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Grammar & Style

1. Grammar

1.1 Tenses

1.2 Punctuation

2. Style

2.1 Coherency

2.2 Phrasing

2.3 Brevity



1 Grammar

Grammar Is Not a Time of Waste

Bart Simpson

1.1 Tenses

Abstract

present simple

«The flow **depends** largely on the distribution of density...»

«We **report** the first observation and quantification of...»

Introduction

truths: present simple

«There **is** an increasing need for...»

«Gaseous forms of carbon and nitrogen **are** important products of...»

past studies: present perfect

«In the past, geophysical methods **have been used** to study...»

«Recent studies in French Guiana **have suggested** the existence...»

this study: present simple

«Here we **present** a strategy for imaging...»

«Our data **challenge** some widely held assumptions about...»

1.1 Tenses

Methods

experiments, processing steps: **past simple**

«Temperature **was measured**...»

«Generic probes **were used** as positive and negative controls...»

Results

figures, tables, theories: **present simple**

«Figure 1 **shows** the photo of...»

«The acquisition parameters **are summarised** in Table 2...»

«According to equilibrium theory, the rate **depends** on...»

observations, findings: **past simple**

«Soils **were** slightly alkaline with a mean pH of...»

«Two variants **were found**...»

1.1 Tenses

Discussion

truths, implications: **present simple**

«Understanding a glacier's mass balance **is** crucial...»

«This **suggests** that biovolume **is** a better indicator...»

past studies: **present perfect**

«Recently, it **has been found** that...»

«Other studies **have indicated** that...»

Conclusions

this paper: **past simple**

«We **showed** that...»

«Our transcriptomic analysis **revealed** that...»

prospectives: **simple future**

«The kinetic parameters **will inform** future models...»

«The influence of iron **will be** the object of future research...»

1.1 Tenses

Acknowledgments

present simple

«We **thank**...»

«I **am** grateful to...»

1.2 Punctuation

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1.2 Punctuation

Full Stop .

mark the end of a sentence

«Carbon is stored by live vegetation.»

indicate abbreviated words

«Growth rates of e.g. taxa...»

punctuate numbers and dates

«They range from 0.1–1.1 µm...»

Comma ,

ensure correct reading of long sentences

«When we began sampling the four sites in 2016, there was...»

set off parentheses or contrasts

«High porosity, as an indicator for potential aeration, is likely to enhance...»

separate items in a list

«We performed an S-wave reflection survey, MASW, and ERT...»

1.2 Punctuation

Colon :

indicate a list, quotation, calculation or summary

«Fluxes were calculated as follows:»

separate an initial clause from a second clause, list, phrase or quotation that supports the first

«This is in line with previous observations: that epiphytes only grow...»

Semicolon ;

separate two complete sentences that are closely linked

«We attributed this to the presence of biogas in the pore spaces; the presence of biogas is a fact well-known for this site.»

use as second level of punctuation in a series of words which already have commas

«Only Elasmognatha, a clade of air-breathing land snails, were found at this site; one family being the...»

1.2 Punctuation

Hyphen -

Compound words

«process-based»

«oxygen-rich»

Dash —

use as colon or semicolon

«This is in line with previous observations — that epiphytes only grow...»

«We attributed this to the presence of biogas in the pore spaces — the presence of biogas is a fact well-known for this site.»

use as comma or parentheses

«High porosity — as an indicator for potential aeration — is likely to enhance...»

1.2 Punctuation

Apostrophe '

Contractions

«Don't» (do not)

«It'll» (it will)

Possessives

«Henry's law»

«The valleys' area»

«It's» is the contraction of «it is».
«It's» is **not** a possessive.

Quotation Marks “ ” or ‘ ’

Quote a source

«Smith et al. (2014) write that microbubbles “are indicators of...”»

«Wang et al. (2010) define resource availability as ‘the presence of...’»

Indicate a quotation by quotation marks only. Punctuate the rest as usual.

«Garcia et al. (2018) claim that “the effects of material properties are...”»

«Martin et al. (2012) suggested ‘plasma polymerisation should...’»

«Rossi et al. (2016) draw two conclusions: “X-ray microscopy is...”»

Do **not** insert additional punctuation marks.

«Garcia et al. (2018) claim that, “the effects of material properties are...”»

«Martin et al. (2012) suggested: ‘plasma polymerisation should...’»

«Rossi et al. (2016) draw two conclusions: — “X-ray microscopy is...”»

1.2 Punctuation

Parentheses ()

include extra information

«To keep filtration time as short as possible (typically < 10 min)...»

include references, abbreviations, manufacturers, etc.

«(Mayr et al., 2020)»

«The halfsaturation constant (K_m)...»

«Polycarbonate membrane filters (Whatman, UK)...»

Brackets []

add to or change a quotation

«Smith et al. (2014) write that “microbubbles [bubbles smaller than one hundredth of a millimetre] are indicators of...”»

«According to Mayr et al. (2020), “[t]he absence of these taxa from the lake sediment enabl[ed]...”»

«Garcia et al. (2018) claim that “the effects of material properties [on microbial adhesion] are...”»

Ellipsis ...

leave out part of a quotation

«According to Mayr et al. (2020), “[t]he absence of these taxa [...] enables...”»

1.2 Punctuation

Exclamation mark !

indicate surprise, anger, or alarm

«Use exclamation marks very sparingly!»

Question mark ?

ask a question

«Speciation on islands: what are we learning?»

2 Style

Choose Your Words Wisely

2.1 Coherency

2.1.1 Paragraph Structure

- spatial or temporal
- general → specific
- specific → general
- least important → most important
- most important → least important
- familiar → unfamiliar
- simple → complex
- certain → uncertain

spatial

large-scale → «Globally, wetland soils are at risk of conversion and
mid-scale → destruction [...]. This is particularly relevant in East Africa [...].
small-scale → Even protected wetlands in Kenya have [...].»

certain → uncertain

certain → «Stratified lakes accumulate methane in their bottom waters.
possible → During lake overturn, stored methane may reach the surface
unknown → layer [...]. [T]he fate of methane during the overturn period is
still a matter of controversy.»

2.1 Coherency

2.1.2 Relational Devices

Parallelism

«First, ... Second, ... Third, ...»

Repetition

Use for clarity.

! Use in moderation

«To quantify [...] cell numbers, we applied CARD-FISH. Samples were fixed [...] onto [...] filters. Filters were embedded in [...] agarose, cells were permeabilized [...] for 70 min at 37 °C and peroxidases inactivated [...] for 10 min [...]. Filters were incubated for 2.5 h at 46 °C [...]. After washing, filters were placed into the amplification buffer [...] for 30 min at 37 °C [...]. DAPI was used for counterstaining cells and the filters were mounted on glass slides [...]»

Transitional Expressions

Use for variety.

«however», «nevertheless», «on the other hand», «in contrast»

«therefore», «consequently», «as a result»

2.2 Phrasing

2.2.1 Useful Phrases

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2.2 Phrasing

2.2.2 Paraphrasing

! Do **not** plagiarise

Elements of paraphrasing

- use different vocabulary
- use different structure
- retain meaning
- retain key words and phrases

Techniques for paraphrasing

«Mangrove forests are frequently inundated by brackish water.»

change vocabulary

«Mangrove **stands** are **often flooded** by **estuarial** water.»

change word order, exchange active ↔ passive

«Brackish water **inundates** mangrove forests **frequently**.»

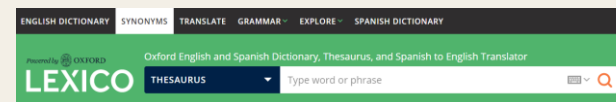
change word class

«Mangrove forests are subjected to **frequent inundation** by brackish water.»

combine techniques

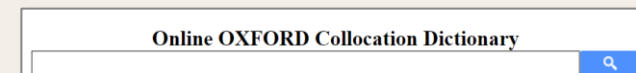
«**Brackish water flooding of mangrove stands is frequent**.»

Use online thesauri for synonyms



[lexico.com/thesaurus](https://www.lexico.com/thesaurus)

Use online collocation dictionaries for common word combinations



[freecollocation.com](https://www.freecollocation.com)

2.3 Brevity



- Keep it short and simple
- Be stingy with words
- Have one idea per sentence
- Use the active form
- Use positive phrases
- Use concrete terms

«we used the method» not «the method was used»

«the results are different» not «the results are not the same»

«it will be published in Nature» not «it will be published in a reputable journal»



- Don't write in «sophisticated style»
- Save on adjectives and adverbs
- Avoid unnecessary constructions
- Don't nominalise
- Don't use empty modifiers
- Don't use tautologous modifiers

e.g. «It is clear that», «the fact is that», «in an attempt to», «in order to»

«reduce» not «achieve a reduction in length»

e.g. «basically», «indeed», «quite», «actually»

e.g. «completely finish», «may potentially», «ultimate result», «blue in colour»

2.3 Brevity



«In this presentation, I am going to present you tips on how to better write a scientific English article about your scientific research.»

«Here ~~it is shown~~ that the ~~bacterial~~ methanotroph assemblage in a mixing lake underwent a ~~considerable~~ bloom and ~~exhibited an~~ ecological succession. As an ~~ultimate~~ result, ~~the oxidation of methane~~ kept pace with the methane supplied from ~~underlying layers of water~~ and, ~~as a matter of fact,~~ ~~the majority of~~ methane was ~~actually~~ oxidized. ~~We believe that~~ this aspect of methanotroph ecology is a ~~highly~~ effective mechanism ~~that achieves a limitation of~~ methane transfer from ~~large freshwater environments~~ to the atmosphere.»

«It can be reasonably supposed that a very large majority of warm-blooded vertebrates characterised by feathers actually have the remarkable capacity to achieve a motion through the atmosphere by generating aerodynamic force.»



«Today, I will present tips on improving your scientific writing.»

«Here ~~we show~~ that the methanotroph assemblage in a mixing lake underwent a bloom and ecological succession. As a result, ~~methane oxidation~~ kept pace with the methane supplied from ~~bottom water~~ and ~~most~~ methane was oxidized. This aspect of methanotroph ecology is an effective mechanism ~~limiting~~ methane transfer from ~~lakes~~ to the atmosphere.»

«Most birds can fly.»

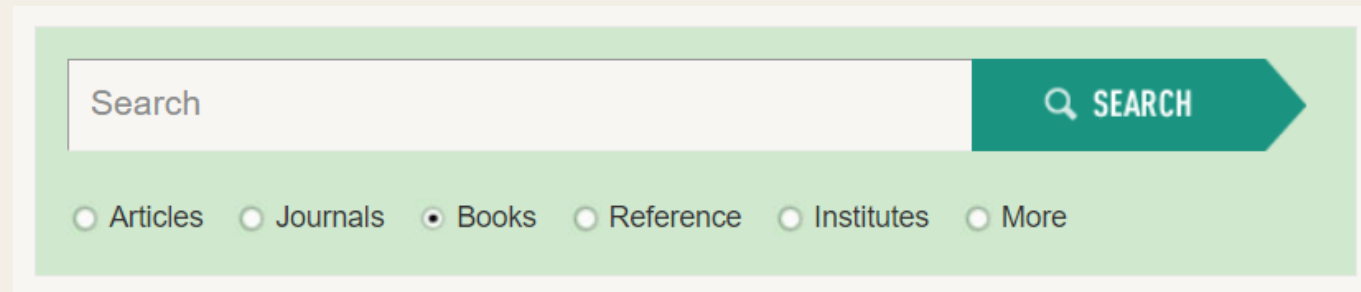
Resources

Heard, S.B. (2016): «**The Scientist's Guide to Writing**». Princeton University Press.

Johnson, S. (2012): «**Getting it Across**». Techne Press.

Luellen, W.R. (2001): «**Fine-Tuning Your Writing**». Wise Owl Publishing Company.

Silvia, P.J (2014): «**How to write a lot**». American Psychological Association.



A screenshot of a search interface. It features a light green background. At the top, there is a white search input field with the placeholder text "Search". To the right of the input field is a dark green arrow-shaped button containing a magnifying glass icon and the word "SEARCH" in white capital letters. Below the search bar, there is a horizontal row of filter options, each consisting of a radio button and a label: "Articles", "Journals", "Books", "Reference", "Institutes", and "More". The "Books" option is selected, indicated by a small black dot inside its radio button.

Final Checks

Content

1. Content: Is the information correct and accurate?
2. Logic: Is my chain of reasoning clear?
3. Plagiarism: Is my writing free of plagiarism?

Style

1. Phrasing: Are my words and phrases appropriate?
2. Coherency: Is my writing smooth and clear?
3. Brevity: Is my writing concise?

Grammar

1. Spelling: Are all words spelled correctly?
2. Grammar: Are all tenses and punctuation marks used correctly?

Revisions

Formatting



Contact

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Thank You!

Questions?



Please Give Us Your Feedback

