

# HOW TO WRITE A PAPER IN ENGLISH

## Mechanics

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# 1 HOW TO WRITE A PARAGRAPH

## PARAGRAPH STRUCTURE / SENTENCE ORDER

First sentence of paragraph should introduce main topic.

Next sentence should be a logical extension of first sentence.

Vary the length of your sentences, but generally keep them short.

Avoid semi colons. Instead, begin a new sentence.

Provide examples / support for what you say and for your findings.

### 1 Read this Introduction to a paper. Is it clear, well structured and logical?

For the last few years, since 2004 in fact, a great deal of interest has been shown, in the areas of research connected to the theme of what is known in the literature as *readability*. In particular, it has been found that, as was probably to be expected, that readers have a preference for phrases that are logical, coherent, short, and thus easy to read; on the other hand, and perhaps ironically, they themselves tend to write in rather illogical, dense and long sentences that often have to be read twice before they can be understood. An example of this is the front page of the Wall Street Journal which is written so that it can be understood by a 15 year old; furthermore, complex subjects such as finance, taxes, and business trends, are written in a way that can be understood by the average 17-year-old. However, according to Mueller, "It's not a question of what people can read; the real question is, what will people read without intense concentration?" A new concept of readability, which also includes what we call the 'enjoyment factor' is presented and analysed.

### 2 Read the paragraph again and answer the questions.

1. Does the first sentence of the paragraph clearly introduce the main topic?
2. Is the contribution of the paper immediately made clear?
3. Is each sentence a logical extension of the previous sentence?
4. Are link words used effectively to connect sentences together?
5. Do the sentences vary in length, and are they essentially reasonably short?
6. Are semi colons avoided, and commas used to a minimum?
7. Do the words *phrase* and *sentence* have a difference in meaning?

### 3 Read this rewritten version. In what ways is it better?

Most documents are written in a complex way. Ironically, the people who write them, even Harvard professors, actually prefer to read texts that can be understood immediately. Readers prefer sentences that are logical, coherent, short, and thus have a high level of 'readability'. In this paper we extend the concept of readability to enjoyment – for a paper to be readable it must also be enjoyable, in the same way as a 'watchable' movie is fun to watch. This finding is in agreement with research [1, 7] carried out by the Wall Street Journal and Newsweek which proved to these publications that the simpler they write, the more of what they write will be read by their sophisticated, well-educated readers. In fact, complex subjects such as finance, taxes, and business trends, are written in a way that can be understood and enjoyed by the average 17-year-old. Our findings also concur with Mueller [13] whose paper on 'readability' states that "It's not a question of what people can read; the real question is, what will people read without intense concentration?"

## 2 HOW TO BE CONCISE AND SIMPLE

*The ability to simplify means to eliminate the unnecessary so that the necessary can speak.*  
Hans Hoffman (abstract painter)

*A good scientific theory should be explicit to a barmaid.* Ernest Rutherford (physicist)

### What referees say:

*The paper was extremely long and must be massively reduced in length..... The paper was packed full of vague statements .... The abstract was far too long. ...The opening sections were superfluous ...*

*Reduce the length by 25%.*

*I would like to see some concrete examples, rather than the somewhat long-winded technical explanations that were not very clear.*

### Three ways to reduce the length of your sentences:

- 1 Have a maximum of two ideas/parts per sentence
- 2 Put the subject at the beginning of the sentence and key information in the second part
- 3 Cut the number of times you use *which*, *and* and other link words

### Three ways to reduce the amount that you write:

- 1 Remove redundant words *For a period of six months = For six months*
- 2 Reduce number of words *This gives us the possibility to do do x = This allows us to do x*
- 3 Use verbs instead of nouns *We made an analysis of x = We analysed x*

## 1 Reduce the length of the sentences

Each sentence below is too long. In each case, decide where you could make a break (/) in the sentence. Then indicate how you would begin the next phrase after the break.

Example: BEFORE: PhD students are famous for delaying the terrible moment when they actually have to find a real job which means that teither they live in poverty or they have to have very rich parents to support them.

AFTER: PhD students are famous for delaying the terrible moment when they actually have to find a real **job.** // **This** means that teither they live in poverty or ...

1. The aim of this paper is to confirm that how we speak and write generally reflects the way we think and that this is true not only at a personal but also at a national level, and to this end two European languages were analysed, English and Italian, to verify whether the structure of the language is reflected in the lifestyle of the respective nations.
2. English is now the world's international language and is studied by more than a billion people in various parts of the world thus giving rise to an industry of English language textbooks and teachers, which explains why in so many schools and universities in countries where English is not the mother tongue it is taught as the first foreign language in preference to, for example, Spanish or Chinese, which are two languages that have more native speakers than English.
3. As a preliminary study, in an attempt to establish a relationship between document length and level of bureaucracy, we analysed the length of 50 European Union documents, written in seven of the official languages of the EU, to confirm whether documents, such as reports regarding legislative and administrative issues, vary substantially in length from one language to another, and whether this could be related, in some way, to the length of time typically needed to carry out daily administrative tasks in those countries (e.g. withdrawing money from a bank account, setting up bill payments with utility providers, understanding the clauses of an insurance contract). The results showed that ..

## **2 Delete any unnecessary words or phrases.**

Example: The solution ~~adopted~~ was to implement ....

1. The result obtained shows that the bugs present in the software have been eliminated.
2. The documents were written in the English language.
3. This was carried out for a period of three months in the first year and for a period of six months in the second year.
4. They have shown we should also consider the possibility of doing the testing in advance.
5. It is important to note that one plus one is equal to two.
6. Our research activity was initially focused on ...
7. As we have already mentioned in Section 4.2.1, it has already been noted in the past and also more recently that substantial improvements in performance can be achieved by...
8. A number of solutions have been proposed during the last few years and their potential has been thoroughly [= in modo esaustivo] analyzed in the literature [3].

### 3 Replace the phrases in bold with ONE word.

Example: This took a **considerable number of** years to implement ..... **many**

1. This one was bigger **with respect to** the other one.
2. This **made it possible for** us to do X **by means of** Y.
3. **As a consequence of this**, we are in a position to do Y.
4. **In order to** do this, the application searches for solutions **in an automatic way**.
5. **From now on in this document** these will be referred to as X and Y.
6. This **allows us to reduce** the complexity **due to the fact that** X can now be used.
7. **On the basis of the fact that**  $X=Y$ , we can now do Z.
8. This should be avoided since **it is generally the case that** there is ambiguity.

### 4 Find a one-word equivalent for the following.

Example: To perform an analysis = **to analyse**

to carry out a test	to make a comparison	to achieve an improvement
to implement a change	to effect a reduction	to exhibit a performance
to execute a search	to give an explanation	to show an improvement

### 5 Replace the noun phrase with a verb.

Example: I don't know **every student** here = *I don't know everyone who studies here.*

1. **What is the pronunciation of** this word?      How do you \_\_\_\_\_ this word?
2. I live far away from **my birthplace**      I live far away from where I \_\_\_\_\_
3. This is linked to **my current project**      This is linked to what I \_\_\_\_\_ now
4. What **type of studies** did you do?      What did you \_\_\_\_\_?
5. **After the degree** I'm going to look for a job.      When I \_\_\_\_\_ I'm going to look for a job.
6. Sorry **for the delay**.      Sorry I \_\_\_\_\_ late.

### 6 Replace the phrases in bold with a verb and make any other necessary changes.

1. This highlighted a **much better performance of England compared to** Italy.
2. This section **contains an explanation of** the various parameters.

3. The user **has the ability to** change the features.
4. These methods will be used **for an investigation of** the properties of ...
5. **The installation of the system is done** automatically.

## 7 Rewrite three or four of these titles

- 1 The Specification and the Evaluation of Educational Software
- 2 A Language for Idea Communication
- 3 Methods for the Analysis of Italian and British Governmental Systems
- 4 Educational Software Specification Definitions Trends
- 5 Cultural Heritage Audiovisual Material Multilingual Search Gathering Requirements
- 6 New archaeology research and teaching technologies
- 7 Examining Narrative Cinema Fiction and Fact Boundaries

## 3 WORD ORDER

### To write logically and in accordance with English word order

- Put your most important points at the beginning of the paragraph and at the beginning of a sentence
- Always follow this order: subject – verb – object
- Put the verb as near as possible to the beginning of the sentence
- Put the subject as near as possible to the verb
- Put the direct object before the indirect object
- Put negative ideas as near as possible to the beginning of the sentence
- Avoid ambiguity

### 1 Rewrite these sentences so that they follow subject verb object order.

1. They are three years that we have been doing this research.
2. It is very interesting this document but I don't understand what does mean 'verbosity'?
3. Among the factors that influence good writing are short sentences and a clear layout.
4. Important parameters are conciseness and non-ambiguity.

## 2 Rewrite so that the verb in bold is nearer the beginning or is made redundant.

1. In this project a systematic investigation of certain languages, and of how they compare under various scenarios, **is proposed**.
2. An increase in the speed that the reader can read the paper and an improvement in their understanding **are generally recorded**.
3. Ten datasets with the same grammar points but from several world languages, and several datasets just from European languages, **were generated**.
4. In Tab. 2 the languages, all the differences in tense usage, and numbers of words, **are listed**.
5. We show that doing blah **is** difficult.
6. This study shows that a positive correlation between verbosity and disorganization in life in general, particularly bureaucratic life in some Mediterranean countries exists.

## 3 Put direct object before indirect object. Make any other changes necessary.

1. We can associate with each language the list of points in Table 1.
2. We sent to the organizers our paper, along with our biographies and a pdf of the presentation.
3. We associated with the verbosity index a chaos index based on the organizational strengths of several countries both within and outside the EU.

## 4 Where appropriate, rearrange so that the subject is next to the verb.

1. The result, after the calculation has been made, can be used to determine Y.

2. These steps, owing to the difficulties in measuring the weight, require some simplifications.
3. This solution, although interesting, is very expensive.
4. This methodology, which has taken many years to develop and is still only in its initial phase, has some very interesting features

## 5 Rewrite so that the subject (X) is shifted to the beginning.

Example: It is unnecessary to do X. = ***X does not need to be done.***

1. It is possible that X was modeled on Y.
2. It is advisable to use X
3. It is necessary to do X first.
4. It is mandatory to use X.
5. It is unlikely that X will be repeated.
6. It is probable that X will be needed.

## 6 Put the negative concept nearer the beginning of the sentence

1. The cases where this is true are very few.
2. For these reasons we found this particular type of service not interesting.
3. It is many years since we encountered a problem like this.
4. Again, even taking this fact into account, a clear correlation does not emerge.
5. Surprisingly documentation on this aspect is completely lacking [= *manca*].



## 4 TENSES USED IN A PAPER

### SUMMARY

In a scientific paper you basically only need three tenses:

- present simple: we study, we find
- past simple: we studied, we found
- present perfect: we have studied, we have found.

The main things you do in a paper are:

1. outline the aims of the study and background - PRESENT SIMPLE AND PAST SIMPLE, AND PRESENT PERFECT
2. give the structure of the paper - PRESENT SIMPLE
3. explain background and review the literature - PRESENT PERFECT AND SIMPLE PAST
4. describing your methodology, equipment and what you did in the lab - SIMPLE PAST
5. report other people's findings - PRESENT SIMPLE (AND PAST SIMPLE)
6. describe what you did in your experiments and to report your results - PAST SIMPLE
7. discuss your findings / results - PRESENT SIMPLE AND PAST SIMPLE
8. draw conclusions - MANY TENSES
9. acknowledge funding and help - MANY TENSES

The most critical mistakes are made in points 5 and 6. If you use the wrong tense it may not be clear whether you are talking about your own results (simple past) or other authors (simple present). You **MUST** use the correct tense in these two cases.

## 1 AIMS OF THE STUDY AND BACKGROUND: PRESENT SIMPLE VS PAST SIMPLE VS PRESENT PERFECT

Use the PRESENT SIMPLE to outline main topics of the research and aim of a project, and also to say how your solution differs from previous ones. Such sentences are typically found in the Abstract and Introduction.

This paper **outlines** a methodology for establishing the amount of verbosity in a nation's language.

The aim of the project **is** to ... [*is if the project is ongoing, was if it is finished*]

The aim of this paper **is** to ...

Use the SIMPLE PAST to state the decisions that motivated your choices.

We **decided** to focus on Italian and English because ...

Our methodology **was designed** so that ...

Use the PRESENT PERFECT to state the background situation as basis for current research, typically in the Abstract and Introduction, and when reviewing the literature. There must be some past-to-present time. In fact, the present perfect gives the idea of something that started in the past and leads up to the present day. It is thus typically used with expression such as: *since, until now, in the last few years, over the last decade, recently*

**Over the last 60 years** English **has transformed** itself from a predominantly writer-oriented language to a reader-oriented language.

**Since the 1950s** people **have been trying** to write in a more simple way.

But if no time reference is made, present simple:

Many native English speaking scientists **try** to write in a simple way.

## 2 STRUCTURE OF THE PAPER: PRESENT SIMPLE VS WILL

Use the PRESENT SIMPLE but not **WILL** to outline how the paper is organized. Note that you can use a mixture of active and passive sentences if you wish.

This paper **is organised** as follows. Section 1 **gives** a brief overview of the literature. A history of the English language **is presented** in Section 2

However **WILL** can be used to describe in other sections of the paper to state what you intend to do next or later in the paper.

This **will be dealt** with in more detail in Sect 2. (the present simple is also possible here)

We **will see** how relevant this is in the next subsection.

We **will** now **explain** how  $x = y$ .

## 3 LITERATURE REVIEW: PRESENT SIMPLE VS PAST SIMPLE VS PRESENT PERFECT

The **PRESENT SIMPLE** is sometimes used to introduce the literature review.

In the literature there **are** several examples of new strategies to perform these tests, which all **entail** setting new parameters [Peters 1997, Grace 2004, Gatto 2005].

Use the **PRESENT PERFECT** to refer to ongoing situations, i.e. when authors are still investigating a particular field. Even though specific past dates are mentioned in the three examples below, these dates are part of a series of dates that describe situations that researchers are still working on today and will continue in the future. This means that **PAST SIMPLE** cannot be used in any of these three cases.

**Since 1998** there **have been** many other attempts to establish an English / Italian readability index [Wallwork et al, 1999; Smithson 2002], but **until now** no one **has managed** to solve the issue of ....

**Recently** researchers **have found** innovative ways to solve the problem [5, 6, 10].

Researchers **have found** innovative ways to solve the problem [Peters 1997, Grace 2004, Gatto 2007].

You must use the **PAST SIMPLE** when the year of publication is stated within the main sentence (i.e. not just in brackets). In the two examples below we are talking about completely finished actions, so the **PRESENT PERFECT** cannot be used.

This problem **was** first analysed in **1994** [Peters].

Various solutions **were** found in the late **1990s** [Bernstein 1997, Schmidt 1998].

In all other cases, the simplest solution is to use STYLE 1 (see previous page):

Evans [5] **studied** the differences between Italian and English. He **provides / provided** an index of ..

Lindley [10] **investigated** the use of the genitive in French and English. He **found** that X = Y, and his results **agree** with other authors' findings in this area.

Smith and Jones [11, 12] **developed** a new system of comparison. In their system two languages **are / were compared** from the point of view of ...

So, use the:

**PAST SIMPLE** with the introductory verb (*study, propose, investigate, develop, design* etc).

**PAST SIMPLE** with the verbs that indicate what the author managed to do (*find, obtain, prove, demonstrate, highlight*)

**PRESENT SIMPLE** to describe the methodology of the author. However, there is no agreement about this, and you could also use the **PAST SIMPLE**. In the third example above, the use of the present seems to underline that Smith and Jones are still using their system and that it is still valid. The use of the past implies that Smith and Jones' system is not in use anymore and it was just a step in this road of research that has subsequently been superseded.

#### 4 YOUR METHODOLOGY + WHAT YOU DID IN THE LAB: PAST SIMPLE

Use the **PAST SIMPLE** to say what equipment you used and what you did during your experiments.

In our experiments we **used** Wallwork's system (Wallwork et al, 2008).

One thousand scientific articles written in English and the same number written in Italian **were scanned** using a conventional high resolution scanner. A high powered (10,000 billion mega) personal computer (supplied by Orange Computers Italia) equipped with a dedicated phrase analysis program 'Word Parser' **was then used** to analyse the articles in terms of:

## 5 + 6 YOUR RESULTS VS OTHER'S RESULTS: PRESENT SIMPLE VS PAST SIMPLE

The most important rule to learn from this section of the course is:

In the sections on Methodology and Results:  
when you talk about published results, use the **PRESENT**  
when you talk about your results in this paper, use the **PAST**

If you say *English sentences tend to be short and concise* this means that you are stating something that has already been reported in the literature and is now considered to be established scientific fact. You are NOT talking about what you found in your research.

Never use the **PRESENT** to refer to your results unless the reader will be 100% sure that you are referring to your results rather than what is known in the literature. Once you have established that you are referring to your findings (and not someone else's) then it is possible to switch to the **PRESENT**.

So you could say:

*In our samples English sentences **tended** to be short and concise.* This refers to your experiments which are now finished..

*We found that English sentences **tend** to be short and concise.* This refers to your conclusions (not just to what you did during your research) and it is preceded by 'we found', so it is absolutely clear that you are talking about your findings and not the literature in general.

## 7 DISCUSSING YOUR RESULTS: SIMPLE PRESENT, MAY, WOULD

Use the **SIMPLE PRESENT** with the verbs that introduce the results (eg *show, demonstrate, underline, highlight, indicate, suggest, reveal*).

The results **suggest / highlight** that ...

Our studies **indicate / reveal** that Russian is the most suitable for ...

To state more tentative conclusions use a **MODAL VERB** or a **CONDITIONAL**.

Our studies **revealed** that Russian **was** the most suitable for ... This **means** that Russian **may / might / would seem to** have many features that might be useful for ...

Our method for quantifying verbosity **is** very reliable. It **can / could be** used for ...,

## 8 CONCLUSIONS: ALL TENSES

Use the **PRESENT PERFECT** to describe what you have done in the paper itself (i.e. to describe the writing process), not what you did in your research. The **PRESENT PERFECT** is typically with verbs such as *describe, outline, present, propose, show, highlight*.

We **have described** a new method for highlighting verbosity in scientific articles. We **have shown** that it can be used in several situations.

Use the **PRESENT PERFECT** to describe how your methodology / system / equipment has been applied elsewhere.

Our system **has been used** by several university faculties in order to ...

Use the **PAST SIMPLE** to refer to your methods and results.

We **analysed** English, Italian, Portuguese and Russian. Our studies **revealed** that Russian

**was** the most suitable for ...

Use the **PRESENT CONTINUOUS** to refer to ongoing research not reported in this paper.

We **are currently investigating** the possibility of doing ...

Finally, use **WILL** to refer to future research.

Future research **will address** the problem of ....

## 9 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: MANY TENSES

To acknowledge the funding.

This work / research **has been** funded by ... = project probably ongoing

This work / research **is being** funded by ... = project certainly ongoing

This work / research **was** funded by ... = project finished

To thank particular people

The authors **would like** to thank

Thanks **are** due to ...

To describe the contribution of particular people.

The authors would like to thank Prof Wallwork ...

... who **made** a useful contribution to .. // ... whose comments **were** fundamental in ..

... who **provided** the samples

## MORE ON THE USE AND MISUSE OF THE PRESENT PERFECT

Misuse of the **present simple vs present perfect**, and the **simple past vs present simple** is very common. Here are some typical examples. *NB Sentences in italics are incorrect.*

*NO! We have begun to use this system in 2003.*

*NO! They are three years that we use this system.*

We **have been using** this system for several years / since 2003.

We first **used** this system in 2003.

*NO! We don't use this system from several years.*

We **haven't used** this system for several years.

The last time we **used** the system was several years ago.

*NO! It is the first time that we use this system.*

It is the first time that we **have used** this system.

Verbs that indicate an action that took place at a particular time (*begin, start, install, implement*) rather than repeatedly over time (*study, test, use*) are generally used with past simple.

*We have implemented this system since the late 1990s.*

We first **implemented** this system in the late 1990s.

We **began** implementing this system in the late 1990s.

We **have been using / testing** this system since the late 1990s.

## Active or passive? What kind of writing style should I use?

If you are writing a paper for publication you should look at the relevant journal to see whether authors use an active/ personal or passive/impersonal style.

However the ISO recommends: Use the third person (eg *it was found*) unless use of the first person (eg *we found*) will avoid very complex and difficult to read sentence constructions, and lead to greater clarity' (ISO 214: 1976). In any case, and as with the whole paper, you must have a clear idea of your intended audience.

Not all journals accept the use of 'we', though this situation is changing (fortunately!).

To avoid ambiguity, use active sentences. 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 person. If you insist on using the passive, then you must use the simple past.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. <b>GOOD!</b> In 2008, <b>we confirmed</b> that Italians are more intelligent than the British [25].  | 1. <b>We</b> clearly indicates that you are referring to your own work.   |
| 2. <b>GOOD!</b> In 2007, <b>Carter suggested</b> that complex sentences could also lead to high levels of stress for the reader [36].                   | 2. The author is the subject of the verb, so it is clear to the reader.   |
| 3. <b>HEAVY!</b> In 2007, <b>it was suggested</b> that complex sentences could also lead to high levels of stress for the reader [ <b>Carter, 36</b> ]. | 3. The passive form means that the reader is not sure until the end of the sentence if it was you or another author. A long literature review full of passive sentences is very heavy for the reader. |
| 4. <b>BAD!</b> In 2007, <b>it was suggested</b> that complex sentences could also lead to high levels of stress for the reader [ <b>25</b> ].           | 4. This is ambiguous. Readers cannot know who made the suggestion unless they go to Ref. 25 and see if it was you or someone else.  |
| 5. <b>DISASTER!</b> In 2007, <b>it was suggested</b> that complex sentences could also lead to high levels of stress for the reader.                    | 5. There is no reference. Readers cannot be sure if <u>you</u> made the suggestion or <u>someone else</u>   |

Below are some alternatives.

### PERSONAL / ACTIVE VOICE

We developed XYZ..

Our approach

Our results show that ...

We believe that these results represent ...

### IMPERSONAL / PASSIVE VOICE

In the present study XYZ was developed

The approach adopted in this work

The results obtained in this study show ..

These results may represent

## More pros and cons of the impersonal vs personal styles

Sometimes the use and non-use of **we** and **our** can be confusing.

Here is the first line of an Abstract.

When we analyze empirical networks, we often compare those to theoretical models.

Does we refer to a) the network community in general b) the authors of the paper?

In this case it is better to use the passive: When empirical networks *are analysed* ...

Here are two potentially ambiguous sentences:

It was *found* that  $x = y$ .

Future research will be *dedicated* to investigating X.

Who did / will do the actions of *finding* and *dedicating* a) the community in general b) the authors of the paper?

In this case it might be less ambiguous to write:

Our research revealed that ... In our tests it was found that ...

*Our* future research

Sometimes you have to use '**us**' or change the construction.

No! This allows to determine the quantities.

= This allows us to determine the quantities.

= This allows the quantities to be determined.

= This means the quantities can be determined.

Summary: In all sections of your paper you must clearly distinction between what you did and what others have done. So generally only use 'we' and 'our' to refer to what you have done.

## EXERCISES

### 1 Underline the correct tense.

1. Abstract In this paper we *describe* / *will describe* a new method for ...
2. Introduction It is well known that some modern languages *are* / *were* more complex than others (eg Japanese vs English) but in our research we *find* / *found* that English *has* / *had* a higher level of complexity than *is* / *was* previously thought.
3. Introduction The paper *is* / *was* organized as follows: ... The methodology used *is* / *will be* outlined in Section 4, and finally areas of future research *are drawn* / *will be given* in Section 5.
4. Introduction In the last few years System A *is gaining* / *gained* / *has gained* considerable interest in the literature ..... System B *is not* / *has not been* used for several years but we believe it is still valid today.
5. Introduction This system *was* / *has been* first used in 1996. But since that time it *is only* / *has only been* used rarely. We believe that this is the first time that the problem of X *is* / *has been* / *was* addressed so specifically.
6. Overview of the literature This problem *was* / *has been* addressed by several authors [Blake, Milton, Holt] but so far no one *managed* / *has managed* to find a complete solution.
7. Overview of the literature Jackson [12] *investigates* / *has investigated* / *investigated* this problem and *finds* / *has found* / *found* it easy to solve. In his model, various new parameters *are* / *have been* / *were* used. Philipps [13] *obtains* / *has obtained* / *obtained* good results using xyz ...

**2 The text below appears in the Results / Discussion section of a paper. For each numbered verb, decide whether you think the action was made by the author (A), someone else (S) or whether you can't tell (C) if it was the author or another person. If you think the tenses are wrong, change them.**

The relationship between the complexity in the way people of a nation write and the complexity in their bureaucratic system **has been dealt** <sup>1</sup> with in many papers (for a review see Smith *et al.*, 1997). The level of bureaucracy in seven major towns in Italy and in France **was assessed** <sup>2</sup>. The time taken to obtain certain documents - passport, driving licence, permission to carry out house renovations - **was analyzed** <sup>3</sup>. The left part of the brain **was analysed** <sup>4</sup> in a random sample of inhabitants of these towns. Under conditions of stress in municipality offices in Italy, the left part of the brain **loses** <sup>5</sup> more cells than in municipality offices in France.

**3 The text below is the continuation of the text above. Where necessary correct the tense of the verbs in bold.**

We also **analysed** <sup>4</sup> the left part of the brain in a random sample of inhabitants of these towns. Under conditions of stress in municipality offices in Italy, the left part of the brain **loses** <sup>5</sup> more cells than in municipality offices in France (Figure 4). Interestingly, the brain **displays** <sup>6</sup> the highest level of cell loss when subjects **are attempting** <sup>7</sup> to get a passport for travel during the summer holidays ( $S^2=0.810$ , data not shown). In fact, in some cases Italians **undergo** <sup>8</sup> total brain shutdown when faced with unhelpful and often rude employees in the passport office. Our results **show** <sup>9</sup> that the sample of subjects in France **remain** <sup>10</sup> significantly calmer while performing tasks that **are** <sup>11</sup> identical to their Italian counterparts. This finding **is** <sup>12</sup> confirmed by other authors who **found** <sup>13</sup> that administrators that deal with driving licences France **were** <sup>14</sup> considerably more helpful and efficient than those in Italy (Guyot 2008, Bruni 2005, Moron 2001).

**4 Passive to active**

Convert the sentences below into the active

1. The results are shown in Figure 2.
2. This quantity was determined from the values in Table 2.
3. This meant that the values could be determined.
4. The model was built in accordance with Phellatio, Kunnilingus et al [69].
5. In the Methodology it is shown how to follow the steps. NB this sentence is not correct English

**5 Change the parts of the sentences that might sound arrogant.**

1. Although some authors recently investigated the brand strategy occurring in mergers, this is the first attempt to systematically examine a relatively large sample of M&As.
2. Our results prove that the Italians are more intelligent than the English.



3. This study will help broaden of our understanding of the brain of PhD students.
4. Our results should stimulate other researchers in this field to ...

## 6 Conclusions

We **1) describe / have described / described** a system for defining the level of verbosity in a language. We **2) compare / have compared / compared** the levels of bureaucracy of several European countries to see if there **3) is / was / has been** connection with the level of complexity in that nation's language/s. We **4) find / have found / found** that the maximum level of bureaucracy was in Italian society and this is reflected in the seemingly infinite length of sentences in the Italian language. We **5) see / have seen / saw** no reason why our verbosity index cannot be applied to other languages such as Arabic, Chinese Hindi, Japanese, and Korean. We believe that our results **6) are / will be / may be / should be** of interest to researchers working in other fields such as social and political sciences. Our future research **7) is / will be / may be / should be** dedicated to extending this research to other laboratories around the world.

## 7 More on Present vs Present Perfect (Continuous). Correct the mistakes.

1. This is the first time that such results are reported in the literature.
2. For the last decade the number of these cases is increasing.
3. They are five years that we are working on this problem.
4. We began using this system since 2004.

## 5 AMBIGUITY

### TOP PROBLEMS IN RESEARCH PAPERS

- 1 Long convoluted complex sentences
- 2 Redundancy
- 3 Words in the wrong order
- 4 **Ambiguity**

These all affect READABILITY. They may cause your paper to be rejected.

A few grammar mistakes will not cause your paper to be rejected.

Below are four grammatical areas that typically cause ambiguity. In addition, you need to be careful with tense usage in distinguishing your work from other researchers: page 7 (making reference to other authors), page 21 (points 5 & 6) , and pages 23-24 (active or passive?).

## 1) THE DEFINITE ARTICLE

I love English = the language

I love **the** English = the people

Italian PhD students are intelligent. = all Italian PhD students

**The** English PhD students are intelligent. = just those English students that I know or that I have been talking about

DO NOT USE **the** IN THESE CASES:

When talking about general concepts.

~~The~~ Languages are useful.

~~The~~ User guides are often written too quickly.

When a number is associated with figure, table, sections etc, and with percentages

~~The~~ Fig. 2. ~~The~~ Section 3. ~~The~~ Point 2. In ~~The~~ Step 2. ~~The~~ 42%.

Before names of people, countries, languages

~~The~~ Smithson's article. ~~The~~ Italy is a beautiful country. ~~The~~ English is not an easy language.

### general (G) vs specific (S)

**Problems** when learning English are very common.

Which problems? We don't know. General problems

**The problems** we've been having with our English pronunciation are very serious.

Which problems? The problems we've had. Specific problems)

**Differences** in opinions on this subject are very common. **G**

**The main differences** are: X, Y and Z. **S**

**Progress** is both inevitable and desirable. **G**

**The progress** we have made so far has been very slow. **S**

### Use THE in these cases

1) For something you have already mentioned.

This paper presents **a new system** for modeling 4D maps. **The system** is based on ...

2) noun **of** noun (This 'rule' works in 95% of cases)

**the** university **of** Pisa

**the** history **of** Italy

## 2) PROBLEMS WITH PRONOUNS

Avoid using pronouns: *it, they, this, that* and *one*. Also avoid *The former .. The latter*

The problem is that you are forcing the reader to try and understand what these pronouns refer to, or to read backwards to find out what *the former* and *the latter* refer to. It may be obvious to you, but it will not be for the reader.

Instead, repeat the word that these pronouns refer to

I like bread and pasta.

I eat **it** for breakfast. I eat **bread** for breakfast.

I eat **the former** for breakfast. I eat **bread** for breakfast.

### 3) RELATIVE CLAUSES

There is a big difference between *who/which* and *that*.

\* *who*(people)/*which* (things): for additional information

\* *that* (people + things): to define / distinguish

1) My brother, **who** lives in Paris, is a researcher

= I only have one brother. The fact that he lives in Paris is just extra information.

2) My brother **that** lives in Paris is a researcher

= I have more than one brother. I use Paris to define which brother I am talking about

The sentence below is ambiguous:

*Correct the sentences below which contain grammatical mistakes mean:*

It could mean that you have to correct all (1) the sentences, or it could mean you only need to correct those sentences that contain grammatical mistakes.

To disambiguate:

1) Correct the sentences below, **all of which** contain grammatical mistakes:

2) Correct **only** those sentences below **that** contain grammatical mistakes:

### 4) GERUND

The gerund is often ambiguous because it does not require a subject. Thus it is difficult for the reader to know what the gerund refers to.

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

Does this the above sentence mean inflation will go down :

a) **before** taxes are reduced b) **after** taxes have been reduced

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

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

Inflation will go down first and then taxes will go down.

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

**THUS** + gerund = and the consequence is

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

You can find more on all the above (apart from the use of pronouns) in the Grammar and Vocabulary Handout.

### EXERCISES

1 Insert *the* where necessary.

A man collected (1)\_\_\_\_\_ antique clocks - see (2)\_\_\_\_\_ figure below. He spent (3)\_\_\_\_\_ hours both carrying out (4)\_\_\_\_\_ research into (5)\_\_\_\_\_ history of (6)\_\_\_\_\_ clocks, and collecting (7)

\_\_\_\_\_ information on them. One morning he wound up two of (8)\_\_\_\_\_most valuable ones and then settled down to a full English breakfast. One of (9)\_\_\_\_\_clocks went two minutes per hour too slow, and (10)\_\_\_\_\_other one went one minute per hour too fast. When he had finished his breakfast he looked at (11)\_\_\_\_\_clocks: (12)\_\_\_\_\_faster one was exactly 60 minutes ahead of (13)\_\_\_\_\_other. How long had (14)\_\_\_\_\_clocks been ticking? (15)\_\_\_\_\_Figure 1: Antique clocks.

## 2 Insert *the* where necessary.

It is well known that <sup>1</sup> women are more intelligent than \_ <sup>2</sup> men. Even \_ <sup>3</sup> women with absolutely no education and who live in total poverty tend to be more intelligent than \_ <sup>4</sup> men, even \_ <sup>5</sup> men who have been to \_ <sup>6</sup> university. Of course there are always . <sup>7</sup> exceptions. In our case <sup>8</sup> exceptions are \_ <sup>9</sup> women in this class. \_ <sup>10</sup> women in this class have exceptionally low levels of — <sup>11</sup> intelligence. \_ <sup>12</sup> PhD students tend to be above average intelligence, indeed \_ <sup>13</sup> female PhD students from most parts of the world who study here in Italy are extremely intelligent. Despite this, <sup>14</sup> female PhD students are here with us today show few or no signs of <sup>15</sup> intelligence. On the other hand \_ <sup>16</sup> intelligence of \_ <sup>17</sup> men in this class is supersonic, particularly \_ <sup>18</sup> English teacher, although \_ <sup>19</sup> English teachers normally don't understand anything. \_ <sup>20</sup> end.

## 3 pronouns: disambiguate these sentences

1. I put the book in the car and then I left it there all day.
2. We could go to Australia, Canada or the Canaries, but they are a long way from here.
3. No user names or passwords are required, unless the system administrator decides that one is necessary.

## 4 Relative clauses. Disambiguate / Correct only those sentences that are ambiguous or which need commas inserting. You may need to write two different versions to explain the two possible interpretations

1. We rejected the samples which were contaminated.
2. Our findings which can be generalized to many other situations can be found in Sect 1.
3. Our findings are in accordance with their findings which all show high values.
4. The component which we wanted to use was unfortunately damaged.

## 5 gerunds: disambiguate these sentences

1. Professor Rossi teaches the students **having** a good level of English.
2. **By watching** too much television, the muscles become weaker.
3. This will improve performance **keeping** clients satisfied.

## 6 Who did what? Part 1

The following extract is the first paragraph of a Discussion (though something very similar might also be found in an Introduction). For each verb associated with a number, try to understand if the verb refers to something Kim (the author) did or found, or to something another author (AA) did or found.

Bilingual children **were found 1** to show a greater adaptability to new situations (e.g. change of school, change of diet) 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 2** (Table 1). One hundred and twenty two children with parents of different nationalities **were assigned 3** to a group (hereafter Group A). It **has been found 4** that those children with parents of the same nationality but who lived in a foreign country (for example, a child with English parents living in Italy) **have 5** a greater level of adaptability than those children with parents of different nationalities living in the native country of one of the parents. Similar adaptability levels **have been found 6** in trilingual children of parents of different nationalities living in a third country [Schenker, 2011], for example the child of a Dutch/Russian couple living in France. However, in many such cases **it was found 7** that one of the three languages was not as strong as the other two (Table 2).

## 7 Who did what? Part 2

Measurements **were made 1** of the speed with which bilingual adults performed simultaneous translations of politicians' speeches because politicians tend to use formal language [Anderson and Kim, 2008]. **Similar tests 2** with Nobel prize winners' acceptance speeches gave similar values of speed. This finding strongly suggests that formal language represents an easier element for translation than informal language. The performance of teenagers **in analogous situations 3** also confirms the above finding. Considering that informal language, in particular slang, **intensifies 4** the stress levels of subjects undertaking simultaneous translation **the lack of changes in stress levels 5** of the bilingual adults with respect to bilingual teenagers when simultaneously translating extracts from a teenage soap opera, would seem to indicate that experience plays an important role. Consequently, stress levels in bilingual subjects **tend 6** to decrease with age.

## 6 VARIOUS STYLISTIC CONVENTIONS

### Generic pronouns

Do not use *he, him, his* if you are referring to a generic person.

*The user can use **his** mouse if **he** wants.*

The user can use **his/her** mouse if **he/she** wants. (OK, but unnecessary and clumsy)

The **user** can use **their** mouse if **they** want. (Seems ungrammatical but is now correct)

**Users** can use **their** mouse if **they** want. (This solution is the best)

### Plurals

1) To form the plural of acronyms and decades simply add an s (no apostrophe is required though it is commonly and mistakenly used).

one CD, two CDs

the 1990s

2) Do not add an s to abbreviated forms of measurements. No full stop (.) is required after such abbreviations

5 kg (5 kilograms), 100 m (100 meters), 6 h (6 hours), 8 min (eight minutes)

3) Do not put an s on adjectives and words that function as adjectives.

*Our **others** results were unclear.* = Our **other** results were unclear.

These results were different from the **others**. ('others' is a noun here)

*The samples were incubated for a **three months** period.*

The samples were incubated for a **three-month** period.

The samples were incubated for **three months**.

### Numbers and abbreviations

1) Never begin a sentence with a number in figures or an abbreviation such as Fig., Tab., App.

***20,000** people came to the convention*

**Twenty thousand** people ...

The convention hosted **20,000** people

***Fig. 2** shows the values*

**Figure 2** shows the values

The values are shown in **Fig. 2**

2) Use written forms for the numbers from one to nine. However, check with the journal where you want to publish your paper and see what their style convention is for this.

*There were **9** people at the meeting.*

There were **nine** people at the meeting.

The above rule does not apply to numbers that:

- come before an abbreviation for a measurement eg 3 ml

- come after Figure, Table, Appendix etc eg Fig. 2, Table 4

3) Use a full stop (.) for decimal numbers, and a comma (,) for whole numbers.

*No! The convention hosted **20.000** people*

The convention hosted **20,000** people

## Acronyms

The first time you want to use an acronym, write its full form first and then the acronym in parentheses.

*No! This policy is called **FIFO** (first in first out).*

This policy is called First In First Out (**FIFO**).

## Apostrophes

1) Avoid contracted forms in formal papers. However, some journals do accept contracted forms - so check with your journal of publication.

*Let's assume that ... = Let us assume that ...*

*This doesn't happen if = This does not happen*

2) Do not use with acronyms and dates. Dates should always be four digits (eg 1940s rather than '40s).

*CD's became common in the late 1980's. = CDs became common in the late 1980s.*

3) Apostrophes may be needed with symbols or letters to show plurals.

Three **Ω's** are required.

There are two c's in Lucca.

## GENITIVE

Generally only indicates human possession (including nations, institutes, companies etc), and also animals or personified objects

*No! The **PC's** screen.*

The **user's** PC.

The European Space **Agency's** Giotto probe was reactivated in 1992.

**Italy's** gold reserves

*No! **Mathematics's** rules.* = The rules of mathematics.

*No! **Malaria's** effects.* = The effects of malaria.

**But where do I put the apostrophe? And do I use 'the'?**

*No! **The Homer Simpson's brain***

Homer Simpson's brain. = the brain of Homer Simpson

Tess's dilemma. = the dilemma of Tess

Bart and Homer's paper = the paper of Bart and Homer

The Simpsons' house. = the house of the Simpsons

### University

**The University of Pisa** is organizing a series of seminars on Scientific English. university / organization point of view, formal

*No! I studied mathematics at Pisa's University.*

I studied mathematics at **Pisa** University. student point of view, less formal

*No! Pisa's three universities are world famous.*

The three universities **in Pisa** are world famous.

### Genitive with time periods

The genitive can be used with time periods.

I'm taking three weeks' vacation next month. = three weeks of vacation

But not when these are preceded by *a / the*.

*No! He's on a three weeks' vacation.*

He's on a 3-week vacation.

### Best solution for Genitive

Don't write anything that you are not 100% sure is correct.

If in doubt, check with Google (Advanced search, domains: .ac, .edu)