

## Scientific Writing: General Tips on Style

- Avoid excessive **rambling**, or **repetitive phrasing**. Every new sentence should do one of the following:
  - ✓ Provide new information to the reader.
  - ✓ Explain previous information further, if necessary.
  - ✓ Develop or refine previous information further.
  - ✓ Make use of/ apply previous information.
- Vary your use of **verbs** (action words) specifically, which can make your writing more dynamic and create a sense of “movement” and “pace” for your reader.
- Avoid unnecessarily **long sentences**; instead, try to capture complex ideas in simple and straightforward sentences (subject + verb) that make sense to the reader.
- Equally, **vary your sentence length** (short + medium + long).
- Avoid very **long paragraphs**; instead, stick to one idea per paragraph. If necessary, look for opportunities to divide your ideas into smaller pieces (and thus smaller paragraphs).
- **Limit pronoun usage**, where possible (I, you, he, she, etc.).
- Use your tenses thoughtfully and carefully, e.g. it is often good (but not essential) to use:
  - **Present tense** when discussing academic theory and scholarship, as well as when discussing fixed or stable conditions/ facts.
    - ✓ E.g. Smith et al. (1967) indicate an important trend in relation to molecular and genetic transformations.
    - ✓ E.g. String theory refers to the ways in which one-dimensional objects propagate through space, as well as to the ways in which such strings interact with one another.
  - **Past tense** when discussing results from experiments, as well as when discussing methods and materials used.
    - ✓ E.g. All 6 petri dishes were sterilised and reused throughout the course of this controlled experiment.
    - ✓ E.g. The participants adhered to strict instructions from the researchers.
  - **Future tense** when discussing hypotheses and potential outcomes.
    - ✓ E.g. This research will enhance theoretical understandings of rock formation in the Northern Hemisphere.
    - ✓ E.g. The project will contribute to discussions about reducing the prevalence of undernourishment in children under the age of six months.
- Avoid **unclear pronouns** like “it”, “this”, and “that”. Your reader may not know, or may have forgotten, what the subject is. To avoid such referential and potentially confusing language, regularly restate your subject, i.e. what does “it”, “this”, and “that” refer to? Tell your reader again.
- Balance your use of the passive voice and the active voice. See the UCD Writing Centre’s handouts on the passive/active voice, as well as the handout on methods and materials.
  - E.g. **Passive voice**: Ethanol was used in the experiment by the researchers because it produces a smaller carbon footprint.
  - E.g. **Active voice**: The researchers used ethanol in the experiment because it produces a smaller carbon footprint.