English for Academic Research

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English for Academic Research: Writing Exercises

Springer

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Preface

Aim of the book and coverage

The book is aimed at postgraduate students, PhD students and researchers whose first language is not English. It is assumed that you have already reached a sufficient level of English to write a research paper, thesis or dissertation.

The book covers all the writing skills that will help you to get a positive reaction from the reviewers of your manuscript, and thus improve your chances of publication. When reviewers say that the level of the English in a manuscript is 'poor', they are often referring not to grammar or vocabulary issues, but to readability problems (see the second section on page vii), such as poor structure, sentences being too long, redundancy, and ambiguity. All these problems, and many more, are dealt with in this book.

Structure of the book, self–study and classroom use

Sections 1–9 of the book practice particular writing skills. Section 10 brings all these skills together in exercises on writing specific sections of a manuscript – from the Abstract to the Acknowledgements. Around half of the exercises in Sections 1–9 can be done rapidly, without the aid of a teacher. They are thus suitable for self study. Other exercises require you to write extended pieces of text, which you will need to have corrected by your teacher or a native speaker of English. Each part begins with cross references to other books in the series (see the first section on page vii).

Instructions and keys to the exercises

Instructions to exercises are in *italics*. Examples of how to do the exercises are shaded in grey.

> If there is no example given and you are not sure how to do the exercise, look at the first question in the exercise and then the answer to that question in the key.

The keys (solutions) to the exercise appear immediately below the exercise, but in a smaller font. The idea is that you don't have to flip to the back of the book to find the answers. This should speed up the process of doing the exercises. In a few cases, there is no key because there are unlimited ways of answering the exercise.

In any case, you should consider the keys as being suggested answers. There may be several possible answers. If in doubt, consult with your English teacher.

Word and phrases in [parentheses] indicate that these are alternative solutions to the ones outside parentheses, but they are probably less commonly used.

Word and phrases separated by a slash (e.g. *which/that*) indicate that both solutions are equally valid.

Language and 'facts' used in this book

A few of the texts may contain technical language that you may not be familiar with. However, it is not necessary to understand every word in each sentence in order to be able to do the exercise. But if you find that the technical language of one particular exercise is an obstacle to you being able to complete the exercise, then simply ignore that exercise and do the next. In fact, the book has been designed to give practice of the same writing skill in more than one exercise.

Most of the facts, statistics and authors' names contained in the exercises have been invented. Some are designed to be humorous. Academic writing can be quite heavy and you may find you are more motivated to do some exercises if there is an element of fun involved. You are thus encouraged to invent data and information. All the exercises reflect the typical style of academic works and many are based on real texts. So whether you are using true facts or inventing your own, the kind of language and constructions you use will be in the same academic style.

Cross referencing with other books in the series

This book is divided into ten parts. At the beginning of each part is a list of the writing skills practiced in the exercises. These skills are cross referenced to two other books in the series:

English for Research: Grammar, Usage and Style – designed to resolve your doubts about the grammar, usage and style of academic English.

English for Writing Research Papers – everything you need to know about how to write a paper that referees will recommend for publication.

This means that you can check how to use a particular writing skill before you start doing the related exercise. Grammar (e.g. the use of articles and tenses) and vocabulary are covered in:

English for Academic Research: Grammar Exercises
English for Academic Research: Vocabulary Exercises

Other books in the series that you might find useful are:

English for Academic Correspondence – tips for responding to editors and referees, networking at conferences, understanding fast-talking native English speakers, using Google Translate, and much more. No other book like this exists on the market.

English for Presentations at International Conferences – all the tricks for overcoming your fear of presenting in English at a conference.

English for Interacting on Campus – tips for: socializing with fellow students, addressing professors, participating in lectures, improving listening skills and pronunciation, surviving in a foreign country.

To find out how the manuals are cross-referenced with the exercise books go to: http://www.springer.com/series/13913

Focus on readability

Your main aim is to get your paper published. The people who determine whether your paper will be published are the editors of the journal and the referees who review your paper.

Readability. This is the key concern of referees. If a paper is not readable it cannot be published. If a paper contains a limited number of grammatical and lexical errors, it can still be published, because such errors rarely prevent the reader from understanding the paper.

Readability relates to the amount of effort the reader has to make in order to understand what you have written. Readability is affected by the following factors:

- sentence length (sentences longer than 30 words are generally hard to assimilate without having to be read twice)
- lack of structure (within a sentence, paragraph or section)
- redundancy (i.e. words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs and sections that add no value for the reader)
- ambiguity and lack of clarity (i.e. the reader is not sure how to interpret a phrase)

A low level of readability is associated with authors who are more interested in expressing themselves in an 'elegant' or 'academic' way, rather than on focusing on what the reader really wants/needs to read, and the best way to make this information immediately clear to the reader. English has increasingly become a reader-oriented language, in which authors feel a responsibility to help their readers, rather than impress them. This does not mean that English has become a simple language and that it has limited expressive power. It means that, when it is written well, it cuts out any unnecessary information, and presents all the useful information in a way that clearly shows the connections between ideas. Ideally, it does not leave gaps for the reader to fill in, nor does it adopt vague language and thus force the reader to make interpretations. Bear in mind, however, that there are still many native English writers whose aim seems to be to obscure rather than enlighten!

Think about what you like reading on the web. You probably appreciate:

- ease in finding the information you want
- short sentences and paragraphs containing only relevant information
- white space, no dense blocks of text
- no distractors (e.g. pop ups, animations, links in every other sentence)

When you write your paper, bear the above in mind. Think about what you like reading, then try to write in a style that will make reading your paper a pleasurable experience for your audience. Make it easy for readers to find what they want and to absorb it. Don't create distractors: so no redundant words and phrases, misspellings, pointless or difficult tables and figures. And don't make your readers wait for key information or force them to read something twice before they can understand it.

A note for teachers

This book of exercises is designed to be used in conjunction with *English for Writing Research Papers*, which is part of the same series of books.

I have tried to cover what I consider to be the most important aspects of writing, particularly the ones that are likely to cause a paper to be rejected. Exercises on grammar and vocabulary can be found in the other volumes of this series.

Many of the exercises, particularly those in Chapters 1-5, can be set as homework as they are quick to do and contain a key. The key is on the same page as the exercise. Simply tell the students to cover the key while they are doing the exercise.

Also the extended exercises (e.g. those in Chapter 10) can be done at home.

I suggest that you use classtime to:

- explain the theory (you can prepare by yourself using the relevant sections from *English for Writing Research Papers*)
- go over the exercises

For full details on how to exploit all the books in the English for Academic series, see:

English for Academic Research: A Guide for Teachers

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