

## Back to School

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## Tense?

- Introduction, Materials & Methods, and Results: past tense
- Discussion: present tense

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## Paragraph structure

- Discuss only one subject in a paragraph.
- Start with a good topic sentence that creates a smooth transition from the preceding paragraph.
- Use appropriate sentence structure
  - Just like the overall paper, the sentence structure should be concise. Avoid excess verbiage and compound sentences.

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## Paragraph structure

- Use consistent style
- Use the same organizational pattern for successive sentences
- Use parallel structure
  - E.g., use “than” or “as” in a comparison
  - E.g., use “whereas” or “however” in a contrast
  - E.g. In lists, “Captured mammals were weighed, marked, and released,” NOT “Mammals were weighed, marked, and captured mammals were released.”
- It is not easier for the reader if you vary style, format, or construction of your paragraphs and sentences.

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## Make your writing easier to read

- Choose the right words:
  - That are accurate (say what you mean)
  - That are appropriate (fit well with the other words)
  - That are familiar (easy to read and understand)

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## Examples of familiar words

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instead of...</li> <li>– Commence</li> <li>– Prioritize</li> <li>– Finalize</li> <li>– Terminate</li> <li>– Utilize (this word drives some reviewers crazy)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use...</li> <li>– Begin</li> <li>– Rank</li> <li>– Finish</li> <li>– End</li> <li>– Use</li> </ul> |
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### Avoid jargon

- Use technical terms only when necessary
- Say it simply and in plain language

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### Avoid passive sentences

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instead of...           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– “Sheet checks involved lifting up sheets and collecting all snakes found underneath.”</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use...           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– “We checked sheets by lifting them up and collecting all snakes found underneath.”</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
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### Tighten, tighten, tighten your writing

- It costs money to publish. These costs are absorbed as page charges by the writer or the publisher. Either way, tighten your writing to keep it as short as possible (remember, this makes it efficient for readers, too).

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### Tighten your writing

- Eliminate waste words (words which say nothing).
  - Especially the word “the” which is overused. If you edit your writing and just eliminate the word “the” when possible, it will tighten your writing.
- Eliminate vague words (words that cannot be quantified or do not add to your understanding).

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### Eliminate redundant words (words whose meaning are already clear)

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instead of...</li> <li>– different alternatives</li> <li>– completely eliminate</li> <li>– refer back</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use...</li> <li>– alternatives</li> <li>– eliminate</li> <li>– refer</li> </ul> |
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### Use one word for a phrase

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instead of...</li> <li>– due to the fact that</li> <li>– prior to the start of</li> <li>– on a regular basis</li> <li>– despite the fact that</li> <li>– in the event that</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use...</li> <li>– because</li> <li>– before</li> <li>– regularly</li> <li>– although</li> <li>– if</li> </ul> |
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### Write in the first person?

- An argument is that in many English classes we were taught to avoid writing in first person. In journals, however, you did the work and you must write in first person. This also helps your writing to be more direct and easily understood.

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