



WRITING WORKSHOP 1

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Verb tenses – past tense

Use **past tense** when referring to work that is already complete or that will be complete by the time of publication.

Example:

During the project, we collected and analyzed four types of samples.

Verb tenses – past perfect

Use **past perfect** to indicate an action completed in the past before another action

Example:

1. Renee **washed** the car when George arrived (simple past)
2. Renee **had washed** the car when George arrived. (past perfect)

In (1), she waited until George arrived and then washed the car. In (2), she had already finished washing the car by the time he arrived.

Verb tenses – present tense

Use **present tense** when speaking about things that are generally true.

Example:

In 1992, McKay and his coauthors argued that the atmosphere of Mars is salmon pink.

Even though this argument was made in the past, the present tense is used because Mars' atmosphere is still salmon pink.

Verb tenses – present perfect

Use **present perfect** to designate an action that began in the past but continues into the present.

Example:

1. Betty **taught** for ten years. (simple past)
2. Betty **has taught** for ten years. (present perfect)

The implication in (1) is that Betty has retired; in (2), she is still teaching.

Verb tenses – future tense

Use **future tense** for work you are proposing or anything that will be done at a later time.

Example:

For future studies, we will collect samples from multiple regions.

Verb tenses – future perfect

Use **future perfect** to indicate an action that will have been completed at a specified time in the future.

Example:

1. Saturday I **will finish** my housework. (simple future)
2. By Saturday noon, I **will have finished** my housework. (future perfect)

Voice

In **active voice**, the subject performs the action represented by the verb.

The board reached a decision.

In **passive voice**, the subject receives the action identified by the verb.

A decision was reached by the board.

Reasons to prefer active voice

To emphasize action.

Active voice conveys directly that people do things or that things happen.

To establish responsibility.

Writers will sometimes use passive voice to hide the agent of the action. For ethical reasons, it might be more preferable to use active voice in similar situations.

Reasons to prefer passive voice

To emphasize the result.

The emphasis is on the recipient of the action rather than the agent.

To follow expectations.

Many publications use passive voice as their preferred style. This is especially done in the sciences in order to maintain the author's objectivity.

To create cohesion and focus.

The recipient becomes the subject of the next sentence.

Style affects a reader's comprehension. Readers may be distracted...

Person

First, second, and third person refers to the point of view you are writing from.

First person: I

Second person: you

Third person: he/she/it

Person

PRONOUN CHART

	SUBJECT PRONOUNS	OBJECT PRONOUNS	POSSESSIVE ADJECTIVES	POSSESSIVE PRONOUNS	REFLEXIVE PRONOUNS
1 ST PERSON	I	me	my	mine	myself
2 ND PERSON	you	you	your	yours	yourself
3 RD PERSON (MALE)	he	him	his	his	himself
3 RD PERSON (FEMALE)	she	her	her	hers	herself
3 RD PERSON	it	it	its	not used	itself
1 ST PERSON (PLURAL)	we	us	our	ours	ourselves
2 ND PERSON (PLURAL)	you	you	your	yours	yourselves
3 RD PERSON (PLURAL)	they	them	their	theirs	themselves

Person

Use **first person** for personal writing, such as a memoir or informal writing

Use **second person** when writing correspondence or addressing an audience

Use **third person** for formal or scientific writing

Wordy phrases

Avoid using wordy phrases or inflated language. Wordiness can make writing difficult to read.

Choose plain words over fancy words when possible

Wordy phrases

Many wordy phrases can be made to be more concise

- A majority of → most
- A number of → many
- Despite the fact that → although
- In order to → to
- It is often the case that → often
- On the grounds that → because

How to eliminate wordiness

1. Simplify verbs
2. Place the “doer” as the subject of the sentence
3. Use active voice
4. Simplify prepositional phrases
5. Eliminate redundancies

Wordiness example

Wordy Sentence:

The point I wish to make is that the employees working at this company are in need of a much better manager of their money.

Concise:

Employees at this company need a better money manager.

Wordiness example

Wordy Sentence:

At 48 hours, we harvested cells from the cell culture dish and counted. We used a hemocytometer.

Concise:

At 48 hours, cells were harvested from the culture dish and counted using a hemocytometer.

Parallelism

When you are writing a series of words, phrases, or clauses, put them in parallel form (similar grammatical construction) so that the reader can identify the linking relationship more easily and clearly.

Non-parallel structure can be distracting or confusing to readers

Parallelism – sentence format

Clear (parallel):

In Florida, where the threat of hurricanes is an annual event, we learned that it is important (1) to become aware of the warning signs, (2) to know what precautions to take, and (3) to decide when to seek shelter.

Not as clear (not parallel):

In Florida, where the threat of hurricanes is an annual event, we learned that it is important (1) to become aware of the warning signs. (2) There are precautions to take, and (3) deciding when to take shelter is important.

Parallelism – list format

Nonparallel

We need to complete the following tasks:

Writing the proposal

Interview instructors

Rough draft

Revise rough draft

Parallel

We need to complete the following tasks:

- Write the proposal
- Interview instructors
- Write a rough draft
- Revise the rough draft

Parallelism – overlapping items

When using parallel structure, be careful that items in different categories do not overlap.

Confusing:

- We need to buy more lumber, hardware, tools, and hire the subcontractors.

Clear:

- We need to buy more lumber, hardware, and tools, and we need to hire the subcontractors.

Numerals & variables

Sentences cannot begin with a numeral, variable, or symbol

To avoid this problem, either spell out the numeral or reword the sentence so that it does not appear at the beginning

Numeral example

Incorrect:

6% of the group failed.

Correct:

Six percent of the group failed.

Variable example

Incorrect:

- *t* tests were used to determine . . .
- *t* Tests were used to determine . . .
- *T* tests were used to determine . . .

Correct:

We used *t* tests to determine . . .

Numerals – when to spell out

The decision over whether to spell out a number depends on the style guide you are following.

General Rules:

- Spell out numbers less than 10
- Use numerals with units
- Use numerals with dates, decimals
- Don't use both in the same sentence, unless they are back to back (*ten 7-point scales*)

Numerals – APA Publication Manual

Use numerals to express

- numbers 10 and above
- numbers in the abstract of a paper or in a graphical display within a paper
- numbers that immediately precede a unit of measurement
- numbers that represent statistical or mathematical functions, fractional or decimal quantities, percentages, ratios, and percentiles and quartiles
- numbers that represent time, dates, ages, scores and points on a scale, exact sums of money, and numerals as numerals

Exception: Use words for approximations of numbers of days, months, and years

- numbers that denote a specific place in a numbered series, parts of books and tables, and each number in a list of four or more numbers

Numerals – IEEE Style Manual

- Spell out units used in text without quantities (e.g., “where the noise is given in decibels”). For units appearing with quantities, use the standard abbreviations listed in Section VIII-G
- Always use numerals for numbers written with units. Otherwise, spell out numbers below 11, and use numerals for others unless they begin a sentence or are combined in a phrase (*gives 7 to 13 times more*).

(p. 24)

https://www.ieee.org/documents/style_manual.pdf

Dangling modifiers

A modifier describes, clarifies, or gives more detail about a concept

A dangling modifier is a word or phrase that modifies a word not clearly stated in the sentence

Dangling modifier example

Dangling Modifier:

Having finished the assignment, the TV was turned on.

Correct Usage:

Having finished the assignment, Jill turned on the TV.

How to correct a dangling modifier

1. Name the appropriate or logical doer of the action as the subject of the main clause:

Incorrect:

Having arrived late for practice, a written excuse was needed.

Revised:

Having arrived late for practice, the team captain needed a written excuse.

How to correct a dangling modifier

2. Change the phrase that dangles into a complete introductory clause by naming the doer of the action in that clause:

Incorrect:

Without knowing his name, it was difficult to introduce him.

Revised:

Because Maria did not know his name, it was difficult to introduce him.

How to correct a dangling modifier

3. Combine the phrase and main clause into one:

Incorrect:

To improve his results, the experiment was done again.

Revised:

He improved his results by doing the experiment again.

Misplaced modifiers

A misplaced modifier occurs when the subject of the modifier is unclear.

Incorrect:

The jacket was too small in the store.

Revised:

The jacket in the store was too small.

Resources

Verbs: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/601/01/>

Person: <http://www.quickanddirtytips.com/education/grammar/first-second-and-third-person>

Parallelism: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/600/01/>

Wordiness: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/635/01/>

Numerals: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/593/1/>

Numerals: <http://www.quickanddirtytips.com/education/grammar/how-to-write-numbers>

Dangling Modifiers: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/597/01/>

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