

# Language tips for editing assessments

Here are some language tips for when editing and proofreading your next assessment.

\* Please note: the following sample citations are in the APA7 style of referencing.

## 1. Using the right tense

Use the appropriate verb tenses for your purpose and be consistent in your use of them. Review a paragraph from an assessment you are currently working on. What tenses are you using and why?

### Present tense

The present tense is commonly used to put forward facts and to introduce the work of other authors.

Jones (2025) **suggests** that one of the ways in which productivity in the workplace **is** increased **is** through flexible working arrangements. Flexible hours **involves** negotiating tasks and timeframes directly with employees. Managers and employees **work** together to develop suitable start and finishing hours based on the needs of the organisation.

### Present perfect tense

The present perfect tense can be used to describe changes between the recent past and now. You might use this to refer to recent research in your discipline where you want to emphasise a recent change.

Over the last 10 years, large population increases in urban areas **have led** to significant traffic problems and this **has affected** the ability of businesses to conduct regular working hours (Nelson, 2022).

### Past tense

The past tense is used to describe a specific historical event or specific research carried out in the past. You might also use this to contrast with more recent research.

Research **conducted** by Smith (2011) **looked** at links between flexibility and productivity. In her research she **conducted** a survey of 200 businesses. These businesses **provided** staff with flexible and set working arrangements. She **compared** flexible working arrangements to set working hours.

## 2. Subject-verb agreement

Ensure that the right form of the verb is used to match the subject of the sentence. Is the subject singular or plural?

**One of the objectives** of playing sport **is** to increase the ability to stay focused on a task.

The **purpose** of this study **is** not clear.

There **are** a number of **studies** to support this claim.

## 3. Parallel structure

Parallel structure refers to ensuring that verb forms used within a list-like sentence are consistent with each other. In the following sentence, for example, it is important that each list item that follows “analysing” also has an “ing” form of the verb.

The marketing process consists of **analysing** the situation to identify opportunities, **formulating** a strategy for a value proposition, **making** tactical decisions, successfully **implementing** the plan and **monitoring** results.

## 4. Active or passive?

Active and passive verb forms are both used in academic writing. Much will depend on the expectations of your discipline, so look carefully at your readings and how they use active or passive verbs.

Passive forms are typical in many sciences and other disciplines. However, in a reflective writing piece you would use active verbs.

**Active:** **We conducted** the survey over a period of 2 months.

**Passive:** The survey **was conducted** over a period of 2 months.

When citing other sources, both passive and active forms are used in academic writing, depending on whether you want to emphasise the **information** (passive) or the **author** of the information (active). Note how the author’s name is a part of the sentence in the active form.

**Passive:** **It was demonstrated** that heart attacks can be caused by high stress (Sturgeon, 2016).

**Active:** **Sturgeon (2016) demonstrated** that high stress can cause heart attacks.

## 5. Linking phrases

Use linking or transition words to:

- Orientate your reader  
*firstly, secondly, finally*
- Connect ideas  
*in addition, furthermore, therefore, however, also*
- Show similarity between ideas  
*correspondingly, similarly, in the same way*
- Contrast ideas  
*instead, in contrast, in comparison, alternatively, however*

Learn more about [signalling and transitional phrases](#).

## 6. Reducing wordy sentences

Learn to identify where your writing contains too much description or overly complex sentences that obscure the purpose of your communication. Good communication, even of complex ideas, is best embodied by the simplest possible grammatical structures. Think carefully about the purpose of the sentence and ask yourself these questions:

- Could I write a simpler sentence that would still express the same idea?
- Have I repeated any words unnecessarily? Could I remove words that don't add any meaning?  
*very, basically, really, quite*
- Is my text too conversational? Avoid using 'you'.  
*... when you think about it.*  
*What I want to tell you about today is ...*  
*You know this is crucial for ...*
- Could I replace a longer phrase with a simpler word or phrase?  
*it is crucial that >> **should***  
*considering the fact that >> **because***  
*despite the fact that >> **although***

Here is an example of a wordy sentence in need of an edit:

Moreover and in summary, the reason for this is that certain technological advances in online communication around the world in the twenty-first century have in many ways impacted quite dramatically upon the way we manage time (despite the fact that these technological advances have often come with the promise of saving time).

Here is an edited, more concise version of that sentence:

Recent advances in global online communication have impacted negatively upon our ability to manage time, despite the often repeated promises of saving time.

Want to learn more about writing assessment tasks?

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