Adrian Wallwork & Anna Southern

100 Tips to Avoid Mistakes
in Academic Writing and Presenting

Springer

English for Academic Research

This series aims to help non-native, English-speaking researchers communicate in English. The books in this series are designed like manuals or user guides to help readers find relevant information quickly, and assimilate it rapidly and effectively.

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Introduction to the Book

Who is this book for?

RESEARCHERS – The book contains one hundred typical mistakes relating to papers, proposals, presentations, and correspondence with editors, reviewers and editing agencies.

EDITING AGENCIES – If you edit academic papers then you will find this book extremely helpful in learning how to correct the typical errors that academics make when writing - both in their manuscripts and in their correspondence with journals. These types of mistakes are listed below under the section *What kinds of mistake does the book focus on?*

JOURNAL EDITORS AND REFEREES – This book will help you make qualified judgments of whether the English of a paper really does require editing. Remember that papers can be delayed by reviewers making indiscriminate (and frequently unjustified) statements about 'poor English'.

TEACHERS OF EAP (ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES) – you will learn which areas of writing and grammar to really focus on. If you also teach presentation skills, the last sections in the book highlight the key areas where presenters make the most mistakes.

This book can be used in conjunction with the other books in this series: https://www.springer.com/series/13913

What kinds of written mistakes does the book focus on?

The book focuses on modifications that increase readability and empathy for the reader, for example by

➢ rearranging the structure of a sentence or paragraph

➢ repositioning / highlighting key information so that it stands out clearly from the surrounding text

➢ deleting redundant words, phrases and sentences

➢ dividing up long complex sentences

➢ repunctuating so that the meaning is clearer

➢ always adopting a positive tone in emails and letters

It also deals with a few specific grammar and vocabulary mistakes, but only where such mistakes might confuse the reader (of a paper, email, proposal etc.) or listener at a scientific conference. If you are interested in learning how to avoid the most frequently made grammar and vocabulary mistakes then you can consult:

Top 50 Vocabulary Mistakes
https://www.springer.com/gp/book/9783319709802

Top 50 Grammar Mistakes
https://www.springer.com/gp/book/9783319709833

Although the above two books focus on mistakes regarding general English rather than specifically academic English, there is much overlap between the two types of English. If you need grammar explanations that are specific to academic English then the following book will be very useful for you:

English for Academic Research: Grammar, Usage and Style

https://www.springer.com/gp/book/9781461415923

And if you want to do exercises in relation to the errors covered in this book, then try these three books:

English for Academic Research: Writing Exercises

https://www.springer.com/gp/book/9781461442974

English for Academic Research: Grammar Exercises

https://www.springer.com/gp/book/9781461442882

English for Academic Research: Vocabulary Exercises

https://www.springer.com/gp/book/9781461442677

How is the book structured?

The book is made up of 100 sections, divided up as follows:

Research Papers: Titles and Abstracts

Research Papers: Introduction and Literature Review

Research Papers: Methods, Results, Tables

Research Papers: Discussion, Conclusions, Review Articles

Readability and Avoiding Redundancy

Word Order, Sentence Length and Paragraphing

Punctuation, Spelling, Google

Project proposals, journal submissions, emails in general

Presentations

Within each section there are several examples given. Each example is organized as follows:

Title: This is either a tip on how to avoid a mistake, or a warning of a typical mistake.

 NO! Examples of typical mistakes.   **YES!** Corrected versions.

MISTAKE A description of why the NO examples are mistakes. Followed, in many cases, by an analysis of each individual mistake.

SOLUTION An explanation of how not to make the mistakes.

IMPACT A more general explanation of the negative impact that a particular mistake could have on the reader (including editors, reviewers, recipients of emails) or listeners (at a conference). And also an explanation of how the solution can have a positive impact.

Notes:

- The NO examples are authentic, i.e. they were taken from real papers. Consequently, they may contain additional mistakes (spelling, punctuation, grammar), not just those that are the topic of a particular section in the book. This means that you can also use the book to see if you are able to i) identify other kinds of mistakes ii) correct them. You can do this by covering the YES version and then attempt to edit / correct the NO version.

- In some cases there is no IMPACT section because the impact is clear or is very similar to the impact of the previous subsection. And in the case of presentations, sometimes just the KEYS are given, i.e. explanations for the way particular slides are used.

- *Italics* are used in the examples to highlight the points made in the MISTAKE and SOLUTION sections. Thus they are <u>our</u> italics, not the author of the paper's italics.

- A bomb icon (💣) is used to indicate the most important tips and 'serious' mistakes in the book. This choice is <u>highly subjective</u> but is based on our agency's 30-year experience of editing scientific research papers. They are 'serious' in terms of how likely they are to create major confusion for the reader or undermine the credibility of the author or presenter. We are thinking primarily in terms of how well the message of your paper or presentation comes across to the reader, or how likely your paper or proposal is to be accepted for publication or funding.

Free downloadable materials

For more materials you can access: https://e4ac.com/english-for-research/
Under the name of this book, i.e. *100 Tips to Avoid Mistakes in Academic Writing and Presenting*, you will find:

- larger and clearer versions (in color) of the slides shown in the last section of this book

- additional mistakes plus analysis

- updates

You can also find details about the other books in this series as well as details of our editing agency (including costs of having your papers edited) and our courses.

Contents

Chapter 1
Research Papers: Titles and Abstracts

1 Whole paper: Concentrate above all on readability; grammar is generally less important. 💣※

MISTAKE I have surveyed thousands of PhD students about what they consider to be the fundamentals of writing research papers in English. While some recognize that readability should be prioritized (i.e. minimizing long sentences and redundancy), most tend to focus on grammar and vocabulary. Few mention conciseness and even fewer mention ambiguity. In my opinion, it is a mistake to think that good grammar and appropriate vocabulary are the key to a good paper. There are other elements, including the ones listed below, that are much more likely to determine whether your paper will be accepted for publication, and which have a big impact on what a reviewer might refer to as 'poor English'. This whole book is designed to help you understand what areas you should really be concentrating on.

SOLUTION

- Always think about the referee and the reader. Your aim is to have your paper published. You will increase your chances of acceptance of your manuscript if referees and journal editors (i) find your paper easy to read; (ii) understand what gap you filled and how your findings differ from the literature. You need to meet their expectations with regard to how your content is organized. This is achieved by writing clearly and concisely, and by carefully structuring not only each section, but also each paragraph and each sentence.

- In your own native language, you may be more accustomed to write from your own perspective, rather than the reader's perspective. To write well in English, it may help you to imagine that you are the reader rather than the author. This entails constantly thinking how easily a reader will be able to assimilate what you the author are telling them.

- Write concisely with no redundancy and no ambiguity, and you will make fewer mistakes in your English. The more you write, the more mistakes in English you will make. If you avoid redundant words and phrases you will significantly increase the readability of your paper.

- Read other papers, learn the standard phrases, use these papers as a model. You will improve your command of English considerably by reading lots of other papers in your field. You can underline or note down the typical phrases that they use to express the various language functions (e.g. outlining aims, reviewing the literature, highlighting their findings) that you too will need in your paper. You can also note down how they structure their paper and then use their paper as a template (i.e. a model) for your own.

IMPACT

If your paper is relatively easy to read and each sentence adds value for the reader, then you are much more likely to be cited in other people's work. If you are cited, then your work as an academic will become more rewarding - people will contact you and want to work with you.

More details about readability and being concise can be found in Sections 31-56.