

## GENERAL WRITING TIPS

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Useful site: <http://www.psychology.org/links/Resources/Writing/>

To not accidentally commit plagiarism, see: <http://psychology.concordia.ca/Grads/PP-plagiarism.pdf>

Useful references on writing style (I can lend you these) are:

- (1) Sternberg, R.J. (Ed.) (2000). Guide to publishing in psychology journals. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- (2) Sternberg, R.J. (2003). The psychologist's companion: A guide to scientific writing for students and researchers, 4th Edition. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

See also: Lilienfeld, S. O., Sauvigné, K. C., Lynn, S. J., Cautin, R. L., Latzman, R. D., & Waldman, I. D. (2015). Fifty psychological and psychiatric terms to avoid: a list of inaccurate, misleading, misused, ambiguous, and logically confused words and phrases. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6. <http://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.01100>

**SOME RULES OF THUMB** (general guidelines, not to be adhered to too rigidly):

*Structures:*

- use parallel structures where possible
- avoid passive sentence constructions
- avoid run-on sentences - keep sentences to one or two ideas only
- make sure that subjects and verbs agree, especially with participles (-ing words)
- avoid using unnecessary adjectives
- report results in the past tense
- avoid contractions (*can't, didn't, shouldn't, won't*, etc.)
- avoid using acronyms and abbreviations as much as possible

*Problem words to watch out for:*

- avoid the word *which* if possible; instead, use *that*
- make sure that the referents for *this* and *it* are clear to the reader
- use *because* instead of *since* or *as*. These have temporal meanings too that can be confusing.
- use *whereas* instead of *while*. The word *while* has a temporal meaning.
- *stimuli, data, phenomena* are the plurals for *stimulus, datum, phenomenon*
- *its* is the possessive of *it* (no apostrophe: similar to other possessive pronouns: hers, ours, theirs, yours)
- *it's* means *it is*, and does NOT mean the possessive of *it*
- avoid when possible first person pronouns (*I, me, my, mine, we, us, our, ours*). Note: The word *we* is especially ambiguous and therefore can impede reading. It can refer to the authors (*We hope to show...*), the readers (*As we will see...*), or humanity in general (*Whenever we perform a complex skill...*).

*General strategies:*

- prime the reader for upcoming concepts that will be introduced later
- repeat ideas as necessary to reinforce and prepare the reader
- use words precisely (avoid conversational shortcuts)
- try to keep to one main idea per paragraph
- avoid footnotes as much as possible
- minimize the use of quotations
- Remember that the reader is building a mental model of the idea you are conveying while he or she is reading the paper. Don't make unnecessary leaps that will confuse the reader. Imagine you are teaching the content of the paper to a smart but relatively naive person. This will help guard against making too many assumptions about what the reader might already know.

I hope this helps. I'll update this list as I think of things or receive suggestions from you.

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