

On writing skills

Dorothea Dette-Hagenmeyer

Ludwigsburg, Germany

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Say what you have to say in 50 words

- **Write an outline**
- Conceptualize the parts of your work
- E.g., journal article:
 - Introduction
 - Methods
 - Results
 - Discussion

Questions to ask before starting

- What do I write?
- What do I write about?
- Whom do I write for?
- Why do I write?
- How do I write?

What do I write?

- Journal article
- Book
- Grant proposal
- Research report
- Dissertation
- Poster
- Lecture/talk

What do I write about?

- Topic
- Type of research
 - Experiment/correlational?
 - Field/lab?
 - Cross-sectional/longitudinal?

Whom do I write for?

- Myself
- My supervisor
- My students
- Colleagues of my discipline
- Colleagues of neighboring disciplines
- The general public

Why do I write?

- To later remember what I did/to tell my coworkers what I did.
- To teach.
- To tell people about my research.

How do I write?

- Language
- Style
- Punctuation
- Format
- APA guidelines

2 good books

- Trask, A.L. (1997). Penguin guide to punctuation. London: Penguin Books.
- Silvia, P. J. (2007). How to write a lot. Washington: APA Life Tools.
- And there are many more!

Style

- Write short sentences
- Chose simple words
- Use technical terms sparingly
- Use technical terms consistently
- Avoid filler words
- Use parallel sentences
- Use a criterion-variant structure
- Avoid wordy phrases

Long sentences are bad

- Children's development and adjustment are heavily dependent on their parents' constitution and behavior, especially, the emotional stability of the parents is important for the emotional development and children of depressed parents show more adjustment problems, as can be seen in a study where in early childhood, maternal depression has been shown to impair emotion regulation of children over 3 years, moderated by child's reactivity (Blandon, Calkins, Keane & O'Brien, 2008).

Write short sentences

- Children's development and adjustment are heavily dependent on their parents' constitution and behavior.
- Especially important for the emotional development is the emotional stability of the parents.
- Children of depressed parents show more adjustment problems:
- In early childhood, maternal depression has been shown to impair emotion regulation of children over 3 years.
- This effect was moderated by child's reactivity (Blandon, Calkins, Keane & O'Brien, 2008).

Use technical term consistently

Before:

People high in neuroticism responded slower than people low in the tendency to experience adverse affective states.

After:

People high in neuroticism responded slower than people low in neuroticism.

Choose simple words

- Subjective cognitive appraisal => appraisal
- Biopsychosocial model => ?
- Individual(s) => person, people
- Trajectories => paths, ways
- Disambiguate => clarify
- Existing literature => literature
- ...

Avoid acronyms

- Anxiety (ANX) and depression (DEP) can be related, but must be differentiated from anxious arousal (ANXAR) and anhedonic depression (ANDEP). The four forms ANX, DEP, ANXAR and ANDEP differ

Avoid filler words

- Basically, these quite useless words add virtually nothing at all; like weeds, they in fact actually remarkably smother your sentences pretty completely.

Avoid filler words

- **Basically**, these **quite** useless words add **virtually** nothing **at all**; like weeds, they **in fact** **actually remarkably** smother your sentences **pretty completely**.
- These useless words add nothing; like weeds, they smother your sentences.

Use parallel sentences

Before:

People in the dual-task condition monitored a series of beeps while reading a list of words. Some other participants in a different group read only a list of words without listening for sounds (“control group”).

After:

People in the dual-task condition monitored a series of beeps while reading a list of words. People in the control condition read a list of words.

Use a criterion-variant structure

- Everyone read a list of words. People in the dual-task condition monitored a series of beeps while reading the words, people in the control condition only read the words.
- Everyone viewed a set of 20 pictures. In the control condition, people merely viewed the pictures. In the evaluation condition, people rated how much they liked each picture.

Avoid wordy phrases

- To be indicative of = to indicate
- To be reflective of = reflect
- To be supportive of = support

- In a rapid manner = rapidly
- In a quiet manner = quietly

Punctuation

- Colon (:)
- Semicolon (;)
- Hyphen(-)
- N-dash (—)
- M-dash (—)

Colon

Indicates that what follows is an explanation or elaboration of what precedes it

- Africa is facing a terrific problem: perpetual drought.
- We found the place easily: your directions were perfect.
- We studied two groups: infants and adolescents.

Semicolon

Joins two complete sentences, when

1. The two sentences are felt to be too closely related to be separated by a full stop;
2. There is no connecting word which would require a comma, such as *and* or *but*;
3. The special conditions requiring a colon are absent.

Semicolon

Tolkien published *The Hobbit* in 1937; the first volume of *The Lord of the Rings* followed in 1954.

Women's conversation is cooperative; men's is competitive.

vs.

Women's conversation is cooperative, while men's is competitive.

Hyphen

- Used in writing compound words
- a light-green dress
- a ten-pound book
- a ten-year-old son
- a far-ranging investigation

N-dash (–)

- Coordinates two concepts
- Expresses “between”
- Parent-child behavior vs. parent–child behavior
- Infant-parent interaction study vs. infant–parent interaction study

M-dash (—)

- Reach out and make a new friend—the dash.
- Work through this—you need dashes.

M-dash (—)

Before:

Forty adults participated in the experiment.
There were 10 women and 30 men.

After:

Forty adults—10 women and 30 men—
participated in the experiment.

M-dash (—)

Before:

Counterfactual thoughts, which are defined as thoughts about events that did not occur, demonstrate the intersection of cognition and emotion.

After:

Counterfactual thoughts—thoughts about events that did not occur—demonstrate the intersection of cognition and emotion.

Write first, revise later

- While writing, do not worry about style or mistakes.
- While revising, do not cling to your sentences, but delete joyfully.

Before submitting

- Count your words
- Check your tables and figures
- Check your headings
- Prepare a blind version, when needed
- Think about potential reviewers, you may be allowed to suggest or exclude some
- Check the rejection rate of the journal to brace for the result of the reviews