

Adrian Wallwork

English for Academic Research: Writing Exercises

English for Academic Research

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English for Academic Research: Writing Exercises

 Springer

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Preface

Aim of the book and coverage

The book is aimed at postgraduate students, PhD students and researchers whose first language is not English. It is assumed that you have already reached a sufficient level of English to write a research paper, thesis or dissertation.

The book covers all the writing skills that will help you to get a positive reaction from the reviewers of your manuscript, and thus improve your chances of publication. When reviewers say that the level of the English in a manuscript is ‘poor’, they are often referring not to grammar or vocabulary issues, but to readability problems (see the second section on page vii), such as poor structure, sentences being too long, redundancy, and ambiguity. All these problems, and many more, are dealt with in this book.

Structure of the book, self-study and classroom use

Sections 1–9 of the book practice particular writing skills. Section 10 brings all these skills together in exercises on writing specific sections of a manuscript – from the Abstract to the Acknowledgements. Around half of the exercises in Sections 1–9 can be done rapidly, without the aid of a teacher. They are thus suitable for self study. Other exercises require you to write extended pieces of text, which you will need to have corrected by your teacher or a native speaker of English. Each part begins with cross references to other books in the series (see the first section on page vii).

Instructions and keys to the exercises

Instructions to exercises are in *italics*. Examples of how to do the exercises are shaded in grey.

If there is no example given and you are not sure how to do the exercise, look at the first question in the exercise and then the answer to that question in the key.

The keys (solutions) to the exercise appear immediately below the exercise, but in a smaller font. The idea is that you don't have to flip to the back of the book to find the answers. This should speed up the process of doing the exercises. In a few cases, there is no key because there are unlimited ways of answering the exercise.

In any case, you should consider the keys as being suggested answers. There may be several possible answers. If in doubt, consult with your English teacher.

Word and phrases in [parentheses] indicate that these are alternative solutions to the ones outside parentheses, but they are probably less commonly used.

Word and phrases separated by a slash (e.g. *which/that*) indicate that both solutions are equally valid.

Language and 'facts' used in this book

A few of the texts may contain technical language that you may not be familiar with. However, it is not necessary to understand every word in each sentence in order to be able to do the exercise. But if you find that the technical language of one particular exercise is an obstacle to you being able to complete the exercise, then simply ignore that exercise and do the next. In fact, the book has been designed to give practice of the same writing skill in more than one exercise.

Most of the facts, statistics and authors' names contained in the exercises have been invented. Some are designed to be humorous. Academic writing can be quite heavy and you may find you are more motivated to do some exercises if there is an element of fun involved. You are thus encouraged to invent data and information. All the exercises reflect the typical style of academic works and many are based on real texts. So whether you are using true facts or inventing your own, the kind of language and constructions you use will be in the same academic style.

Cross referencing with other books in the series

This book is divided into ten parts. At the beginning of each part is a list of the writing skills practiced in the exercises. These skills are cross referenced to two other books in the series:

English for Research: Grammar, Usage and Style – designed to resolve your doubts about the grammar, usage and style of academic English.

English for Writing Research Papers – everything you need to know about how to write a paper that referees will recommend for publication.

This means that you can check how to use a particular writing skill before you start doing the related exercise. Grammar (e.g. the use of articles and tenses) and vocabulary are covered in:

English for Academic Research: Grammar Exercises

English for Academic Research: Vocabulary Exercises

Other books in the series that you might find useful are:

English for Academic Correspondence – tips for responding to editors and referees, networking at conferences, understanding fast-talking native English speakers, using Google Translate, and much more. No other book like this exists on the market.

English for Presentations at International Conferences – all the tricks for overcoming your fear of presenting in English at a conference.

English for Interacting on Campus – tips for: socializing with fellow students, addressing professors, participating in lectures, improving listening skills and pronunciation, surviving in a foreign country.

To find out how the manuals are cross-referenced with the exercise books go to: <http://www.springer.com/series/13913>

Focus on readability

Your main aim is to get your paper published. The people who determine whether your paper will be published are the editors of the journal and the referees who review your paper.

Readability. This is the key concern of referees. If a paper is not readable it cannot be published. If a paper contains a limited number of grammatical and lexical errors, it can still be published, because such errors rarely prevent the reader from understanding the paper.

Readability relates to the amount of effort the reader has to make in order to understand what you have written. Readability is affected by the following factors:

- sentence length (sentences longer than 30 words are generally hard to assimilate without having to be read twice)
- lack of structure (within a sentence, paragraph or section)
- redundancy (i.e. words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs and sections that add no value for the reader)
- ambiguity and lack of clarity (i.e. the reader is not sure how to interpret a phrase)

A low level of readability is associated with authors who are more interested in expressing themselves in an 'elegant' or 'academic' way, rather than on focusing on what the reader really wants/needs to read, and the best way to make this information immediately clear to the reader. English has increasingly become a reader-oriented language, in which authors feel a responsibility to help their readers, rather than impress them. This does not mean that English has become a simple language and that it has limited expressive power. It means that, when it is written well, it cuts out any unnecessary information, and presents all the useful information in a way that clearly shows the connections between ideas. Ideally, it does not leave gaps for the reader to fill in, nor does it adopt vague language and thus force the reader to make interpretations. Bear in mind, however, that there are still many native English writers whose aim seems to be to obscure rather than enlighten!

Think about what you like reading on the web. You probably appreciate:

- ease in finding the information you want
- short sentences and paragraphs containing only relevant information
- white space, no dense blocks of text
- no distractors (e.g. pop ups, animations, links in every other sentence)

When you write your paper, bear the above in mind. Think about what you like reading, then try to write in a style that will make reading your paper a pleasurable experience for your audience. Make it easy for readers to find what they want and to absorb it. Don't create distractors: so no redundant words and phrases, misspellings, pointless or difficult tables and figures. And don't make your readers wait for key information or force them to read something twice before they can understand it.

A note for teachers

This book of exercises is designed to be used in conjunction with *English for Writing Research Papers*, which is part of the same series of books.

I have tried to cover what I consider to be the most important aspects of writing, particularly the ones that are likely to cause a paper to be rejected. Exercises on grammar and vocabulary can be found in the other volumes of this series.

Many of the exercises, particularly those in Chapters 1-5, can be set as homework as they are quick to do and contain a key. The key is on the same page as the exercise. Simply tell the students to cover the key while they are doing the exercise.

Also the extended exercises (e.g. those in Chapter 10) can be done at home.

I suggest that you use classtime to:

- explain the theory (you can prepare by yourself using the relevant sections from *English for Writing Research Papers*)
- go over the exercises

For full details on how to exploit all the books in the English for Academic series, see:

English for Academic Research: A Guide for Teachers

Contents

1	Punctuation and spelling	1
1.1	commas: reducing number of	2
1.2	commas: adding	3
1.3	semicolons: replacing	4
1.4	brackets: removing	5
1.5	hyphens: adding	6
1.6	hyphens: deciding where needed.....	7
1.7	initial capitalization: in titles	8
1.8	initial capitalization: in main text	9
1.9	various punctuation issues: 1	10
1.10	various punctuation issues: 2	11
1.11	spelling	12
2	Word order	13
2.1	choosing the best subject to put at the beginning of the phrase	14
2.2	putting the key words first.....	16
2.3	avoiding beginning the sentence with <i>it is</i> : 1	17
2.4	avoiding beginning the sentence with <i>it is</i> : 2	18
2.5	choosing the best word order to help the reader: 1	19
2.6	choosing the best word order to help the reader: 2	22
2.7	choosing the best word order to help the reader: 3	24
2.8	shifting the parts of the phrase to achieve optimal order: 1	25
2.9	shifting the parts of the phrase to achieve optimal order: 2	26
2.10	shifting the parts of the phrase to achieve optimal order: 3	28
2.11	shifting the parts of the phrase to achieve optimal order: 4	29

2.12	reducing the number of commas and parts of the sentence.....	30
2.13	putting sentences into the correct order.....	31
2.14	typical mistakes.....	32
3	Writing short sentences and paragraphs	33
3.1	dividing up long sentences: 1	34
3.2	dividing up long sentences: 2	36
3.3	dividing up long paragraphs 1	38
3.4	dividing up long paragraphs 2	40
3.5	dividing up long paragraphs 3	42
3.6	dividing up long paragraphs 4	43
3.7	putting paragraphs into their most logical order	45
3.8	writing short sentences: 1.....	46
3.9	writing short sentences: 2.....	46
3.10	writing short sentences: 3.....	46
4	Link words: connecting phrases and sentences together	47
4.1	linking sentences and paragraphs.....	48
4.2	deleting unnecessary link words	49
4.3	deciding when link words are necessary.....	50
4.4	choosing best link word	51
4.5	reducing the length of link words / phrases	52
4.6	shifting the position of link words expressing consequences	53
4.7	using link words to give additional neutral information	54
4.8	using link words to give additional positive information	55
4.9	using link words to give additional negative information.....	56
4.10	making contrasts	57
4.11	making evaluations.....	58
4.12	connecting sentences by repetition of key word or a derivation of the key word	59
4.13	describing processes	60
4.14	describing causes	61
4.15	describing effects and consequences	61
4.16	making contrasts, concessions, qualifications, reservations, rejections	62
4.17	outlining solutions to problems	63
4.18	outlining a time sequence.....	65
4.19	explaining figures and tables: making comparisons	66
4.20	making evaluations and drawing conclusions: 1.....	67
4.21	making evaluations and drawing conclusions: 2.....	67
5	Being concise and removing redundancy	69
5.1	removing individual redundant words.....	70
5.2	removing several redundant words: 1.....	71
5.3	removing several redundant words: 2.....	73

5.4	reducing the word count: titles.....	75
5.5	replacing several words with one preposition or adverb	76
5.6	replacing several words with one adverb.....	77
5.7	replacing several words with one word.....	78
5.8	replacing a <i>verb + noun</i> construction with a single verb: 1	79
5.9	identifying verb and noun clauses	80
5.10	replacing a <i>verb + noun</i> construction with a single verb: 2	82
5.11	replacing a noun phrase with a verb or <i>can</i> : 1.....	83
5.12	replacing a noun phrase with a verb or <i>can</i> : 2.....	84
5.13	replacing nouns with verbs in titles of papers.....	85
5.14	identifying whether link words could be deleted.....	86
5.15	deleting unnecessary link words: 1	87
5.16	deleting unnecessary link words: 2	88
5.17	deleting unnecessary link words: 3	89
5.18	unnecessary use of <i>we</i> and <i>one</i> : 1	90
5.19	unnecessary use of <i>we</i> and <i>one</i> : 2	91
5.20	avoiding redundancy in introductory phrases.....	92
5.21	avoiding redundancy in references to figures, tables etc.	92
5.22	rewriting unnecessarily long sentences: 1.....	93
5.23	rewriting unnecessarily long sentences: 2.....	94
5.24	rewriting unnecessarily long sentences: 3.....	96
5.25	reducing length of an abstract.....	97
5.26	reducing length of an introduction	98
5.27	reducing the length of the outline of the structure	99
5.28	reducing the length of the review of the literature: 1.....	100
5.29	reducing the length of the review of the literature: 2.....	101
5.30	reducing the length of the materials and methods	102
5.31	reducing the length of the conclusions section.....	102
5.32	reducing the length of the acknowledgements	103
6	Ambiguity and political correctness	105
6.1	repetition of words to aid reader's understanding: 1.....	106
6.2	repetition of words to aid reader's understanding: 2.....	107
6.3	avoiding ambiguity due to use of <i>-ing</i> form: 1.....	108
6.4	avoiding ambiguity due to use of <i>-ing</i> form: 2.....	109
6.5	disambiguating sentences: 1	110
6.6	disambiguating sentences: 2.....	112
6.7	pronouns and political correctness.....	113
6.8	non-use of masculine terms for generic situations: 1.....	114
6.9	non-use of masculine terms for generic situations: 2.....	115
6.10	non-use of masculine terms for generic situations: 3.....	115

7	Paraphrasing and avoiding plagiarism	117
7.1	deciding what is acceptable to cut and paste.....	118
7.2	quoting statistics.....	119
7.3	paraphrasing by changing the parts of speech	120
7.4	paraphrasing by changing nouns into verbs.....	121
7.5	paraphrasing by changing the parts of speech and word order: 1	123
7.6	paraphrasing by changing the parts of speech and word order: 2	124
7.7	finding synonyms: verbs 1	125
7.8	finding synonyms: verbs 2	126
7.9	finding synonyms: verbs 3	127
7.10	finding synonyms: nouns 1	128
7.11	finding synonyms: nouns 2	129
7.12	finding synonyms: adjectives.....	130
7.13	finding synonyms: adverbs and prepositions 1.....	131
7.14	finding synonyms: adverbs and prepositions 2.....	132
7.15	paraphrasing by changing word order.....	133
7.16	replacing <i>we</i> with the passive form.....	134
7.17	making a summary: 1	136
7.18	making a summary: 2	137
7.19	making a summary: 3	138
7.20	making a summary: 4	138
8	Defining, comparing, evaluating and highlighting	139
8.1	writing definitions 1	140
8.2	writing definitions 2.....	141
8.3	writing definitions 3.....	141
8.4	making generalizations.....	142
8.5	confirming other authors' evidence.....	143
8.6	stating how a finding is important.....	144
8.7	highlighting why your method, findings, results etc. are important.....	146
8.8	highlighting your findings.....	147
8.9	comparing the literature.....	148
8.10	comparing contrasting views.....	151
8.11	comparing your methodology with other authors' methodologies.....	152
8.12	comparing data in a table.....	153
8.13	questioning current thinking	154
8.14	evaluating solutions.....	155

9	Anticipating possible objections, indicating level of certainty, discussing limitations, hedging, future work	157
9.1	anticipating objections and alternative views.....	158
9.2	indicating level of certainty 1	159
9.3	indicating level of certainty 2	160
9.4	reducing level of certainty.....	161
9.5	discussing the limitations of the current state of the art	162
9.6	qualifying what you say	162
9.7	dealing with limitations in your own results: 1	163
9.8	dealing with limitations in your own results: 2.....	164
9.9	dealing with limitations in your own results: 3.....	165
9.10	toning down the strength of an affirmation: 1	166
9.11	toning down the strength of an affirmation: 2	167
9.12	toning down the strength of an affirmation: 3	168
9.13	toning down the strength of an affirmation: 4	169
9.14	direct versus hedged statements 1.....	170
9.15	direct versus hedged statements 2.....	171
9.16	discussing possible applications and future work.....	173
10	Writing each section of a paper	175
10.1	abstracts	176
10.2	introductions	177
10.3	creating variety when outlining the structure of the paper	177
10.4	outlining the structure of the paper.....	178
10.5	survey of the literature	178
10.6	methodology / experimental	179
10.7	results.....	180
10.8	discussion: 1	180
10.9	discussion: 2.....	181
10.10	differentiating between the abstract and the conclusions: 1	182
10.11	differentiating between the abstract and the conclusions: 2.....	183
10.12	conclusions: 1	184
10.13	conclusions: 2.....	184
10.14	acknowledgements: 1	185
10.15	acknowledgements: 2.....	185
	Acknowledgements	187
	About the Author	187
	Editing Service for non-native researchers / Mentorship for EAP and EFL teachers	187
	Index	189

Section 1: Punctuation and spelling

Abstract

TOPIC	ENGLISH FOR RESEARCH USAGE, STYLE, AND GRAMMAR	ENGLISH FOR WRITING RESEARCH PAPERS
apostrophes	25.1	
colons	25.2	
commas	25.3, 25.4	3.14
hyphens	25.6, 25.7	
parentheses / brackets	25.8	3.17
periods (full stops)	25.9	
semicolons	25.11	3.15, 3.16
titles		11.6, 11.7

1.1 commas: reducing number of

Reduce the number of commas in the following sentences by changing the phrase round.

The specimens, each of which was cruciform, weighed 90–100 g.

= The specimens were cruciform and weighed 90–100 g.

1. This device, as is well known, will separate X from Y.
 2. Let us strengthen, by means of the circuit of Fig. 3b, the example given in the previous subsection.
 3. This book, which is aimed at non native researchers, contains a series of exercises practising writing skills.
 4. This paper, which is an amplified version of a paper presented at the Third Conference on Writing, is divided into five main parts.
 5. The results of the survey, once they have been processed, will be used to make a full assessment of the advantages of such an approach.
 6. Let us take into consideration, using the data given in Table 1, the most important parameters.
-
1. As is well known, this device will separate X from Y.
 2. Using the circuit of Fig. 3b, let us strengthen the example given in the previous subsection.
 3. This book is aimed at non native researchers. It contains a series of exercises practising writing skills.
 4. This paper is an amplified version of a paper presented at the Third Conference on Writing, and is divided into five main parts.
 5. Once the results of the survey have been processed, they will be used to make a full assessment of the advantages of such an approach.
 6. Using the data given in Table 1 the most important parameters can be considered.

1.2 commas: adding

Insert commas where needed. Do not change the order of the words.

X not Y was the most useful.

= X, not Y, was the most useful.

1. Artists have always experimented with a variety of organic natural materials for use as paint binders and varnishes and as ingredients for mordants.
2. First he spoke about X and then about Y.
3. For breakfast I have yoghurt corn flakes and bacon and egg.
4. In direct inlet mass spectrometry solid or liquid samples are introduced into a small glass cup.
5. It costs \$2200000.
6. More and more Americans wait until the deadline to pay their bills.
7. The menu offered the usual choices of turkey lamb and chicken.
8. The paper is in three parts. Firstly we look into X. Secondly we discuss Y. Thirdly we investigate Z.

The commas are marked with a hash (#).

1. Artists have always experimented with a variety of organic natural materials for use as paint binders and varnishes # and as ingredients for mordants.
2. First he spoke about X # and then about Y.
3. For breakfast I have yoghurt # corn flakes # and bacon and egg.
4. In direct inlet mass spectrometry # solid or liquid samples are introduced into a small glass cup.
5. It costs \$2 # 200 # 000.
6. More and more # Americans wait until the deadline to pay their bills. (*more and more* has been interpreted as meaning *increasingly*).
7. The menu offered the usual choices of turkey # lamb and chicken.
8. The paper is in three parts. Firstly # we look into X. Secondly # we discuss Y. Thirdly # we investigate Z.

1.3 semicolons: replacing

Where possible and appropriate, remove the semicolons and replace them with full stops or commas.

One relatively easy method to collect information is asking for it directly from the individual under a form of questionnaire. I used questionnaires from bilingual subjects located in Florence, **(1) Tuscany**; Milan, **(2) Lombardy**; and Rome, Lazio. The participants were asked, for example, when they acquired their second **(3) language**; if they use both languages **(4) regularly**; and how they self-rate their level of proficiency in reading, listening, writing and speaking. Issues may arise from a different importance given to factors affecting language **(5) acquisition**; for example, can the length of residence in a foreign country be considered an index of proficiency? Some 27 attempts have been made to develop a reliable and valid questionnaire, which could predict the relationships with objective measures (e.g., Marian, Blumenfeld & Kaushanskaya, **(6) 2007**; Tokowicz, Michael & Kroll, 2004). Although these questionnaires were all different, they showed a consistent degree of overlapping items, for example, age of L2 (i.e. second language) first **(7) exposure**; years of L2 instruction **(8) received**; and language spoken at home. Li et al. (2006) identified these recurring items, which were consolidated into a single **(9) source**; however, despite the authors' intention to add new functions to the interface they did not develop it further.

1 and 2: semicolons are required here as otherwise the reader would not be able to distinguish the towns (Florence, Milan, Rome) from their regions (Tuscany etc.) – it would seem that all the words were related to the same type of entity.

3 and 4: semicolons could be replaced by a comma as there is no possible confusion here.

5: a full stop could be used here.

6: the semicolons are useful to divide up the list of authors into separate groups.

7 and 8: semicolons are not strictly necessary here, but they help the reader differentiate between the commas (which in this case are used to separate this long sentence into shorter clauses) and the semicolons which divide up the items in the list.

9: a full stop should be used here.

1.4 brackets: removing

Where possible, remove the brackets and rewrite the sentences accordingly. In some cases, the information in brackets is redundant.

1. If the method is used correctly (i.e. each step is followed in sequence) then the results are generally in line with the best results obtained by other authors in the literature (e.g. Smith [2011], Yang [2012] and Singh [2013]).
 2. For certain countries (e.g. Peru, Chile and Honduras) these distinctions do no apply.
 3. The software performs all the checks (price, quantity, quality).
 4. In practice this allows the users to shift the queries to one direction or the other, depending on a (positive or negative) skewing factor.
 5. We decided to use this procedure (as defined in ISO 12 / 998) as it is generally more efficient.
-
1. If each step in the method is followed in sequence then the results are generally in line with the best results obtained by other authors in the literature, for example Smith [2011], Yang [2012] and Singh [2013].
 2. For certain countries (e.g. Peru, Chile and Honduras) these distinctions do no apply.
 3. The software checks the price, quantity, and quality.
 4. In practice this allows the users to shift the queries to one direction or the other, depending on a skewing factor that can either be positive or negative.
 5. We decided to use this procedure (ISO 12 / 998) as it is generally more efficient.

1.5 hyphens: adding

Insert hyphens where needed.

She has a full time job. = She has a full-time job.

1. An Italo American project.
 2. A second order problem.
 3. A 50 year old man.
 4. A 10 year period.
 5. The use of a compiler controlled network.
 6. Via point to point routing.
 7. On the fly compilation.
 8. We need to look at the decision making process.
 9. This is not a heart related illness.
 10. There is an ever growing need for such devices.
 11. These are all real life situations.
 12. This entails using a market based mechanism.
 13. Our profit maximizing models solve this problem very neatly.
 14. It is a robot like device.
 15. There is no mention of any time dependent factors.
-
- | | |
|--|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. An Italo-American project. 2. A second-order problem. 3. A 50-year-old man. 4. A 10-year period. 5. The use of a compiler-controlled network. 6. Via point-to-point routing. 7. On-the-fly compilation. 8. We need to look at the decision-making process. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. This is not a heart-related illness. 10. There is an ever-growing need for such devices. 11. These are all real-life situations. 12. This entails using a market-based mechanism. 13. Our profit-maximizing models solve this problem very neatly. 14. It is a robot-like device. 15. There is no mention of any time-dependent factors. |
|--|---|