

THE GURU SPEAKS by Ilse Evertse (stpubus@gmail.com) ©

Yes, the language guru speaks to those who need a quick reminder of the most important matters that they will need to remember when writing in English.

1) Are you writing in USA or UK English? Please determine this before you start writing as the spelling and punctuation with inverted commas differ:

UK: ...which Brown (2007) calls "pretty", we call fair, but Black (2006) calls "handsome".

US: ...which Brown (2007) calls "pretty," we call fair, but Black (2006) calls "handsome."

UK: ...according to White (2005) "pretty, fair and handsome".

US: ...according to White (2005) "pretty, fair, and handsome."

2) General punctuation observations:

When referring to the USA in text, do **not** use full stops between (**not** U.S.A. or U.S.)
*In the **US** there are various types of...; in the **USA** there are various types of...*

References to "America" or "The United States of America" are rare.

...businesses, markets, etc. Do **not use** a double full stop after "etc." at the end of a sentence.

...tools (e.g., training and internships) but ...tools, for example, training and internships.

...managers, i.e. those responsible for the organisation of...

It usually does not matter whether you use "e.g.," or "e.g." and "i.e.," or "i.e." but **standardise** – don't switch!

Note: The APA style requires *i.e.*, to be used in parentheses, otherwise use "that is".

5000 employees generating 100,000 EUR. Most texts only start using a comma in a 6-figure amount. Europeans like using *100.000*, but this is **wrong**.

French and Italians often have chevrons <<xxxx>>, in their texts. They are not used in English. Replace them with inverted commas if required (most probably not!).

"The manager remarked that he had been annoyed and..._very forgetful." Elipses have a SPACE before and after as indicated by the underlining in the example.

Beware of the use of the ampersand: "*R&D management*" is fine.

However, when you're referring to authors in the text itself,

"Howard & Jones (1957) maintain that little encouragement is given to those who..."

is **not** correct.

"Howard and Jones (1957) maintain that little encouragement is given to those who..." (Brown & Black 2006)"

is fine if you use the ampersand in **all** the references. Don't switch between "&" and "and".

US Eng texts add a comma before the final "and": (Brown, Black, and White 1920).

3) Referencing:

While we're on the topic: there are almost as many reference systems as there are universities, journals, in-house publications, etc. **We therefore do not edit References.** The various reference systems have their own unique use of punctuation and formatting. While editors will indicate the most obvious referencing errors – such as those above – it is up to you to ensure that you are familiar with the specific referencing system.

The same applies to incorrect formatting – editors are not formatters and if your paper, article or dissertation requires difficult formatting, learn this before you start writing. Even better,

learn to make and use a template. Once you have mastered templates, you will never again have problems with styles, page breaks, numbered paragraphs, etc. It is truly worth spending time to get to know the power of Microsoft Word before you start writing a dissertation or a book.

A gentle reminder: when you mention "recent publications", don't refer to publications that are 10 or even more years old. They are most certainly not "recent".

When Europeans write English texts they often use "cf" or "see" or "e.g.," before a (or even with every) reference. In English "cf." should **not** be used and "see" should **only** be used if you are really inviting a comparison of authors' viewpoints, which won't be every time you refer to a source, while "e.g.," should also **only** be used if you truly refer to an example of sources. The reader understands that the author cannot possibly refer to all the sources on a specific (popular) topic.

Note: The APA style allows the use of *cf.* in parentheses.

Another gentle reminder: If you have never written a paper, article or dissertation and your writing skills aren't what they should be, do take the time to study a few really good ones. Dissertations require a specific form and while you may think that you understand this, just check. You will earn your editor's everlasting thanks!

See *Writing to be Read*.

4) "Counting" words:

UK: *Firstly, secondly, thirdly*

US: *First, second, third*

Please, please don't count unnecessarily: "*There are 3 goals: 1) xxx, 2) yyy, 3) zzz*" or *First(ly), second(ly), etc.* We can ALL count to 3 or even to 10! Try using words and terms such as "the next/another/ a subsequent goal is..."; "this is followed by yyy"; "thereafter xxx follows". You will at times have to count, but it can become very reader-unfriendly.

5) Hyphens:

"Hanging" hyphens are normal in Germanic languages, but rare in English. "*He ordered soft and hardware*" **not** "*he ordered soft- and hardware*". In English we understand that the *soft* means software. If, in more difficult constructions, the relationship is not as clear, repeat the last bit: "*He ordered software and hardware*".

In German, long words are combined by means of hyphens. This should **not** be done in English:

computer-mediated communication **not** *computer-mediated-communication*.

Please note that UK Eng and US Eng often differ in that US Eng seldom uses hyphens unless the lack of hyphens could cause confusion.

Where should the hyphen be in the following?

Real life-generated case studies or *real-life-generated case studies*?

Logically, *real-life-generated cases*, but some American publications seem to prefer *real life-generated case studies*.

p. 1-10, from 1920-1950 (**no** spaces; the hyphen instead of "to")

BUT

Between 1920 *and* 1950....

the 5-year-old girl said...

the 7-point Likert scale

X-rays - use a hard hyphen (CTRL Shift hyphen) then you'll never have "X" at the end of a line and "-rays" on the other

As a general rule in UK Eng: *risk-taking behaviour* (adjective) **but** *risk taking is addictive*. Americans prefer loose words and the hyphen is "disappearing" even faster in US Eng than in UK Eng. There are some nouns that are also hyphenated, like "*problems with decision-making are related to...*". But these too are increasingly being spelled as loose words, but if it aids comprehension, do use the hyphen.

A good dictionary and <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/> are generally a great help, but specifically with prepositions that non-native speakers find a challenge.

6) The use of an/a:

A European, a useless man (the noun is not pronounced as a vowel but as j or y)

A hotel, hospital, history lesson (the h is pronounced)

An honest man, an HIV infection (the unpronounced h sounds like a vowel: AITCHEYEEVEE)

7) Battle tautology:

Tautology is when you repeat yourself but just use different words. Academics often fall into this trap, so be careful!

"...such as, for example..."

"anonymity, no one knows the other"

"it is clearly evident"

"the pricing of only one single certificate"

"honest and trustworthy"

"finally, the last section"

"in the offing in the foreseeable future"

"to mentally interpret"

"corresponds to, i.e. resembles..."

8) Pronouns:

People = who or whom; everything else = that or which

*The men **who** were watching the match...* (use *who* if you can change the sentence to say: they/he/she/we were watching the match)

*The men **whom** we were watching...* (use *whom* if you can change the sentence to say: the men were watching them/him/her)

but *Which of those men is your father?*

*The employees working for the organizations **that** imported....*

*The organizations **that** we visited in the rural area, **which** had suffered tremendous drought, decided to save water ...*

Note the difference between the use of "that" and "which".

A rule of thumb: "**which**" is used if you add extra information to the basic sentence.

German-speakers, remember there is **no comma before that** as there is before "*dass*" in German.

*The organization **whose** manager had been reprimanded...*

The girls **whose** parents were missing...

The dress **to which** I had lost my heart **not** ...which I had lost my heart to
The address **at which** he lived **not** which he lived at

Don't change the pronoun when you start off with "one":

One cannot change **one's** mind halfway, **not** one cannot change your mind.

9) Using **where** correctly

The incorrect use of "where" is almost prevalent. "Where" = a place, therefore:

These are tasks **during which** you are required to... **not** tasks where you are asked to...

The game **in which** a ball is thrown at... **not** game where a ball is thrown at...

A portfolio report **in which** icons are ... **not** report where icons are...

A module **in which** members may enter... **not** module where members may enter...

10) The use of **so-called**

Germans love using *so-called* as a translation of *so-genannte*, which it isn't, as *so-called* has a negative connotation in English:

The so-called healer promised that he would...

If you want a similar word, try (sparingly, please):

*Management of what could be labelled as monitoring is often an excuse for... **not** management of so-called monitoring is often an excuse for...*

11) Use of **many/few** and **much/little**

For those of you who have forgotten:

That which you can count = many/few friends, projects, lines

That which you can't count = much/little love, funding, data, support

Please remember that in UK Eng *data* is a plural noun: *data are/were/have been collected*

In US Eng *data* is a singular noun: *data is/was/has been collected*

Do **not** switch between plural and singular!

12) Use of **can/may** and **might**

Texts in which authors just used "may" sound really awkward and rather old-fashioned.

Generally, one would use "can/could" but you can't do without "may" either:

*We **may** make use of the data that Y collected, although we **could** run into trouble as permission **might** be withheld. We cannot put our research at risk.*

If there is a possibility of uncertainty (which is often the case in academic texts), use could/might:

*If the results are limited to the sample, this **might** lead to a wrong impression...
By assuming that the authors are referring to case A, we **might** be following a...*

13) The use of **as** and **than**

As our competitor, Ajax has more competencies and knowledge **than** our company has.

As our competitor, we have to monitor Ajax more **than** we do other companies.

14) Do NOT assume that the English you speak/use is correct

This rule is applicable to native speakers as well. In fact, the English of native speakers is often grammatically less correct than that of non-natives who have had rules drummed into them!

There's many businesses in this sector may be everyday South African, but it is still **wrong**, while *there are many businesses in this sector* is **correct**.

15) Style

Please remember that while one-sentence "paragraphs" seem cool, they're not paragraphs. American journals dislike them!

Be gender neutral. European publications are more tolerant, but American journals dislike the use of "he". Use plural nouns, which will allow you to use "their" **instead of** "he" or the really cumbersome "he/she" or even worse "(s)he". For more help see Butcher's Copy-editing as well as <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/608/01/> for non-sexist English and <http://www.apa.udel.edu/apa/publications/texts/nonsexist.html/>

Possessive Case: Although long "of" constructions become more reader-friendly when the possessive case is used:

The heads of the various countries' organisations **instead of** *the heads of the organisation of the various countries*

don't overuse the possessive case in theses as it is often found to be "unacademic".

However, articles and papers seem to benefit from the use of the possessive case as it contributes to the reader-friendliness. The rule of thumb:

A singular noun adds an 's whether it ends on an s or not:

The organisation's management

The bus's route

The business's employees (yes, ss's is correct!)

The company's policy

A plural noun that does **not** end on an s, also adds an 's

The men's club

The children's playroom

A plural noun that ends on an s, just adds an '

The organisations' management

The buses' routes

The businesses' employees

The companies' policy

Take care when using the possessive case with acronyms and abbreviations and company names:

An **NGO's** policy, but **NGOs'** policies

Siemens' various branches. The company web site will often indicate how the name is written in the possessive.

Passive voice: The grammar checker usually hates the passive voice (*it has been maintained that...*), but academic writing can't always avoid it. However, since US journals often dislike it intensely, write active sentences whenever this is possible as such sentences are shorter and far more reader friendly. However, rather use the passive voice than have many awkward sentences. If you write for a journal that dislikes any kind of passive verb, the following "tricks" may help:

The term is definable **instead of** the term has to be defined
The following barriers are identifiable **instead of** the following barriers have been identified
These issues link to/relate to/build on/result **instead of** these issues are linked to/related to/based on/derived from
Assign this finding to **instead of** this finding is allocated to

Indirect (reported) Speech: You **only** use the Present Tense when referring to a generally accepted truth:

The manager **mentioned** that he **had been pleased** to see that grass **is** still green. He **could not understand** why anyone **would want** to change the colour now that irrigation **is** readily available

The use of tenses (see A short-cut to understanding tenses): Non-native speakers all seem to find the Present Continuous Tense very easy, but **avoid** it in academic texts as it sounds truly strange. Thus:

This thesis **indicates** the various... **not** this thesis is indicating the various...

German-speakers are especially very fond of "exists" in all its various forms. This is **not** a typical English usage

There were many different organizations **not** many different organizations existed
There are various types of organizations **not** there exist various types of organizations

Be careful of awkward sentence constructions:

This organizational change enabled the management of various units, **NOT** This organizational change enabled to manage various units

Sentences in academic texts should NOT begin with:

But, **try:** *However, ..., consequently..., nevertheless,*

So, **try:** *Therefore, ...*

Because of, **try:** *Owing to* (use "due to" in the middle or end of a sentence)

And **try:** *Furthermore, ...; moreover, ; in addition...*

For this reason, **try:** *Consequently,*

Rule of thumb: vary the words that you use and keep your readers happy!

"Additionally" should not be over-used. Look and you'll see that it is not used all that often in English text. **Try:** *In addition, furthermore, moreover.*

Rule of thumb: (again) vary the words that you use and keep your readers happy!

Do **not** over-use *thanks to*. This is very often used incorrectly and ad nauseam:

Owing to his great talent he could... **not** *thanks to his great talent...*

The goals were achieved due to the hard work of... **not** *the goals were achieved thanks to the hard work of...*

Avoid the use of "don't/doesn't/didn't, haven't/hasn't/hadn't in academic writing.

Never use: *get/got, things, some.*

Try: *Acquire, obtain, matters/issues/points, a few*

Do not over-use "both":

The manager intends to speak to the workers as well as giving them a raise **instead of** *the manager intends to both speak to the workers as well as giving them a raise.*

Do not use "air quotes" when terms have been established or there is no confusion possible:

He asked for advice on lessons learned **instead of** he asked for “advice” on “lessons learned”.

Do find other ways of expressing *on the one hand ... on the other hand*, as this becomes very boring: **Try:**

not only employees, **but also** management...;
employees **as well as** management...;
both employees **and** management...

Be careful with word order. Keep sentences as clear as possible.

In South Africa, a gradual power shift occurred from 2000 onwards, which resulted... not
From 2000 onwards, in South Africa, a gradual power shift has occurred, which resulted...

In a specific jurisdiction, the policy core attributes of a governmental program will not be significantly revised **not** *the policy core attributes of a governmental program in a specific jurisdiction will not be significantly revised.*

Check the use and correct English spelling of terms by doing a *Google* search. Do ensure that you specifically look at native British or American sites as European sites often produce weird and wonderful English!

If you are unsure of the correct preposition (on, into, for, etc.) – which is a problem for all non-native speakers and many native speakers as well use <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>. This site gives verbs and the prepositions that go with them. You could also do a *Google* search. Should it, for example, be “*benchmark at*” or “*benchmark against*”? Type each of the options in turn (with the inverted commas as indicated) into *Google* and see which option produces the most hits – “*benchmark against*” should be the winner. However, the above site is still the best as *Google* may be wrong.

15) **Concluding remarks**

Your editor will use Microsoft Word’s Track Changes to edit your text. If the editor misunderstands and changes a perfectly correct word/phrase/sentence - this happens, they’re not infallible nor do they know everything about all topics - do **not** waste time by rewriting the entire word/phrase/sentence again. Use the review icon bar (which will appear at the top of your screen): highlight the (now) incorrect word/phrase/sentence and click on the “reject change” icon or you can simply do a right click on the deleted original and click on the “reject change” option – your original text will be resurrected and the edits will disappear! You could also highlight, right click, and click on “reject insertion”.