

Preface

Who is this book for?

This book is aimed at researchers in any discipline who wish to write a research paper in English. If your first language is not English, you should find this book particularly useful.

I have never written a paper before. Will this book help me?

This book is intended both for inexperienced and experienced authors. In the Contents page, a (#) indicates that inexperienced writers should pay particular attention to this subsection. You can refer to the other points when you write more papers in the future.

The useful phrases in Chap. 19 will help you to structure your paper and give you an indication of the typical coverage of each section.

I have written many papers before. Will I still learn something from this book?

If you have ever had a paper rejected due to poor English, poor structure or poor readability, then this book will certainly help you.

What are the three most important things I will learn from this book?

This book is based on three fundamental guidelines.

I ALWAYS THINK ABOUT THE REFEREE AND THE READER

Your aim is to have your paper published. You will increase your chances of acceptance of your manuscript if referees and journal editors (i) find your paper easy to read, (ii) understand what gap you filled and how your findings differ from the

literature. You need to meet their expectations with regard to how your content is organized. This is achieved by writing clearly and concisely, and by carefully structuring not only each section, but also each paragraph and each sentence.

2 READ OTHER PAPERS, LEARN THE STANDARD PHRASES, USE THESE PAPERS AS A MODEL

You will improve your command of English considerably by reading lots of other papers in your field. You can underline or note down the typical phrases that they use to express the various language functions (e.g. outlining aims, reviewing the literature, highlighting their findings) that you too will need in your paper. You can also note down how they structure their paper and then use their paper as a template (i.e. a model) for your own.

3 WRITE CONCISELY WITH NO REDUNDANCY AND NO AMBIGUITY, AND YOU WILL MAKE LESS MISTAKES IN YOUR ENGLISH

The more you write, the more mistakes in English you will make. If you avoid redundant words and phrases you will significantly increase the readability of your paper.

What else will I learn?

You will learn how to:

- significantly improve your chances of having your paper published by thinking in terms of the referee and the reader
- reduce the number of mistakes you make in English
- plan and organize your paper, and structure each paragraph and each sentence so that the reader can easily follow the logical build-up towards various conclusions
- decide what to include in the various parts of the paper (Introduction, Methodology, Discussion etc.) and what typical phrases to use
- write a title and an abstract that will attract attention and be read
- highlight your claims and contribution
- make it 100% clear whether you are referring to your own work or someone else's
- use the minimum number of words required – this does not mean that less scientific content will be included, but simply that you find the clearest and most concise way to express this content
- increase the level of readability of your paper by helping readers to quickly understand what you are saying
- identify the correct style - personal or impersonal
- choose the correct tenses
- avoid ambiguity, for example being very careful that it is 100% clear what pronouns (e.g. *it*, *them*, *this*, *these*, *one*) refer to

Clearly, researchers from different disciplines write in different ways and sometimes follow a different structure. For example, there are significant differences between the

ways a medical, mathematical and sociological paper are written and constructed. However, whatever field you are in, the rules of good writing in English are the same: clarity, logic, conciseness (no redundancy), no ambiguity, and the highest level of readability possible.

This book focuses on language, structure and readability issues. It also tells you the key elements to include in the various sections of a paper.

It does not cover, for example, how to compile figures, tables, and bibliographies.

Who else will benefit from reading this book?

Proofreaders, those who work for editing services, referees, journal editors and EFL, ESL and EAP trainers should also find this book useful. I hope to be able to show you the reasons why the English of non-native speakers often does not comply with the standards of international journals. Knowing these reasons should then help you to give advice to authors on how to improve their manuscripts, and students on how to improve their writing in general. It should also help you understand the difficulties that non-natives have when writing in English.

Finally, if you are a tutor, supervisor or professor of any nationality, I hope that you will use this book as a resource to help your students improve their scientific writing skills. I imagine that you are generally able to identify the errors in writing made by your students, but you may not have the time or knowledge to explain how to rectify such mistakes.

I am a native English speaker. Should I read this book?

Most certainly. It contains good writing rules that are also found in books written exclusively for a native audience. Even papers written by native speakers are rejected in terms of poor readability i.e. the referee cannot understand what you are trying to say even though your English is grammatically correct. The only chapter that you probably don't need to read is Chap. 2, which deals with word order in English. Also, there are some grammatical rules that you can skip.

How is this book organized?

The book is divided into two parts and the full contents can be seen in the Contents on page xiii. This Contents page also acts as a mini summary of the entire book.

Part 1: Guidelines on how to improve your writing skills and level of readability.

Part 2: Guidelines about what to write in each section (Abstract, Introduction, Methodology etc.), what tenses to use, and typical useful phrases.

I recommend you read all of Part 1 before you start writing your paper. Then refer to specific chapters in Part 2 when you write the various sections of your paper.

Each chapter begins with a very quick summary of its importance. This is followed either by advice from experts in writing and/or science, or by typical comments made by referees in their reports. Many of the comments from the experts were commissioned specifically for this book. The other quotations are referenced in the Links and References section at the back of the book. The referees' comments are extracts from referees' reports, which I have edited to make them more concise and to avoid any technical words. The comments are designed to make you think of typical things referees might say about your work, and thus to warn you of potential pitfalls in your paper.

A typical chapter then proceeds with a series of points for you to take into account when you are carrying out a particular writing task.

Each chapter ends with a summary of the main points.

Chapter 20, the final chapter in the book, contains a checklist of things to check and to consider before sending your manuscript to the journal.

What about grammar?

Chapter 1 covers syntax, i.e. where to position different types of word (nouns, adverbs etc.) within a sentence. Chapter 6 discusses the most common grammatical mistakes that cause ambiguity and which could thus cause your paper to be rejected. Other essential grammar rules are covered in relation to when they are required in specific sections of a paper – see the Index on page 00. Further details on grammar are provided in the companion volume: *English for Research: Usage, Style, and Grammar*.

Are the extracts in this book taken from real papers?

Most of the examples are taken from real published papers, and in some cases the names of the authors and titles of the papers, plus where they can be downloaded, can be found in the Links and References section at the back of the book.

To explain some specific points, I have used original and revised versions of extracts from unpublished papers (i.e. from manuscripts being prepared by my PhD students) – again these are referenced at the back of the book. In a few other cases, I have invented examples.

How do I know if the examples given are good or bad examples?

Example sentences are preceded by an S, e.g. S1, S2. If they contain an asterisk (e.g. S1*) then they are examples of sentences that either contain incorrect English or are not recommended for some other reason. Longer examples are contained in a table. This table contains the original version (OV) and the revised version (RV). Unless otherwise specified, the OVs are all examples of how not to write.

Other books in this series

This book is a part of series of books to help non-native English-speaking researchers to communicate in English. The other titles are:

- English for Presentations at International Conferences
- English for Academic Correspondence and Socializing
- English for Research: Usage, Style, and Grammar
- English for Academic Research: Grammar Exercises
- English for Academic Research: Vocabulary Exercises
- English for Academic Research: Writing Exercises

Acronyms and Abbreviations

I have used and/or coined the following acronyms for use throughout this book.

- KF: key finding (a very important result of your research)
- KFP: key finding paragraph (a paragraph where a key finding is introduced and discussed)
- NS: native speaker (someone whose first language is English)
- NNS: non native speaker (someone whose first language is not English)
- OV: original version
- PV: paraphrased version
- RV: revised version
- S: sentence
- S*: this sentence contains incorrect English

Note: Throughout the book I use X, Y and Z to replace the technical words used by the author of the example text.

Glossary

The definitions below are my definitions of how various terms are used in this book. They should not be considered as official definitions.

adjective: a word that describes a noun (e.g. *significant, usual*)

adverb: a word that describes a verb or appears before an adjective (e.g. *significantly, usually*)

ambiguity: words and phrases that could be interpreted in more than one way

active: use of a personal pronoun/subject before a verb, e.g. *we found that $x = y$* rather than *it was found that $x = y$*

direct object: in the sentence 'I have a book', the book is the direct object

indirect object: in the sentence 'I gave the book to Anna', book is the direct object, and Anna is the indirect object

infinitive: the root part of the verb (e.g. *to learn, to analyze*)

- ing form: the part of the verb that ends in *-ing* and that acts like a noun (e.g. *learning, analyzing*)

link word, linker: words and expressions that connect phrases and sentences together (e.g. *and, moreover, although, despite the fact that*)

manuscript: an unpublished written work that is going to be submitted for publication

modal verb: verbs such as: *can, may, might, could, would, should*

noun: words such as: *a/the paper, a/the result, a/the sample*

paragraph: a series of one or more sentences, the last of which ends with a paragraph symbol (¶)

passive: an impersonal way of using verbs, e.g. *it was found that $x = y$* rather than *we found that $x = y$*

phrase: a series of words that make up part of a sentence

redundancy: words and phrases that could be deleted because they add no value for the reader

section: a principal part of a paper e.g. the Introduction, Results, Discussion

sentence: a series of words ending with a period (.)

Use of initial capital letters

The various section headings used throughout a paper have been given an initial capital letter (Abstract, Introduction, Methodology etc.). An example:

In your discussion of the literature – here *discussion* is used in a general sentence, it could be replaced by a synonym, for instance, *analysis*

In your Discussion you need to – here *Discussion* refers to the Discussion section of the paper.

Tenses

The following tenses are referred to in this book.

FUTURE SIMPLE: *we will study, he will study* etc.

PRESENT SIMPLE: *we study, he studies* etc.

PRESENT CONTINUOUS: *we are studying, he is studying* etc.

PRESENT PERFECT: *we have studied, he has studied* etc.

PRESENT PERFECT CONTINUOUS: *we have been studying, he has been studying* etc.

PAST SIMPLE: *we studied, he studied* etc.

Punctuation

The following punctuation marks are referred to in this book.

.	full stop
,	comma
;	semi colon
()	parentheses
'blah'	single quotes
"blah"	double quotes