



English Language Enhancement Workshops: Fundamentals in Academic Writing

Seminar 3: Advancing your Academic English

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Warm Up Discussion

1) What are some of the main differences between formal and informal English?

more advanced vocabulary, longer sentences, fewer personal pronouns...

2) What are three of the most typical parts of an academic paper?

Introduction/background, literature review and discussion...

3) What are some of the types of evidence we can use in an academic paper?

facts, scholarly opinions, scientific evidence...

Academic English Characteristics

Complexity: More vocabulary and more varied vocabulary. It tends to use more noun-based phrases than verb-based phrases. More grammatically complex, including subordinate clauses and passive voice.

Explicitness: Academic writing is explicit about the relationships in the text. The writer will make it clear to the reader how the various parts of the text are related using transition words.

Hedging: You need to adjust the strength of the claims you are making depending on your stance and availability of evidence.

Academic English Characteristics

Evidence: Writers must be responsible for any claims they make. They are also responsible for demonstrating an understanding of any source texts they use.

Organisation: Academic writing is well-organised. It flows easily from one section to the next in a logical fashion.

Planning: Academic writing is well-planned. It usually takes place after research and evaluation, according to a specific purpose and plan.

The Maxim of Complexity

The key to the complexity of academic English lays in the type of vocabulary used. We should use longer and more complex sentences in academic English and also try to avoid phrasal verbs or *informal lexis*.

Research *tells us* that...

indicates

Some problems have been *found*.

discovered

The author discussed issues *like* famine and poverty.

such as

She *has got to* identify alternatives.

must

The country does not have *enough* resources.

sufficient

The Maxim of Complexity

Academic English should also avoid phrasal verbs and make use of nominalisation (changing verbs or adjectives into nouns) whenever appropriate.

Phrasal verbs:	<i>accounted for</i>	>	<i>explained</i>
	<i>brought about</i>	>	<i>caused</i>
	<i>cut out</i>	>	<i>removed</i>

Nominalisation:

<i>We analysed the data and revealed</i>	>	<i>An analysis of the data revealed</i>
<i>The data assume that</i>	>	<i>One of the assumptions of the data</i>
<i>The business must create value</i>	>	<i>Value creation is key to the business</i>

Complexity: Removing Phrasal Verbs

create eliminate establish intervene
investigate propose raise reduce

1. Researchers have been looking into the problem for 15 years now.
2. This issue was brought up during the investigations.
3. The teacher acts as a 'facilitator', and will only step in if something goes wrong.
4. Realistically, examination boards cannot altogether get rid of the possibility of errors arising during testing.
5. A poor classroom environment can cut down students' ability to learn.
6. It is very difficult to find out exactly how consultants help facilitate the introduction of change.
7. After several years of trying, the head teacher decided to come up with a comprehensive information programme to improve the quality of decisions.

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Complexity: Removing Phrasal Verbs

Replace the highlighted verb phrase with a single-word verb that has the same meaning.

1. The doctor said it would take three days **to get over** the disease.
2. I was told **to stay away from** narrow alleys at night.
3. The nurse was asked **to pick up** the prescription before noon.
4. It is essential that the government **comes up with** a real plan.
5. The paper box **fell apart** in the rain.
6. She wasn't sure she could **go on with** the job.
7. If you have any questions, please **let me know**.
8. There is no reason **to throw away** your old toys.

Complexity: Removing Phrasal Verbs

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1. The doctor said it would take three days **to overcome** the disease.
2. I was told **to avoid** narrow alleys at night.
3. The nurse was asked **to collect** the prescription before noon.
4. It is essential that the government **devises** a real plan.
5. The paper box **disintegrated** in the rain.
6. She wasn't sure she could **continue** the job.
7. If you have any questions, please **notify me**.
8. There is no reason **to discard** your old toys.

Complexity: Nominalisation

The following sentences are too personal and use too many verbs. Try to change the verbs into nouns and re-structure the sentence.

1. Professor Smith emphasises the importance of speaking English in his classroom.
2. Congestion on the highway has occurred more than once this week.
3. He investigated the situation by himself.
4. The university planned to establish a research body.
5. There is always a need to contextualise the data.
6. Students may interpret the results differently to the professor.
7. We are required to show our ID cards before entering the campus.
8. Wealth is not distributed evenly in the UK.

Complexity: Nominalisation

The following sentences are too personal and use too many verbs. Try to change the verbs into nouns and re-structure the sentence.

1. **Spoken English** has **important emphasis** in Professor Smith's class.
2. **Highway congestion** has been a **frequent occurrence** this week.
3. He was the **sole investigator**.
4. The **university research body establishment plan**...
5. **Contextualisation of the data** is essential.
6. **Differences in data interpretation** may appear among the students and the professor.
7. **Presentation of identification documents** is a **campus entry requirement**.
8. **Uneven distribution of wealth** still exists in the UK.

The Maxim of Explicitness

In order to be explicit in academic writing, the connections between ideas should be very clear. To do this, we use cohesive devices, or transition words, that connect sentences and paragraphs together. This creates a smooth flow of ideas so that the reader can follow them easily.

There are three main ways in which a text can be made cohesive: **transitions**, **pronoun references** and **rephrasing of key ideas**.

Transition words:

moreover, in addition, to conclude

Pronoun references:

Garralda (2022) claims > He reported

Rephrasing of key ideas:

international students / exchange students / students living overseas

Explicitness: Pronoun References

What do the words highlighted below refer to?

BUSINESS SHORT LIFE

La Ferrera (2016), a researcher at the University of Leipzig, has researched the life cycle of new business start-ups in Britain and Germany. *She* found that *they* have an average life of only 3.4 years and considers *this* is due to two main reasons: one economic and the other social. *The former* appears to be a lack of initial working capital, *the latter* a failure to carry out sufficient market research. La Ferrera considers that together *these factors* account for approximately 70% of business failures. *Her* conclusion is that the failure to do market research is the more serious disadvantage, as *this* affects the whole design of the new enterprise.

The Maxim of Hedging

Hedges, as stance markers, are used to mitigate a statement. In academic writing, very certain language is rarely used. For example, you would be unlikely to see the sentence “*reducing fat intake lowers the risk of heart disease*” in an academic essay or report. Instead, you will see examples like these which vary the strength of the claim:



It is certain that

It is very probable that

It is likely that *reducing fat intake lowers the risk of heart disease.*

It is possible that

It could be that

The Maxim of Evidence

We must ensure we understand the importance of academic integrity. Plagiarism is a serious offence in university and can lead to differing penalties depending on the seriousness of the offence.

Acknowledging, citing and referencing all sources of information we have used is essential. We can do this by using:

Reporting verbs: Windsor (2021) *believes* that...

In-text citations: “there has long been a great educational divide between the rich and the poor” (Windsor, 2021, p. 1).

A reference list: Windsor, R.J. 2021. *The effectiveness of an online grammar study...*

The Maxim of Organisation

Important themes under the organisation maxim include the flow of the writing and topic continuity. An important strategy here is being able to link new information with old information. When you introduce new information at the end of a sentence, you should repeat this idea at the beginning of the next sentence.

Culture shock and reverse culture shock have **several stages in common**. **These shared stages** include a **honeymoon stage**, a disintegration stage and an adaptation stage.

During the **honeymoon period**, students **feel elated** by the freshness of the culture. **This excitement** occurs whether a student is entering a new culture or **returning to their home culture** after a long absence. **When students return home**, their reaction to the once-familiar sights can surprise them.

The Maxim of Planning

Successful academic writing comes from a meticulous process and revising and editing, which may include:

- Putting your first draft aside for a day so that you can come back and look at it through fresh eyes.
- Focusing more on your language weaknesses when you are editing. Check every sentence for these errors, especially longer sentences, which are more likely to have errors.
- Using grammar checkers to catch some of your grammatical errors. However, they do not always pick up subject-verb agreement, and sometimes they may correct a misspelled word for you but choose the wrong word form.
- Getting a friend to read through your essay and ask if they can find any weaknesses or gaps in your argument or give you any suggestions for language improvement.

The Maxim of Planning

A common problem that students have when selecting a topic for an essay is choosing one that is too broad. Some scholars may write a whole 100,000-word thesis on the topic “how has social media changed the way we see the world,” while some undergraduate students start off wanting to write a 1,000-word essay on this topic.

In what way has social media changed the way we see the world?

How has social media changed the way we communicate?

How does online communication differ from face-to-face interaction?

How does social media affect how we talk with the people around us?

Phrasal English

English is a phrasal language whereby verbs or nouns take on different meanings depending on the words that appear next to them.

Research-orientated: Help writers to structure their activities and experiences of the real world.

Text-orientated: These clusters are concerned with the organisation of the text and the meaning of its elements as a message or argument.

Participant-orientated: These are focused on the writer or reader of the text.

Phrasal English

We can see the difference in the types of phrases used across genres by **scanning the QR code** and **looking at Table 3** in the document.



Genre	Research-oriented	Text-oriented	Participant-oriented	Totals
Research articles	25.5	60.3	14.2	100
PhD dissertations	34.1	54.7	11.2	100
Master's theses	48.6	42.5	8.9	100
Overall	36.1	52.5	11.4	100

Academic Phrases

The most common four-word phrases in Academic English include...

on the other hand

in terms of the

in the case of

the end of the

on the basis of

as a result of

the way in which

it is possible to

at the end of

per cent of the

the extent to which

in the context of

at the same time

it is important to

that there is a

a wide range of

it is clear that

one of the most

at the time of

in the form of

as shown in figure...

Source: Hyland (2008)

Academic Phrases

Look to the extract from Chua and Yau's (2022) article by scanning the QR code and **underline at least five** common academic phrases. Make a note of the context or sentence where you see it used.



Phrasal English

Choose an appropriate phrase for each of these sentences. Use **Table 1** on the document to help you.

1. _____ 3, the number of correct responses ranged from 16 to 83.

2. _____, these results demonstrate a strong desire for students to perfect their grammar mistakes.

3. _____ remember that _____ sample is not large enough to be representative of the general population.

4. _____ publishing, the present study is one of the only demonstrations of grammar skills _____ Chinese universities.

Phrasal English

Choose an appropriate phrase for each of these sentences. Use **Table 1** on the document to help you.

1. **As shown in figure 3**, the number of correct responses ranged from 16 to 83.
2. **In addition to this**, these results demonstrate a strong desire for students to perfect their grammar mistakes.
3. **It is important to** remember that **the size of the** sample is not large enough to be representative of the general population.
4. **At the time of** publishing, the present study is one of the only demonstrations of grammar skills **in the context of** Chinese universities.

Phrasal English

Now, try to write five of your own academic-style sentences that could be seen in a thesis or research article. Share them on Padlet by scanning the QR Code.

Each sentence should include at least one common academic phrase.

