

Steve Walton

ACADEMIC WRITING

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ACADEMIC WRITING

WHERE WE'RE GOING

- ▶ Know yourself
- ▶ Organise your writing
- ▶ Use words well
- ▶ Punctuate properly
- ▶ Use footnotes well

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KNOW YOURSELF

3

ACADEMIC WRITING

KNOW YOURSELF

- ▶ Know your body rhythms
 - ▶ best time of day/week for concentrated thought and writing
 - ▶ best time of day/week for reading and note-taking
 - ▶ best time of day/week for organising your ideas
 - ▶ best time of day/week for checking references
- ▶ Nothing will make more difference than proper sleep

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ORGANISE YOUR WRITING

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ACADEMIC WRITING

HOW I EXAMINE A THESIS

- ▶ Read title and abstract
- ▶ Review contents pages and bibliography
- ▶ Read introduction and conclusion
- ▶ Read introduction and conclusion of each chapter
- ▶ Read main chapters through

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ACADEMIC WRITING

A THESIS...

- ▶ ...is a report on research
 - ▶ ...is *not* the story of the researcher's journey
- ▶ ...is an act of communication from writer to readers
- ▶ what is your thesis about?
 - ▶ what is/are the key research question(s)?
 - ▶ why is this project worthwhile?
 - ▶ what are you claiming?
- ▶ how have you organised the discussion so that it's easy for your reader to follow?

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ACADEMIC WRITING

ORGANISING BY SIGNPOSTING

- ▶ Chapter by chapter
 - ▶ at the start
 - ▶ what's this chapter doing?
 - ▶ how does the chapter contribute to the thesis argument?
 - ▶ how is this chapter organised?
 - ▶ at the end
 - ▶ what have we learned in this chapter?
 - ▶ how does what we've learned move the argument on?
 - ▶ how does this conclusion lead to the next chapter?

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ORGANISING A PARAGRAPH

- ▶ Five questions you answer in writing
 - ▶ What are you claiming?
 - ▶ What reasons support that claim?
 - ▶ What justifies connecting those reasons to your argument?
 - ▶ What evidence justifies those reasons?
 - ▶ What alternative views/objections/problems are there, and how do you respond to them?

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ORGANISING A PARAGRAPH

- ▶ The sentence vortex
- ▶ Write first, edit later
 - ▶ get the 'horrible first draft' written by free writing
 - ▶ do not attempt to 'edit as you go'—do that at least a few hours (preferably a day) later

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ORGANISING A PARAGRAPH

- ▶ one topic...one paragraph
 - ▶ use an opening 'topic sentence' to identify what the paragraph is about
 - ▶ be clear what each clause and sentence are doing
 - ▶ claim
 - ▶ supporting reasons
 - ▶ justifying the link to the argument
 - ▶ evidence for reasons
 - ▶ alternative views and response

11

“What can be said of Lydia, who gathered with other women to pray? She is a businesswoman dealing in purple cloth (Acts 16.14) and a woman of some social status, for she confidently addresses Paul, asking that they might stay with her (16.15). Lydia is also a property owner whose house and household become the centre of the fledgling church (16.40); as such, she is a woman of some means. She is also receptive to the gospel. Luke tell us that God opened her heart to the good news, and so she and her household were baptized. This meant that Lydia was able to demonstrate her allegiance to God with a covenant sign, something God-fearing or women could never do. Christianity was forging a new path not only for Gentiles, but for women.

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USE WORDS WELL

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ACADEMIC WRITING

“ The capacity of a decision unit to induce innovation implementation within an adoption unit is crucial to organizational success. Risk and complexity are characteristics of innovations that can lead to resistance within organizational adoption units. Communication costs, types of power, and communication channels are structural characteristics that can be used by a decision unit to overcome this resistance. The interaction of those factors can determine the degree of successful innovation implementation within organizations.

‘Communication and Innovation Implementation’

14

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‘Communication and Innovation Implementation’

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“ Many employees resist innovations they perceive to be risky or complex. In successful organizations, managers adopt communication strategies that help break down such resistance.

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WRITING MORE SIMPLY

- ▶ reduce abstract nouns
 - ▶ -ion -ism -ty -ment -ness -ance -ence
- ▶ make your idea concrete and relate it to people
- ▶ use verbs well
 - ▶ reduce passive verbs (but don't reject them entirely)
 - ▶ reduce use of forms of 'to be'
 - ▶ use evaluative verbs, so the reader knows what you think

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EVALUATIVE VERBS

| Awesome | Neutral | Poor |
|--------------|------------|---------|
| argues | applies | asserts |
| critiques | composes | chooses |
| demonstrates | debates | claims |
| evaluates | interprets | recites |
| illustrates | shows | states |

Mewburn, Firth & Lehmann, *How to Fix Your Academic Writing Trouble*, 27

20

“ What is interesting about viruses is that their genetic stock is very meagre.

21

“ What **is** interesting about viruses **is** that their genetic stock **is** very meagre.

Viruses originate from a surprisingly meagre genetic stock.

22

“ *American Beauty* **is** one of the best films I have ever seen. The Academy gave the movie a 'Picture of the Year' award, among other honours. There **are** many good uses of cinematography throughout the film. I **will be** describing how cinematography **is** used to enhance what **is** happening in that particular scene.

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 - ▶ reduce use of forms of ‘to be’
 - ▶ use evaluative verbs, so the reader knows what you think
 - ▶ the ‘dynamic dozen’ rule—have at most twelve words between subject and verb

27

WRITING MORE SIMPLY

- ▶ exercise ad- words
 - ▶ adverbs -ly
 - ▶ replace adverbs by vivid verbs

28



She walked **painfully** toward her car.

She **dragged herself** toward her car.

She walked **happily** toward her car.

She **sauntered** toward her car.

She walked **drunkely** toward her car.

She **tottered** toward her car.

She walked **absent-mindedly** toward her car.

She **meandered** toward her car.

WRITING MORE SIMPLY

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 - ▶ adverbs -ly
 - ▶ replace adverbs by vivid verbs
- ▶ 'For Käsemann, the gospel was of course about "faith", which was completely different from "religion", accepting the sheer gift of the gospel through God justified not the "religious" but precisely the ungodly.'

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- ▶ 'For Käsemann, the gospel **was** of course about "faith", which **was** completely different from "religion", accepting the sheer gift of the gospel through God justified not the "religious" but precisely the ungodly.'
- ▶ 'Käsemann contrasts "faith" and "religion". To show "faith" means accepting God's gift of the gospel, and through the gospel God justifies *ungodly* people, not "religious" people.'

WRITING MORE SIMPLY

- ▶ exercise ad- words
 - ▶ adverbs -ly
 - ▶ adjectives: words or phrases which describe nouns

“ We have assembled surgical and clinical expertise second to none, have a state-of-the-art trauma center, developed sophisticated minimally invasive techniques, and called on innovative training and technology to ensure the highest level of patient safety and quality of care.

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WRITING MORE SIMPLY

- ▶ exercise ad- words
 - ▶ adverbs -ly
 - ▶ adjectives: words or phrases which describe nouns
 - ▶ does the meaning of the sentence change without the adjective? If not, delete it
 - ▶ use a stronger noun
 - ▶ severe problem → crisis
 - ▶ avoid 'very' and 'really'
 - ▶ very happy → delighted
 - ▶ a really good movie → a fantastic movie

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“ The chef stood lazily over the grill, slowly and wearily flipping the greasy burgers as he carefully balanced the long, gray ash of his cigarette over the dangerously hot stove.

I walked slowly and methodically through the majestic, lush, green hills, the scent of fresh, spring grass smelled very, very nice.

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AVOID ZOMBIE WORDS

- ▶ 'this' 'that' 'it', etc.
 - ▶ The woman threw a vase through the window and broke it.
 - ▶ My counsellor told me, 'Write letters to the people you hate and then burn them.' I did that, but now I don't know what to do with the letters.
 - ▶ clarify the antecedent!

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WRITE GOOD SENTENCES

- ▶ start with the subject
- ▶ use the shortest forms of words
 - ▶ use rather than utilise
 - ▶ concept rather than conceptualisation
 - ▶ method rather than methodology
- ▶ keep to one main clause and one dependent clause

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Writers find getting started on the next sentence, paragraph or chapter is often a real heave of effort. In order to avoid that heave, they might write extraordinarily long, convoluted sentences (easily a whole paragraph long), and if they can manage to have six sub-clauses, preferably broken in two by a nest of parentheses—marked by dashes, commas and brackets—they often will (and better if they can make the paragraph last for a page or two).

Many writers find it difficult to start new sections, whether sentences, paragraphs or chapters. Some writers use long and complex sentences or paragraphs to avoid this difficulty.

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WRITE GOOD SENTENCES

- ▶ start with the subject
- ▶ use the shortest forms of words
- ▶ limit sentences to 25–35 words most of the time
- ▶ keep to one main clause and one dependent clause
- ▶ limit paragraphs to 250–300 words in the main:
 - new idea, new paragraph
- ▶ don't refer back 'As I argued earlier'
- ▶ explain one idea at a time
- ▶ avoid tangential ideas—they're for an article or your next book

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PUNCTUATE PROPERLY

- ▶ apostrophes
 - ▶ its and it's
 - ▶ it's = it is or it has
 - ▶ its = belonging to it
 - ▶ possessives have apostrophes; plurals do not
 - ▶ the apple's seeds, but *not* apple's 50p each
 - ▶ plural possessives; put the apostrophe at the end
 - ▶ the lecturers' grumpiness
 - ▶ *not* the lecturer's grumpiness (unless it's just one lecturer)

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PUNCTUATE PROPERLY

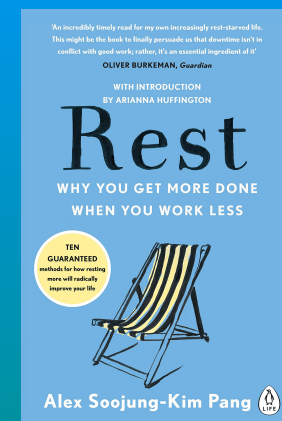
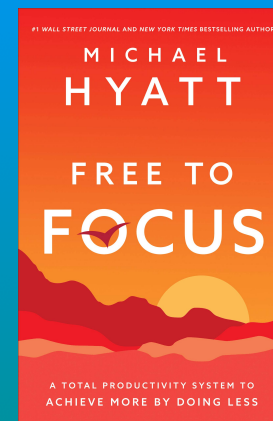
- ▶ apostrophes
- ▶ the comma splice
 - ▶ use of a comma to connect two independent clauses —a longer 'stop' is required
 - ▶ 'Jim usually gets on well with people, he is an understanding man.'
 - ▶ use two sentences
 - ▶ use a conjunction 'and', etc.
 - ▶ use a semi-colon

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RESOURCES

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KNOW YOURSELF



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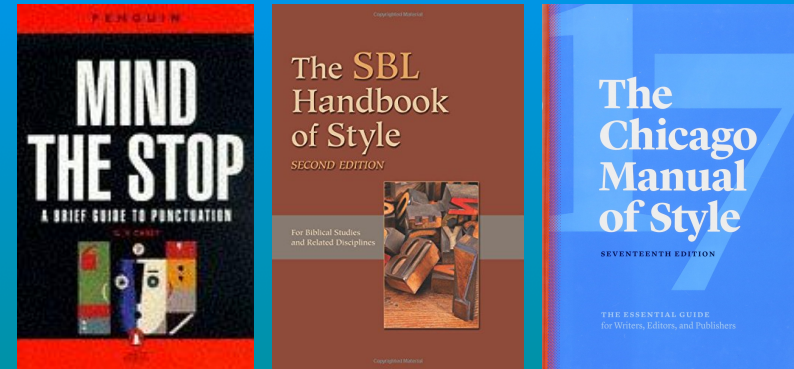
ON WRITING WELL



<http://www.writersdiet.com>

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PUNCTUATING AND REFERENCING



G. V. Carey

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USEFUL WEB SITES

- ▶ The Thesis Whisperer <https://thesiswhisperer.com>
- ▶ Research Degree Insiders <https://researchinsiders.blog>
- ▶ Writing for Research <https://medium.com/@write4research>
- ▶ Pat Thomson <https://patthomson.net>
- ▶ Acts and More <http://stevewalton.info>

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ACTS AND MORE

<http://stevewalton.info>

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