

ESL Writing Tips

You are a professional and are very proficient at academic writing in your first language, but when it comes to translating your work into written English, suddenly you don't know your "ifs" from your "ofs." This is natural in professional ESL writing, because writing in another language is a lot more complicated than speaking it. Some things will always need the eye of a native speaker and the expertise of the editors at Scribendi.com's ESL editing services. Prepositions and articles can seem downright impossible at times! However, there is a lot you can do to improve your ESL writing right now.

UK/US spelling: Select the correct spelling before you start writing

Words like "neighbour," "behaviour," and "labour" have an "o-u-r" ending in the UK and an "o-r" ending in the US, while "centre," "metre," and "litre" end with "r-e" in England and "e-r" in America. The word "travelled" can have a British "l-l" or a Yankee "l." So how's an ESL writer to remember all of this? The good news is you don't need to start memorizing discrepancies. Instead, simply decide on your audience and preferred spelling conventions, go to the Tools menu in Microsoft Word, select Language, Set language, and pick US or UK English. This will help ensure spelling uniformity in your ESL writing. Are you wondering about the other English language options? Well, they will let you use the local slang. For example, the Australian version follows the UK conventions, but allows you to call your rivals "a pack of Galahs" (birds).

Who is doing what?

"In this study, the results of our research will be discussed." OK, but by whom? Or, "This study wants to investigate the effects of the experiment." No, it doesn't, because a study cannot want anything. Do not tie yourself in linguistic knots trying to avoid the first person in your ESL writing. It is perfectly correct to say, "In this study, we will discuss the results of our research." Additionally, do not overuse "one" to refer to yourself or people in general ("One's ideas are shaped by one's culture"). It is more common to use the general, impersonal "you" ("Your opinions are influenced by your culture") in professional English writing.

Short is better

Concise and clear is what you are aiming for, so keep your sentences short and sweet. The longer you let them become, the more chance there is that a reader will find them confusing or that the verb/subject agreement will falter. If you write a sentence that is longer than four lines, cut it in half. Two to three lines is long enough in any English document.

Count/Non-count nouns

Some nouns in English are countable, while others are uncountable. Uncountable nouns are always thought of as one undividable whole and are written in the singular. Nouns

like "water" and "fun" are examples of uncountable nouns. Here are a few suggestions that you might find useful when writing a professional English document:

- We need to say "A lot of information is available," not "Many informations are available." Alternatively, you may include a countable word like "many facts."
- "Research" is usually uncountable in the US (i.e., "Previous research shows..."). However, in the UK, "Previous researches show..." is acceptable. For a countable noun, try "studies" in your ESL writing.
- Experts seem to be divided on the word "data." You can use it as uncountable and say "Data is available..." or you can use it as a plural form (of the Latin datum) and say "Data are available...." The latter is used more commonly in English academic work.

While we are counting, use the singular form with the words "each" and "every" ("Every experiment shows the same result") and the plural form with the word "all" ("All the experiments were successful") in your ESL writing.

False friends to ESL writers

Our professional ESL editors always warn non-native writers to watch out for false friends, or words that sound the same in your native language and in English, but which actually have different meanings. "Actually" is a good example; it means "in reality" in English. However, "*attualmente*," which is an Italian word that sounds similar, means "currently." Even adopted English words can trick an ESL writer. A person who is "*hai tenshun*" in Japanese is excited, but the literal translation, "high tension," means someone who is on edge or nervous in English. So when in doubt, do not just guess and make it "sound English." Look it up in a good English dictionary for native speakers. If your dictionary suggests a word that you have never heard before, type it into an Internet search engine to see if it is commonly used. Using a word like "sanguinolent" instead of "bloody" might sound impressive, but "sanguinolent" is a medical term, and it would be inappropriate to employ in an English paper about history!

Check your English spell-checker's work

If you insert an incorrect word in your ESL writing, don't automatically accept the suggestion from your English spell-checker. If you type "Results are constint with previous studies," your spell checker will offer "constant." However, the correct word is "consistent." Remember that you are smarter than your computer!

Lastly, the most important thing to remember is that if you want to be sure that your ESL writing is correct, get it checked by a native speaker. Scribendi.com's ESL editing services are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, so feel free to submit your document anytime.