



Compecs
PROFESSIONAL ENGLISH COMMUNICATION SOLUTIONS

Improving Communication Skills for Reviewing English Journal Articles

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**Making evaluations:
politeness strategies**

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**Common mistakes and
useful internet sites**



General Principles in Writing Reviewer Comments

- ✓ Comments must be stated **objectively** and **without any prejudice**.
- ✓ Comments should be made with a **collaborative tone** and spirit.
- ✓ Comments must be supportive, **constructive**, thoughtful, and fair. They should identify both **strengths and weaknesses** and offer **concrete** suggestions for improvement.
- ✓ Critical comments must be presented professionally in a **respectful manner** and should not be overly harsh or disparaging.



Information for Reviewers



Becoming a Better Reviewer (and Writer and Researcher, too)

Characteristics of Excellent Reviews

Excellent reviews

- Discloses any potential conflicts of interest.
- Explains the reviewer's view of his or her intended role or expertise, e.g. topic expert, methodologist, practitioner.
- Is respectful.
- Offers specific constructive comments.
- Is appropriate in length.
- Helps editors with the decision on acceptance.
- Comments on how the report fits in the state of current knowledge on the topic.
- Comments on the importance, impact or action related to the study.
- Comments on the appropriateness of the paper for this journal.
- Offers rationales for reviewer recommendations.
- Supports comments with references, when possible.
- Makes helpful suggestions on the general organization, format and display of data.
- Points out areas that are unclear in text, tables or figures.

<http://www.annfammed.org/site/misc/pdfsanddocs/ReviewExamples.pdf>



Information for Reviewers

DISAPPOINTING REVIEWS

Review that copy edits instead of evaluating content

This is a well done study that sheds light on the gap between the subjectivity of practice and the objectivity of evidence based medicine that is becoming the standard of care.

I think this is the main point of the paper and should be more emphasized. It speaks to a need for on-going education in risk assessment using an objective and evidence based approach. Also the authors should consider using a formal testing of agreement such as Kappa or other test of agreement or correlation.

2nd sentence: I suggest "economics" instead of "economic issues" – less redundant.

1st sentence: Do you mean "translating" vs "incorporating"?

4th sentence: "Human" should be "human"

2nd sentence: I suggest taking out "discussing" (eg, "updated guidelines, barriers and facilitators...")

Last sentence – "four" is mis-spelled

1st paragraph - It would look cleaner to spell out "%" each time.

3rd sentence – should "increase in age gap" be "increase in predicted age gap"?

Last sentence – too long

Isn't "thus" traditionally followed by a comma?



Information for Reviewers

Annals of Emergency Medicine
An International Journal

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Information for Reviewers

Overview of Your Written Review

- Most journals use a two part form
 - Comments for editors (shared with other reviewers, but not authors)
 - May include specific questions or check boxes
 - Comments for authors
 - A blank page



Sentence structure

Vs.

Information structure



Information Structure

Compare: How do you feel about Jaesung?

- 1) Although Jaesung is a nice guy, he drinks a lot.
- 2) Although Jaesung drinks a lot, he's a nice guy.
- 3) Jaesung is a nice guy, but he drinks a lot.
- 4) Jaesung drinks a lot, but he is a nice guy.



Basic IS Principles

A. Main clause principle

Example: Even though it's raining, **I am going out for a walk.**

B. End placement principle

Exercise 1: ~~The relationship between A and B~~
was examined in this study.

(2) This study examined **the relationship between A and B.**



Basic IS principles

Exercise 2: Which pair of sentences has a better information flow?

- (1) Firefighting is one of the most dangerous occupations.
- (2) One of the most dangerous occupations is firefighting.
- (3) However, it is also one of the most rewarding.
- (4) Another, interestingly enough, is farming.



Information Structure

C. End weight principle

Exercise 3: Which sounds better?

- 1) An increase in glucose intolerance in people over sixty-five as well as in people with a high body mass index is a common assumption in diabetes research.
- 2) A common assumption in diabetes research is that glucose intolerance increases in people over sixty-five as well as in people with a high body mass index.



Basic IS Principles

D. Information flow

a) Use pronouns

b) Use “*this* + *summary word*”

or use “*this* + *interpretive word*”

c) Communicate “*old information*” before
“*new information.*”



Use Pronouns

Exercise 4:

In 2015 there was another outbreak of measles (Rubeola). This time *(this/it)* occurred in Disneyland and affected 125 individuals from eight states (CDC, 2015). This outbreak was covered extensively in the news in part because *(this/it)* was wide-spread with potential for high exposure rates even though *(this/it)* affected fewer people and lasted for a shorter period of time.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pedn.2018.06.009>



Use Pronouns

Exercise 5:

The weather in January was much warmer than usual.

1) ***(This/It)*** was even warmer than December.

The weather in January was much warmer than usual.

2) ***(This/It)*** may be connected to global warming trends.



Use Pronouns

Exercise 6:

When first waking from anesthesia, you may feel confused, drowsy, and foggy. **(*This/It*)** usually lasts for just a few hours, but for some people—especially older adults—confusion can last for days or weeks.



“This”+ Summary Word

Exercise 7:

- 1) In 2015 there was another outbreak of measles (Rubeola). This time it occurred in Disneyland and affected 125 individuals from eight states (CDC, 2015). This _____ was covered extensively in the news in part because it was widespread with potential for high exposure rates even though it affected fewer people and lasted for a shorter period of time.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pedn.2018.06.009>



“This”+ Summary Word

2) The increase in the number of children diagnosed with ADHD has been striking; it has quintupled from 1990 to 1998 from 1 million to nearly 5 million. This _____ has been accompanied by a significant increase in stimulant use in children with ADHD amounting to as much as 48% (Kube, Peterson, & Palmer, 2002).

<https://doi:10.1016/j.pedn.2006.03.001>



Use “this”+ Summary Word

- 3) For a long time, we have been hearing about Samsung's stretchable 9.1-inch OLED panel. This _____ has given birth to many rumors and leaks online. They have also made other smartphone manufacturers adopt this _____ in their to-be-launched phones.



Use “this” + Summary Word

- 4) In recent years, the number of students applying to Ph.D. programs has increased steadily, while the number of places available has remained constant. This _____ has resulted in intense competition for admission.



Use “this”+ Interpretive Word

- 5) According to a recent survey, 26% of all American adults now smoke, down from 38% 30 years ago. This _____ can be partly attributed to the mounting evidence linking smoking and fatal diseases, such as cancer.



Old Before New

Exercise 8: Which sounds better?

- 1) Younghee spends her Saturday nights at Sweet Bakery.
Mr. Kim owns the bakery. He has been making pastries the French way since opening the bakery in 1995.

- 2) Younghee spends her Saturday nights at Sweet Bakery.
The bakery is owned by Mr. Kim. He opened the shop in 1995 and has been making pastries the French way ever since.



Old Before New

Which sounds better?

- 3) Jingu Park received a master's degree in computer science from X and is now working at the Institute of Computer Technology. He is currently working on information systems as a researcher at the institute.
- 4) Jingu Park received a master's degree in computer science from X and is now working at the Institute of Computer Technology. As a researcher at the institute, he is currently working on information systems.



Information Structure

Compare:

We keep hearing that Samsung has plans to release a phone that's completely bendable.

- 1) **If the new report turns out to be true**, slim computers that bend and fold could be coming in just a few months.
- 2) Slim computers that bend and fold could be coming in just a few months, **if the new report turns out to be true**.

<http://www.businessinsider.com/samsung-flexible-foldable-phone-vidoes-2015-9>



Information structure

Compare:

- 1) **Although the risks are high**, Kaesong Industrial Complex has to be restarted immediately.
- 2) Kaesong Industrial Complex has to be restarted immediately **although the risks are very high**.



IS Structure and Passive Voice

Exercise 9: Which sounds better?

- 1) We went to see a movie. Steven Spielberg directed the movie. He has made a lot of popular movies, such as ET, Jaws, Indiana Jones, and Schindler's List.
- 2) We went to see a movie. The movie was directed by Steven Spielberg. He has made a lot of popular movies, such as ET, Jaws, Indiana Jones, and Schindler's List.



Politeness Strategies

Worst Peer Review Comments

REJECTED



Shit My Reviewers Say

Collecting the finest real specimens of reviewer comments since 1456

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“Most part of ‘methodology’ is useless, most of paragraphs are irrelevant to the main topics.”



25 Brutally Honest Peer Review Comments From Scientists



“The findings are not novel and the solution induces despair.”

Thinkstock / BuzzFeed

The rest of this review operates from the assumption that this paper is a sincere attempt at scientific evidence and argument.

This paper is desperate. Please reject it completely and then block the author's email ID so they can't use the online system in the future.



Softening Criticism

A. Use third person perspective

Compare:

(x) (**You**) need to include ...

Explain/describe/add X.

(o) **This paper/The manuscript/The author**
needs to include ...



Softening Criticism

B. Use conditionals

Examples:

- 1) The discussion **would have been** somewhat more relevant **if** the paper **had included** more recent literature to support his views.
- 2) The article **would be** more persuasive **if** the paper **related** the findings to ...



Evaluative Adjectives

In this _____ study,
the author attempts to show that ...



Evaluative Adjectives

➤ Evaluative adjectives

P+ = very positive **P** = positive **0** = neutral

N = negative **N+** = very negative

(0) unusual	(N) limited
(N) small	(N) restricted
(P) useful	(P) significant
(P) careful	(0) competent
(0) exploratory	(P+) remarkable



Evaluative Adjectives

➤ Evaluative adjectives

P+ = very positive **P** = positive **O** = neutral

N = negative **N+** = very negative

(O) ambitious	(O) modest
(P) important	(N+) flawed
(P+) innovative	(P) interesting/engaging
(P+) impressive	(P+) elegant
(O) preliminary	(N) unsatisfactory



Softening Criticism

C. Present good news and bad news in pairs

1) In this **impressive** but **flawed** study,
the author...

2) In this **flawed** but **impressive** study,
the author...



Softening Criticism

3) This study is an important contribution and warrants swift publication, **but** **some**

points need attention.

4) **Some points need attention, but** this study is an important contribution and warrants swift publication.



Softening Criticism

D. Use hedging

- 1) The ideas are clear here, but **I think** adding the following specific functions and data **would** allow the information system to be more complete.

- 2) **Although** **I found** the discussion of the three theories of X **very interesting**, **I found** it difficult to relate them to the rest of the paper.



Hedging (Vague Language)

Types	Examples
Introductory verbs	seem, tend, appear to be, believe, suggest, think, look like
Modal auxiliary verbs	would, may, might, could
Frequency Adverbs	often, sometimes, usually, seldom
Probability adverbs	unlikely, probable, possible
Modal nouns	assumption, possibility, probability
That clauses	It could be the case that It might be suggested that
To-clause + adjective	It may be possible to obtain It is important to develop



Hedging

Exercise 10: Use hedging.

- 1) The topic of the manuscript is inappropriate for the scope of this journal.
- 2) The author is mistaken about some points.
- 3) Climate change is caused by human activities.
- 4) There is already considerable research in this area.



Another Use of Hedging

- ❑ A politeness interpretation

Ex) I think, I feel, I found

Example:

- 1) **I thought** the authors did an excellent job of describing their position on the issue.

Compare:

- 2) The authors did an excellent job of describing their position on the issue.



Sample Decision Letter

Based on my own reading of your paper, I share the reviewer's concerns about two issues in particular. First, **I thought that it would be very helpful to** the reader **if there was** some representation of the adherence data as a function of stigma levels. For example, a figure depicting how electronically-monitored adherence varied as a function of racial discrimination **might provide** a more intuitive sense of the size of the observed effect.



Sample Decision Letter

Continued:

Second, given the proportion of participants who report a heterosexual orientation, **it might be worthwhile to address** the relationship between perceived discrimination and self-identification of sexual orientation in your sample. I also have two minor editorial suggestions regarding the Tables: 1) in order to conserve journal space, **please integrate** the data from Table 1 into the text, and 2) in Table 2, **please reserve** the asterisks for significant effects, and **consider using** a different symbol (e.g., +) to highlight marginal difference.



Reporting Verbs



Reporting Verbs

High-Frequency Reporting Verbs						
Discipline	Verbs and Frequency					
Rank	1	2	3	4	5	6
Biology	describe	find	report	show	suggest	observe
Physics	develop	report	study	find	expand	
Electrical engineering	propose	use	describe	show	publish	develop
Mechanical engineering	describe	show	report	discuss	give	develop
Epidemiology	find	describe	suggest	report	examine	show
Nursing	show	report	demonstrate	observe	find	suggest
Marketing	suggest	argue	find	demonstrate	propose	show
Applied linguistics	suggest	argue	show	explain	find	point out
Psychology	find	show	suggest	report	demonstrate	focus
Sociology	argue	suggest	describe	note	analyze	discuss
Education	find	suggest	note	report	demonstrate	provide

From *Academic Writing for Graduate Students* (2012)

Reporting Verbs

In academic writing, you can refer to ideas or research of others by using reporting verbs, e.g. *Brown (2011) states that....* Your choice of reporting verb can show the reader how you feel about the research you are quoting or paraphrasing, e.g. *Smith (2010) shows ...* vs. *Smith (2010) advises to....* vs. *Smith (2010) challenges ...*

Neutral

- to show
- to demonstrate
- to investigate
- to explore
- to state
- to report
- to list

Tentative

- to suggest
- to propose
- to advise
- to recommend
- to speculate
- to hypothesise
- to reason

Strong (in favour)

- to assert
- to advocate
- to encourage
- to argue
- to affirm
- to believe
- to appraise

Strong (against)

- to challenge
- to dispute
- to disagree
- to refute
- to negate
- to object
- to contradict



Reporting Verbs

Exercise 11:

- 1) The results **indicate/establish** that there is a link between smoking and lung cancer.
- 2) The test results **confirm/suggest** diagnosis and guide treatment.



Reporting Verbs

- 3) The latest series of studies **questions/challenges** the conclusions of previous research.
- 4) The results given in Figure 3 **validate/support** the second hypothesis.



Reporting Verbs

➤ Reporting claims

Key claims	Supporting points
assert	note
claim	observe
state	point out



Reporting Verbs

➤ Reporting claims

Compare:

- 1) Hyland (2016) **notes** that poor diet is a key cause of obesity. He **claims** that obesity is a major issue in developing countries.
- 2) Hyland (2016) **claims** that poor diet is a key cause of obesity. He **notes** that obesity is a major issue in developing countries.



Reporting Verbs

➤ Reporting results

Results/findings	Conclusions
demonstrate	conclude
find	indicate
show	suggest



Reporting Verbs

Exercise 12:

In a study to investigate obesity, Hyland (2012) **suggested** that young people who ate fast food more than 3 times a week were heavier than young people who ate meals at home. This finding **shows** that obesity is associated with eating fast food.



Common mistakes



Suggest/Recommend

Exercises 13: Correct the mistakes.

- 1) I suggest you to check this term throughout your manuscript.
- 2) I suggest it to be simplified by taking out some....



Suggest/Recommend

Correct grammatical patterns

1. suggest/recommend/propose + 'THAT' Clause

2. suggest/recommend/propose + [a person's]

Gerund

3. suggest/recommend/propose + Noun



Anthropomorphism

Exercise 14: Correct the mistakes.

- 1) This experiment attempted to demonstrate that X can affect Y.

- 2) The statistics argued in favor of adding X to Y.



Verb Tense

Exercise 15: Choose the correct tense.

- 1) We investigate the causes of death among Korean diabetic patients between 2005 and 2015.
- 2) Table 1 above demonstrate the success of cloning in various animal species.



Verb Tense

- 3) One implication of these findings is that cultural stressors may increase the risk for poor mental health outcomes among this group.



Verb Tense

4) Choose the correct tense

- a. We **found** that the pressure **increased** as the temperature **rose**, which **indicated** that temperature **played** a significant role in the process.
- b. We **found** that the pressure **increases** as the temperature **rises**, which **indicates** that temperature **plays** a significant role in the process.
- c. We **found** that the pressure **increased** as the temperature **rose**, which **indicates** that temperature **plays** a significant role in the process.



Collocations

Exercise 16: Choose (an) adverb(s) from the box.

utterly strongly bitterly ridiculously highly deeply

- 1) very concerned →
- 2) very controversial →
- 3) very opposed →
- 4) very disappointing →



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Thank You!



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