

**Avoid Colloquial writing:** informal way of speaking, appropriate for informal oral conversation, but not for writing.

**Examples to avoid:**

1. **Contractions** like isn't, can't, won't, it's, it'll, I'll, doesn't
2. **Clichés.** Examples:

Short and sweet	Last but not least	It goes without saying
At a loss for words	Word to the wise	Too little, too late
Find myself	Easier said than done	On top of the world
Saw the light	In the nick of time	Took a turn for the worse
Make ends meet	Time and again	Think outside the box
3. **Never use the words, “obviously” or “of course.”** If what you are saying is obvious, the sentence does not need to be in your paper. If it is important that it is in your paper, then it must not be obvious to everyone. This word can also appear insulting to your reader, if what you are saying was not before obvious to him or her.
4. **Avoid filler words.** These are words that can be removed from a sentence and still retain its meaning. Examples:
  - a. **basically:** “*Basically*, the research found that people react to monetary incentives” or “The research found that *basically* people react to monetary incentives.
  - b. **even:** Often, this word is found as an "additive" to a series but is generally not needed, as in the following example: "The basket contained eggs, sandwiches, and *even* utensils."
  - c. **Just:** When used in the same context as “basically,” this is another overused filler word that one should omit. Example: "When pouring the solution, *just* be certain not to spill its contents."
  - d. **well:** Generally used to begin a sentence following a question. Example. "Why is global warming a problem? *Well*, a number of ecosystems..."

5. Colloquial phrases / incorrect grammar examples:

Instead of “a lot,” say “several” or “many”

“Alright” is not a real word. If what you mean is “all is correct,” then use the two words, “all right.” If you mean is “satisfactory” as in, “the sandwich is alright,” then use the word “satisfactory” or an appropriate synonym.

“Would of,” “Could of,” “Should of.” In these, the second word should be “have,” not “of.”

Do not use “pretty,” or “really,” when you mean “very.”

**Do not write in passive voice.** Passive voice means to describe the subject as being acted upon. Active voice is a description of the subject performing action. Don't be afraid of writing in first person. While it can be overdone and make for a repetitive sounding narrative, it is allowed and can be done well. Examples:

Do not do this (passive): The surveys were emailed out to potential respondents.

Do this (active): We emailed surveys to potential respondents.

Do not do this (passive): The data was collected by the authors using stratified sampling.

Do this (active): The authors collected the data using stratified sampling.

**Do not be unnecessarily repetitive.** Avoid being repetitive, where you repeat the same idea more than once in a sentence or across multiple sentences. Did you notice what I did? Try to communicate your ideas only once, compactly, without any fluff. It is happening again! I did not need any of this explanation after by bold heading, “do not be unnecessarily repetitive.” I am digging myself in a deeper hole...

It is one thing to be repetitive, and another to build an idea. It is possible you need multiple sentences or paragraphs to explain your idea, provide examples or evidence, or provide important details the reader should understand. As an example, this paragraph was useful further discussion on the topic of being repetitive. The first paragraph is awful.

**Tell a story, build an idea.** When you write your paper, think about the purpose of each paragraph and what idea you are trying to build, and how you are doing it. Avoid writing papers that sound like letters you wrote to your mom from camp, “Then I did this.. Then I did this... Then I did this.”

Literature reviews (especially first drafts) might sound this way, “This author said this... Then this author said this... Then this author...” Try to avoid this.

Methodology sections (especially first drafts) might sound this way, “I wrote a survey... Then I collected the data... Then I performed this hypothesis test... Then I performed this hypothesis test.” Again, try to avoid this.

### **Spell check / grammar check / punctuation check.**

1. Even though modern computer software has a spell checker, you should still spell check, because you might incorrectly use the wrong word, but still result in technically correctly spelled words. Real examples I have seen:
  - their, they're, and there
  - right and write
  - its and it's
  - “does not” incorrectly typed as “doe snot”
2. Grammar check and punctuation check your work. There are thousand of grammar and punctuation rules, enough to fill multiple books. Follow these steps to identify any grammar mistakes in your work:
  1. Carefully read and check your own work. The best writers in the world put grammar mistakes in their first draft. Check your work and fix your mistakes.
  2. Have a friend read and check your work.
  3. Have the UW-L Writing Center look at your work. See <http://www.uwlax.edu/writingcenter/>

**Verb tense:** In writing your verb tenses should agree. If you are writing in past tense, keep it in past tense. If you are writing in present tense, keep it in present tense. Do not switch from one tense to another in a sentence, in a paragraph, or even in the whole document, unless the timing of an action you are describing demands you do. You may notice, this document is written in the present tense.

#### **EXAMPLE OF INCORRECT VERB TENSE:**

The author estimated the difference between the groups and concludes there is a large difference.

- 'estimated' (past), 'concludes' (present)

*Your research project should be written in present tense.* In general, you should use present tense when writing about your own ideas or factual topics. You should even use present tense when citing literature. Write “Smith (2010) finds that...” not, “Smith (2010) found that...”