

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. IMPROVING GRAMMAR

➤ **Step 1**

Reading avidly is a great way to improve one's grammar.

➤ **Step 2**

Secondly, invest in a grammar book or self-study grammar book with lots of examples and illustrations.

➤ **Step 3**

If the examples are verbs and verb tenses, then practice using them in sentences and then paragraphs.

➤ **Step 4**

Focus a good portion of your time on writing complete sentences and proper paragraphs. In addition, you can build on that by writing a page then short stories and of course have your grammar checked as you go through the various stages.

➤ **Step 5**

If you use the internet often then also try to incorporate that in improving your writing and grammatical skills (for example, sending emails). Therefore, incorporate grammar into your life in a practical way and your everyday language.

➤ **Step 6**

Overall, you should invest in reading, grammar, writing, speaking and listening materials. Moreover, practice, practice, practice. This is the most effective way to improve one's grammatical skills.

2. IMPROVING SPELLING

➤ **Read, read, read**

This is the No. 1 advice spelling champions will offer anybody. When you read, your mind tends to absorb every word that your eyes pass through. This gives you the chance to discover new words without even trying. Reading will also help you get used to seeing so many words at one time.

➤ **Use a new word every day**

Grab the nearest dictionary and open up any page and point at a random word, or if you come across a new word when reading, quickly write it down somewhere and find the definition. If that word is

something you don't use all the time or have never heard of, take the chance and use it that day. Use it in one of your casual conversations with a friend (Example: "My teacher was so austere; we couldn't talk at all during class."). You're actually memorizing the word, if you haven't realized it, which is basically the same as memorizing the spelling. If you do this every day, your vocabulary will grow, and so will your spelling abilities.

➤ **Understand where words come from**

Have you ever used a big word and thought "Why is it called that?" or "Where did these words come from?" Just like a tree, big words start from the root. Let's use the word cacophony as an example. The meaning of cacophony is "a harsh or discordant sound." Cacophony is actually two Greek root words joined together: kako- (meaning "bad") and -phonia (meaning voice or sound). Understanding the root words help you build bigger words as you go along. So the next time your teacher asks you to spell a word meaning "bad writing," you'll be sure to know that you'll spell out cacography.

➤ **Write it out**

Many spellers practice their words by writing it down twice and spelling it. Just like reading, you're allowing your mind to absorb each word. As you write them down, the words will stick much easier on your mind. If you have got a journal or extra notebook lying around, pick it up and write a story or write about your day.

➤ **Play word games**

Most students do not consider reading fun. If you are one among them, you can substitute that (but not entirely) by playing word games. Playing board games like Scrabble, Boggle, and word searches gives you the chance to dig deep in your mind for all sorts of words you never thought you knew.

Keeping these tips in mind, you'll be able to spell your way to success.

3. IMPROVING CONTENT

WHEN THE TOPIC IS GIVEN ON THE SPOT:

You are expected to:

- ✓ Present an original, insightful work that effectively addresses the intended audience
- ✓ Develop and supports points with ample evidence/examples
- ✓ Write clearly and coherently
- ✓ Demonstrate a consistent and logical pattern of reasoning
- ✓ Write in an appropriate academic tone; avoiding informal language or expressions

WHEN THE TOPIC IS PREMEDITATED:

Research Your Topic

- Learn to collect information about your topic from numerous sources
- Learn how to support your points and opinions with specific facts.

For most students the word “research” means surfing the Internet in search of any relevant to their topic data. Such approach does not work for good academic writing. First, because the internet does not control the quality of information appearing on your screen. Second (more important), in most cases the search engine will not lead you to the right type of information. So, how can you make the best of your research? Read the following tips that will help you to research efficiently. The research process involves four steps:

- **Find background information of your subject.** Once you’ve defined the topic of your writing, use references from the list of the recommended literature to spot background information of your subject. First do some preliminary reading of general reference material, like an encyclopedia, dictionary, or other reference source.
- **Plan and search.** Where can I find information on my topic?
 - In books or government documents (use the library catalogue to find out what books and documents are available)
 - In periodicals (look up an article index to know what articles have been published.)
 - On the Internet.

This stage suggests processing a lot of information and finding the material pertinent to your subject. So you will have to do extensive reading of the sources you come across. Not to be tired and bored by looking through tons of information use the formula of “**SQ3R**”: Survey, Question, Read, Recall, Review.

- **Survey** – find the relevant sources of information. When you evaluate this or that book or article, pay attention to: date of publication (you are not writing memoirs), contents and index page; preface, first and last paragraphs.
- **Question**- before starting to read, ask yourself what you expect to find out from this book/article. It will systematize your reading as you proceed.
- **Read** – The purpose of your reading is to find the vivid and powerful arguments to support your idea in the shortest possible time.

Using the following reading techniques you will get the most of the material you have read:

- ◇ Skimming the contents you get its general idea.
- ◇ Scanning allows you find the material you need.
- ◇ Doing search reading you concentrate on the meaning of the specific terms.
- ◇ Perusing the text you should note down the information you are going to use in your essay.
- ◇ Reading may turn out to be a tiring and monotonous pastime for you. To refresh your mind take regular breaks off. Your reading should be conscious. Make sure you understand every idea presented in the book/article.
- ◇ As you are researching compile a working bibliography (running list of the material you read), later it will serve as a basis for your list of Works Cited.
- **Evaluate the information you have found.** The quality of your work depends on the sources you have used for it. That is why you should be able to differentiate between the authoritative and trivial information. All the sources of information are divided into two large categories: online or printed materials. As you evaluate the sources, mind the following:

Magazines and newspapers are meant for general public rather than for academic purposes. Do not support a significant argument or idea of your essay only with a fact originated from the magazines as the data here is often invalid and subjective.

Journal articles usually focus on research and experiment results and discuss latest innovations in science as well as controversial issues in science. Moreover they are peer-reviewed and carefully edited. Such approach guarantees reliability and objectiveness of the information you are going to include into your essay.

The Internet gives a more superficial look at the problem than the printed editions, without the deep insight into the problem as in the printed academic sources. But using organized subject directories, particularly those assembled by professors and academic librarians you can come across useful information. Subject directories are built by hand and usually contain only links screened for quality and value.

- **Identify and include the most vivid and convincing facts and evidence into your writing.** Do not fail to note down the source of every quote you are going to include in your essay when you are still exploring the information.

- ◇ Select content relevant to the task
- ◇ Present content relevant to the task
- ◇ Do not include irrelevant and repetitive content.
- ◇ Also remember, sufficient information should be included so that purpose of the text is met.
- ◇ Knowledge of language conventions should be applied to produce a text.

On the whole, you should demonstrate a perceptive understanding of the relevant aspects of the topic or theme. The work produced should consistently display illustrative details. Creative pieces, if any, should reflect a high degree of imagination and sensitivity.

4. IMPROVING ORGANIZATION AND STYLE

Tone

The tone in academic and professional writing is usually restrained and formal; it can be terse. The language tends to be relatively free of modifiers (adjectives and adverbs). Strong statements are usually presented in a deceptively "mild" manner.

Active voice

Active voice is preferred over passive voice. Active voice lends more energy to your writing.

Length of sentences

The optimal sentence length comprises 15 -20 words. However, it does not imply you have to produce every sentence according to this standard. It is far better to vary the length and the rhythm of the sentences. Combine long sentences with shorter or even elliptical constructions.

Paragraphs

Avoid single-sentence paragraphs. On average, paragraphs consist of five to seven sentences. The purpose of a paragraph is to fully develop a single idea. Be sure to divide your paper into readable paragraphs. Each paragraph should have a clear topic sentence. Read it carefully to be sure it treats a single topic.

Give the reader a map

If you want your readers to navigate the road of your writing and reach the proper destination, make the going easy for them. Use these devices to make your business documents more readable

- ◇ **Paragraphs** -Start a new paragraph as often as it is logically possible. A story composed of several short paragraphs appears more accessible than one that resembles a scientific paper.
- ◇ **Bullets and lists** - Bullets are typographical symbols (boxes, circles, asterisks, dashes) that draw attention to a particular piece of text. These are excellent for lists, which are wonderful signposts themselves. Any information that you can boil down into an easy-to-grasp listing boosts the readability of your writing. Bulleted lists work well for outlining the steps in a process.
- ◇ **Subheads** - Use mini-headlines to break up the copy in memos and letters and direct the reader through your writing.

Don't lose your reader. Remember it's not only what you say, but how you say it.

Coherence

Be sure every sentence connects to the one before it and the one after it. Help the reader follow the steps from one idea to the next. Then check to see that every paragraphs connects to the one before it and the one following. If your paper lacks coherence, it doesn't "stick" together. Although you may know how the sentences are connected, the reader may not. If you jump from one topic to another, you can throw the reader off the track. A reader could get lost trying to find the connections among and between ideas. Coherence often can be improved by using transitions and signposts.

Transitions and signposts

Transitions are clauses or phrases that connect two ideas; signposts are reminders you write into your paper that tell the reader where you have been and/or where you are going. Transitions can be made explicitly with words or phrases such as "next," "Turning to a different perspective," or "On the other hand." Signpost example: "Having examined the first problem of language and the second problem with the interviews, I now conclude that we must conduct a new study." The signpost reminds the reader of the two points you have covered before you move on to the conclusion you will draw.

Syntax

Work on improving syntax. Syntax concerns the ways words are put together. Although meaning might be understood (eventually) if the words are in a complicated order, meaning is more accessible when the syntax matches appropriate patterns. Revising sentences to improve syntax.

Language use

Use sex-neutral language. The language we write and speak leads us to perceive in certain ways; sex-neutral language helps reduce evaluative connotations that lead to inequalities. For example, use "people," "individuals," or "humans" instead of "man" and "mankind." Use "he or she," "s/he" instead of using "he" when the person could of either sex.

Agreement in number

Be consistent when you use singular and plural. This sentence needs editing: "Women have gained respect as a capable mother, employee, and homemaker." "Women" is plural; "mother," "employee," and "homemaker" all are singular. This sentence should read "A woman can gain respect as a capable mother, employee, and homemaker" or "Women have gained respect as capable mothers, employees, and homemakers."

Voice or point of view

Be consistent in the "person" you use. If you begin the paper using "one," you must use that construction throughout. The same is true for the other ways of using person: "s/he" (or they) and "you." Read through your paper looking for places where you take a point of view by identifying a "person." Be sure the "person" remains consistent throughout your paper.

Examples:

"When you read a paragraph, you can"

OR

"When a student reads a paragraph, s/he may"

OR

"When one reads a paragraph, one may"

The work should be **consistently well organized, clear and coherent**, and arguments should be presented in a perceptive and persuasive manner.

Paragraph structure and transitions must **develop effectively and substantiate the ideas being expressed.**

5. IMPROVING FORMAL/PROFESSIONAL LANGUAGE

In contrast to spoken English, a distinctive feature of academic writing style is for writers to choose the more formal alternative when selecting a verb, noun, or other part of speech.

English often has two (or more) choices to express an action or occurrence. The choice is often between, on the one hand, a verb which is part of a phrase (often verb + preposition), and a verb which is one word only. Often in lectures and in everyday spoken English, the verb + preposition is used (eg speak up, give up, write down); however, for written academic style, the preferred choice is a single verb wherever possible.

Examples:

Informal: The social worker looked at the client's history to find out which interventions had previously been implemented.

Academic: The social worker examined the client's history to establish which interventions had previously been implemented.

FORMAL TEXT	INFORMAL TEXT
The relationship between television and cinema grew increasingly symbiotic in the 1980's as television companies invested heavily in feature film making.	T.V. and the movies got more and more dependent on each other in the 1980's as T.V. companies put a lot of money into making movies.

6. IMPROVING VOCABULARY

Make the Dictionary Your Best Friend

A dictionary is the first irrefutable resource to improve your vocabulary. It's only by looking up a word in a dictionary that you'll learn its precise meaning, spelling, alternate definitions, and find much more useful information about it. Whenever I read and come across a word that I don't understand I immediately stop and look it up in the dictionary. After I'm clear of its meaning I write it down and include it in my vocabulary list of words to learn. A thesaurus is also a valuable resource for learning by finding connections between words, such as their synonyms and antonyms.

Practice Using the New Words

Once you learn a new word don't stop there, it's by using the new words that you truly commit them to your long-term memory. Be creative and try to use your newly learned words in as many ways as possible:

- ✓ Write them down
- ✓ Say them aloud
- ✓ Create sentences with them, mentally or in writing
- ✓ Try to use them in a conversation

Also, it's important to be aware of your own language style and how you talk: every time you catch yourself saying common or nonspecific words such as "NICE", try coming up with richer and more precise expressions instead.

Personal Relevance

Did you know that our memories are actually geared to block out information that isn't considered personally relevant? You can use this to your advantage by making new words personally relevant and dramatically improving your retention as a result. Making a word personally relevant will dramatically enrich your learning. Studies show that our memories are actually geared to "forget" or "block out" information that isn't perceived as relevant. The same studies also show that your memory dramatically improves when information is made personally relevant.

When you learn a new word, think of common examples in your own life where the word would apply. For example if you learn the word "belligerent", which means "aggressive and war-like", you could think of your belligerent neighbour who makes aggressive remarks over the fence. Next time you are complaining about him to your friends, tell them that you are "fed up with your belligerent neighbour".

Use Imagery

The creation of visual images to represent words is an effective vocabulary building strategy. Indeed, some words are easier to visualize than others. Generally this technique works best with words that correspond to "concrete" objects. It does not work very well with words that denote abstract concepts.

An example of a concrete object is a computer. It is easy to visualize a computer while saying the word "computer" in your head. This will enhance your memory and understanding of the word and lower the chance that you will forget it. An example of an abstract concept is "truth". This is much harder to visualize and for that reason this technique will not render itself to learn this kind of word.

Play With Words

A great fun way to improve your vocabulary is to play word games. Word games give you a chance to boost your vocabulary and have fun while you do it.

Traditional word games can be great fun. These include scrabble, boggle, and crosswords. There are also many web sites that have word games. Often these sites can hook you up with an opponent, so you don't even need to find people to play with.

Example word games: The Internet Scrabble Club, Yahoo Games, Crossword Puzzles

7. IMPROVING HANDWRITING

➤ Step 1

Find an example of handwriting you like and might want to imitate. This will give you a goal.

➤ Step 2

Buy some lined paper in a rule you're comfortable with, whether that's wide-, college- or narrow-ruled.

➤ Step 3

Choose a pen or pencil you like using. Keep in mind that this writing instrument doesn't have to be a Mont Blanc to be the right one for you.

➤ Step 4

Realize that practicing and perfecting will be an ongoing process. To truly improve your handwriting, you must work on it enough that the improvements become natural behavior.

➤ Step 5

Develop a test sentence for yourself and write it at the top of your first practice page. At the beginning of each new week, write this sentence at the top of a new page to help you gauge your progress.

➤ Step 6

Begin with individual letters and practice writing at least one letter per day, incorporating the improvements that will help you reach your goal. Concentrate on overall letter formation, the size of ascenders and descenders, the slant of each letter, and beginning and ending strokes.

➤ Step 7

Move on to complete words once you've made it all the way through the alphabet. Pay attention to character spacing, the way your letters flow from one into the next, and the spacing you place between words.

➤ Step 8

Practice, practice, practice until your handwriting looks the way you want it to.

8. IMPROVING ATTITUDE

Let's be honest: how do you feel about having to write?

Do you tend to view a writing project as a challenge or as a chore?

Or is it merely a dull duty, one that you have no strong feelings about at all?

Whatever your attitude may be, one thing is certain: how you feel about writing both affects and reflects how well you can write.

Your attitude toward writing is directly related to your abilities. The one who enjoys writing does well because he/she practices often, and she practices because she does well. On the other hand, the one who hates writing avoids opportunities to improve.

You might be wondering, "What can I do if I don't especially enjoy writing? Is there any way I can change the way I feel about having to write?"

"Yes," is the simple answer. Certainly you can change your attitude--and you will, as you gain more experience as a writer. In the meantime, here are a few points to think about:

- Sharpening your writing skills will help you to improve your grades in many different courses, not just in English classes.
- Regardless of your career goals, writing is one of the most practical skills you can have. On a typical work day, professionals in fields as diverse as engineering, marketing, computer programming, and management spend anywhere from 15% to 50% of their time *writing*.
- According to a study conducted in 2005 by the College Board, more than 75% of managers report that they take writing into account when hiring and promoting employees.
- Writing can be personally rewarding and enriching, an outlet for our anxieties rather than a cause of them. Keeping a journal, composing letters or e-mails to friends, even writing an occasional poem or short story (whether or not we ever intend to show our work to anyone else)--all allow us to practice our writing skills without the fear of being judged.
- Writing can be fun. You will soon find that being able to express your thoughts clearly in writing can produce an enormous sense of delight and satisfaction.

As you begin working to become a better writer, you will find that your attitude toward writing improves along with the quality of your work. So enjoy! And start writing.

Defining Your Goals

Spend some time thinking about why *you* would like to improve your writing skills: how you might benefit, personally and professionally, by becoming a more confident and competent writer. Then, on a sheet of paper or at your computer, explain *to yourself* why and how you plan to achieve the goal of becoming a better writer.

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