How to write your university papers with ease
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTRODUCTION</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>III. Verbs</th>
<th>32</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A word on academic writing</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Language resources</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to start</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>I. Monolingual dictionary</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEFORE YOU START</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>II. Collocation dictionary</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>III. Thesaurus</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional verbs</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>IV. Corpus</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mind maps</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>STYLE</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Sentence length</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Contractions</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation vs. procrastination</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Rhetorical questions</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LANGUAGE</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Hedging</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>STRUCTURE</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Passive Voice</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>WHAT TO AVOID</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Nominalisation</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Punctuation</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. Subject-verb agreement</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Nouns</td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Modifiers</td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If you are reading this handbook, it probably means that you want to work on your academic writing skills. Good decision! This handbook will help you throughout the whole process of writing a paper – from reading the instructions to the final proofreading. So, let’s start!

**A WORD ON ACADEMIC WRITING**

Academic writing comprises all the essays, reports, theses and other papers you are asked to write during your studies. It is crucial to acquire the skill of academic writing during your studies because writing papers is an inseparable part of university education. I will not help you with the content – that’s your job, but I will try to provide you with useful tips that will take your academic language and style to the next level.

Even though the attitudes towards the definition of academic writing differ to some extent, several features of academic writing are fixed.

**Academic writing is:**
- formal in language and style,
- objective,
- impersonal,
- structured,
- concise,
- backed-up by evidence.

Your paper should possess these qualities as well. As they are closely related to strategy, structure and language, they will be separately described in more detail in the following chapters. So, the most important question that has arisen…

**HOW TO START**

It is absolutely normal if you are not certain how to start writing. When I am supposed to write something, the first thoughts that are in my mind are often doubts. So, if you have the same problem, don’t worry! I hope that you will find what you are looking for on these pages. If you have a lot on your mind, flip through the book. If you came with a certain problem, have a look at the ideas below and you can directly continue to the page you need to consult.

I don't know:
- how to start ...................................................... go to page 12
- what the instructions say ................................ go to page 14
- what to write about ........................................ go to page 16
- why I should even write it ............................. go to page 19
- when it is the right time to start .................... go to page 20
- if the grammar is correct ............................... go to page 24
- if the vocabulary is formal enough ............. go to page 30
- which language resources I can use .......... go to page 32
- if my paper makes sense ............................... go to page 40

OK. This list of problems is slightly terrifying. But I promise that you will feel better after reading a few chapters. So, roll up your sleeves and let’s get down to it!
Academic writing does not only include writing itself, it is much more complex. The paper you will have written is just the last fragment of the whole work. Writing a paper does not start by writing, it starts with making a strategy. A good strategy plays a crucial role in academic writing. In the following subchapters, I would like to explain the basic steps that you should consider before starting your work.

**STRATEGY**

One of the most important steps in academic writing is to plan. Swales and Feak stated in their book (which is definitely worth reading) that "academic writing is a product of many considerations: audience, purpose, organization, style, flow, and presentation" (2012, p. 3). And I cannot do more than agree. Therefore, I would like to provide you with a few ideas that could help you to prepare for writing in this chapter. Some of the points include:

- **Consider the instructions.** Reserve time for considering what type of writing you are supposed to produce. You simply need to read the instructions carefully. Carefully means on your own, slowly and three times! So-called instructional verbs (summarize, discuss, verify, compare etc.) that are incorporated in the instructions indicate how you might approach the writing. The next chapter deals with the instructional verbs in more detail and is worth reading.

- **Brainstorm.** Think about the task before you start writing the paper. Brainstorming can help you to discover new thoughts and ideas that you can later incorporate into your work. If you spend 10 minutes brainstorming before you start writing, you can come across many different and more useful ideas than when you think and write simultaneously.

- **Make notes.** Every idea that comes across your mind (while brainstorming or when you’re having tea with your grandma) can be valuable in your writing. So, jot down everything you think of — and if you are too lazy to journal (because I am!), just use your smartphone. Or, if you want to be creative, try the tool I present in chapter Mind maps.

**INSTRUCTIONAL VERBS**

It is essential to adjust the content as well as the style and structure of your paper in accordance with the instructions provided. You need to stick to the instructions and write exactly what your teacher wants you to write.

Instructional verbs are those verbs that appear in the instructions provided by your teacher. They should help you to understand what you are supposed to write and in what style, but we all know it is not always the case. You will find a list of instructional verbs that you can encounter in the instructions below. It is crucial that you can interpret them correctly and adjust the language, structure and style of writing in compliance with them.

**ANALYSE**

If you are asked to analyse a topic, it basically means to examine the topic in detail. Break it down to smaller parts and look thoroughly at all of them. Explain the basic of each part clearly and state how and why they are connected. Do not forget to support all ideas with evidence.

**ARGUE**

This definitely does not mean to have an argument. You are supposed to gather various views on the topic by different authors and support their ideas or theories with evidence to determine the most suitable/practical theory for your application.
**SUMMARISE**

To summarise means to state briefly the main points of the issue. You should not go into details or provide complex evidence and examples. Try to remain concise and stick to the overall principle only.

**MIND MAPS**

It is probably not necessary to introduce mind maps, but I will do it anyway — just in case someone has never heard about them. In simple terms, mind maps are diagrams that depict your ideas in a creative, playful way. They map your ideas naturally, exactly as they come out of your brain. Surprisingly, mind maps have been around for ages. The great minds such as Leonardo da Vinci, Issacs Newton or Richard Feynman used them regularly. Feynman even pushed it to the next level and created his own model for learning. You can google “Feynman technique” if you want to learn more.

You can imagine the mind map as a tree (see fig. 1). The main idea (which is the concept you need to extend) is the trunk — the most important part of the tree that support the other parts (= subsequent ideas). Then you draw the main branches which represent the subsequent ideas and other minor twigs which grow from the branches.

![Figure 1 How to create a mind map](image)

**CRITICISE**

If you are supposed to criticise a theory, you are asked to identify its weaknesses as well as strengths. However, your judgement needs to be absolutely objective, which means that it is based on logical reasoning and supported by evidence.

**COMPARE**

When you compare something, you define the differences and similarities. You access the problems or arguments and support them with evidence. You can also assess the advantages and disadvantages and determine which theory is more suitable for your application.

**DEFINE**

Define basically means to provide a precise definition of something. However, this is not always easy as different authors have different views on the same topic. You, therefore, need to collect these ideas and put them together to create a suitable definition.

**DISCUSS**

When you discuss, you investigate a certain theory or topic and provide the arguments of both sides and give reasons and evidence for and against both of them. Even though you probably do not agree with one of them, you should always remain open-minded and objective.

**EXPLAIN**

Explain does not only mean to describe something, but you also have to make the problem clear and easy to understand. Provide information on its cause and implications. You can also provide a definition and examine it thoroughly or include different views on the topic.

**JUSTIFY**

If you are asked to justify something, you need to provide evidence and support it with arguments in a way that convinces the reader about the correctness of your point of view.
In figure 2 there is a mind map that I created for myself to outline the content of this chapter, and now it comes handy to illustrate the process of creating the maps. To see the map, look at the next page.

First, I decided to brainstorm how this chapter should look like. I am not an artist and I do not like my drawings, so I simply typed “mind map tool” in my browser and opened an online tool to make my work easier.

Secondly, I wrote the central idea in the centre, the phrase “mind map” is therefore the trunk of my mind map. Next, I just brainstormed, and it resulted in 5 branches which I further developed in the order in which the ideas occurred in my mind. But I did not create this mind map at one go. I came back to it three times and each time added new ideas or removed those ideas that I did not consider important anymore.

If you properly examine the mind map (it is on the next page), you will see that I did not use all ideas that are written there. And you also do not need to. It is a bank of ideas that can serve you to create a table of content for your paper.

And why you should try the mind maps too? They can be very helpful in terms of gathering ideas for writing. It is simply a different way of noting down your ideas and to be honest, it is sometimes nice to do the work differently. Also, every idea that comes across your mind can be traced back. Imagine you only made a list of words, which you forgot about. When you remembered it a week later, you probably would not recall why you write this word or phrase. Now, imagine you made a mind map. When you look at it a week later, you know exactly how the ideas are connected. Great! And what is even better, you can add a new idea right away – just draw a new branch and you can continue just where you ended.
AUDIENCE

As it may influence the content of your paper and the language that is used, a crucial point in planning is to know the audience, which means those who might read your paper. I know, I know, your audience is always the teacher, you would say. But I will give you another point of view. As your teacher is a professional, someone who is skilled and experienced in the field, you need to prove that you understand the topic well enough. Therefore, you also need to adapt the style and language to it. You should remain formal and avoid subjectivity. Even if your task is to evaluate, you should always back your arguments up with evidence. Do you see what I mean? Your audience influences the whole style of your paper.

To illustrate the idea, compare these two tasks:

- Write an open letter to a city council because you are not satisfied with their last decision on drinking on public.
- Write a letter to your old friend who lives abroad and tell them about your recent experiences.

So, in both cases, you are supposed to write a letter. But as you can probably see, it is a completely different letter every time. Why? You know the answer—the audience is different. Whereas in the first task you need to be formal, objective, impersonal and structured, in the second task you are actually required to be the exact opposite—informal, subjective and personal. However, you should also maintain some logical structure to ensure that your friend will understand what you are talking about.

PURPOSE

The purpose of writing is closely connected to the audience. As your audience is most commonly your tutor, the main purpose is to show that you are familiar with the topic (Swales & Feak, 2012). Easy to say, but what does it mean to you?

The purpose of writing usually determines how motivated we are and how much we enjoy the process. I said that because I literally hear you saying this: “Why am I supposed to write this?! It is absolutely useless! I’ll just copy the work of others, anyway.” And I completely understand because I was saying something similar not a long time ago. But now I want to give you another point of view. Write it for yourself. Really. Forget about the fact that you are supposed to demonstrate your competence for a moment and think about the possible advantages of writing a paper. No, don’t say there are none. Think about what you can gain from writing a particular paper.

Maybe you learn to employ various resources in your paper or to classify the sources according to their relevance. Or, if you are writing a lab report, you can revise the whole lecture, and therefore you strengthen the knowledge you gained during that lesson.

Even if you think of only one positive thing, it is enough. Stick with it and you’ll see that the writing gets easier.

MOTIVATION VS. PROCRASTINATION

We all know what it means to procrastinate. We all of a sudden need to watch the new series, play that computer game, check the social media every 15 minutes and not to forget that our rooms are cleaner than ever before. Generally speaking, we suddenly have a lot of different “important” tasks to do and we postpone writing or studying to the last possible moment. But there is one unpleasant aspect of this behaviour, we usually feel embarrassed or even frustrated, because we had not done enough or even nothing that we needed that day. Does it sound familiar to you? I hope it is not your problem, but I will give you some tools to cope procrastination anyway.

TIME-MANAGEMENT

So, we are back at the beginning. Plan your writing process. If you are supposed to write a 20 pages long paper, you are probably terrified. But what if you write one page at a time? If you divide the task into smaller portions, you basically set several goals. You can also make a to-do list. Every time you write something and complete the goal, you can cross it out from the list. To cross out the completed tasks is satisfying, am I right? Consequently, the task is much easier and as a bonus, you are satisfied every time you cross out the task. In other words, if you look
at the job not as a whole but as several smaller tasks, it seems to be much easier.

**TAKE BREAKS**

Taking breaks is vital. When we postpone the tasks to the latest moment, we need to squeeze a lot of work into a small amount of time. However, then there is no time for breaks and at the end, we end up exhausted. So, take breaks instead of procrastinating. If you schedule a short, ten-minute break after every 50 minutes of working, you will manage to do a lot more. So, make yourself a cup of tea, go for a walk around your room, have a look out the window, eat some fruits or check the messages. Then you can continue at ease.

**MOTIVATE YOURSELF**

Your motivation to write is most probably given by the fact that you want to obtain a grade, and therefore you must fulfil the criteria. This is something called extrinsic motivation. Extrinsic means *coming from outside*. In other words, you are forced to write papers even though you personally do not want to. Nevertheless, writing papers is an inseparable part of education. Therefore, it is mainly your task to transform the extrinsic motivation into intrinsic. Which basically means to find a personal purpose of writing (see chapter Purpose).

If you want to find more information about this topic, I wholeheartedly recommend that you read a book *End of Procrastination* (original name *Konec prokrastinace*) from a Czech author Petr Ludwig. It is full of great tools that you can employ to cope with procrastination and gain self-discipline. This chapter is based on the book as well.
Language of academic writing is definitely not a black and white situation. If you expect a fast and easy language guide, I will disappoint you here. The variety of language that is used in academic writing is unexpectedly wide. It is more a series of choices that you have to make to ensure your writing is clear and comprehensible, but at the same time, you are comfortable writing it. Therefore, this chapter is more a job for you to find what is the most appropriate choice for you, and then apply it in your text. However, there are some features of academic writing that should be always kept in mind.

- **Formality.** Your writing has to be formal in language and style. There is no place for colloquial vocabulary, contractions or phrasal verbs.
- **Impersonality and objectiveness.** In the technical branch, you are usually not required to provide your opinion. On the other hand, your arguments should always be backed up by evidence. The use of passive voice is recommended in this case.
- **Clarity and conciseness.** Keep in mind that less is more – even when writing academic text. Your paper should not be too wordy, because it only deteriorates the comprehensibility. The logical structure is also crucial to ensure that the reader of your paper can follow your flow of ideas.

This was just a small overview of the main features. Individual aspects of grammar and vocabulary will be discussed in the following chapters. I will also give you tips on several resources that you can use to meet these features of academic writing and enhance the level of your writing. If language and style is your weak spot, don't worry about it when you're writing. Write the essay soon enough to be sure that you have enough time left to proofread and rewrite it if necessary. It's much better to focus on the content first and work on the language later.

**GRAMMAR**

Grammar is basically a collection of rules and conventions that we obey to create sentences. I will not explain you the basics of grammar, of course. But there are specific parts of grammar that are frequently employed in academic writing. It comprises a passive voice that is used to emphasize impersonality, punctuation that tends to be more complicated in academic writing or nominalisation.

### 1. Passive Voice

Passive voice is what makes the paper sound objective and impersonal because the agent of the action described in the sentence is not what we are interested in and can be completely omitted. In the technical field especially, the author or writer is often not that important as the device, invention or mechanism being discussed, and therefore it is better to use the passive. Let's explain it in more detail using the following examples.

A: The first light-emitting diode was produced in 1962 by Nick Holonyak Jr.
B: Nick Holonyak Jr. produced the first light-emitting diode in 1962.

The information provided by those sentences is exactly the same. However, we perceive the information differently in each sentence. In A, the diode is the main object of interest, whereas in B it is more likely Nick Holonyak, the inventor.

C: I will summarize the findings in the next chapter.
D: The findings will be summarized in the next chapter.

This example illustrates the impersonal style. It's probably no use in asking you which sentence is more impersonal; it is of course sentence D that sounds more impersonal as well as more objective and formal, and that's exactly what is required in academic writing. However, the passive should not be overused in the paper, otherwise, it would seem...
forced. It is good to find a balance, which would result in a mixture of passive and active voice.

II. Nominalisation

To put it simply, nominalisation is the use of noun phrases. It is one of the common features of academic writing. The noun used in the phrase is often converted from a verb (see the examples). Nominalisation is a great tool to make your text concise, because thanks to nominalisation, you can compress more information into fewer words. In example A, two noun phrases are connected by a verb. Thanks to these noun phrases the sentence sounds smart and formal.

A: In technical fields specifically, there is a common occurrence of passive voice that meets the requirements of impersonality and objectiveness.

When you proofread your paper, you can analyse the sentences in which nominalisation would be possible and rewrite them. To do this, you need to find the verb that you then transform into a noun. See examples B.

B1: Electrons get excited when they rapidly absorb energy.

B2: The rapid absorption of energy results in excitation of electrons.

The nominalisation, however, is not always needed. The following example shows that nominalisation can sometimes also sound forced and it is better to omit it. See examples C.

C1: The failure of students to plan their writing process results in the worsened evaluation.

C2: Students fail to plan their writing process, which results in the worsened evaluation.

III. Punctuation

Punctuation is the usage of symbols that are incorporated in the text in order to make it more comprehensible. It is for instance used to separate phrases and sentences or to indicate which type of sentence it is. The most common punctuation marks are full stops, commas, semicolons, colons, dashes, hyphens, question marks, exclamation points, parentheses or brackets.

We undoubtedly all know how to use a full stop or brackets. However, the right usage of commas and semicolons is maybe not that clear, and yet so important especially in academic text. So, let’s go through the most common examples, which you should not confuse in your papers. Spoiler: you need to know what dependent (DC) and independent (IC) clauses are to understand what I am talking about. Google it in case you are not sure.

Commas

There are several different scenarios when you should use a comma:

- **After an introductory phrase.** An introductory phrase can comprise a single word or a longer phrase, but both of them require a comma. Needless to say, the introductory phrase always needs to be separated by a comma. Yes, this is also an introductory word.

  ```
  After an introductory phrase. An introductory phrase can comprise a single word or a longer phrase, but both of them require a comma. Needless to say, the introductory phrase always needs to be separated by a comma. Yes, this is also an introductory word.
  ```

- **If DC precedes IC in the sentence.** Dependent clauses often start with after, although, as, because, if, since, when, while, before, whereas, whether, even if, even though, in order to.

  ```
  If DC precedes IC in the sentence. Dependent clauses often start with after, although, as, because, if, since, when, while, before, whereas, whether, even if, even though, in order to.
  ```

- **To separate items in a list.**

  ```
  To separate items in a list. It does not matter if you are writing an essay, letter, complaint or bachelor’s thesis; always make sure the punctuation is correct.
  ```
• Around words, phrases or clauses that are not an essential piece of information in the sentence.

The correct usage of punctuation, such as commas or semicolons, is a crucial skill of an academic writer. If you are not sure about the usage, which happens to be a problem for many people, you can always consult an online dictionary.

• With FANBOYS. For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet and So are so-called coordinating conjunctions connecting independent clauses, and they require a comma.

I advise you to learn the acronym by heart, so you can recall it more easily.

There also are some cases when no commas are used. Do not use them before that or in sentences which contain a clause comprising essential information. Commas are not used in sentences where the independent clause goes first, and the dependent clause follows. The comma is also not used if the second part of the sentence does not contain a subject. For example sentence He came home and went out again. does not require any comma. Also, the fact that a sentence is long does not necessarily mean it needs commas; the usage of commas always depends on the sentence structure.

Semicolons

In contradiction to the Czech language, English uses semicolons very often. They have to be used when:

• Connecting two IC without coordinating conjunction. If you want to connect two independent clauses, you need either a comma + FANBOYS or a semicolon. The connection by a comma only would be “too weak” in this case, and therefore it is a mistake.

A: The meeting has been going on for more than three hours; no important decision has yet been made.

B: The meeting has been going on for more than three hours, but no important decision has been made.

Example A requires a semicolon because there is no linking word between the independent clauses. In example B, the clauses are connected with a FANBOYS, which requires a comma.

• Connecting two independent clauses with a conjunctive adverb.

You can also use so-called conjunctive adverbs to connect two IC. They require a semicolon that precedes the adverb and a comma following the adverb.

These adverbs are for example: also, still, however, consequently, besides, moreover, otherwise, as a result, in addition, on the other hand, therefore etc.

It would be probably better to read this chapter several times; otherwise, you can’t be sure that you remember everything.

The sentence in example C also requires both a semicolon and a comma, because there is a conjunctive adverb – however.

C: The meeting has been going on for more than three hours; however, no important decision has yet been made.

Examples A, B and C are the same sentences that are made up of two independent clauses and is written in three different ways requiring different punctuation. Therefore, if you are not sure about the correct punctuation, you can try to modify the sentence in order to handle the punctuation correctly.

IV. Subject-verb agreement

It can seem silly that I want to talk about the subject-verb agreement here. Everyone knows that subject and verb need to “agree” in number (which means they both need to be either plural or singular). However, there are some cases that may be tricky, so you should always make sure what the subject of the sentence is and whether the verb agrees. In short sentences, the verb usually follows the subject, but it can be more complicated in longer sentences. See the examples A, which show that in longer sentences the subject and verb are far apart, and other nouns can easily confuse you. The subject-verb agreement is in bold and the possibly confusing noun is underlined to keep it clear.
A1: Several leading members of the party have criticised the improvement proposal.

A2: The only explanation that he was able to deliver for his shameful actions was that he was tired.

Several other cases might be problematic:

A and B is plural if the subject is seen as two different units.

A or B / Neither A nor B / Either A or B take a singular verb if the items are singular and plural verb if the items are plural.

Either the manager or the accountant is at work.

If one part of the subject is singular and the other plural, it is stylistically more appropriate to place the plural part second and use a plural verb:

Neither the manager nor the employees are at work.

(Only) one of … who/which/that

One is a singular pronoun and goes with a singular verb, but a phrase “one of … that” can be problematic (see the examples below).

One of the students really enjoys writing theses.

She is the only one of the students who really enjoys writing essays. (Only she enjoys)

VOCABULARY

Vocabulary also has to meet the criteria of formal language. Thus, you should not employ colloquial language such as slang, idioms, phrasal verbs or vague expressions in your papers. Repetition is also a trait of poor style, and thus you should avoid it.

Every-day words can change their meaning when used in a specific context. Bit, for example, can be a computing unit or a little piece of something. Colloquial words may also have their substitutions in
academic variety (e.g. show → illustrate, outside → exterior, a lot of → many).

I. Nouns

We have already spoken about nominalisation, which commonly occurs in academic text. In order to be able to incorporate nominalisation in your paper, you need to be familiar with the “general academic nouns” — formal and usually quite abstract nouns that you often encounter in the papers no matter which field you are concerned with.

There is also vocabulary that is specific to particular areas. In electrical engineering, for example, you have to know terms such as shaft, bolt, transducer, switch or relay. In informatics, it is then for instance cache, driver, bit, port or router. You will learn this vocabulary naturally, as you will deepen your knowledge in the field.

II. Modifiers

Modifiers usually comprise adjectives and adverbs. They are called modifiers because they modify the word — they provide details, emphasis or specific information. The text is more detailed thanks to them. But it can easily become wordy, so don’t overuse them. Sometimes it is better to leave the text plain.

There are some examples of modifiers:

- **Adverbs**: relatively, apparently, rather, fairly, particularly, primarily, generally, specifically, approximately, precisely, highly.
- **Adjectives**: appropriate, accurate, relative, characteristic, relevant, significant, precise, potential, complex, specific, traditional.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of</th>
<th>Relatively high number of</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>Fairly accurate summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small sample</td>
<td>Rather small sample</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feature</td>
<td>Characteristic feature</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

III. Verbs

There are 3 points that you should be aware of when writing academic text:

- **No phrasal verbs.** If it is possible, use their one-word synonyms. There are examples of several phrasal verbs and their synonym which are more appropriate for academic texts.

  - Carry out → Conduct
  - Come up with → Develop
  - Look into → Examine
  - Put into practice → Implement
  - Get rid of → Eliminate
  - Make easy → Facilitate

- **Verb patterns matter.** Make sure that you know how to use the verbs when you link more of them together. You can find verb patterns in monolingual dictionaries.

- **Subject-verb agreement.** This phenomenon is discussed in chapter Subject-verb agreement on page 28.

**LANGUAGE RESOURCES**

This chapter is incorporated in the handbook in order to provide you with useful resources that could improve your vocabulary or style. These resources are namely monolingual and collocation dictionaries, thesaurus and corpus. All of them can help you to enhance your papers with minimal effort by providing an endless source of set phrases, verb patterns or collocations, and more importantly — their use in sentences.

I. Monolingual dictionary

Online monolingual dictionaries such as Oxford or Cambridge dictionaries can help you when you are not sure about:

- The right meaning of the word,
- spelling,
- verb patterns,
• whether the noun is countable,
• usage in sentences,
• collocations.

It is better to look at the issue immediately while writing because you could forget about it and that would result in unnecessary mistakes. I always open a dictionary in my browser as soon as I start writing to save some time later when I need to look for something.

II. Collocation dictionary

Collocations are super useful when you want to extend your sentences and add some specific information. I personally like the Online OXFORD Collocation Dictionary. But you can simply google the word you need to modify together with “collocations” (e.g. “results collocations”), and then you can explore the hits to find what will suit you the most. If we will stick to the word results, there are some examples of collocations that might be useful:

- Adjectives: logical, good, positive, desired, disastrous, unfortunate, inevitable, impressive, dramatic, spectacular, surprising, lasting
- Verbs: have, get, obtain, achieve, produce

As for adjectives, I would be careful with the word good, because that basically does not say anything about the results. Always try to be as specific as possible.

The verbs get and have are not the most formal, so rather select from the last three depending on what you want to say.

So, from a sentence: The study has good results.
You can make: Impressive results were achieved in the study.

In 3 easy steps:
- Adding specific information by using collocation dictionary,
- exchanging the verb for a more formal version,
- and converting the active voice to passive.

III. Thesaurus

Thesaurus can generously contribute by presenting a large number of synonyms that are a great tool against word repetition. Let explore the synonyms of the word thing. You may won’t believe me, but according to Thesaurus.com there are more than 100 words that could be possibly used instead of a thing. There is a list of my favourites.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Concern</th>
<th>Detail</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Fact</td>
<td>Feature</td>
<td>Idea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Object</td>
<td>Phenomenon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Point</td>
<td>Situation</td>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>Quality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All of them sounds better than the infamous thing. You only need to consider what meaning “your thing” has to manage to select the best synonym.

IV. Corpus

Corpus is a collection of text – written or spoken, academic, professional or colloquial. You can, for example, verify how frequently used the collocation you selected is or the usage of a particular word in a sentence. You can, for example, try Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) or British National Corpus (BNC).

Tips for corpus search:
- you can select academic text only under the search window,
- \([n^*]\) can be used to represent any noun,
- \([v^*]\) = verb,
- \([r^*]\) = adverb,
- \([j^*]\) = adjective,
- \([p^*]\) = pronoun,
- \([d^*]\) = determiner,
- \([c^*]\) = conjunction,
- \([t^*]\) = preposition,
- a question mark can be used to replace any single letter,
- square brackets extend the search to any form of a word, (when you type [have], it searches for have, has, had).
When you filter academic text only, you can also verify whether the word you want to use is commonly employed in academic writing or not. The number of hits will indicate how often it is incorporated in the papers. But do not only follow the number, you should also read a bit of the text in order to decide if the meaning stays the same and if the text is truly academic. You know it well: trust, but verify!

All these sources are similar to a certain extent. It rather depends on you, what resource will suit you the most. If you get used to employing these sources in your writing process, your papers will become more sophisticated without expending a great deal of effort.
It has been said many times that academic style is formal, objective and impersonal. There are some tips that can help you to create a formal piece of writing.

**SENTENCE LENGTH**

The length of sentences naturally varies, and it is not possible to determine the right number of words that should form a sentence. Even though there is no correct length of a sentence, you should avoid writing either too short or too long sentences. You do not need to count the exact number of words in each sentence in order to determine whether the sentence is of appropriate length. It is enough to read the text as a whole, and I guarantee that you will notice if the length is not suitable. You can read the following examples:

**Extremely short sentences are bad.** They sound choppy. It is not good for the essay. I’ll give you a piece of advice. Try to make them longer. You will see the result immediately.

**Extremely long sentences are also bad for your essay** because they make the essay sound wordy even if it is not, which is not appropriate, as the reader will easily get tired of reading such long sentences; and that is the main reason, why you should try to divide them into a higher number of shorter sentences to increase comprehensibility of the text as a whole.

The first example is many short sentences and the second is only one sentence that is way too long. None of it is appropriate. The best outcome is a variable length of sentences that flows naturally and is easy to read.

**CONTRACTIONS**

Even though contractions are widely used in spoken academic discourse, they should not be employed in writing. They are simply not formal. You probably noticed that I often use them in this book. That’s because I wanted to keep the text easy to read, and therefore I chose such a style of writing that is definitely not academic, but rather neutral or even informal sometimes.

I randomly selected 10 common contractions and wrote their full versions in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contraction</th>
<th>Full Version</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It's</td>
<td>It is / It has</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isn’t</td>
<td>Is not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There’s</td>
<td>There is / There has</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That’s</td>
<td>That is / That has</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wouldn’t</td>
<td>Would not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can’t</td>
<td>Can not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shouldn’t</td>
<td>Should not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let’s</td>
<td>Let us</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**RHETORICAL QUESTIONS**

Purely and simply, just don’t use them. But keep reading if you want to know why. Rhetorical questions are those which are not expected to be answered. Writers use them to make their writing more creative and to make an impression on the readers as well. Even though you may think that using rhetorical questions could be beneficial for your paper, the opposite is the truth. Rhetorical questions engage the reader by leaving open space for them to fill with their own thoughts and ideas. In academic style, however, there should be no room left for the imagination. The information provided needs to be clear and straightforward. In addition to this, you are supposed to provide answers, not questions. Does it make sense?

**HEDGING**

Hedging means avoiding definite statements. You should make sure that you are not imposing your ideas on others when writing academic texts because that would deny the requirement of objectivity, and therefore deteriorate your paper. In other words, you should simply indicate that you are “not sure” about the accuracy of the idea even
though it is absolutely accurate and correct – it has to be, you shouldn’t present statements you are not sure about. Hedging is only a matter of politeness. So, let’s go through the list of words that you can employ in the sentence to make it less straightforward.

- **Verbs:** seem, tend, appear, believe, assume, suggest, indicate, propose, consider
- **Modal verbs:** could, should, would, might, can, may
- **Adverbs:** fairly, likely, possibly, probably, sometimes, often, usually, relatively
- **Adjectives:** probable, possible, relative, evident
- **Nouns:** probability, possibility, suggestion, assumption, belief, proposal
- **Phrases:** to certain/considerable extent, it is widely agreed, according to the study, in the view of many researchers.

Climate change is caused by humans.

↓

Climate change might be caused by humans.

↓

It has been widely agreed that climate change is caused by humans.

↓

In the view of many researchers, climate change might be caused by humans.

The previous study results are wrong.

↓

The previous study results appear to be wrong.

At the same time, however, you should avoid vague expressions. In every-day life, we usually use vague expressions when we don’t know something, or we don’t want to speak about it. There is no place for such a strategy in academic papers. To suppress vagueness, you can try to use modifiers (see page 31).
The structure of a paper is one of the most important aspects of academic writing. If compared to describing people, it is probably a better idea to start from the top to the bottom, or from the whole to the tiny details than to jump from hairs to nails. In academic writing, it is also necessary to stick to a pattern and suppress often an incoherent flight of ideas.

Present old information before new. The old information that is familiar to the reader creates a basis for the newly presented ideas. You can then easily create a link between the old and new ideas, and therefore maintain a clear arrangement of the text.

The connection of sentences and paragraphs in the paper is known as cohesion, and it is an important aspect of the structure. Linking words are a great tool to ensure the logical arrangement of the paper. They indicate the relationship between individual sentences (or ideas). Different linking words have a different purpose in writing. There are some of them that you might adopt in your paper:

- **To point out a conflict:** On the other hand, in contrast to, however, but, whereas, while.
- **To emphasize:** In addition, moreover, even more, besides, more importantly.
- **To provide reasons:** Therefore, thus, consequently, as a result, so.
- **To introduce an example:** For example, especially, such as, to illustrate, particularly.

Paragraphs should be also interconnected. Every paragraph should include one idea, and it is crucial to link these ideas together in a logical manner. A few practical phrases to ensure linking paragraphs together follow.

- **Using numerals:** Firstly, secondly, first of all, to begin with.
- **To develop an idea:** Next, subsequently, afterwards, then.
- **To summarize:** Consequently, given these points, hence, altogether.

Cohesion is also guaranteed by repetition. If you repeat old information and specify how it is connected to the new information, you establish a relationship and therefore maintain the link between the ideas.
WHAT TO AVOID

CHAPTER 5

SUPPRESS COMMON MISTAKES
WHAT TO AVOID

This chapter summarizes 8 points that you should avoid when writing academic papers. Some of them already appeared in previous chapters but practice makes perfect, so let’s revise them and add some extra points.

1. **Do not exaggerate.** Present the real information you have, and do not try to improve your paper by exaggerating. It does not work.
2. **No personal comments.** If you are asked to add your personal attitude, it is perfectly ok. Otherwise, try to stay objective whether you like it or not.
3. **Do not digress from the topic.** Make sure that the whole paper stays within the limits of your topic. Digression from the topic is usually “awarded” by reduction of points in your assessment.
4. **Suppress word repetition.** Try to use some of the resources; they will definitely help you overcome word repetition. If you are not sure whether it is your problem, you can search the document for several words that might repeat and then substitute them.
5. **Be careful with run-on expressions (etc., and so on).** The run-on expression can add vagueness to your text and that is not desirable. You can, therefore, replace them with such as or including and list only two or three items.
6. **No sentence fragments.** Make sure that your sentences always contain both the subject and the verb, otherwise, the sentence can’t make sense.
7. **No grammar and spelling errors.** If the content is outstanding, the teacher may overlook some of the minor mistakes. However, you should always proofread your paper or give it to someone else to do it for you.
8. **Avoid incoherent flow of ideas.** Keep in mind that the reader has to be able to follow your thoughts. Present old information before new in order to build a basis for connecting the information which comes next.

CONCLUSION

So, this is it! I hope that you did find what you were searching for on these pages. If you still have doubts, go to search online. The internet is an infinite source of information, but please be careful to consult only reliable webpages. You can find a lot of information on academic writing e.g. from teachers of various universities in English speaking countries. And the last thing: good luck with your papers!
REFERENCES

BIBLIOGRAPHY