

Academic English Companion

“A major cause of deterioration in the use of the English language is very simply the enormous increase in the number of people who are using it.”

Anonymous

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How to avoid common spelling/grammatical errors

Affect or Effect

Drinking alcohol will **affect** your liver. *(verb meaning to cause a change in something)*

The **effect** of the drug was immediate. *(noun meaning result or consequence)*

The Head of Dept. plans to **effect** sweeping changes. *(verb - to bring about)*

Advice or advise

My **advice** is to wait a while before deciding what to do. *(noun meaning recommendation)*

What would you **advise** me to do? *(verb meaning recommend)*

Adviser is the traditionally correct British spelling.

Advisor is more common in American spelling.

Accept or Except

I **accept** your invitation

They all agreed **except** John.

Amount or number

Amount is used with non-count nouns (words that have no plural form):

There was a certain **amount** of opposition to the proposal.

Number is used with plural forms:

A **number** of proposals were presented at the meeting.

Composed of or Comprise

The report is **composed of** ten sections *(is made up of)*

The report **comprises** ten sections *(contains)*

(Never use the construction "is comprised of". It is incorrect)

Could of/Could have

Could of is incorrect and arises from an attempt to write down what is heard.

I **could have** stayed longer at the party.

I **could've** stayed longer at the party.

The same problem exists with should, would, might, and must have.

I before E except after C

Ceiling, Conceited, Perceive, Receive.

Believe, Achieve, Chief.

Enquiry or Inquiry

Both are correct. British English favours the first spelling and American English the second.

Ensure or Insure

Ensure = to make sure

Can you please ensure that everything is in order?

Insure = to arrange for financial compensation in the event of injury, loss or damage.

I have to insure my car.

Especially or Specially

The two words are very close in meaning and sometimes overlap.

I bought the car **especially** for you. (*for you alone*)

They received a **specially** commissioned report (*for a special purpose*)

Farther or Further

Both can be used for physical distance but "farther" is the word preferred by most writers for this purpose.

Further is used in a more figurative sense:

Nothing was **further** from his mind.

Further is also used in some expressions:

Further education

Until **further** notice

Furthermore

Personal and Personnel

She had **personal** problems.

That was a very **personal** remark.

The **personnel** will receive training in first aid.

The **personnel** officer will advertise the vacancy.

Practice or Practise

Practice makes perfect. (*noun*)

The doctor set up his **practice** in Dublin. (*noun*)

I **practise** the piano every day. (*verb*)

He is **practising** his lines for the play. (*verb*)

Principle or Principal

Principal = chief

His **principal** aim is to increase sales

The **principal** of the school called a meeting.

Principle = moral rule

He was a man of great **principles**.

The **principal** of the school has no **principles**

To or Too

To = preposition

Give this **to** my sister.

To = part of the infinitive (to read, to do)

Do you know how **to** swim?

Too = excessively

It was **too** expensive.

Too = also

Can I go **too**?

Seen and Done

I seen = incorrect

I have seen or I saw

I done = incorrect

I have done or I did.

Quiet or Quite

Quiet = no noise

He wanted peace and quiet so he went to the countryside for the weekend.

Quite = rather, somewhat

He was quite annoyed when he heard that his car had been stolen.

There, Their, They're

There = adverb of place

She is standing over there.

There = impersonal adverb

There is a stain on the carpet.

There are more drinks in the fridge.

Their = possessive adjective meaning belonging to them

Their house has been sold.

They're = contraction of They are

They're coming to the party tonight.

Who's or Whose

Who's = Who has

Who's been using my computer?

Who's = Who is

Who's at the door?

Whose = belonging to someone

Whose car is this?

You're or your

You're = contraction of You are

You're in big trouble

Your = possessive adjective meaning belonging to you

What is your phone number?

It's and Its

It's = contraction of It is

It's not fair.

It's your fault.

It's = contraction of It has

It's been a long semester.

Its = possessive adjective like his/her

The dog wagged its tail.

The product and its benefits appealed to the target market.

We're or Were

We're = contraction of We are

We're going on holidays to Mexico.

Were = past tense of verb "to be"

They were in Portugal last year

You were right all along.

We were not invited to the reunion.

How to use the apostrophe

1. Indicates a possessive in a singular noun

The boy's hat (one boy)

The dog's tail (one dog)

The company's policy (one company)

The product's features (one product)

If the possessor is plural and does not end in "s", the apostrophe precedes the "s".

The women's movement

The children's playground

The men's room

2. If the possessor is a regular plural (ends in "s"), the apostrophe follows the "s"

The boys' hats (more than one boy)

The babies' bibs (more than one baby)

The customers' complaints (more than one customer)

The researchers' findings (more than one researcher)

3. Indicates time or quantity

In one month's time

A good day's work

Two week's notice

4. Indicates the omission of figures in dates

Summer of '68

How to match nouns and pronouns

Make sure that you match pronouns (he, she, them, etc.) with the nouns they replace.

Example:

The work of a mother is never done because **they** are on duty all day long. (*Incorrect*)

The work of a mother is never done because **she** is on duty all day long. (*Correct*)

Be careful of subjects that start with a singular noun, but seem to become plural.

Majority, group, competition and team take singular verbs.

Examples:

The majority of protesters **comes** from Dublin - not come. (*referring to majority*)

The group of doctors **is** investigating the disease - not are. (*referring to group*)

The team **has been** working on the campaign - *not have been*.

The Management team **has** to decide on a price policy - *not have*

The competition **has** resources we lack - *not have*

Each is a singular indefinite pronoun.

Each of them **has** been given a warning - *not have*.

Each of the engineers **has** a particular task to complete - *not have*.

Each of the companies **has** a different budget - *not have*.

How and when to use commas

Commas are used in the following contexts:

1. Lists

Commas are used to separate items in a list.

Examples:

They manufactured televisions, video recorders, mobile phones, CD players and calculators.
The four firms concerned were Smith and Stevens, Boultons, Tuckers and Kays, and Jones.
This recording sets the scene, fills in the background and reflects how the client sees the situation, how he chooses to describe it, and how much he wishes to reveal.

2. Mark off short asides:

Examples:

In fact, they finished the project before the deadline.
In conclusion, the manager thanked all his colleagues for their hard work.
He was aware, by the way, of increasing costs.

4. When one phrase explains/supports the other (noun phrases in apposition) - giving someone's title or explaining a product/service

Examples:

Ms Jones, the Head of Sales, was at the meeting.
The accountant, Ms. Clinton, wrote the report.
The product, an expensive perfume, was launched last week.
Bio Products, a newly privatised company, has had problems with recruitment.
John Farley, the hotel manager, decided to open a spa on the grounds.

5. After clauses beginning with Although, Unless, As, Before, Since, Whether, Because, Once, If, After.. (Subordinate Adverbial clauses).

Examples:

Although the competition was fierce, they successfully launched the new product.

Because he is not in the best of health, Mr White is retiring early.

If you finish before 6pm, we will be able to make our dinner reservation.

Once the budget has been agreed, we can work on the campaign.

Before they designed the product, they carried out extensive research.

6. When using words like "but" and "so" (coordinating conjunctions), place the comma before the word.

Examples:

I completed my essay, but I have not submitted it yet.

The results of the survey were negative, so they had to draw up a new plan.

7. It is better not to join two sentences with a comma followed by: however, nevertheless, furthermore, moreover, hence, therefore, similarly, certainly, in contrast, in other words, in addition (conjunctive adverbs). Start a new sentence and place a comma after the adverb.

Examples:

I completed the task in one hour. However, it took two hours to input the data.

The meeting has been cancelled. Therefore, I will not be presenting the data this week.

They rejected the treaty in Ireland. In contrast, the Spanish voted to accept it.

He never did his continuous assessment project. Nevertheless, he passed the exam

The market in France is very competitive. Similarly, the Spanish market had several well-established brands.

How and when to use colons/ semi-colons/hyphens

Colons

Can be used to introduce lists.

Example:

You need the following ingredients: butter, flour, eggs, sugar and milk.

Make sure when using the colon to introduce a list that it has been preceded by a 'summing-up' word or phrase.

Examples:

Mr Jones raised the following objections: the new changes were difficult to implement, they excluded the participation of certain employees, and they were likely to prove expensive.

I had all the equipment I needed: a tent, a sleeping-bag, a torch, water bottle and a rucksack.

The company manufactures the following products: soap, detergent, washing-up liquid and deodorant.

She broke every single item on the kitchen table: cups, saucers, plates, bottles and an antique jug.

We have many birds in the garden: thrushes, robins, starlings and sparrows.

Semi-colons

Semi-colons can be used to join two sentences closely related in meaning.

Examples:

Alice was conscientious and able; she deserved to pass the examination.

The animal had been badly neglected; it was in a wretched state.

The Finance Dept. is having a training day; 50 employees are expected to attend.

John analysed the results of the survey: they were not positive.

NOTE: Be very careful with semi-colons. If you do not fully understand when to use a semi-colon, just use a full stop.

Hyphens

Hyphens are used to combine two or more words to form a single adjective. They can be vital to meaning.

You are a hard-working woman.

You are a hard, working woman.

There is substantial difference in meaning between 'a little used path' and 'a little-used path'.

They chose a little known actor to endorse the product.

If there is no hyphen between little and known in the sentence above, the reader understands that the actor is small and famous! Put the hyphen in the correct place and the actor is merely not known by most of the public.

How to write a written assignment/essay/report

The most common mistake in completing a written assignment is failure to answer the question - not doing what you have been asked to do. The question must be analysed carefully and constantly referred to. This keeps you on track. You will not be awarded marks for irrelevant information.

Before you start writing or researching you must carefully consider the question you have been asked. The following definitions will give you an indication of what is required of you in a written assignment.

Recognising what you are being asked to do (An explanation of words used in assignments)

| | |
|------------------|---|
| Analyse: | Discuss in detail. Break a subject into its parts/aspects/periods and examine merits, defects, failures and strengths. |
| Appraise: | Evaluate/find value of. |
| Argue: | Maintain by reason/prove/persuade. Back up points by reference to facts and experts' opinions. Make sure facts have credible sources. Make points in a logical order and never use generalisations. Give both sides of argument and never ignore the side of the argument you do not support. Beware of bias. |
| Assess: | Weigh up/judge (give your opinion). |
| Clarify: | Say what it is and it is not. Correct misconceptions. |
| Compare: | Look for similarities and differences between and perhaps reach a conclusion about which is preferable. |
| Contrast: | Indicate differences between. Assess pros and cons of differences and sum up on value. |

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| Criticise: | Give your judgement about the merits or defects of theories/opinions or about the truth of facts. Back up your judgement by a discussion of evidence or reasoning involved. |
| Define: | Set down the precise meaning of a word or phrase. |
| Describe: | Give a detailed or graphic account of. |
| Discuss: | Investigate or examine in detail by argument and debate. Give reasons for and against. Examine the implications. |
| Evaluate: | Make an appraisal of the worth of something in the light of its truth or usefulness. |
| Examine: | Investigate, scrutinise, discuss. |
| Explain: | Interpret and account for. Give reasons for - may be empirical (historical) or logical. Make clear. Show how it has become what it is and why it functions as it does. |
| Illustrate: | Explain with examples. |
| Indicate: | Point out/show. |
| Interpret: | Explain meaning of. |
| Justify: | Give reasons for. Show them to be true or reasonable. |
| Outline: | Give the main features of a subject omitting minor details and emphasising structure and arrangement. |
| Refute: | Prove a statement to be false. |
| Relate: | Show how things are connected to each other and to what extent they are alike or affect each other. |

- State:** Present in brief, clear, simple form.
- Summarise:** Give a concise account of the main points, omitting details and examples.
- Trace:** Follow the development or history of a topic from point of origin.

Collecting the information you need

Remember to relate your writing to the question at all stages. Information not relating to the topic is superfluous and from the reader's point of view, irrelevant information only takes from the overall quality of the written assignment/essay/report. Do not fall into the trap of writing "everything you know". You may have 10 points, but unless all points are relevant to the topic/question, you are wasting your time and the time of the reader.

If you are completing a written assignment for a Continuous Assessment requirement, you have time to organise your research and plan your writing task:

1. Gathering ideas and materials

- Note-taking from printed sources (library or text books).
- Web-based research (company profiles, reports).
- Tutorial notes

NB: At this stage, make sure you note down all the information you need for your bibliography and the page numbers of the materials you have consulted.

2. Steps in selecting relevant information

You must concentrate on selecting the most relevant information and discarding the irrelevant material (no matter how interesting it may appear!). Reading purposefully and taking relevant notes will cut down on preparation time.

This is the stage at which you gather your "hard evidence" - statistics, examples, quotes - to provide grounds in support of your argument.

- Speed-read approach - quickly explore the area covered by the book/article to see if it relates to your written assignment - glance through the table of contents to see if you can find any chapters relevant to your topic.
- Section/topic selection - search for the sections/topics that concern you and ignore the rest. If pressed for time, you can read the conclusion to each chapter in a textbook to see if the chapter content is relevant to your needs.
- Choose your points - read the sections that are relevant and highlight main points.

3. Prioritise points of essay

Take your notes and organise your points into sections. Make a decision on the importance of information you have gathered - separate your information into a) most important points, b) supporting examples, and c) references to case studies or experts.

Some students find it helpful to colour code their information - Highlight main points in pink, examples in yellow and quotations in green. Colour coding can help you find material quickly when you are ready to put the essay together.

Structuring your work: Introduction - Body - Conclusion

Introduction

- State what you understand by the title/question.
- Briefly indicate what your objectives are.
- Mention aspects of the subject you plan to concentrate on.
- State what you will explain or argue

NB: Think of your introduction as a forecast of what is to come in the main body of the written assignment. It is usually a good idea to write your introduction after you have written the body of the assignment/report.

Writing good Introductions

The Introduction should make it clear that you will attempt to satisfy the specific requirements of the title and the tutor. The direction the written assignment/essay/report is taking should be made clear to the reader. Terms may have to be defined, issues clarified, and background described. In this way, the explanation and the argument to follow can then be clearly understood.

- Get to the point!
- Explain the title if required (Perception Theory examines how consumers.....).
- Give a brief background to the topic so that the reader is eased into the discussion. Only include information helpful to the context of the assignment you are writing. For example, if asked to write about advertising of jams and sauces, do not discuss campaigns about cars or clothing!
- Show the reader where you are going and what your objectives are, and outline the stages of your written assignment/essay/report. For example, you will discuss the background to the issue, examine both sides of the argument, provide examples to support both sides, and finally come to a conclusion regarding which side you support and give reasons why.
- Let the reader know how you are going to develop your points. You do not have to give away all your ideas/angles, just an indication of what points are going to be discussed.

Example

Title of an essay: Discuss the impact of immigration on the Irish Economy.

Introduction - statement about the current state of the economy. Brief statement on immigration statistics/situation (explanation or reasons for, etc.). State that your essay will concentrate on positive and negative aspects of immigration on the economy - jobs, housing, tax, infrastructure, etc, (supported by news articles and other examples). You will examine each point individually. Having presented the facts, you will come to your own conclusions about the matter.

You do not discuss the effects of immigration on Irish society unless it is a point linked to the economy.

(If you have written a draft of your introduction before writing the body of the essay, you might find it helpful to rewrite the introduction based on how you develop your points in the body of the essay)

The Body

This is the point where you present and develop the “hard evidence”. The body of your essay is divided into paragraphs and you must remember to include only one point per paragraph. Each point must be suitably and sufficiently supported by examples, facts, statistics, etc.

- Build on your argument/point with ideas, examples, opinions and facts.
- Support key points with examples.
- Use researched evidence and your own thoughts (mention your experience only if required).
- Compare and contrast, if required.
- Examine your points and decide if they need to be developed further.
- Check that the links between paragraphs are logical and that each step you take has been signposted (see transitional phrases). (see page 22)

Writing good body paragraphs

A paragraph consists of a series of sentences about a single topic. A paragraph is normally between five and seven sentences long. Generally, the first sentence introduces the topic of the paragraph and the other sentences support this topic.

The topic sentence presents the subject of the paragraph. If the writer does not develop the topic sentence adequately, the paragraph can appear vague and lacking in direction. The reader is presented with an underdeveloped point.

The sentences in the paragraph should support the topic sentence. They can provide examples, define key words and provide details that clarify and develop your main point. You can also use comparisons or contrasts. You must ensure that all sentences relate back to the topic sentence and not drift away from the main point. If you want to make a different point, move on to another paragraph.

Body paragraphs within any written assignment must have unity. You move from paragraph to paragraph following the same rules as before, developing your points and your argument as you go. Try to make use of transitional words/sentences (see page 22) to indicate to the reader that you are further developing a point or deciding to move in another direction - compare and contrast-type written assignments. Refer back to the point made in the previous paragraph and signal your intent using transitional words/phrases.

Never make an unsubstantiated claim. All of your points must be supported by hard evidence.

Conclusion

This is the final analysis stage and you should be happy that you have explored the topic and arrived at a conclusion.

- Summarise/reinforce your point (briefly)
- Return to the title and echo it in another way. This is where you finalise your argument and restate the introduction based on points made in the written assignment/essay/report.
- It should be clear to the reader that you have answered the question or arrived at a point of view.
- If needs be, you may speculate on future possibilities based on your previous points. This is not considered a new point! You could use the final lines of your conclusion to suggest ways in which the material covered applies to larger concern. Scientists/computer programmers may suggest future development of area. Marketing/Management students may indicate future consumer trends.

Writing good conclusions

In the conclusion you sum up by pulling together all elements and connecting the key points that you have made. You have to show that the body of evidence that you have provided supports the viewpoint you presented at the start. There must be a sense of closure. The conclusion should show that a credible attempt has been made to meet the requirements of the topic title. No new points can be added here and no irrelevant information supplied.

Some handy guidelines for writing conclusions:

- The conclusion should be about the same length or less than the introduction.
- The conclusion should reaffirm the content of the assignment, not merely repeat it. Use synonyms to avoid repetition of terms.
- Retrace the steps of your argument (briefly). In this way, you remind the reader of how the component parts of your written assignment/essay/report fit together.
- The conclusion should follow logically from the title, introduction and body of the text.
- There should be a definite sense of finality about it - a definite viewpoint, an answer to a question or a solution. You present your conclusion in a final, persuasive form.
- Make sure you do not end with a weak conclusion.

Example of an “essay” plan.

When you have a lot of notes, a plan will help you to sort out where each piece of information goes and how the points can be connected. You have a framework to work with. Note down points to be included in the introduction and conclusion and then draw up an outline indicating where you are going to peg your points and how they will be connected.

Introduction

Introduce the topic and state where the essay is going.

Paragraph 1

First point to be discussed supported by evidence.

Paragraph 2

Point leading on from previous paragraph/exploration of point and moving forward supported by examples/statistical evidence.

Paragraph 3

Possible continuation of same idea. Explore a wider angle. Look at international example, etc., supporting points.

Paragraph 4

Possible introduction of other side of argument, if required. (Compare and contrast essay.) Introduce change in direction. Point and supporting examples.

Paragraph 5

Point and examples in support of previous paragraph. Possible elaboration of point.

Paragraph 6

Indication of where you stand in the argument and evidence/reasons to support your stand.

Conclusion

Restatement of points made in Introduction. No new points in this section. Pull together all points to show that conclusion has been reached. Show reader you have discussed your way to a final conclusion where all points give weight to wrapping-up section of your essay. Maybe suggestions for further study (depending on essay type).

Checklist to vet your written assignment

- Have you interpreted the question correctly?
- Is your introduction clear - does it tell the reader what the assignment is about?
- Have you missed any point/angle?
- Have you dealt with all the issues in a balanced way?
- Do you have a unified theme?
- Do you have a topic sentence that introduces the subject of each paragraph?
- Is there a logical progression from point to point/paragraph to paragraph?
- Are all your points necessary and relevant?
- Is each point supported by evidence and examples?
- Are the points well connected and developed?
- Could you discard any examples/points as superfluous?
- Are there smooth transitions from paragraph to paragraph and point to point?
- Is the conclusion backed up by evidence in the body of the assignment?

How to avoid plagiarism

Please refer to ITT Dublin's booklet on "Study Skills for Success" for guidance on how to reference books/journals/websites that you have used as sources of information for your work.

"Study Skills for Success" is available from the Part Time Information Desk, Department of Lifelong Learning.

How to signpost/link sections or paragraphs of your work

Not all paragraphs in a written assignment require a transitional phrase. If your work is clearly planned, it will be obvious where you are heading with your argument. You will not need to provide a “road map”.

However, too often the sentences in a paragraph can appear disconnected from each other. While the writer knows where the argument is going, the reader can be easily confused and not see the pattern. By using transitional phrases, you guide the reader through your written work. Your paragraphs become more relevant because they are linked.

The following transitional words/phrases may help you to signpost your way through your written assignment more clearly.

Transitional Words/Phrases

To extend or elaborate

the next step
 then
 first, second, etc.
 finally
 in this way
 in fact
 for example
 furthermore, moreover
 in addition
 by extension
 what is more
 in one respect
 in effect
 surprisingly/not surprisingly
 In particular

To concede

of course
 even so
 granted
 admittedly
 after all

To mark consequence

accordingly
 consequently
 as a result
 it follows that
 thus, therefore
 for these reasons
 given that

To refer

from this
 as this suggests
 as this illustrates
 after that
 before that
 lately, recently
 formerly, previously

To stress similarities

similarly
 likewise
 in the same way
 just as
 at the same time
 correspondingly
 comparably

To contrast

in contrast
 however, but
 instead
 but perhaps/while
 on the contrary
 on the other hand
 although

How to write a summary

Important points to consider when writing a summary:

- Try to remember that a summary is primarily a reading exercise. You are reporting back on an article/text that was written by another author.
- A summary usually consists of a piece that is about one third the length of the original text.
- When you are asked to write a summary you are required to mention the main idea/topic/argument of the original piece in your own words.
- You may also mention major details and supporting ideas in brief, but again, they must be written in your own words.
- You should only include general information and omit unnecessary details.
- You never include your own ideas or opinions. In a summary you are presenting the ideas of another writer - not your own! You might be required to comment on the ideas at a later stage, but only if required by your tutor.
- The first step is to mention the author and the title (and publication date and publisher, if required). Ex: Mary Thornton's essay "Battle of the Genders" (Education Newsletter 7/11/07) examines the divide between male and female colleagues in the management arena.....
- Throughout the summary you should mention, at least once, the name (surname) of the author. This is known as an "author tag" (Thornton states/underlines) and reminds the reader that you are referring to the original piece.
- Try to find the main point of the piece. But bear in mind that the author might include several points in the article. If so, they all must be included.

- You do not necessarily have to follow the organisation or sequence of the original article. Your job is to generalise about the article in your own words.
- Try to keep the summary as brief and specific as possible.
- Make sure you preserve the emphasis of the original. If a point is given prominence in the original, then this point must be included in your summary.
- Pay attention to the language that you use. Use the most economical wording possible. Try not to use many adjectives. Use synonyms wisely to preserve the original meaning. Preserve the tenses of the original piece - is/will/might. Be aware of words like almost, if, only.

Steps in writing a summary.

1. Read the text once to familiarise yourself with the topic.
2. Read the text again and, this time, make a list of all the points that have been made.
3. Look at the points and make sure they are accurate and not repeated.
4. Identify key sentences that summarise the whole work and formulate these points in your own words (preferably in one sentence). You now have your summary sentence that introduces all the points that have been made.
5. The next step is to examine the details (quotes, statistics, examples) in the text the author used to support main point/points. Ask yourself how the author demonstrates his/her point. Note any examples relevant to your needs.
6. Looking at the examples, omit passages that restate a point. Take care not to omit necessary details. Try to condense lengthy details and do not be tempted to use too many quotes. Take one or two representative examples/quotes/statistics from the original - usually the most repeated or persuasive - and rewrite them in your own words.

Useful phrases for author tagging:

- According to author (name)
- Author (name) argues/indicates/points out
- Author (name) makes it clear that...
- Author (name) defines X as
- Author (name) refers to recent studies

Checklist for a summary

1. Have you mentioned the name of the author and the article?
2. Does the summary include the main idea and the supporting points of the main text (in brief)?
3. Does the summary generalise the ideas adequately?
4. Does the summary use appropriate detail where necessary?
5. Are any of the ideas repeated unnecessarily?
6. Is there at least one author tag used?
7. Does the summary only contain opinions/ideas from the original text?
8. Is the summary written in your own words?
9. Is the summary written in a concise way without unnecessary language?

How to get more help

Call to the Academic English Drop-in Centre

Check notice board or with the Part Time Information Desk for the opening hours.



