

Penglish Style: rules for revising academic writing

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[Preface: the inspiration for and purpose of this guide.](#)

[Introduction: Five principles of the “plain academic style”](#)

Appropriateness; Specificity; Economy; Clear, forceful language; and Fluency & Variety

[PART 1: Observe basic, appropriate rules and conventions](#)

1. Cite all quotes (**Cit**)
2. Refer to author by last name (after first introduction of full name)
3. Correctly format titles
4. Integrate quoted text into your sentences (**IQ**)
5. Avoid clichés
6. Avoid slang and colloquial language (**Col**)
7. Academic Essays need titles
8. Observe requested format rules, *always*

[PART 2: Avoid vagueness by being SPECIFIC](#)

Avoid all these bad habits that lead to **vague writing**:

9. Don't provide the definitions of a term or concept to replace analysis of the concept. *(especially true of literary or technical terms).*
10. Don't use “Empty Noun Phrases” (**ENP**) without clarifying specifically what you're referring to.
11. Avoid “Unanswered Questions,” (**UQ**) clauses that imply questions rather than stating specific ideas.
12. Avoid Vague authorial attributions (**VAA**) when more-specific ones actually capture the author or character's tone and position.
13. Avoid long quotes (**>Q<**): use only the part that shows the exact idea you're focusing on
14. Avoid Rhetorical questions (**RQ**): commit to clear ideas that answer those questions.
15. Assert the main idea of a paragraph in just one, and only one, topic sentence.

Stay in the appropriate **POV**: (4 rules)

16. Avoid the general use of you. “**you**”
17. Attribute ideas to authors to distinguish them from your own. (**AA**)
18. Use the “historical present tense” when writing about works of art. (**PT**)

19. Avoid all self-conscious references *when you are not the subject** (SCR), including references:

- to yourself,
- to “we” or to “the reader,”
- to your essay itself,
- to your process of writing the essay

*UNLESS it’s a personal essay or your opinion. In these genres, you MUST use “I”!

PART 3: Write with ECONOMY, without extra words:

20. Avoid Off-topic/Vague introductions (VI)
21. Avoid redundant introduction of author (or work) (RIA)
22. Avoid the “Worksheet-itis” construction (W-itis)
23. Avoid awkward possessives (AP)
24. Avoid pretentious diction (PD)
25. The “1-word rule”: *replace longer phrases with single words that mean the same thing* (1-W)

Part 4: Be CLEAR by using more direct language

26. Frame main ideas around actions, not on single words (especially nouns)
27. The “3 of 4 rule” for specific, complete main ideas
28. Avoid the 4 errors that cause weak, passive, and wordy sentences:
 - Avoid using ABSTRACT nouns as the SUBJECTS of sentences (AS)
 - Avoid the Passive Voice (PV)
 - Avoid Weak Verbs (WV); use active verbs
 - Avoid “nounification,” turning verbs into nouns
29. Avoid making Negative Statements (NS); always focus on what IS happening.

Part 5: Create FLUENCY AND VARIETY by following a few simple rules

30. Vary sentence beginnings (the “NO CHOP” rule)
31. Always connect evidence to claims about it; generally avoid ever creating a sentence in an analytical paper of any kind whose only function is to convey a single event or action. (// or “Connect show → tell”)
32. Don’t use “and” to combine separate sentences. (The “no and” rule)
33. Include at least one transition in every sentence (TR)
34. Never *begin* two sentences in a row with a transition (Vary TrPL)
35. Vary the order of “show and tell” with each detail (vary S → T)
36. Vary the structure of each successive complex sentence. (Redundant sentence structure: (RSS))

Part 6: APPENDIX of other useful techniques of composition