



Improving Your Writing

Teaching and Learning Unit Faculty of Economics and Commerce



Introduction

International students in the Faculty are naturally worried about their English language skills. In particular, they are concerned that their writing skills are not good enough. However, **everyone** can learn to improve their writing skills. This is very much a part of graduate-level education.

The following points should encourage all students who feel that their English is 'not good enough':

- Everybody (including your lecturers) are working on improving their writing—literacy is very much a life-long commitment for all (native speakers included!)
- No-one who writes well does so because they are “naturals”—they have worked hard at it
- English is a complex language with many different influences (see the video: *The Adventure of English*). If you are finding it hard, it is entirely to be expected
- Your commitment to learning how to write better is vital for your future career—regardless of subject area. Good English literacy is truly a “generic” skill that is as important—possibly more important—than subject knowledge acquired. Your efforts will eventually be rewarded.

The following Helpsheet consists of examples of real student writing with suggested re-writes. It should be read in conjunction with the **TLU Helpsheets: Readability and Punctuation** and the Booklet: **Good Writing**.

Some General Tips

Here are some simple tips that help international students greatly.

1. Don't Overload the Sentence

Good writing never *overloads the reader's memory*. Bad writing frequently does (see **Example 1** below). Avoid lots of noun phrases, compound nouns (nouns added to nouns) adjectives and adverbs. Make sure there is a **main verb** in every sentence that explains what is *happening* and a **main subject** that explains *who or what* is doing the action.

2. Don't Write Long Sentences

A simple way to fix bad writing is to *shorten your sentences*. You can't write a good long sentence if you can't write a good short one. Keeping the sentences short minimises grammatical mistakes. You have better control over short sentences.

3. Keep the Subject of the Sentence at the start with the Main Verb nearby

You would be surprised how this simple rule can help. Read **Example 1** below once again. The subject is “Globalisation” but *this word is not even in the sentence!* The re-write begins with the main subject and the main verb close together at the start of the sentence (underlined). Doesn't it make a big difference?

4. Don't Copy what you Read

Sometimes you read articles that are written by professionals *for* professionals. Sometimes good academic articles by professionals are *not that well written* (but they have good ideas). They are thick with jargon and complex language. Trying to copy this style will lead to disaster. It will make you very anxious because writing in this style will be uncomfortable for you. You are **not expected** to write in a sophisticated academic style. Forget what you might have been told by your English teachers at home. You should concentrate on **clarity** not trying to “sound academic”.

5. Edit your Work

Good writing is subject to constant editing. See **TLU Helpsheet: Editing and Proofreading**.

Example 1

Because the economy of each country is becoming a close relationship and every country need depend on some aspect of the economy in other country more or less every country needs these people who have the experience of studying overseas in order to develop the business with other countries.

Suggested Re-write

[Globalisation has affected the relationship between different countries and their economies.] Each country's economy [now] has a close relationship with the economies of other countries. Every country needs and depends on some aspect of the economy of other countries. [For example ...]

There are two main reasons for this. Every country needs people who have the experience studying overseas. This experience helps to develop business with other countries [and this, in turn, improves local businesses]. Secondly ... [argument continues]

NB: In the following examples—from actual student writing—have followed bad examples—in *italics*—with a rewrite in **bold** text. Suggestions for writing occur in bullet points.

Examples 2 and 3

- There is often a problem with word arrangement in your writing—which words need to be changed in the following passage? (There is also a plural form mistake here—can you spot it?)
- A good idea is not to use “etc.” like this at the end of sentence—spell out the idea/ example or drop the “etc.” Don't be lazy—it reads too informally! Avoid long sentences if you have trouble with grammar. The passages below are awkward to read and unclear. Try putting a full-stop in and making two sentences. (You will need to use “it” to begin the next sentence).

This software reduced drastically the number of hours needed to collect the data from all the lenders and it also performs repetitive calculation such as month by month repayments, deferred or payments position, etc.

This software drastically reduces the number of hours needed to collect the data from all the lenders. It also performs repetitive calculations such as month-by-month repayments, and deferred or payments position.

The cost of the Finance Finder program, for single user version, is \$799 and is targeted mainly at the accounting profession but can be used by anyone who needs up-to-date information regarding interest rates.

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Example 4

- In the following passage there is a preposition error and a plural form error. It is also a bit unclear—“recession” applies to every item in the list that follows it, but there is no such thing as a recession of corporate upheaval or recession of increasing demand of temporary accountants!!! Can you rewrite this so that it is clear? (incidentally, we don't usually say “recession of the economy” we say “economic recession”).

More senior accountants leave permanent employment and do contract work because of the recession of the economy, corporate upheaval, and increasing demand of temporary accountant.

Senior accountants leave permanent employment and do contract work because of economic recessions. Other reasons for them leaving permanent employment include corporate upheavals and the increasing demand for temporary accountants.

Example 5

- Tense errors/inconsistencies are frequent mistakes in your writing. Fix up this next example. You will need to think of a better word than “specialities” which can't be used as a noun here—try another form of the word.

Companies become confident of contract accountants who has specialities such as corporate advisors, tax and EDP experts, treasury experts and internal auditor.

Companies are confident in using contract accountants. They also have specialist corporate advisors, tax and EDP experts, treasury experts and internal auditors.

- There is a redundancy problem in the next passage—one word is entirely unnecessary. There is also a plural form mistake. You might also like to clarify this sentence by splicing it into two. It's also a good idea not to lump figures together like this. If you want to make an impact on the reader, give a new sentence for a new figure. (What does your eye tend to read, the 6% or the more impressive figure 30%?)
- Remember the rules of capitals here.

Example 6

Honda's president announced that this year car production in japan will be increased 6% more than last year and car sale in japan will be increased 30% in 4 years.

Honda's President announced that car production in Japan will increase 6% more this year than last year. Car sales in Japan will also increase 30% in 4 years.

- In the passage below, there is a plural form error and also a redundancy. Word ending problems abound. There is also the misuse of an article in the second sentence. The verb "launch" reads oddly next to "increase" (how does one set in motion [in order] to increase something?) Perhaps the writer means: "new models will be launched **so that** domestic sales can increase." (?)

Example 7

Honda's domestic production decreased 13%, but oversea production increased 17%. With the improving efficiency and high technology production, new models will be launches to increase vast domestic sales.

Honda's domestic production decreased 13%, but overseas production increased 17%. With improving efficiency and high production, new models will be launched. This will ensure that domestic sales can increase.

- Word ending problems and missing words are the features of the next example. There is also a major tense difficulty. The simple future tense ("will drop") is mixed up with the past perfect tense ("has been") so it is quite unclear when the events being described actually occurred.

Example 8

Export will drop 3% next year, since the manufacturing has been shift to close the market and reduce the cost.

Exports will drop 3% next year. This is because manufacturing has closed the market (?) This has led to a reduction in costs.

Example 9

- The next example exhibits word ending difficulties and tense confusion. The sentence needs to be spliced into two for ease of comprehension. Watch out for the redundancy

in the last line.

Organisation has to be carefully analyse their current position, their future desired position and then lay plans that will lead to the involvement approach that fits them, because there is no universally best approach for all organisations.

Organisations have to carefully analyse their current position and their future desired position. They then need to make plans that will lead to the best approach. This is because there is no universal approach for all organisations.

Example 10

- This example reverses the order between the topic sentence and the examples that should follow it. The passage would be much clearer if it began "There are several key factors.....") .

Current organisation operations approach such as management system, work design approach that has been implemented, presence of a union organisation are several key factors which have to be studied in choosing which approach to be implemented.

There are several key factors that have to be studied when choosing the approach to be implemented. These approaches include the management system and the work design approach. These approaches have to be implemented in the presence of a union organisation.

Example 11

- The next sentence is far too long—as it stands it makes no sense at all! Try splicing the sentence and getting rid of some of the unnecessary words (why say "studied and considered" when one expression will do? What is the difference between "implement" and "operate"?)

The values and beliefs of management, employee and society (key participants) are important aspects to be studied and considered in the approach deciding process in order to implement the approach fully and to operate effectively.

The values and beliefs of management, employees and society (key participants) are important aspects to be studied. They are important in order to implement the approach deciding process. They are also necessary for the process to operate effectively.

Example 12

- In the next passage there are articles missing. The first sentence is also too long. (Splice it after “used”, cut out “because” and commence with “These”.) Can you think of a better verb than “uses” in the first line to avoid the repetition with “used” in the second line? What is the difference between “situations” and “approaches”—will one word do the job?
- Look at how many times “approach” is used. Avoid the repetition.

Organization should consider the kind of work it does and the technology it uses in deciding which approach to be used because these two aspects cannot be easily changed in some situations and approaches. The degree of interdependence among individuals and degree of complexity in technology are critical influences on the involvement approach selection.

The organization should consider the kind of work it does and the technology it employs in deciding the approach to be used. These two aspects cannot be easily changed in some situations. There are two critical influences on the selection of the involvement approach: the degree of interdependence among individuals and the degree of technological complexity.

Example 13

- Articles are missing in the next example. Uses dashes (—) instead of commas in the first line to draw attention to the important material that follows. Delete “to” in the first line.
- This example is also unclear because there is no topic sentence introducing the high involvement approach. It begins with an elaboration of the idea but there’s no introduction. Try using some connector words like “firstly,” “secondly” etc., in the second sentence and splice this sentence into two.

High involvement, also called business involvement approach, allows people to at the lowest level to contribute in the total organisation performance, not just in group performance. This is the most complex approach to be implemented because every features of “control” organisation has to be redesigned “innovatively”, the technology for the approach has not been yet fully developed and this is still “new” for management.

The high involvement approach is a very important one in management. The high involvement approach—also called the business involvement

approach—allows people to contribute to every aspect of the organisation’s performance. They do not just contribute to group performance. This is the most complex approach to be implemented. This is so for two reasons. Firstly, every feature of “control” organisation has to be redesigned “innovatively”. Secondly, the technology for the approach has not been yet fully developed and this is still “new” for management.

Example 14

- The next example begins with a topic sentence and follows nicely with examples/elaborations/contrasts. It is a good paragraph in other ways too—note the use of connectors: “because”, “however”, “and finally”. Note also the use of the reference word “this” in the second sentence to avoid the repetition of the “job involvement approach”. Do you notice how clear it is compared with the previous examples?
- The problems with it are: missing word endings, verbs and prepositions. There is also a problem with the list given in the first sentence—does the writer really mean “less turnover” or the opposite?

The job involvement approach bring productivity and quality improvement, less absenteeism and turnover. This structure seem to be more stable compared with parallel suggestion because the cohesiveness of the team. However, this approach often fail to capture individual contribution to strategic decisions and works. This approach often resisted by middle manager and need some significant costs for employee training (individual job enrichment and teams). And finally, it may cancelled if it does not influence higher-level decision making concerning organizational structure and rewards allocation.

The job involvement approach brings productivity and quality improvement, less absenteeism and more turnover. This structure seem to be more stable compared with the parallel suggestion because the cohesiveness of the team. However, this approach often fails to capture individual contributions to strategic decisions and work. This approach is often resisted by middle managers and needs some significant costs in terms of employee training (individual job enrichment and teams). And finally, it may be cancelled if it does not influence high-level decision-making concerning organisational structure and rewards allocation.

Example 15

- Missing words occur in this next example. There is also some unnecessary/incorrect preposition use. Avoid the unnecessary repetition of “different” by conjoining “situations and results.”
- The second last sentence makes no sense—rewrite it so it does make sense.
- There is also some confusion about numbers here. The writer begins talking about “three approaches” and then talks about “four features”. Presumably the writer means the four things listed: histories, advocates, advantages and disadvantages. If so, the writer needs to distinguish the four features from the three approaches somehow.

These three approaches encourage employee participation in decision making. Yet, organisations interested in implementing the approaches have to know their different histories, advocates, advantages and disadvantages, and then strategically choose the best approach which fits for the organization. The approaches move the four features to the lowest level of organization in different degree to fit different situations and produce different results. The movement degree will determine the core management which concentrates the features the least, to high involvement management which moves the features the most. The approaches compete each other to some degree, but one is not always better than others.

There are three main approaches to ... These are : 1, .. 2 ... and 3[unstated] These three approaches encourage employee participation in decision making. Yet, organisations interested in implementing the approaches have to know four important features of an organization: their different histories, advocates, advantages and disadvantages. They then need to strategically choose the best approach which fits the organization. The approaches make the four features relevant to the lowest level of the organization. Each approach is used in different ways to fit different situations and results. The movement degree, for example, will determine the core management approach. This concentrates the features the least. By contrast, the high involvement management uses the features the most. The three approaches compete with each other to some degree, but one is not always better than the any other.

Example 16

- Missing verbs and articles abound in this next example. The sentences are also too long—try shortening the first sentence after “effectively” and using “It also solves” to begin the next sentence.

Quality Circles, one of suggestion involvement approach that uses group, function more effectively and solve problems more efficiently than individual written suggestion approach. Advanced quality circles program also train employee in problem solving analysis and strategic quality control. Quality circles program is easy to implement and does not change existing organisational structure.

Quality Circles is one of the suggestion involvement approaches that uses group, functions more effectively. It also solves problems more efficiently than the individual written suggestion approach. The Advanced Quality Circles Program also trains employee in problem solving analysis and strategic quality control. The Quality Circles Program is easy to implement and does not change existing organisational structure.