

Handout Scientific Writing in English –class 10
Topic: spelling conventions and self-correction

Part 1: Spelling conventions

a/an

The indefinite article *a* is used for indefinite reference. *An* is used to modify all words beginning with a vowel sound: *an umbrella, an international experience.*

Be careful with the following: *a university, a European grant, an hour, a/an MA in Science.*

Abbreviations

Try to restrict yourself to a bare minimum. Abbreviations that are often attested are *i.e.* and *e.g.*

Mind the punctuation in the following: ^{3 letters} Mr or Mr.? ^{4 letters} MA or M.A.?
both both

Accents

English does not make use of accents. So we don't find constructions such as *Some patients, however, do express their satisfaction.*

American forms

There is a difference between American and British spelling. Be consistent in your usage.

Aesthetic ^B	esthetic ^A
Flavour ^B	flavour ^A
Centre ^B	center ^A
Defence ^A	defense ^B
Analyze ^A	analyse ^B
Modelled ^B	modeled ^A

Apostrophes

→ English does not use apostrophes to indicate the plural form of nouns; you find *skis* and *photos* and not *ski's* and *photo's*.

Is it CFCs or CFC's? It is 1960s or 1960's? ^{both}

Capital letters

- English uses capital letters in everything to do with nations: *a Dutch researcher; a researcher from Latvia.*
- English also used capitals in titles: *Professor MacWhinney*
- Finally, English used capitals in days and months: *Monday, January.*

Double consonants

- If the final consonant follows a stressed vowel, it is doubled. Compare:
Omit – omitted
Occur – occurring
Differ – differed
Focus – focused

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Be careful with double consonants in the following words:

1. adress *dd*
2. agressive *gg*
3. committment *l*
4. Brittain *t*
5. developpment *p*
6. dramaticaly *ll*
7. proffessional *f*
8. successful *cc*

Hyphens

Long words in English are typically spelled as two separate words:

The Opium Act

Winter season

Group interaction

Research project

You get a hyphen in compound adjectives and compound verbs:

A nineteenth-century novel

Habit-forming activities

To air-condition *(n,v)*

To water-cool *(n,v)*

-ic or -ical?

Electric – a specific machine that works on electricity: *an electric fire*

Electrical – machines in general that work on electricity: *electrical appliances*

-ise or -ize?

Advice: use -ize in all instances, except in cases where -is belongs to the stem, as in:

Advise, arise, despise, revise.

Problem pairs

Be aware of the following problem pairs in English spelling:

Adapt – adept (adjust – apt) *adjust at apt*

Advice – advise (noun – verb)

Affect – effect

Choose – chose

Compliment – complement *to finish*

Dependent – dependant (dependent – an independent variable)

Desert – dessert

Moral – morale (virtuous – mental flexibility)

Practice – practise (noun – verb)

Precede – proceed (went before – go on)

Principle – principal *sh...*

Stationary – stationery (fixed – things for the office)

Part 2: Self-correction

Self-correction check-list

Step 1: Macro-level editing (TEXT)

1. Is the text divided into appropriate sections and does every section have an appropriate heading?
2. Is the order of the different sections logical and appropriate?
3. Are all paragraphs of roughly the same length?
4. Is the general meaning and intention of the text clear?
5. Are all references to other sections in the text appropriate or still appropriate?

Step 2: Meso-level editing (PARAGRAPH/SENTENCE)

1. Is the structure of the various sections appropriate?

Introduction: from general to specific: establishing a research territory; establishing a niche (pointing out shortcomings of previous research); occupying the niche

Results: locating the results in a table; highlighting the most important findings; discussing the most important findings

Conclusion: consolidation of research space; the expressing of limitations; implications or recommendations for future research.

2. Does each paragraph within the sections really only contain one topic?
3. Is the order of information within each paragraph appropriate (linear progression for argumentative paragraphs and continuous progression for definition paragraphs)?
4. Does each paragraph use enough examples or evidence for the claims that are made?
5. Does the text in general display textual cohesion?
 - Is the terminology that is used consistent?
 - Is the use of tense in the sections consistent or does a break in consistency constitute a special focus case? (see Table 1 tense use per section)
 - Is the lexical choice of words appropriate and varied? (see Table 2 for lexical variation in referring to tables in the results section)
 - Are the ideas expressed in each section made more coherent by the use of appropriate connectives (adversatives, resultatives, summatives) (see Table 3 for an overview)

Step 3: Micro-level editing (SENTENCE AND CLAUSE)

1. Is the topic (first) sentence of every section, and to a lesser extent paragraph, short and does it tickle the curiosity of readers?
2. Is the 'old' information placed at the front of the sentence and is the 'new' information placed towards the end of the sentence?
3. Is there no frontal overload in the sentences (principle of end weight)?
4. Are the sentences not too long (no more than two newsworthy items per sentence)?
5. Does the text use appropriate focus constructions when necessary (see flowchart)?

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6. Are the clauses within sentences always combined appropriately (for example by means of –ing constructions or through the use of connectives)?
7. Do sentences express ‘intelligent uncertainty’ where appropriate? (tend to, relatively, etc.)
8. Do all the ‘details’ go right?
 - Is it the case that the majority of sentences do not end in a preposition (except phrasal and prepositional verbs)?
 - Is shall generally avoided and is will used instead?
 - Are split infinitives avoided (unless for emphasis reasons)?
 - Is the distinction between that (only restrictive relative clauses) and which (both restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses) observed?
 - Is whom substituted by who in all cases, except following a preposition: ‘ by whom’ ?
9. Is the use of punctuation appropriate?
 - Are commas used for orientations, insertions and addition?
 - Are commas used to create a better readability of the text without overdoing it?
 - Are comma splices avoided?
 - Are colons and semi-colons used appropriately?
 - Are all sentences left of the colon complete?
10. Does the text contain any spelling errors (spelling check and manual check)?
11. Are all the references to other texts complete and accurate?
12. Is the lay-out up to scratch?

Table 1: Predominant tense use per section of a research paper/dissertation

Section research paper or dissertation	Dominant tense used
Introduction	Simple present (this study attempts to...)
Theoretical framework (previous research)	Present perfect (this study has examined); simple past to refer to single studies (Jones investigated)
Methodology	Simple past (we analyzed ten procedures)
Results	Simple past (it was found that)
Discussion/Conclusion	Simple present (these results show)
Abstract	Simple present (preliminary results indicate); simple past to contrast the present study to previous work

Table 2: An overview of lexical means to refer to tables or graphs

Lexical means (variation) to refer to visuals (tables and graphs)	Present; summarize; illustrate; reveal; display; demonstrate; indicate; suggest; contain; depict; list; report; plot; show; describe; discuss; give
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Table 3: An overview of connectives

Nature of the connectives	Frequently attested connectives (examples)
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Adversative	But; nevertheless; yet; conversely; by contrast; in contrast; on the other hand; despite this; even so; for all that; nonetheless
Resultatives	Accordingly; consequently; as a consequence; as a result; for that reason; because of this; thus; therefore; hence
Summatives	All in all; in sum; in short; briefly; to sum up; summing up; in conclusion; to conclude

Flowchart focus constructions

1. Is it enough to present your message without emphasis?

Yes: use declarative clauses (main and relative clauses) ¹

No: use one of the special focus constructions (continue reading)

2. Is it important that the subject is in the initial, focus position?

Yes: use an existential construction – There + BE + focused subject (+ complement): ²

There are two methods that can be used to solve this problem.

No: use another focus construction (continue reading)

3. Do you want to use a special construction to indicate that you have reached a turning point in your text (you have talked about a topic for some paragraphs and now want to move on to something else)?

Yes: use either a cleft construction or th-wh construction (continue reading)

No: use a pseudo-cleft construction – Wh + BE + one focused constituent: *What this study has failed to show is the amount of participants that are needed to create a representative sample.*

4. Apart from the contrast function, do you also want to explicitly convey that the focused constituent you are presenting is the only possible candidate in a range of options?

Yes: use a cleft construction – It + BE + one focused constituent + that + clause: *It is precisely this problem that has puzzled scientists for decades.*

No: use a th-wh construction – Th – BE – Wh: *That is why this study only looks as one of these aspects.*

No + emphasis ← Declarative clauses : main + relative clauses

Emphasis ← focus constructions :

subject emphasis only possible construction → Existential construction : There + BE + focused subject (+ complement)

preference to move to next subject → cleft construction : It + BE + one focused constituent + that clause

not only possible construction → th-wh construction : Th + BE + Wh

Stay the same subject → pseudo-cleft construction : Wh + BE + one focused constituent