

Ten hacks for academic writing

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Abstract

Academic writing is a notoriously difficult genre for both native and non-native speakers. Failure to meet the expectations of the discourse community (e.g. teachers, reviewers) is likely to result in low grades for students and rejection letters for researchers. There are a multitude of implicit codes to adhere to, which novice writers may not be fully aware of. Writers face a multitude of problems when planning, drafting, editing and proof-reading. Although there are numerous websites and books designed to assist novice writers, putting into action the prescriptive advice is not always straightforward. A case in point is the difficulty in proofreading the latest draft of a paper or essay displayed on the screen. The memory of multiple earlier versions tends to impair the ability to notice even simple errors in the latest version. The generic advice of proofreading before submitting is simple to suggest, but an onerous task, particularly so when English is an additional language. A hack to circumvent this screen-memory interference issue is the use of text-to-speech engines to read the text aloud and proof-listen rather than proofread. This paper showcases ten innovative hacks that undergraduates, postgraduates and professors can harness to solve or ameliorate common problems. These hacks have been tried and tested by hundreds of students and researchers in Hong Kong, Thailand and Japan.