

## Make Your Writing More Formal

### 1. Avoid Phrasal Verbs

Phrasal Verbs are phrases “that consists of a verb with a preposition or adverb or both, the meaning of which is different from the meaning of its separate parts” (The Cambridge English Dictionary). In other words:

**Phrasal Verbs = when you use 2+ words to express action (informal)**

**Dynamic Verbs = when you use 1 word to express action (formal).**

**NOTE:** Below we have used a red cross and a green tick for clarity. However, while phrasal verbs are best avoided in academic writing, note that they are not grammatically incorrect, and they are used frequently in writing (e.g. “lead to”, and “result in”).



Here are some examples:



Phrasal	Dynamic
This hypothesis <b>brings together</b> ...	This hypothesis <b>synthesises</b> ...
The experiment <b>works out</b> this way because...	The experiment <b>concludes</b> in this way because...
This <b>makes up</b> for the results of the article because...	This <b>accounts</b> for the results of the article because...
Smith <b>looked at</b> the neural activity of reactions to humour in his study on the affects of laughing on cognitive functions.	Smith <b>analysed</b> the neural activity of reactions to humour in his study on the affects of laughing on cognitive functions.



- These examples take longer to read.
- They read as very conversational.
- They are somewhat vague.



- These examples are more direct.
- They read as professional.
- They are clearer about the action being performed.

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Some more Examples of Phrasal Verbs and Potential Replacements



Phrasal	Dynamic
Add up	Calculate
Carry out	Conduct, execute
Find out	Identify, ascertain, discover
Get across	Convey, communicate, reveal
Put together	Synthesise, compose, assemble
Back up	Support
Leave out	Omit
Pass on	Transmit
Make up	Fabricate, devise, falsify
Set up	Establish, arrange
Look into	Analyse, examine, evaluate, research, investigate
Come about	Occur, result
Point Out	Indicate, highlight, explain, outline
Narrow down	Modify, focus, emphasise, focalise
Get rid of	Eliminate, remove, dispense
Points towards	Suggests, indicates

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### 2. Other Informalities to Avoid

#### **Contractions:**

This is when we use an apostrophe ( ' ) to indicate that a letter has been omitted in order to shorten two words into one. You should avoid contractions in academic writing and write out sentences in full. E.g. *don't*. A better way of writing this is: *do not*.

#### **Colloquialisms:**

These are common phrases that are particular to a given culture or location, which may not make sense to a broader audience, and which are too informal for academic writing. E.g. *It is as broad as the day is long*. A better way of writing this is: *It is a topic with tremendous scope*.

#### **Rhetorical questions:**

This is when we ask the reader a question. The problem with asking questions, however, is that the reader cannot give an answer, which can make the question somewhat redundant. Instead of asking rhetorical questions, students should write declarative statements, which are far more assertive. E.g. *How can scientists begin to address climate change?* A more declarative statement version of this is: *Scientists can begin to address the many facets of climate change by...*

#### **Clichés:**

This is when we use phrases that everybody has heard before, but which are very repetitive because they have been so overused. This detracts from the formal register of your writing. E.g. *Chemicals of this kind should be avoided like the plague*. A better way of writing this is: *Chemicals of this kind should not be used because...*

#### **Hyperbole and Generalisations:**

This is when we exaggerate a claim or a fact. While this is very common in everyday speech, overstatement in academic writing suggests that the author has not taken the time to ascertain a correct measure or metric. E.g. *As all scholars agree...*, or *The author always returns to this point of...* A better way of writing such claims is: *Scholars such as John Smith and Mary Fitzpatrick agree...*, or *The author frequently returns to this point of...*