

Some General and Scientific Writing Suggestions

General:

Affect is a verb, *effect* is a noun. One way to remember this is that “affect” starts with an ‘a’ for “action”. Examples: the effects were clear, the independent variable affects the dependent variable, there was an experimenter effect, the experimenter affected the outcome of the study through subtle reinforcing behaviors.¹

That is almost always used instead of *which*. Example: The handout *that* described common grammar errors... *Which* should be used much more sparingly and only used as a restatement that does not change the basic meaning of the sentence (non-restrictive). Example: The latest study, which has been widely publicized, is a rigorous test of the hypotheses.

However is better used in the middle or the end of a sentence rather than at the beginning. Example: Instead of “However, the participants were not debriefed,” it is better to say “The participants, however, were not debriefed” or, perhaps better, “The participants were not debriefed, however,” depending on which makes the most sense at the time and interrupts the flow of the sentence least.

Since should only be used when referring to time passing (e.g., ...since the early days before science), and *because* should be used otherwise (e.g., I try to improve my writing, because I do not want to sound foolish).

While should be used when referring to something happening at the same time (e.g., while the participants were filling out the questionnaire, the experimenter smoked a cigarette), and *whereas*, *but*, or *and* should be used otherwise (e.g., He spoke eloquently, whereas she sounded unprepared).

Scientific:

When reporting results or study procedures, past tense is used. Example: “a *t* test *indicated* that the two groups *were* significantly different.” When reporting statements or claims that an author has made, use present tense. Example: “Newsom (2024) discusses the importance of longitudinal data for assessing change.” Be careful about moving between past and present tense, especially in the same paragraph and, even more importantly, in the same sentence.

Spell out integer values under 10 if they do not represent precise measurements (e.g., “eight participants” vs. “score of 10.5”) or appear at the beginning of a sentence (“Eighty-four participants responded.”). Use figures if the value is over 10 (e.g., 450 participants), uses decimals (e.g., “9.5”), precedes a measurement scale (e.g., “5 cm”), or if the number modifies another number (e.g., “ten 7-point scale items”). See Sections 3.2-3.9 in the APA Publication Manual 7th edition for many more examples.

Use *because* or *because of* rather than *due to*.

The word *data* is plural, not singular. Examples: Data *were* collected; Data *were* analyzed. *Data set* is singular, however. Example: The data set *was* large.

Do not use data set variable names in your write-up (e.g., “DEPX3”), but a conceptual term or name of the measure (e.g., “depression” or “Beck Depression Inventory”). If referring to an item on a questionnaire, use the whole question wording in quotations or a brief description (e.g., “problems with sleep disturbances”).

¹ *Affect* is sometimes used as a noun by psychologists as a synonym for emotion. And one can always try to use *effect* as a verb as in trying to “effect change,” but this usage always hurts my ears.

Think about using more formal language:

<u>not so good</u>	<u>better</u>
so,	therefore, thus, consequently,
wrong	incorrect
right	correct
can't	cannot (i.e., avoid all contractions)
you	one, participants, researchers, theorists
ran analyses/analyses were run	conducted tests, computed values, tested hypotheses
big	large
really big	very large

Think about being as concise as possible:

<u>not so good</u>	<u>better</u>
the fact of the matter is	it is true that, clearly, apparently, in fact, evidently
due to the fact that	because

Think about being more precise:

<u>not so good</u>	<u>better</u>
They were friendly.	The participants were friendly.
It is the best measure available.	The Hoffner scale is the best measure available.

(if you find yourself starting a sentence with "it" or "they" or "those," you are probably not being specific enough for the reader).

Use scientific logic in describing results:

<u>not so good</u>	<u>better</u>
the theory was proven	the hypothesis was supported, hypothesis was confirmed, the findings were consistent with the hypothesis

Other recommended sources:

Publication manual of the American Psychological Association, seventh edition. (2019). Washington, DC: APA. ISBN: 9781433832161.
(An excellent source for many style and technical writing tips, not just APA style formatting.)

Alred, G.J., Brusaw, C.T., Oliu, W.E. (2020). *Handbook of technical writing, twelfth edition.* Bedford/St. Martin's Press. ISBN: 978-1-319-36838-5.

Bradley, L., Noble, N., & Hendricks, B. (2020). *The APA Publication Manual: Changes in the Seventh Edition. The Family Journal, 28(2), 126-130.*

Brians, P. (2008). *Common errors in english usage, second edition.* Sherwood, OR: William, James & Company. ISBN: 1590282078. Website: <https://brians.wsu.edu/common-errors/>

Grammar Girl website: <http://www.quickanddirtytips.com/grammar-girl>

Holmbeck, G. N., & Devine, K. A. (2009). Editorial: An author's checklist for measure development and validation manuscripts. *Journal of Pediatric Psychology, 34(7): 691-696.* <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2735062/>

Williams, J.M., & Bizup, J. (2021). *Style: Lessons in clarity and grace (13th Edition).* Pearson. ISBN: 0135171830

Zinsser, W.K. (2006). *On writing well, seventh edition.* HarperCollins. ISBN: 9780060891541