*—Check to ensure that my reader will understand why my sentences follow each other within paragraphs and why one paragraph follows another.

### 2. EDIT FOR LENGTH

1. *Is every word necessary or useful to the points that I am making?*
2. *Are my sentences too long?*—Use a simple test: Read your sentences aloud. If you have to take a breath or if you get lost in your delivery, the chances are your sentences are too long. Use the help provided above to cut long sentences (pages 7–9).

### 3. EDIT FOR CLARITY

1. Cut jargon: Most of it is fuzzy and quite avoidable.
2. *Eliminate fuzzy phrases*: Why write “concerning the matter of” or “with regard to” when “about” is perfectly appropriate?
3. *Search for passive constructions* and justify them (see page 16) or remove them.
4. *Rewrite sentences that begin with “there is [are, was, were]”*. Impersonal constructions obscure the action and add nothing to the meaning. Instead of “There is no study that specifically addresses the question,” write “No study specifically addresses the question.”

### 4. EDIT FOR CONTINUITY

Now start over with a clean version of your document, one that incorporates the changes you have made in your earlier drafts.

1. *Do first references to persons, examples, or other particular matters fully identify them?*
2. *Do my transitions still make sense?*
3. *Are my cross-references accurate?*—If you state something is mentioned “above” or “below,” you should ensure that these locators are correct. Recheck all page-number cross-references.

### 5. PROOFREAD

1. *Check your spelling.*

Even if your document has been run through a spell-checker, read it again, with a dictionary at your side. Spell-checkers are neither perfect nor they do not catch homonym errors (“there” for “their”).

2. *Correct other typographical errors* (missing words, tense endings, plurals).
3. *Enforce a consistent editorial style.*

Be consistent in such matters as capitalisation, abbreviations, spelling out numbers, and citation forms. Consistency is achieved only by using the appropriate style (or author) guide.

4. *Check your punctuation.*

See the punctuation rules introduced in session 1.

Finally, put your document aside; let it rest. After a few days, read it once more from the perspective of your intended audience.