

## SUMMARY OF WRITING COURSE

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NOTE the numbers in this summary have no relation to the numbers in the exercise file.

### 1: EMPATHY

Key skill is RESPECT and EMPATHY: their point of view not yours.

1. Writing and speaking clearly – generally with short sentences
2. Layout that is easy to see, read and understand
3. Concrete concepts with lots of clear examples.
4. Minimum number of words, pages, slides, info

### 2: READER-CENTERED

Think about what your reader really needs to know.

Don't include information that is of interest to you, but of no interest to the reader.

The reader is in a hurry – help them find what they want quickly and easily.

Write less. There will be less for your reader to read and you will make fewer mistakes.

Write in a way that makes it easy for the reader to follow:

*NO! Human memory can be subdivided into sensory memory (by which we see a film as a continuous scene rather than a series of still images), short-term memory (as used*

YES: There are four main types of human memory. First, sensory memory, for example we see a film as a continuous scene rather than a series of still images. Second, short-term memory, this helps for example ...

### **3: EMAIL TO EDITOR REGARDING STATUS OF PAPER**

Minimum number of words and clear layout.

*Subject line:* Manuscript 1453

Dear Helena Smith / Dear Editor / Dear Prof Smith

I was wondering if you had received my email sent *date* (see below) regarding the submission of my manuscript (1453). Please could you let me know whether the paper is under review and when I can expect to receive the reviewers' comments.

Attached is a copy of the paper for your convenience.

Best regards

[dopo la firma ci sono tutti le mail precedenti]

### **4: EFFECTIVE STYLE**

No study has proved the benefits of parenthetical phrases (*incisi*), impersonal forms, long complex sentences, or abstract words rather than concrete words.

However, many studies have proved the benefits of:

- writing clearly and concisely
- using personal forms
- writing from a reader point-of-view

The point is **not** complexity. The point is **not** good vs bad. The point is: is this text **effective** or not?

## 5: EVEN ITALIANS CAN USE SHORT SENTENCES

Tullio De Mauro, professor of linguistics at the University of Rome wrote to me saying:

E' possibile scrivere in italiano **periodi lineari e brevi, altamente comprensibili** \*, come raccomandavano nel Duecento nella loro *Regola* i fraticelli francescani. \* In Italian it is possible to write **clear, short and easily understandable** sentences.

## 6: SHORT SENTENCES AND PARAGRAPHS

If you want:

- the referees to accept your paper
- the reader to understand you
- your research proposals to be funded
- your CV to be read and understood (so that you get a job)
- people to reply to your emails

Use short simple sentences and short paragraphs. Not just in English but in your own language too.

## 7: WHAT NATIVE SPEAKING REVIEWERS AND READERS DO NOT WANT

- Unnecessary effort (long sentences, poor organization, redundancy)
- Findings that are not highlighted
- Ambiguity / Generic nonsense
- Contribution / Innovation not clear
- Spelling mistakes

All these show lack of empathy for the reader. The reader is forced to try to make sense of poorly written work.

## 8: WHY PAPERS ARE REJECTED

Papers and projects are NOT normally rejected for a few grammar or vocabulary mistakes.

But CVs are rejected even for just one spelling mistake.

Projects and papers ARE rejected because they require too much mental effort by the reviewers.

## 9: READER / AUDIENCE-ORIENTED

Trend today in English: seeing things from the audience's point of view rather than your point of view (i.e. empathy). So what is the moral of the story?

- For everything you do, think about the **audience** (readers or conference attendees)
- Think in terms of **them them them** NOT *me me me*
- What do **they** want to know, read first and hear first?
- How can I make it easier for **them**?

## 10: SENTENCE LENGTH AND POSITION OF KEY INFO

The more parts a sentence has, the more difficult it will be to read.

The key info tends to be at the beginning (subject) and end of the sentence.

The longer the *middle part of the sentence*, the less likely it will be read with full attention.

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

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

## 11: WRITING RULES

Don't put the subject too far from the key information.

Don't bury/hide the subject in the middle of the phrase.

Divide up long sentences into smaller parts.

Having shorter sentences also makes it easier to change their order.

## 12: DECIDING SENTENCE LENGTH

Write your first draft without thinking too much about the length of the sentences. Then look for long sentences and read them aloud. If you have to inhale, you need to divide up the sentence.

- Do NOT write a series of sentences of only 5-15 words.
- Occasionally use short sentences to attract attention (particularly in Abstract and Discussion).
- Generally speaking, avoid sentences of more than 35 words.
- NB: clarity (chiarezza) and readability are independent of sentence length.

Your main aim is to maintain readers' interest so that they continue reading (or listening).

If your sentence contains one or more of the following, you probably need to divide it up:

*i) which + which ii) and + and + and iii) , + , + , + , + iv) also + in addition / furthermore v) ;*

Consider deleting info contained in parentheses, or remove the parentheses.

The readability of a long sentence also very much depends on the order in which the information is given.

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## 13: HOW TO STRUCTURE A PARAGRAPH

The scientists and engineers who work at NASA are among the most intelligent people in the world.

They can understand long complex sentences. But they decide to use short simple sentences and paragraphs in the documents that they write for each other. You should do the same:

- First sentence: introduces overall topic.
- Sentences are linked together - an idea from one sentence is recalled in the next sentence.
- Max. of two ideas per sentence.

- Repeating key words is OK - just choose ONE word and always use that word
- Vary the length of sentences

#### 14: WORD ORDER

Use the following order and try to keep the four parts as close as possible together.

1 subject    2 verb    3 object    4 indirect object

#### 15: PUT THE SUBJECT AT BEGINNING OF THE SENTENCE

NO!!! *We have mentioned a number of different factors that can improve one's writing of scientific papers, however there is one factor that is even more important than the others (ie conciseness, sentence length, blah blah and blah blah, using verbs instead of nouns) and this factor is rarely taken into consideration by writers although it is absolutely fundamental; that factor is, of course, **putting the subject at the beginning of the sentence.** (67 words)*

YES!! **Putting the subject at the beginning of the sentence** is fundamental in improving one's writing of scientific **papers. However**, unlike the other factors (ie conciseness, sentence length, using verbs instead of nouns) it is rarely taken into consideration by writers. (40 words)

- 1 Reader doesn't have to read complete sentence to discover what it is about.
- 2 Forces you to use shorter sentences and be more direct.
- 3 Reduces the number of words needed.
- 4 Reduces the number of mistakes.

#### 16: PUT THE MAIN VERB NEAR THE BEGINNING OF THE SENTENCE

If you use an ACTIVE form, then the verb will be near the beginning of the sentence instead of the end. This makes the sentence easier to read.

*NO! **Some future developments** and blah  
blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah  
blah blah blah blah blah **are described.***

YES! The document **describes** ... / **We describe** some future developments and ...

## 17: DIRECT OBJECT BEFORE INDIRECT OBJECT

*NO) We sent to the publisher of the journal whose address we found on the internet **our manuscript.***

YES) We sent **our manuscript** to the publisher of the journal whose address we ...

If the **direct object** is very long: split sentence + repeat the **direct object**

*NO) We sent **our manuscript, which had taken six years to research and six months to write (before being accepted after three reviews and two rejections),** to the journal.*

YES) We sent **our manuscript** to the journal. **The manuscript** had originally taken ...

## 18: THE SANDWICH TECHNIQUE

Never humiliate the other person. You don't know the circumstances of the other person, so always give them the benefit of the doubt. Always prefer SOLUTIONS instead of CRITICISMS.

### **Positive (but honest) beginning**

Hi, Overall it's looking great – thanks. //// Thanks very much for getting this first draft ready.

### **Introduce criticisms gently**

I just have a couple of things to clarify ... ///// Have you thought about doing x, y, z?

### **Take joint responsibility / suggest solutions**

One thing we could do is ... / The best solution might be ..

It might be a good idea if we ... / Perhaps we could ...

### **Positive Ending – again, must be sincere**

Anyway, I think we're nearly there. // Thanks so much for what you've done so far, I really appreciate it.

### 19: BE CLEAR WHICH DIRECTION YOUR SENTENCE IS GOING IN

If sense is negative, use a negative form and use it near the beginning of the sentence.

Penso che lei **non** venga alla lezione. = I **don't** think she is coming to the lesson.

Ho **poco** tempo. = I **don't** have much time.

Ho **meno** amici di te. = I **don't** have as many friends as you.

Va al cinema **raramente**. = She **rarely** goes to the cinema.

Don't delay subject with an impersonal expression beginning with *it is advisable, probable, likely, mandatory etc that*

NO) *It is advisable that a foreign language should be learned at a young age.*

YES) **A foreign language** should be learned at a young age.

Reader's expectation: i) Aim = why you are doing something ii) How = the means with which you do it

Don't insert parenthetical information between subject and verb (i.e. don't use *frasi incisi*)

NO) **English**, although currently the international language of business, **may** one day be replaced by Spanish or Chinese.

YES) *Although* **English is** currently the international language of business, it may one day be replaced by Spanish or Chinese.

YES) **English is** currently the international language of business. *However*, it may one day be replaced by Spanish or Chinese.

Always choose a construction that looks familiar to you.

YES) It is not easy to find ...

NO) Rarely can a candidate be found with all ...

## 20: TRADITIONAL ABSTRACT

Mini paper: Summarizes each section in the paper.

- 1) The problem that this paper is trying to resolve. Why did you carry out your project?
- 2) New solution given by authors of the paper. What makes it different from previous research?
- 3) Validity of the model. Does it really do what you say it does?
- 4) Results. What is new compared to previous results?
- 5) Implications and future work. What does this all mean? What are your conclusions and recommendations? What do you plan to do next?

## 21: TENSES IN THE ABSTRACT

### Simple past: what YOU did in YOUR work

Three red flags *were identified* that indicate that the time to leave him has come.

### Simple present: what is already known from the literature

Many women *have* doubts about the right moment for leaving their partner. Often women *wait* in hope for a change in their partner's habits.

### Simple past: what YOU found

The probability of eliminating these habits *was found* to be significantly low.

### Simple present: implications

These numbers *provide* a good indication of when the time to leave him has come.

## 22: HOW TO BEGIN YOUR ABSTRACT

If possible, put the one or more of your key words as close as you can to the first words of the abstract. Don't begin with a generic phrase or with some information that your readers will already be very familiar with. The following beginnings are NOT eye-catching:

*In the last few years ...*

*The issue of xyz is becoming increasingly the subject of research ...*

*This paper presents ...*

*The aim of this research is to ..*

*Cancer is a worldwide problem ..*

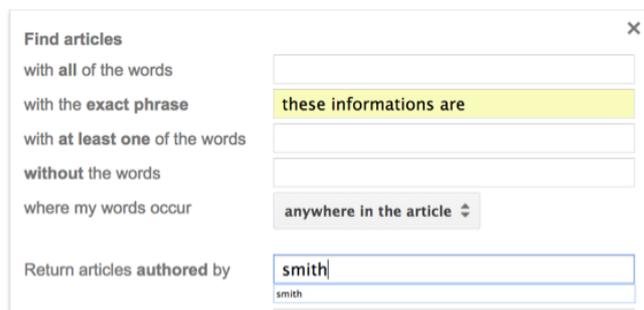
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## 23: CHECKING YOUR ENGLISH

Do NOT use Google Translate to check your English.

Recommended site: [context.reverso.net](http://context.reverso.net)

Use Google Scholar Advanced as follows:



The image shows a screenshot of the Google Scholar Advanced search interface. On the left, there are several search options: "with all of the words", "with the exact phrase", "with at least one of the words", "without the words", and "where my words occur". The "with the exact phrase" option is selected and highlighted in yellow. Below these options, there is a search input field containing the text "these informations are". To the right of the input field, there is a dropdown menu labeled "anywhere in the article" with a double-headed arrow icon. At the bottom, there is a section labeled "Return articles authored by" with an input field containing the text "smith". Below this input field, the name "smith" is listed as a suggestion.

## 24: HOW DOES YOUR ENGLISH SOUND?

Scrittori diversi hanno diverse metodi di organizzazione dei loro rapporti, e alcuni sembrano avere alcun methodo visibile a tutti. La maggior parte degli scrittori migliori, tuttavia, sembrano essere in straordinariamente vicino un accordo per l'approccio generale di organizzazione.

## **25: CUT AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE**

If you cut redundant words it is impossible make mistakes with them!

This gives us the possibility to do x = This allows us to do x

We made an analysis of x = We analysed x

For a period of six months = For six months

Redundant words are words that add no value for the reader (typically abstract words and pointless introductory phrases at the beginning of sentences)

If you are not 100% sure that what you have written is correct then either delete it or paraphrase it.

## **26: WHY BE CONCISE?**

Make your ideas stand out – don't hide your most important information in a mass of redundant words. Hans Hoffman: *The ability to simplify means to eliminate the unnecessary so that the necessary can speak.*

- Limits opportunities for error
- Leads to shorter sentences. So forces you to have clear ideas about what you want to say
- Keeps referees happy
- Reduces times and costs (editing service, ink, paper, photocopies)

Guarantees that readers will READ your paper rather than SKIM / BROWSE.

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## 27: HOW TO WRITE TITLES OF PAPERS

A title is like a mini mini paper, it is a summary of the abstract. If possible, put your key words at the beginning of your title.

Good titles:

- Immediately make sense to the referee
- Catch attention of browser
- Have definite and concise indication of what it is written in the paper itself
- Contain key words
- Use verbs and prepositions.
- Put adjectives next to the noun they describe.

Use the definite article correctly:

*NO) Importance of Improving Design of Internal Systems*

YES) The importance of improving the design of internal systems

## 28: WHAT TO AVOID IN TITLES

The words in italics in the following titles are all in the most important position (i.e. the first words of the title) but are so generic that they give no information.

- *The design* of an XYZ system for implementing ABC.
- *An investigation* into the modeling of the XYZ process.
- *The development* of an XYZ tool for predicting ABC.
- *A study* of a *novel* ABC system.
- *An insight* into XYZ.

Avoid unsubstantiated words like *innovative* and *novel* - instead describe using key words what makes your work unique.

## 29: BEFORE WRITING YOUR INTRODUCTION

Look at your chosen journal. Choose a paper that is relevant to you and which you found easy to read. Note:

- How Abstract and Intro are structured differently
- What elements from the Abstract the Introduction expands on
- How sentences from the Abstract are paraphrased in the Introduction
- What information is covered in the Abstract but not in the Introduction, and vice versa
- Relative word counts

## 30: TYPICAL MISTAKES WITH THE PRESENT PERFECT AT THE BEGINNING OF THE INTRODUCTION

*NO) In the last few years readability indexes are becoming increasingly popular.*

YES) **In the last few years** readability indexes **have become** increasingly popular.

*NO) We believe that this is the first time that such a procedure is used for this purpose.*

YES) We believe **this is the first time** that such a procedure **has been** used for this purpose.

*NO) Since 2013 this method is adopted by the scientific community to investigate ...*

YES) **Since 2013** this method **has been adopted** by the scientific community to ...

### 31: HOW TO CITE THE LITERATURE

Present the novelty of your approach and results in the context of what has already been done. Citing key papers without stating how specifically you build on them is insufficient.

Follow this pattern for each group of authors that you refer to: 1) what they did (in terms of your topic) 2) the limitation of what they did 3) what you have done to overcome this limitation 4) how your contribution is original and distinguishes itself from previous work

Smith et al (2015) reported that  $x = y$ . However, they were unable to prove that  $y = z + 1$ . We prove that ...

In 2016 Jones et al carried out a test on Z, but only with a relatively small sample. In this paper, we use a much larger sample ...

Use the same *us vs them* technique in the Discussion when comparing your results with those of other authors.

### 32: PARAPHRASING (OF 'ITALIANS DO IT BETTER')

#### Synonyms

*Cicccone proposed / suggested / stated / found / revealed that ...*

*Italians perform preliminary reproductive activity / execute the coital task ...*

#### Active to passive

*It has been claimed / proposed / suggested / stated / found / revealed that ... (Cicccone, 1998)*

#### Different form / Different word order

*According to (Cicccone, 1998), Italians outperform the rest of the world in terms of pre-natal penetrative spermatozoa production.*

*The Italian race tends to perform the fornicatory act in an enhanced manner (Cicccone, 1998).*

Paraphrasing avoids:

- Plagiarism
- Repetition of phrases within your paper
- When you are not sure that a sentence you have written is correct, paraphrase the sentence using a form that you know is correct.

Adrian's fantastically obvious rule #2: Only write what you know is correct

### 33: METHODS – TENSES

**Simple past** to describe preliminary work

An explorative research approach **was** adopted using a seven-page survey on cost and performance. The findings **were** collected using an internet questionnaire survey. Six hundred Italian engineering companies **were selected** from 2,002 companies.

**Simple present** to describe your model, procedure, sample, device etc

Firstly, we **define** X as an exogenous measure of the natural rate of longevity of people.

As in Chakraborty (2016), we **assume** that ... The rule **is** thus given by the following formula:

Our machine **uses** diesel ... It **has** a 1000 hp engine ...

### 34: RESULTS – TENSES

**Simple past** to describe what you found and what happened during your experiments.

The value of x **was** higher than expected.

The increase in pressure **had** no effect on this value.

**Simple present** i) to refer to figures, tables etc ii) to say what the implications are. Typically after *show, explain, highlight, believe, mean*

The results **are given** in Table 4. Figure 1 *highlights* that X **equals** Y.

We *believe* that this means that our method **outperforms** previous methods.

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### 35: DISCUSSION: BE CLEAR WHAT YOU DID AND WHAT OTHER AUTHORS HAVE DONE

Use ACTIVE and *WE* to distinguish between you and other authors

1. GOOD! In 2017, we confirmed that Italian dogs are more intelligent than British dogs [25].
2. GOOD! In 2015, Carter suggested that dogs are more intelligent than cats [36].
3. OK! In 2015, it was suggested that dogs are more intelligent than cats [Carter, 36].
4. NOT OK! In [36], it was suggested that dogs are more intelligent than cats.
5. DISASTER! In 2014, it was suggested that dogs are more intelligent than PhD students.

Generally the past tense is used after the name of the author, particularly if the date is part of the main sentence. However, sometimes you may also find the present.

1. In 2018, Carter **suggested** that dogs are more intelligent than cats [36].
2. Carter **suggests** that dogs are more intelligent than cats [Carter, 2018].

### 36: USING THE PAST AND PRESENT TENSES TO HIGHLIGHT WHO DID WHAT

Readers need to be able to understand the subject of the verb immediately. In the sentence below: *were found* – by who?. Don't force them to wait till the end of the sentence.

NO) Bilingual children **were found** to show a greater adaptability to new situations and demonstrated a greater ease in communicating confidently with adults [Simons, 1995]. As result of an extensive search for bilingual children in ten European countries, 149 children **were identified** (Table 1).

Use the most appropriate tense: the **simple past** (*were found*) is frequently used to describe YOUR work not that of others. Use the present tense to talk about known facts discovered by other people.

YES) Bilingual children **show** a greater adaptability to new situations and demonstrated a greater ease in communicating confidently with adults [Simons, 1995]. **Simons investigated children from the US and Canada. On the other hand, the focus of our study was**

**Europe and** as a result of an extensive search for bilingual children in ten European countries, 149 children *were identified* (Table 1).

Not making the distinction clear between what YOU did and what OTHERS have done causes more confusion for the reader than any grammatical or vocabulary mistake.

### 37: HIGHLIGHTING YOUR FINDINGS

- Begin a new paragraph
- If possible, use 'we' and active form
- Use shorter than normal sentences
- Keep the paragraph short

Be careful not to make statements that are too strong. Instead, be cautious:

**As far as we know**, there are no studies on ...

**To [the best of] our knowledge**, the literature has not discussed ...

**We believe that** this is the first time ...

### 38: DISCUSSING YOUR LIMITATIONS

If you describe the limitations of your research + all possible objections, then it help prevent the reviewers and editors from finding fault in your findings / interpretations.

Don't present your limitations in a negative way.

*NO) **Unfortunately**, the sample size was small ... NO) **Moreover**, there were some discrepancies in the ... (moreover tends to be used when saying something negative)*

Use this 3-part strategy:

**1) Limitations** We were unable to access the data on X because such data are not available in the public domain.

**2) Justification** Other studies found the same problem (e.g. Lu 2012, King 2013) and decided to focus only on Y and Z.

**3) Solution** We are currently in the process of collecting data on X, and this will be the subject of a future paper.

Don't end your Discussion (or Conclusions) by talking about your limitations.

End with something very positive – this will be the reader's final impression.

### 39: CONCLUSIONS: TENSES

**present perfect:** to describe what you have done in the **PAPER** itself The present perfect is typically used with verbs such as *describe, outline, present, propose, show, highlight*.

We **have described** a new method for comparing languages. We **have shown** that it can be used in several situations.

**past simple:** what you did in your **RESEARCH**.

We **used** an innovative method to achieve our objective. We **investigated** the use of several languages. We **used** XYZ software which **produced** some interesting results.

#### 40: DON'T FORCE READERS TO MAKE A MENTAL EFFORT

**Discussion:** do **not** just mention other authors' work that supports your own results and force the reader to make connections.

Instead, **show how** their work supports your results (or justify why it doesn't).

**Conclusions:** do **not** just make a summary and force the reader make their own conclusions.

Instead, tell them clearly why your work is so **important** and what the **implications** are. What does it all mean?

Remember that the Conclusions may be the last the reader reads or that the audience hears.

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#### 41: HOW TO AVOID AMBIGUITY

Put the elements in a sentence in the most logical order.

Make sure subjects are next to their verbs.

Avoid gerunds (-ing) unless the subject is clear.

*NO) If you take your dog in the car don't let him hang out of a window **while driving**.*

*YES) ... while you are driving*

Gerunds don't have subjects so they can be ambiguous:

*NO) I found a **bug using** the software.*

*YES) While I was using the software I found a bug.*

#### 42: - ING + THUS / BY

**THUS** + gerund = and the consequence is / and then (temporal) [hence, therefore, so]

Inflation will go down, **thus reducing** taxes.

**BY** + gerund = this is how it will happen

Inflation will go down **by reducing** taxes.

First taxes will be reduced and then inflation will go down.

Inflation will go down **by** reducing taxes.

#### 43: DANGERS OF PRONOUNS

Avoid using when the reader may not be clear which previous noun they are referring to : *it, they, this, that, one* and *the former/latter*

Instead, repeat the word that these pronouns refer to. Repeating words is OK.

\*\*\*\*\*

#### 44: WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU HAVE FINISHED WRITING YOUR PAPER

Leave it for a few days, then cut drastically – words, sentences, paragraphs, tables, figures, even subsections. Only leave what readers need to know. You can probably delete 25% without removing useful content.

For every paragraph you write, ask yourself whether the reader will be able to understand why you did x,y, z, and why it is important.

**Check:** i) **that** paragraphs are not too long ii) subject verb agreement iii) spelling iv) letter to the editor. Get your colleagues to check too.