

## Academic Writing for Publication and Anti-Plagiarism Training Part 1 Publishing and Clarity of Ideas in English

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### Getting published

#### General advice on publishing: “dos and don’ts”

There are basically two things that you need to do to get published:

1. Write a paper about something that is **original**.
2. Write it **clearly**.

Only you know what is original since it is your field. This means that the “angle” of the presentation of the ideas is original, for example, an aspect of a topic that has not been done before. This can be a summary or literature review that pulls the ideas of a field or an aspect of a field together that has not been done before. Publishers want variety in their publications, so write them an inquiry letter and see if they are interested in your idea.

Regarding clarity, there are several approaches you can take as a writer of English as a second language.

- 1) You can struggle with English and send your paper off. **There is a good chance that you will fail.**
- 2) You can have it translated into English by a translator that you trust and then send your paper off. If it is original, and clear, **there is a good chance of success.**
- 3) Do the best job you can (make it as clear as possible), hire a good editor, and then send your paper off. **There is again a good chance of success.**

One more piece of advice: make your paper fit the journal. Read the journal and copy the style to the best of your ability without sacrificing the originality of your topic or your style.

Finally, one thing to avoid at all costs: **plagiarism**. It can have severe legal consequences.

Plagiarism can take different forms:

1. Copying others’ words without quotation marks
2. Close paraphrasing (paraphrasing with sentence structures and vocabulary too similar to the original; merely substituting words with synonyms)
3. Paraphrasing without citing the source
4. Using someone else’s idea without proper citation
5. Copying your own previous work

Let's take a look at some examples based on the following original text on plagiarism from Wikipedia:

“Within academia, plagiarism by students, professors, or researchers is considered academic dishonesty or academic fraud, and offenders are subject to academic censure, up to and including expulsion. Many institutions use plagiarism detection software to uncover potential plagiarism and to deter students from plagiarizing. In journalism, plagiarism is considered a breach of journalistic ethics, and reporters caught plagiarizing typically face disciplinary measures ranging from suspension to termination of employment. Some individuals caught plagiarizing in academic or journalistic contexts claim that they plagiarized unintentionally, by failing to include quotations or give the appropriate citation. While plagiarism in scholarship and journalism has a centuries-old history, the development of the Internet, where articles appear as electronic text, has made the physical act of copying the work of others much easier” (Plagiarism, 2015).

#### 1. Copying others' words without quotation marks

**Example of plagiarism:** In this paper, the idea of plagiarism will be discussed. Specifically, it will be asserted that plagiarism is *considered academic dishonesty or academic fraud, and offenders* are often punished in some way, including expulsion from school.

Comment: Plagiarized? You bet. The other person worked hard to create this sentence, and you didn't. You just took the words from the author. Note that the last part is plagiarized even though the words have been changed, so this represents two types of plagiarism: copying the words exactly in the first part (in italics) and then changing them only slightly in the second part. They are BOTH plagiarism. “(Plagiarism, 2015)” as at the end of the text above needs to be inserted at the end, according to NIDA's style manual and following the American system, inside the period and after the quotes.

#### 2. Close paraphrasing (paraphrasing with sentence structures and vocabulary too similar to the original; merely substituting words with synonyms)

**Example of plagiarism:** In journalism, plagiarism is considered a break in journalistic ethics, and if reporters are caught plagiarizing they typically face disciplinary measures from suspension to termination of employment.

Comment: Here the words have been changed but it is too close to the structure of the original to NOT be plagiarism. It is plagiarism *with and without* “(Plagiarism, 2015).”

#### 3. Paraphrasing without citing the source

**Example of plagiarism:** Some individuals caught plagiarizing in academia or in the area of journalism assert that they have plagiarized by mistake, or failed to include quotations or provide the correct citation.

Comment: This is the SAME idea and if you use it and don't acknowledge where you got it, it's plagiarism. “(Plagiarism, 2015)” has to be added at the end.

#### 4. Using someone else's idea without proper citation

**Example of plagiarism:** Plagiarism has a long history, and today the Internet has made copying the work of others a lot easier than in the past.

Comment: Here the same idea is expressed as at the end of the text above, but the original author is not acknowledged for it. “(Plagiarism, 2015)” has to be added.

5. Copying your own previous work: Strange as this sounds, you can't use words you have used in the past in a new work. If that were the case, then people would just publish the same article in different journals and call them new.

The main point? DO YOUR OWN WRITING AND THINKING, and if you use the words or thoughts of others then you have to tell the reader, ALWAYS.



## Writing with Clarity

We are now going to talk about what is arguably the most important aspect of writing: *clarity*. What is it, and how do you achieve it?

### Specific advice on creating documents that possess “clarity.”

#### Clarity on the sentence level<sup>1</sup>: aligning subjects and characters, verbs and actions for strong writing.

Academic writing is typically thought of as being complex, as the ideas that it expresses are often complex or complicated. However, because the ideas in an article or essay are complex it does not mean that they can't be clear.

#### 3 points about complex writing, two negative and one positive

- Complex writing can **gratuitously complicate complex ideas**.
- Complex writing can **gratuitously complicate simple ideas**.
- Complex writing can **precisely express complex ideas** (this is what you want!).

Here is an example of the first kind of complexity.

Similarities may develop in the social organization of societies at similar levels of economic development because there are “imperatives” built into the socio-technical system they adopt which drive them to similar responses to common problems. This model, therefore, places great emphasis on the level of economic development of nations to account for movement towards common forms of social organization. Alternatively, convergence may result from simple borrowing, so that a model of the diffusion of innovation becomes appropriate. Where such borrowing occurs, levels of development may be less relevant than integration in networks of influence through which ideas and social forms are diffused. Economic development may, of course, set limits on the capacity of a nation to institute systems available to be copied, and the propensities to copy may enable nations to install convergent patterns more rapidly than one would have predicted from knowledge of their level of economic development.

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<sup>1</sup> The following material relies heavily on the work of University of Chicago Professor Joseph Williams. Persons interested in exploring these ideas further are recommended to read his book, Style, published by The University of Chicago Press, 1990.

This means:

Societies at similar levels of economic development may converge because “imperatives” in their sociotechnical system cause them to respond to similar problems in similar ways. To explain this, the model emphasizes economic development. But societies may also converge because they borrow, so a model would have to explain how ideas and social forms diffuse through networks of influence. Of course, a society at a low level of development may be unable to copy features of some systems. But a society with a strong propensity to copy may do so more rapidly than predicted.

Here is an example of the second kind of complexity.

The absence from this dictionary of a handful of old, well-known vulgate terms for sexual and excretory organs and functions is not due to a lack of citations for these words from current literature. On the contrary, the profusion of such citations in recent years would suggest that the terms in question are so well known as to require no explanation. The decision to eliminate them as part of the extensive culling process that is the inevitable task of the lexicographer was made on the practical grounds that there is still objection in many quarters to the appearance of these terms in print and that to risk keeping this dictionary out of the hands of some students by introducing several terms that require little if any elucidation would be unwise.

—From the forward, *Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language*

This means:

We excluded vulgar words for sex and excretion not because we could not find them. We excluded them because many people object to seeing them. Had we included them, some teachers and school boards would have refused to let this dictionary be used by their students, who in any event already know what those words mean.

When you are trying to get published or when you writing your dissertation, for example, aim for no. 3: make your complex ideas as clear as possible. But.....how do we do that? What do you mean by clarity? By studying grammar? Certainly not. Grammar and clarity are not the same thing. You can be grammatical and completely unclear. “Three figs ran up the wall in red.”

Dr. Williams makes a discovery! We can make our writing clear by looking at, and understanding, the structure of writing.

How would you describe the following?

1. **Decisions** in regard to the **administration** of **medication** despite the **inability** of irrational patients voluntarily appearing in Trauma Centers to provide legal **consent** rest with a physician alone.

What happens when we **change the nouns** (decisions, administration, medication, inability, consent) **to verbs**, and **make the actors the subjects of those verbs**?

When a patient voluntarily appears at a trauma center but behaves so irrationally that he cannot legally consent to treatment, only a physician can decide whether to administer medication.

Easier to understand?! What about the following? What seems to be the problem? Are parts of the sentence kept apart that should have been kept together? Let's see.

2. China, so that it could expand and widen its influence and importance among the Eastern European nations, in 1955 began in a quietly orchestrated way a diplomatic offensive directed against the Soviet Union.

Easy to understand, or as easy as it could be?

What about this?

In 1955, China began to orchestrate a quiet diplomatic offensive against the Soviet Union to expand its influence in Eastern Europe.

Sounds clearer, no? What's the difference? The sentences above are unclear for different reasons.

Number 1? It's unclear because it's **abstract** and **turgid**.

Number 2? It seems disjointed or does not flow.

But what do you mean by "turgid?" That doesn't help me understand why it is not clear. What we need, Williams realized, is **a language to talk about lack of clarity that goes beyond words like "turgid" or "disjointed"—one that will help us revise our own writing**. We can find this language in storytelling.

We begin telling stories when we are children and it never stops. There are two essential components of a story: *characters* and their *actions*. Jack climbed the beanstalk. Rapunzel let down her golden hair.

Let's look at 2 more sentences.

3a. The current estimate is of a 50% reduction in the introduction of new chemical products in the event that compliance with the Preliminary Manufacturing Notice becomes a requirement under proposed Federal legislation.

Do there seem to be any characters in the above sentence like the characters in a story? No, but **this does not mean they are not there!**

3b. If **Congress** requires that **the chemical industry** comply with the Preliminary Manufacturing Notice, we estimate that **the industry** will introduce 50% fewer new products.

What about concepts? Can they be characters? Compare the next two sentences.

Because the intellectual foundations of evolution are the same as so many other scientific theories, the falsification of their foundations would be necessary for the replacement of evolutionary theory with creationism.

Do you understand this sentence? It's grammatical!

What if we **make theories (concepts) play the role of competing characters?!**

In contrast to **creationism**, **the theory of evolution** shares its intellectual foundations with **many other theories**. As a result, **creationism** will displace **evolutionary theory** only when it can first prove that the foundations of **all those other theories** are false.

As you can see, looking at writing as story telling where **the concepts are the actors performing actions** can have a tremendous influence on how clear the writing seems to the reader.

What about this sentence? What is the story? What are the characters and their actions?

Though the **Governor knew** that the cities needed new revenues to improve schools, **he vetoed** the budget bill because **he wanted** to encourage cities to increase local taxes.

Pretty clear. Why? Because there are several actions expressed here, and they are all expressed in verbs, giving the sentence force (and clarity).

Let's be devils and rewrite the above sentence, changing the verbs to nouns.

Despite his **knowledge** of the **need** by cities for new revenues for the **improvement** of their schools, the Governor **executed a veto** of the budget bill **to give encouragement** to the cities for an **increase** of local taxes.

Now we see the first principles of clear writing.

- 1) The subjects of sentences name the cast of characters.
- 2) The verbs that go with those subjects name the crucial actions of those characters.

**Guideline for writing: subjects and verbs = characters and actions**



### **Characters**

Let's look at another sentence.

Our lack of knowledge about local conditions precluded determination of committee action effectiveness in fund allocation to those areas in greatest need of assistance.

What are the characters here? We? Committee?

Let's rewrite it.

Because **we** knew nothing about local conditions, **we** could not determine how effectively the committee had allocated funds to areas that most needed assistance.

Because **we** knew nothing....**we** could not determine....**the committee** had allocated .....

Although "areas" is still the object of a preposition (to *areas*), it is also the subject of *needed*: ....areas that most needed assistance.



## Actions

How are the actions named in the above sentences? In the first, they are not verbs but abstract nouns: lack, knowledge, determination, action, allocation, need, assistance.

In the second sentence **actions are named in verbs**: *we knew nothing, we could not determine, the committee allocated, areas needed.*

This gives us some advice about revising: when your writing is turgid or abstract or too complex, do two things.

**First**, locate the cast of characters and the actions that those characters perform (or are the objects of). If those characters are not subjects and their actions are not verbs, revise so that they are.

Suggestion: run a line under the sentence. If 1) you have to go 6 or 7 words into the sentence to get past the subject to the verb and 2) the subject of the sentence is not one of your characters, think about revising.

**Characters and actions should align.** This is important. Here is a couple more examples.

The argument that failure to provide for preservation of the royalty rate upon expiration of the patent discouraged challenges to the contract does not apply here.

Who is arguing, failing, challenging? Let's invent characters as if we knew who they were and make them the subject and their actions verbs—as though we were telling a story.

**Harris** *argues* that when **Smith** *gave* him no way to *preserve* the royalty rate when **the patent** *expired*, **Smith** *discouraged* him from challenging their contract. But **that argument** *does not apply* here.

Better? You bet!

Remember advice from your English teacher, be specific and concrete, and you were not sure what he or she meant? Look at these examples.

There has been an affirmative **decision** for program **termination**.

Now let's **use subjects to name characters and verbs to name their actions**.

*The Director* **decided** to **terminate** the program.

When we do this, it automatically becomes more specific and concrete. What about the advice not to use too many prepositions?

An evaluation of the program **by** us will allow greater efficiency **in** service to clients.

Instead: We will evaluate the program so that we can serve clients better.

More advice from your English teacher: put your ideas in logical order!

The **closure** of the branch and the **transfer** of its business and non-unionized employees **constituted** an unfair labor practice because the purpose of **obtaining** an economic benefit by means of **discouraging** unionization motivated the **closure** and **transfer**.

Now let's **name subjects as characters and verbs as actions**.

The partners **committed** an unfair labor practice when they **closed** the branch and **transferred** its business and non-unionized employees in order to **discourage** unionization and thereby **obtain** an economic benefit.

**Summary: When you align subjects and characters, verbs and actions, you turn abstract, impersonal, apparently expository prose into a form that feels much more like a narrative, into something closer to a story.**

What we have said above does NOT mean that all sentences have to be simple to be clear. The important thing is not how many words we use, but **how easy it is for the reader to get from the beginning of the sentence to the end—and understand everything in between!**

Let's look at an American undergraduate, writing for a professor and trying to make his writing sound sophisticated.

After Czar Alexander II's emancipation of the Russian serfs in 1861, many now-free peasants chose to live on a commune for purposes of cooperation in agricultural production as well as for social stability. Despite some communes' attempts at economic and social equalization through the strategy of imposing a low economic status on the peasants, which resulted in their reduction to near-poverty, a centuries-long history of important social distinctions even among serfs prevented social equalization.

What do you think? Sound abstract? The student was told to re-write his paragraph, aligning subjects and characters, and verbs and actions. He wrote this:

In 1861, Czar Alexander II emancipated the Russian serfs. Many of them chose to live on agricultural communes. There they thought they could cooperate with one another in agricultural production. They could also create a stable social structure. The leaders of some of these communes tried to equalize the peasants economically and socially. As one strategy, they tried to impose on all a low economic status that reduced them to near-poverty. However, the communes failed to equalize them socially because even serfs had made important social distinctions among themselves for centuries.

Now how does it sound? Let's look at what the student wrote when following the principles we talked about earlier.

After the Russian serfs were emancipated by Czar Alexander II in 1861, many chose to live on agricultural communes, hoping they could cooperate in working the land and establish a stable social structure. At first, those that led some of the communes tried to equalize the new peasants socially and economically by imposing on them all low economic status, a strategy that reduced them to near-poverty. But the communes failed to equalize them socially because for centuries the serfs had observed among themselves important social distinctions.

We can conclude from what we have said thus far then the following: **we judge a sentence clear, generally speaking, if both of those levels are aligned; that is, if the writer expresses crucial actions in verbs and central characters (real or abstract) in subjects.**



## Subjects and Characters

Let's talk a little bit more about subjects and characters: first, characters. There are many kinds of characters. The most important are **agents**, the direct source of an action or condition.

They can be collective:

**Faculties** of national eminence do not always teach well.

They can be secondary or remote:

**Mayor Daley** built Chicago into a giant among cities.

Figurative agents that stand for real agents:

**The White House** announced today the President's schedule.

**The business sector** is cooperating.

**Many instances of malignant tumors** fail to seek attention.

In some cases, we name subjects that are really the **means** by which some unstated agent performs an action, making the **instrument** seem like the agent of that action, as in the following:

**Studies** of coal production reveal these figures.

**These new data** establish the need for more detailed analysis.

**This evidence** proves my theory.

That is,

When **we study** coal production, **we find** these figures.

**I have established** through these new data that **we must analyze** the problem in more detail.

With this evidence **I prove** my theory.

In these sentences, the instruments act so much like agents that there is little point in revising them.

Some characters do not appear in a sentence at all, so that when we revise we have to supply them.

In the last sentence of the Gettysburg Address there is a rallying cry for the continuation of the struggle.

In the last sentence of the Gettysburg Address, **he** rallied **his audience** to continue the struggle against the South.

In other sentences, the writer may imply a character in an adjective.

Determination of policy occurs at the **presidential** level.

**The President** determines policy.

Medieval **theological** debates often addressed what to **modern** thought seems to be metaphysical triviality.

Medieval **theologians** often debated issues that **we** might think were metaphysically trivial.

In some sentences, the characters and actions are so far removed from the surface of the sentence, we have to rewrite the sentence completely.

There seems to be no obvious reason that would account for the apparent unavailability of evidence relevant to the failure of this problem to yield to standard solutions.

I do not know why **my staff** cannot find evidence to explain why **we** haven't been able to solve this problem in the ways we have before.

Most often in academic writing characters modify an abstract noun or are objects of prepositions such as by, of, on the part of.

**The Federalists'** belief that the instability *of government* was a consequence *of popular democracy* was based on **their** belief in the tendency *on the part of factions* to further their self-interest at the expense of the common good.

**The Federalists** believed that **popular democracy** destabilized **government** because **they** believed that **factions** tended to further their self-interest at the expense of the common good.

Often in academic writing we have to supply **indefinite subjects** because the sentence expresses a general statement.

Such multivariate strategies may be of more use in understanding the genetic factors which contribute to vulnerability to psychiatric disorders than strategies based on the assumption that the presence or absence of psychopathology is dependent on a major gene or than strategies in which a single biological variable is studied.

If **we/one/researchers** are to understand the genetic factors that make some patients vulnerable to psychiatric disorders, **we/one/researchers** should use multivariate strategies rather than strategies in which **we/one/researchers** study only a single biological variable.

**Writing is strengthened with the creation of clear subjects/characters and the verbs/actions that go with them, as you can see from the example above.**

Is lack of a good indefinite pronoun a weakness in English? **We** can sound pretentious and can refer to too many people. Hence, the passive voice, as we shall see later. Here is a preview.

If the generic factors that make some patients vulnerable to psychiatric disorders **are to be understood**, multivariate strategies **should be used** rather than strategies in which **it is assumed** that a major gene causes psychopathology or strategies in which only a single biological variable **is studied**.



## Verbs and Actions

Action as we mean it here includes not only physical movement but also mental processes, feelings, and literal and figurative relationships. Look at the next four sentences. What happens to the meaning as you read them?

There **has been** effective staff information dissemination control on the part of the Secretary.

The Secretary **has exercised** effective staff information dissemination control.

The Secretary **has effectively controlled** staff information dissemination.

The Secretary **has effectively controlled** how **his staff disseminates** information.

What are the crucial actions above? **Be? Exercise?** No, they are **control** and **disseminate**.

### How to make your writing less clear; use nominalizations instead of verbs!

Many academic writers use a verb, **not to express action** but to **state that an action exists**.

A *need* **exists** for greater candidate selection **efficiency**. = We must select candidates more efficiently.

There is the *possibility* of prior *approval* of it. = He *may* **approve** of it ahead of time (or, it may be approved ahead of time, if you use the passive voice).

We **conducted** an *investigation* of it. = We **investigated** it.

The *review* **was done** of the regulations. = They **reviewed** the regulations.

**When you take a verb (or an adjective) and make a noun out of it, it is called a *nominalization***—even the word nominalization comes from a verb: *nominalize*.

Here are some examples:

Verb	→	Nominalization	Adjective	→	Nominalization
discover		discovery	careless		carelessness
move		movement	difficult		difficulty
resist		resistance	different		difference
react		reaction	elegant		elegance
fail		failure	applicable		applicability
refuse		refusal	intense		intensity

Our **request** is that on your **return**, you conduct a **review** of the data and provide an immediate **report**.

We **request** that when you return, you **review** the data and **report** immediately.

Here is another example.

The **discovery** of a method for the **manufacture** of artificial skin *will have the result* of an **increase** in the **survival** of patients with radical burns.

— Researchers **discover** how to **manufacture** artificial skin

— More patients **will survive** radical burns

*If* researchers **can discover** how to **manufacture** artificial skin, more patients **will survive** radical burns.

**Once again you can see how the sentence is strengthened with the creation of a strong subject/character and verb/action relationship.**

One last example.

The presence of extensive rust **damage** to exterior surfaces *prevented* immediate repairs to the hull.

— Rust had extensively **damaged** the exterior surfaces

— We could not **repair** the hull immediately

*Because* rust had extensively **damaged** the exterior surfaces we could not **repair** the hull immediately.

**Summary: you can achieve clarity in your writing, sometimes, by avoiding abstract nominalizations. When you can, use a verb and not a nominalization.**

### Clarity and the passive voice

You can also be clearer in your writing if you avoid unnecessary passive constructions.

**Quick review of active voice:** In active sentences, the subject typically expresses the agent of the action, and the object expresses the goal or the thing changed by the action.

<i>subject</i>				<i>object</i>
Active: The partners	→	broke	→	the agreement.
agent				goal

**Quick review of passive voice:** In passive sentences, the subject expresses the goal of an action; a form of *be* precedes a past participle form of the verb; and the agent of the action may or may not be expressed in a *by*-phrase.

<i>subject</i>		be (past participle)		<i>prepositional phrase</i>
Passive: The agreement	→	was broken	→	by the partners.
goal				agent

Let's look at two examples, with the passive and active phrases in bold.

It **was found** that data concerning energy resources allocated to the states **were not obtained**. This action **is needed** so that a determination of redirection **is permitted** on a timely basis when weather conditions change. A system **must be established** so that data on weather conditions and fuel consumption **may be gathered** on a regular basis.

We **found** that the Department of Energy **did not obtain** data about energy resources that Federal offices **were allocating** to the states. The Department **needs** these data so that it **can determine** how to **redirect** these resources when conditions **change**. The Secretary of the Department **must establish** a system so that his office **can gather** data on weather conditions and fuel consumption on a regular basis.

Academic writing has as one of its goals “objectivity” in the presentation of ideas, and one way in which that is typically achieved is to keep the author OUT OF THE WRITING. And one way to do that is through the use of the passive voice.

Take a look at the following abstract. First-person plurals are in bold. Let's make it more “objective” by getting rid of the references to the authors.

### **THE PRACTICALITY OF EFL WRITING FOR THAI UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: AN ATTITUDINAL STUDY**

**Abstract:** As a contribution to the development of the teaching of English writing in Thailand and studies of second language (L2) writing, **we** reported in this paper on a research project on Thai undergraduate students' writing frequency and their attitude toward writing in English as a foreign language (EFL). The chapters of the paper include a description of a preliminary pilot study conducted in 2005 and the present research as its further inquiry. The principal instrument of the research was a questionnaire on attitude and writing frequency, which **we** developed based on the data from the preliminary study. **We** performed both statistical and qualitative analyses. **We** put the distributed copies of the questionnaire in Thai, the respondents' native language, and **we** undertook statistical analyses of the answers via the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 13.0. **We** discovered that the frequency of writing played a more vital role in their attitude toward EFL writing than the students' majors. This finding leads, in **our** opinion, to the research argument that students – no matter what their fields of study – need ample opportunity to write in English. Additionally, **we assert here** that in order for students to have more favorable attitudes toward EFL writing, not only do they need to write often; they also need to perceive the practicality of EFL writing, and effective and adequate feedback, including that on linguistic features of the texts as well as positive support from their teachers.