

# IGA – Academic and Project Writing

## Seminar 5

### Homework Task from seminar 4:

\* Write a short essay 200 – 300 words (2-3 paragraphs max) giving your own opinion on how to keep your heart and cardiovascular system healthy. Think about general knowledge you have learnt over time for this.

\* You could also consider information such as: how exercising is beneficial for health, eating a healthy diet and reducing unhealthy foods, managing stress, avoiding smoking, getting enough sleep etc.

\* Think about using some of the concepts we have been discussing (nominalisation, formal language, etc). It's short, so think about how to include relevant information (eg introduction, main body, conclusion) in such a brief text.

\* Upload your writing onto MS Teams prior to the next class, Please name it again, eg. Floyd HW4 etc.

\* Be prepared to share and peer review it with the group next week.

## Passive and Active Voice

### 1. Passive and active voice

\* When and why **is the passive voice used** in academic writing? This question can be confusing...

\* When do **we use the active voice** in academic writing? I get confused regarding this question...

The active voice is used for most non-scientific writing as using it often results in clearer language and sentences, and stops the sentences from becoming too wordy or complicated. Fewer words are needed to express an action in the active voice and so using it often results in shorter, more concise sentences.

The active voice can help ensure clarity by making it clear to the reader who is taking action in the sentence. In addition, the active voice stresses that the actor (or grammatical subject) precedes the verb, again, putting emphasis on the subject.

The order of words in a sentence with active voice is subject - verb - object.

- ***I am including*** further details about the budget and its management in this application.
  - This sentence structure puts the emphasis of the sentence on the subject, clarifying who is conducting the study.

Passive voice is used much more often in scientific and academic writing as the focus is shifted from the author and researchers, on to the topic or activity – which is the real focus of the writing. It is considered to be more objective and fact based in its tone as research and conclusions can be drawn without the authors taking centre stage in the writing.

You can usually recognise passive voice as the construction contains the verb 'be' in some form, eg. am, is, was, were, are, been (subjects were recruited, the study group was blinded...etc).

- Details about the budget and its management **are included** in the application.
  - In this sentence, it is not clear who conducted this study, the focus is no longer on the author but on the activity.

## 2. Use of active and passive voice in scholarly writing

According to the APA, writers should select verb tenses and voice carefully. Consider these examples to help determine which form of the verb is most appropriate:

*This study will be conducted within the European Union Framework.*

vs

*I will be conducting the study within the European Union framework.*

The passive voice is considered to be acceptable in the APA style and may often be appropriate, especially in scientific writing when writing about methods and data collection.

However, students often overuse the passive voice in their writing, which means their emphasis in the sentence is not on the action taker. Their writing is also at risk of being repetitive. Consider the following paragraph in which the passive voice is used in each sentence:

*A survey **was administered**. Using a convenience sample, 68 teachers **were invited** to participate in the survey by emailing them an invitation. E-mail addresses of teachers who fit the requirements for participation **were provided by the principal of the school**. The teachers **were e-mailed** an information sheet and a consent form. Responses **were collected** from 45 teachers...*

VS

*In this study, **I administered** a survey. **I created** a convenience sample of 68 teachers. **I invited** them to participate in the survey by emailing them an invitation. **I obtained** e-mail addresses from the principal of the school...*

VS

*In this study, **I administered** a survey using a convenience sample. Sixty-eight teachers **were invited** to participate in the survey. **The principal of the school provided** me with the e-mail addresses of teachers who fit the requirements for participation. **I e-mailed** the teachers an information sheet and a consent form. A total of **45 teachers responded**...*

### **Conclusion:**

Remember, use voice strategically. The APA recommends the active voice for clarity for the majority of writing. However, the passive voice may be used, with intention, to remove the emphasis from the subject, as a method for varying sentence structure, to change the focus onto the activity and to create objectivity, particularly in scientific writing.

There is a general trend nowadays of using the active voice in writing, but consider some of the above examples and some uses of the passive voice that may be useful to implement in your writing. Think about the importance of the message to the reader, and whether the focus needs to be on the subject or the activity in the writing. Also consider the writing from an objective standpoint, how close or distant the author should be from what is being written.

### **3. Structure**

**Active voice** (the subject is the performer of the action):

- The group conducted the study in 2010.
- The researchers have carried out many experiments in order to determine the correct conclusion.

**Passive voice** (the subject is the receiver of the action):

- The study was conducted by the group in 2010.
- Many experiments were carried out by the researchers, in order to determine the correct conclusion.

Adapted from: ([https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general\\_writing/academic\\_writing/active\\_and\\_passive\\_voice/index.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/academic_writing/active_and_passive_voice/index.html))

- ▶ 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 only use the passive voice when you 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>)

#### 4. Which of the sentence pairs below could be appropriate for academic writing and why?

- 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.
- e) We have developed a new, cutting edge technique that may help to revolutionise both open and arthroscopic surgery, and from early March it will be used routinely in our daily surgery here.

f) A new, cutting-edge surgical technique has been developed, which may help to revolutionise both open and arthroscopic surgery, and will be used routinely in our daily surgery here.

g) In total, 500 subjects will be recruited for the study, before being randomised into the 3 different treatment groups and the control group.

h) We plan to recruit 500 subjects in total for the study, then they will be randomised into the 3 different treatment groups and a control group.

**5. Now rewrite the sentences below as passive sentences:**

a) They built the main hospital building in approximately 1 and a half years.

b) He has designed the experiment so that it can be completed with only a minimal budget.

c) It is essential that the applicant follows the required structure for the grant proposal.

d) She should complete recruiting all of her subjects by the end of January.

e) A good proposal presents facts that support the arguments contained in the text.

f) The Abstract briefly illustrates the main points of the proposal.

**6. Fill the gaps in the text below with the correct form of the verb (active or passive):** 10 mins

A research proposal \_\_\_\_\_ (differ) in important respects from other forms of writing with which students are more familiar, such as an academic essay or a research paper. Instead of trying to reach a minimum length (e.g., 7 pages or 2000 words), you must achieve discrete goals within a specified space constraint (e.g., 2 pages or 750 words). Many students \_\_\_\_\_ (find) this shift challenging, but

the process of writing a proposal is essential for organizing your exciting ideas and prioritizing your next steps.

While an essay or a research paper \_\_\_\_\_ (require) an overall argument and provides evidence to support it, a research proposal \_\_\_\_\_ (organize) around questions to which the author does not yet have answers. A good research proposal does make an argument of a particular sort: its purpose is to convince readers that the questions are worth trying to answer and that the author has a concrete plan for doing so. A good proposal and, by extension, a solid research agenda \_\_\_\_\_ (structure) around a central interpretive problem that \_\_\_\_\_ (break down) into a series of smaller, more specific questions. Even if you begin with a topic that just seems fascinating, you \_\_\_\_\_ (find) that you have lots of different kinds of questions about its historiography and history. As you work toward a proposal, try to isolate and prioritize those questions: Which questions do you most want to find the answers to? Which questions can you realistically answer? If they are not the same, how might you reconcile what you \_\_\_\_\_ (want) to discover with what can \_\_\_\_\_ (discover) through independent research?

## 7. The passive voice and reporting verbs

The passive voice is often used in scientific writing in conjunction with reporting verbs.

*\* Complete the sentences below, putting the verb in brackets in the correct passive form:*

- a) From the rigorous literature review conducted, it \_\_\_\_\_ (establish) that there are in fact, many different classifications of long bone disease, used in orthopaedics worldwide.
- b) Although academic malpractice \_\_\_\_\_ (allege) by one previous author, no concrete evidence to substantiate this claim was submitted at any point.
- c) Although similar results \_\_\_\_\_ (claim) in several previous studies to date, poor methodological detail has made them impossible to verify.
- d) In an earlier study, it \_\_\_\_\_ (propose) that unless a more homogenous subject population is recruited, a lack of correlation between chronic pain and disability is unlikely to be established.
- e) Similarly, in one previous research paper this characteristic \_\_\_\_\_ (acknowledge) by the authors to be highly significant.
- f) Our research group aims to improve the current state of knowledge on this controversial question, and it \_\_\_\_\_ (hope) that these difficult questions that \_\_\_\_\_ (debate) for so long, may finally be clarified.

## 8. Forms of quantity

Here are some more things to look for with your academic writing, in relation to quantifying different things.

\* 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.

### 8.1. Correct use of quantity words:

\* Read 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.....*much* research.

\* Other examples of uncountable words?

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

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

- |  |                      |
|--|----------------------|
| - considerable / substantial (decent or fairly big size) | - small              |
| - 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 of* = 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).

## 8.2 What do the following quantity expressions mean?

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

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

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

### Homework Task:

\* *Find an example of your own academic writing – eg. an abstract, a section of an introduction / methodology / conclusion / research proposal etc.*

\* *Look at the language used in the writing and underline / highlight examples of the passive / active voice used in the writing. Also look at the language more generally in terms of use of formal / academic language, nominalisation, academic style, etc.*

\* *Reflect on the writing, (make some notes if needed) on how you think it may be improved, what was good about it, etc.*

\* *Upload your writing onto MS Teams prior to the next class - please name it again, eg. Floyd HW5 etc.*

\* *Be prepared to share and peer review it with the group next week.*