

BASIC WRITING SKILLS

GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Don't use contractions, such as “*don't*”, “*can't*” and “*won't*”. In formal writing, you should always write the words in full.

2. Don't use colloquial vocabulary. It is really the type of language that is used in everyday conversation – which means that it is informal. Academic writing should always be formal.

These are some examples of expressions that you should avoid, together with their formal alternative:

Informal	Formal Alternative
figure out	deduce
check up	investigate
find out	discover
loads of research	extensive research
a lot of	many / much
for sure / I am sure	certainly

Avoid other types of informal English such as figures of speech: metaphors, similes, hyperbole, clichés and idioms. Some examples of these include:

The mind is an ocean (metaphor)

The mind is like an ocean (simile)

Thousands of tests (hyperbole)

No pain, no gain (cliché)

It is now all water under the bridge (idiom)

3. Avoid using run-on expressions such as: *and so forth, and so on and etc.* Instead, write a sentence as a complete statement:

for example, instead of

Some examples of citation styles include APA, IEEE, Chicago Manual of Style, Harvard, etc.

write

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4. Don't use rhetorical questions – questions for which no answer is expected. They are inappropriate for academic writing: readers might not know the answer and the point being made could be more strongly and clearly expressed as a statement. For example, instead of writing:

What do we mean by “stalking”? It has been defined as “a long-term commitment to engaging in persistent campaigns of harassment that have ...

write

Stalking is usually defined as a long-term commitment to engaging in persistent campaigns of harassment that have...

5. Place adverbs within the verbs. In informal English, adverbs are usually placed at the beginning or end of sentences. However, in academic writing, they should be placed within the verb group, so instead of writing

The media presents the nursing profession in a negative way generally.

write

The media generally presents the nursing profession in a negative way.

6. Avoid starting with a coordinating conjunction such as *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, and so*, because they are meant to join words, phrases and clauses.

However, the following transitional adverbs, as appropriate, can be used instead at the beginning of sentences: *additionally, moreover, nevertheless, however, therefore, thus, alternatively.*

Task Achievement	
Do's	Don'ts
Answer all parts of the question.	Go 'off' topic.
Plan your main points so they stay on topic.	Give your opinion if you are not asked to.
Be specific in your main points and examples.	Ignore parts of the question that do not interest you or are difficult.
Support ideas with thorough explanations.	Change your opinion about the topic during the essay.
Provide your opinion if asked.	Make generalizations.
Use appropriate formal language.	
Write in paragraphs with one main focus.	
Coherence and Cohesion	
Do's	Don'ts
Write in paragraphs, usually 4 or 5 per essay.	Use the same linking words or phrases again and again.
Always have an introduction and conclusion.	Skip the conclusion if you are short on time.
Have one central topic per paragraph.	Include more than one or two ideas per paragraph.
Use a range of linking words and phrases.	Forget to answer the question in your conclusion.
Organise your ideas logically.	
Support main points with an explanation and example.	
Lexical Resource	
Do's	Don'ts
Use synonyms and paraphrasing to avoid repeating the same words.	Use informal words and phrases.
Use less common 'question specific' words.	Misspell words.
Use collocations where appropriate.	Reuse words directly from the question if possible.
Use formal language.	Use complicated words you are not 100% confident about using.
Show control over different forms of words.	
Check for spelling mistakes at the end.	
Grammatical Range and Accuracy	
Do's	Don'ts
Use different tenses when appropriate.	Forget to check your work for errors.
Use passive voice and conditionals if appropriate too.	Get your word order wrong.
Use punctuation correctly.	Use grammatical structures you are not confident about.
Use simple and complex sentences.	Make any of the common errors associated with: articles, word formation, verb tense, plurals, capital letters and full stops.
Check your work carefully at the end.	

Topic sentences need to:

- be short
- be clear
- relate to the question
- avoid too much detail
- be more general in nature than in some other genres
- come as first sentence in the paragraph

Sentence connections

Basically, all connections fall into four types:

1. Argument & counter argument
2. Opinion & supporting examples
3. Opinion & supporting reasons
4. Listing (reasons or examples)

Make sentence pairs by matching each sentence with one that follows on from it. For each pair, say what type of pair it is (from the list above).

1. Firstly, television news reports are often too short or superficial to explain the full context of a story.
2. In my view, products such as cosmetics or soaps should not be tested on animals.
3. I am convinced that governments' economic policies do harm to the environment.
4. It is often said that the only way to prevent crime is to enforce stricter punishments.

a For instance, governments do nothing to encourage people to use public transport instead of their cars.

b Such items are not essential, and there is no need to make creatures suffer for the sake of making money.

c However, statistics show that stiff punishments do nothing to reduce crime rates.

d Secondly, television news editors tend to favour stories which offer sensational images that make 'entertaining' viewing

There are different ways to make transitions:

1. **Use linking words *firstly, secondly, thirdly* etc.** These are quite straightforward and make it easier for the examiner to follow the progression of your ideas.

Numerous scientists have proven that global warming is a dangerous phenomenon. Firstly, they believe it has accelerated and is becoming ever more unpredictable. Secondly, a global solution is needed, but unfortunately the globe still consists of individual players .i.e. nation states. Thirdly, evidence is mounting proving its severity, yet the scientists are painfully aware of the lack of action from governments.

2. **Repetition** can also be beneficial sometimes. It refers to the situation when by using repetition you improve comprehension. It means that you can repeat key points of your ideas using synonyms.

Numerous lawyers have proven that global warming is a dangerous phenomenon. Firstly they believe it has accelerated and is becoming ever more unpredictable. These legal experts believe a global solution is needed, but unfortunately the globe still consists of individual players .i.e. nation states. Furthermore, evidence is mounting proving its severity, yet the law practitioners are painfully aware of the lack of action from governments.

3. **Demonstratives** – devices that show what we referred to previously. For example, these, those, that, this. Under no condition should you use it in your topic sentence. Demonstratives are only to be used in the supporting ones when a reader already knows what you're talking about.

They have proven that it is a dangerous phenomenon, in fact it has accelerated and is becoming ever more unpredictable, this is the view of most of the legal profession, regarding global warming.

Writing like the above creates a lot of reader strain! How do we correct it?

Lawyers have proven that global warming is a dangerous phenomenon, in fact it has accelerated and is becoming ever more unpredictable.

WHOLE WORK STRUCTURE

An introduction does three basic things:

- States the topic and the question
- Paraphrases the question
- States your opinion (if necessary)

Good introduction

Deciding where to live is one of life's most difficult choices. One may opt for life in the country, or the city. In my opinion, life in the city is more advantageous. This is due to the fact that the city offers better economic and social opportunities.

As a person reaches adulthood, he needs to decide on where he would prefer to live.

While there are advantages to both living in the country and in the city, I believe that for economic reasons, life in the city is more beneficial. This is because the city offers more employment opportunities, as well as a more affordable cost of living.

Bad Introduction

Nowadays, cars are a very popular way of getting around. Day by day many more people drive cars around but others feel that they cause global warming. Global warming is one of the most serious issues in modern life. They also affect people's health and well-being which is also a serious issue.