



MASARYK UNIVERSITY  
Dept. of Foreign Languages



## POSTGRADUATE ACADEMIC WRITING COURSE

### SESSION 4

#### **Homework tasks:**

- Activity 6 from seminar 3 on Hedging – completed and ok? Questions?

- Look at 1-2 research articles that you have. Try to locate some examples of use of **3<sup>rd</sup> person voice** and **hedging** used – write a few examples of each of these down to share next seminar.

#### **Examples:**

- Rewrite the following lines using more formal language:

1. Some people believe the information that the professor was arguing for had come from a previous study that covered everything relevant.
2. People generally believe that he thought up his theory when he was a young student.
3. We found that our study went against the information found in a previous study. This was different to what we expected, as we thought it would be similar and agree with the other study.

## 1. Passive and active voice

\* Which of the sentence pairs below could be appropriate for academic writing and why?

\* **Discuss these statements with a partner, then feedback to the group.**

a) We wanted to understand how penicillin affects growth of bacteria. To do this, we grew bacteria in the presence of varying concentrations of penicillin. We learned that penicillin inhibits growth of bacteria.

b) The growth of bacteria was studied. Bacteria were grown in the presence of varying concentrations of penicillin. It was discovered that bacterial growth is inhibited by penicillin.

c) One sample was dissolved prior to thermal treatment. At 30 minute intervals samples were withdrawn and dissolved in carrier solutions, and the temperature of the bath was increased by approximately 5°C.

d) We dissolved one sample prior to thermal treatment. At 30 min. intervals, we withdrew samples and dissolved them in carrier solutions, and we increased the temperature of the bath by approx. 5°C.

- ▶ The passive voice emphasises the action over the person doing the action (the actor). It is a very useful technique when the actor is not important to the event.
- ▶ **Warning:** You should not use the passive voice all the time but mainly when you really need to; overuse tends to produce dull writing; particularly in conjunction with nominalization it can contribute to writing sounding very formal and losing clarity!
- ▶ To know more about, read: Lilita Rodman: The passive in technical and scientific writing; <http://www.camlang.com/tsp001.cfm>

(Adapted from Alison Brown, 2007; Bonte and Martin, 1481-82 in Rodman, L. <http://www.camlang.com/tsp001.cfm>)

## 2. Contractions (shortened forms)

Which of the sentences below can be appropriate for academic writing and why?

\* **Discuss the statements together as a class group.**

a) It's no less important to understand that conversation, so far as it concerns the idea of trusteeship, is principally an European affair: African and Asian voices don't become audible in any substantial way until the onset of decolonisation.

b) It is no less important to understand that conversation, so far as it concerns the idea of trusteeship, is principally an European affair: African and Asian voices do not become audible in any substantial way until the onset of decolonisation.

c) As Salman Rushdie, who became the first Western writer to become the victim of a *fatwa*, said: "It's ridiculous – isn't it? –to have to say, but I *am* a human being, unjustly accused, unjustly embubbled. Or is it I who am being ridiculous, as I call out from my bubble, *I'm still trapped here, folks; somebody, please, get me out?*"

d) As Salman Rushdie, who became the first Western writer to become the victim of a *fatwa*, said: "It is ridiculous – is it not? –to have to say, but I *am* a human being, unjustly accused, unjustly embubbled. Or is it I who am being ridiculous, as I call out from my bubble, *I am still trapped here, folks; somebody, please, get me out?*"

(Adapted from Alison Brown, 2007; Bain, W: 2003, p.11; Rushdie. S. in MacArthur, B.: 1999, p. 484)

### 3. Nominalization (noun forms)

*Which of the sentences below can be appropriate for academic writing and why?*

**\* Discuss in small groups, then feedback to the group.**

a) Comprehension is aided by repetition.

b) You can understand something better if it is repeated.

c) Germany invaded Poland in 1939 and that was the immediate cause of the World War II breaking out.

d) Germany's invasion of Poland in 1939 was the immediate cause of the outbreak of the World War II.

e) The company's original conclusion that the establishment of increased flexibility in attendance hours has resulted in a decrease in absenteeism, was endorsed in the most recent analysis.

f) In a recent analysis the company confirmed its earlier conclusion that greater flexibility in attendance hours for workers reduces absentee rates.

### More tips for academic writing:

(Adapted from Alison Brown, 2007)

- ▶ Academic writing usually has more noun structures than verb structures.
- ▶ The noun forms are useful in condensing text and when the focus is on conditions or results rather than actions.
- ▶ **Warning:** too much nominalization can make your writing very dense, unnecessarily complex and tedious to read. You have to strike a balance here!

### 3.1 Noun based phrases – correct the sentences

Rewrite the following sentences, *change the underlined parts of the sentence by using more formal academic language and noun based phrases.*

**\* Work in pairs or small groups, then discuss with the class group:**

Many factors are important when talking about how fast the population is growing in developing countries.

Wages growth and labour productivity are both related to the amount of people living per square kilometre in a city.

He is a failure as he can't remember a word, nor does he know why he is going to be executed.

Menzel (1973) has shown that non-speaking chimpanzees can convey where food is located to one another.

It is easiest to list foods and drinks according to the best place that they should be stored.

The week after the patient is admitted appears to be the time when the risk is greatest.

At the point in time that the riots occurred, 36 per cent of the workforce in Handsworth were not working.

### 3.2 Academic verbs and nouns

*Write a definition or synonym for each of the following verbs. Then write down the noun based form of the same word and use it in a sentence with appropriate context.*

**Discuss and write examples in small groups, then discuss with the class group.**

eg. *participate* – to take part in an activity. *Participation* - The complete participation of all group members was expected.

perceive:

allocate:

justify:

illustrate:

regulate:

classify:

document:

convert:

conclude:

validate:

retain:

#### **4. Forms of quantity**

*\* Here are some more things to look for with your academic writing:*

*\* Read each pair of sentences, discuss which sounds better, more formal.*

### Formal forms of quantity with positive verbs

**No vs not any** The analysis did *not yield any* new results **vs** The analysis yielded no new results

**Few vs not many** There do not seem to be many viable solutions to this problem  
**vs** There seem to be *few* viable solutions to this problem

**Much vs a lot of** *Much* research has been conducted into global warming **vs**  
a lot of research has been done on global warming.

#### 4.1. Correct use of quantity words:

**\* Read and discuss the following information with the class group:**

**uncountable nouns:** eg.. a *great deal of* research.....a *large / great amount of* exercise / time.....or a *small amount of* research.....*little* research.....*some* information.....*much* time / exercise....

**Other examples of uncountable words?**

**countable plural nouns:** eg... a *large number of* studies / papers....or ...a *small number of* participants....or ..*few* researchers....or .... *many* subjects...

Both a **number** and an **amount** can be described as:

- small
- considerable / substantial (decent or fairly big size)
- significant (worthy of attention, noteworthy)
- enormous
- total (all)
- surprising
- excessive (too much / too many)
- fair (quite a lot)
- reasonable (acceptable)

**Other forms of quantity:**

*the bulk* = the majority eg ..the bulk of those who were sent questionnaires have completed them..

*as a whole* = considered as a group rather than individually...eg...the survey shows that as a whole, the population has become more conscious of regular exercise.

*One of our* respondents....use plural form for the noun being described (a common error).

## 4.2. What do the following quantity expressions mean?

\* **Connect the expression to the correct definition, then think of an example in context:**

exceeding	mostly or approximately (slightly informal)
in excess of	use to suggest the number was unexpectedly large
fewer and fewer	means higher than (formal)
more and more	means over (mainly used in official, legal writing)
more or less	a steadily increasing amount of, increasingly
no fewer than	a steadily declining number of, decreasingly

(adapted from: Academic Vocabulary in Use, McCarthy and Odell, Cambridge Uni Press, 2008)

## 5. Conciseness and straightforward language.

Read the following statements, what language is necessary? What language is better?

\* **Discuss with the class group**

### Conciseness - clichés, redundant words and colloquialisms

- ▶ Use the most straightforward term and reduce unnecessary words, e.g. *with a high degree of certainty* **vs** *certain*; *... advance planning* **vs** *planning*...
- ▶ Jacob (1998) *says* that the test is not 100% reliable. **vs** Jacob (1998) *concedes* that the test is not 100% reliable. (E.g. *describe, contend, examine, state, disagree, observe, assert, support, claim, dispute, suggest, purport, persuade, dismiss, refute, propose, concur, recommend, object, contradict*)
- ▶ The paper was *pretty awful*. **vs** The paper was *poorly researched*.
- ▶ The idea that primary sequence alone determines tertiary structure in protein folding can be *an idea that not everyone agrees with*. **vs** The idea that primary sequence alone determines tertiary structure in protein folding can be *a controversial one*.

**Note:** Although you should be aware of these characteristics, it's probably *not a good idea to try to completely change your writing style when you first sit down to write a draft* of an article or thesis. If you try to remember everything, you may sit for hours trying to perfect the first sentence. Instead, write however you feel comfortable writing, but *learn to develop your editing skills*, paying attention to the above mentioned characteristics.

(Adapted from Alison Brown, 2007)

