



# Top Tips For Academic Writing

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# Top Tips For Academic Writing

Authored by:

**Maina Wachira**, Research and Analytics Associate, The Mawazo Institute

**Rachel Strohm**, Co-Founder and Board Chair, The Mawazo Institute

**Dr. Fiona W. Moejes**, Director of Programmes, The Mawazo Institute

**Dr. Rose M. Mutiso**, Co-Founder and CEO, The Mawazo Institute

Designed by:

**Arafa C. Hamadi**, Graphic Design and Creative Advisor, The Mawazo Institute





## What is Good Academic Writing?

Good academic writing communicates using language that is as clear and easy to understand as possible.

You can improve your writing by using simple and concrete language, avoiding unnecessary repetition, writing focused paragraphs, editing your work carefully.

The following tips will help your readers focus on **what you're saying rather than how you're saying it.**



# Tip 1.

## Use Simple Synonyms.

Clear, direct words make your writing accessible and easy to read. If there is a **simple synonym** for a word or phrase, use it. For example:

Instead of	Try
“utilised”	“use”
“arduous”	“difficult”
“due to the the fact that...”	“because”



# Tip 2.

## Use Concrete Language.

Academic writing should provide a clear understanding its topic. It helps to use **concrete and specific language** that creates **a vivid mental image**. For example, consider two endings to the following sentence:

In this ending “river pollution” and “impact on plants, animals, and humans” are broad, abstract, and hard to picture.

1. *...evaluating river pollution and its impact on plants, animals, and humans.”*

In this ending more concrete alternatives are used, outlining what type of pollution and what kinds of impacts will be focused on.

2. *...evaluating the level and types of major pollutants in the river, as well as their impact on the aquatic biodiversity and socio-economic wellbeing of local residents.”*



# Tip 3.

## Prefer the Active Voice.

The **passive voice** begins with the person or item acted upon:

**what** was completed?

**who** completed it?

*~~The survey~~ was completed by the ~~research team~~...*

The active voice begins with the person or thing acting:

*"The research team completed the survey.."*

**who** completed it?

**what** was completed?

If the writing standards in your field allow it, using the active voice can make your sentences shorter and more engaging.



# Tip 4.

## Keep Your Sentences Short.

If you have a **compound sentence**\* that combines two or more parts that can each stand alone, turn it into multiple sentences. For example:

“Water affects the socio-economic wellbeing of a society and the health of natural **ecosystems; unfortunately**, as population growth has accelerated, so has the demand for and impact on available water resources.”

### Can be rewritten as:

“Water affects the socio-economic wellbeing of a society and the health of natural **ecosystems. Unfortunately**, as population growth has accelerated, so has the demand for and impact on available water resources.”

\*Visit [this webpage](#) for a helpful refresher on sentence structure and sentence types.





# Tip 5.

## Be Careful with Jargon.

Every field has **jargon**, its technical or distinctive terminology. However, even common terms can cause confusion if they are not defined.

For example, “women’s empowerment” may be unhelpful jargon in the social sciences. Does it mean helping women in business, legislating against gender-based discrimination, or something entirely different?

**If readers won’t understand the specific ideas or activities described by a term, changing it will likely make your writing more effective.**





# Tip 6.

## Avoid Repeating Terms.

Key research terms can't always be avoided, but your writing will be more interesting if you avoid repeating words several times in a row.

For example:

“The most recent survey of Ziwa river’s **water quality** was conducted over two decades ago, testing only a limited number of **water quality** and biodiversity indicators.”

**Could be rephrased as:**

“The most recent survey of Ziwa river’s **water quality** and biodiversity was conducted over two decades ago, testing only a limited number of indicators.”



# Tip 7.

## Avoid Repeating Facts.

Researchers sometimes repeat entire facts at different points in the same paper.

**As a rule of thumb, each fact should appear only once in the body of a paper.** If you repeat a fact in multiple places, pick the location where it makes most sense and delete other instances.

The exception to this rule is when facts from your results or literature review are mentioned in your abstract or introduction, since these preview later parts of the paper.



# Tip 8.

## Write Focused Paragraphs.

Each paragraph, for example in a research paper, should have:

- A single **theme** that unites the evidence it presents,
- A **topic sentence** that clearly communicates the theme,
- A **conclusion and transition** that highlights key issues and sets up the next paragraph.

Following these guidelines will keep your paragraphs brief, make it easy for readers to find specific topics in your paper, and weave your paragraphs together into a cohesive whole.



# Tip 9.

## Edit Your Writing.

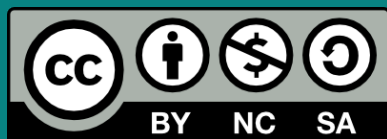
**Editing** usually aims to improve four aspects of your writing:

- **Literacy.** Editing may involve fixing punctuation, spelling, sentence structure, and other grammatical errors in your paper.
- **Readability.** Editing may involve changing words, paragraph structure, and sequencing to make your paper a clear and cohesive whole.
- **Truth.** Editing may involve making sure that every claim in your paper is supported, either directly or in a credible included reference.
- **Formatting.** Editing may involve ensuring that the papers font, body, references, etc. are presented according to publisher guidelines.





These training materials are provided as part of the Mawazo Learning Exchange, a professional development platform for African researchers. The Mawazo Learning Exchange is a programme of the Mawazo Institute, a non-profit research organisation based in Nairobi, Kenya. Mawazo's mission is to support the next generation of female thought leaders and scholars in Africa, and get policymakers and the public engaged with their research.



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