

The value of academic editing

This material has been prepared by the IPEd Standing Committee on Academic Editing for the IPEd website – public section for potential clients. It complements resources from the Ambassador program also on the [website](#). IPEd members should check resources on [academic editing](#) and be aware of IPEd's [Guidelines for editing research theses](#).

How academic editors add value

Academic editors can save time and stress for writers of academic material, both students and academics, at all stages of an academic project. Editors can ensure material proceeds smoothly through the process of research and publication by being aware of deadlines, requirements and conventions. IPEd's *Australian standards for editing practice* provide general guidance about what editors do, but academic material can have additional needs. Academic editors are valuable members of the research team, helping to ensure the quality of research and related material.

Academic material includes grant applications, research proposals, ethics applications, data collection instruments, journal articles, journals, conference papers, conference proceedings, working papers, book chapters, books, research reports, theses and more.

Across a wide range of academic material, academic editors can help by:

- ensuring academic conventions and tone
- formatting academic work to specific requirements
- meeting word and/or page limits
- advising on publication issues
- ensuring clear communication in text and non-text academic material
- ensuring consistency and setting up style sheets and templates.

Ensuring academic conventions and tone

Academic editors can ensure academic writing has the right academic tone for the audience and meets academic and research conventions. This includes word choice, structure, formatting, referencing and meeting academic conventions for presenting research material including statistics, tables and graphs.

Referencing is a vital part of academic work. Academic editors can help ensure appropriate referencing that meets conventions. Editors are aware of the purpose of referencing and aware of different referencing styles and formats.

See examples under [‘Ensuring academic conventions and tone’](#) below.

Formatting academic work to specific requirements

Academic material such as journal articles, theses and grant applications usually has strict formatting requirements to be accepted or published. Requirements can include heading styles and numbering, spelling style (Australian, UK or US English), referencing style, word and/or page limits, required elements and the order of material.

Academic editors can format material to meet the specific requirements, ensuring material is not delayed or rejected simply for not meeting requirements. Editors can check that all the elements required for a specific type of work are included and correct, including preliminary pages, the main text and appendices or supplementary material.

For example, journals often have very specific requirements for initial submissions and material can be rejected if it does not meet these requirements for both content and presentation of material. Similarly, the thesis by publication format requires careful attention to the formatting requirements if material in the thesis has been formatted for submission or publication in other sources. Grant applications can have very stringent requirements to even be considered by funding bodies.

See examples under [‘Formatting references and citations to a specific style’](#) below.

Meeting word and/or page limits

Many types of academic material and outputs must meet specific strict word and/or page limits. Word limits may apply for headings and titles, abstracts, journal articles, conference papers, theses and grant applications for funding. Page limits may apply for grant applications to funding bodies such as the Australian Research Council and National Health and Medical Research Council.

Academic editors can edit academic material to meet word or page limits, ensuring academic material is not rejected simply for being too long. Depending on the material provided and the limits, editors can suggest material to be deleted, rewritten or trimmed or can rewrite or edit material to maintain the meaning within the specified limits.

See examples under [‘Meeting word limits and ensuring clear communication’](#) below.

Advising on publication issues

Academic editors can advise on publication issues to improve the likelihood of publishing in target, high quality publications. Academic editors can help develop a publication strategy, advise on choosing publications to disseminate research, advise on the publication process and requirements including the initial submission and the review process, advise on handling sensitive or potentially controversial issues, prepare reference lists and appendices, and review responses to reviewers and journal editors.

Editors can advise on the increasingly diverse range of publication options and formats. For large research projects, academic editors may project manage the dissemination of research in print, online and social media.

As part of advising on publication issues, academic editors may also format work to meet specific publisher requirements or word and/or page limits, as noted above.

Ensuring clear communication in text

Academic material can have a wide audience including academic colleagues or the broader community. Academic editors can ensure clear communication in academic work for all audiences by applying the [Australian standards for editing practice](#), including:

- reducing ambiguity, verbosity and repetition
- correcting grammar, spelling and punctuation
- ensuring consistency.

See examples under [‘Meeting word limits and ensuring clear communication’](#), [‘Correcting grammar, spelling and punctuation’](#) and [‘Ensuring consistency’](#) below.

Ensuring clear communication in tables and graphical material

Academic work is not just about the text. Academic editors can ensure clear communication in tables and graphical material by:

- ensuring consistency in titles and numbering
- formatting tables and graphical material for consistency and clear communication
- ensuring tables and graphical material have appropriate sources, references and notes
- checking for completeness in table entries

- ensuring clarity and consistency between descriptions in the text and in tables and graphical material.

Ensuring consistency and setting up style sheets and templates

Academic work can be written over several years and may be a compilation of material written by several different authors or originally prepared for other purposes. Academic editors can ensure consistency in voice and tone, terminology, grammar, spelling, punctuation and formatting throughout an academic work.

Academic editors can support and add value to an academic project right from the start by advising on how to set up and format long documents in Word or by working in multi-author teams. This can include setting up a style sheet for commonly used words and items in the project documents and setting up a template in Word or styles in a Word document. Editors can also advise on using features in Word such as styles, cross-referencing, automatic numbering and tables of contents to make changes and updating easier.

Academic editors can ensure consistency in material written over long periods of time by multiple authors.

See more on [style sheets](#).

See examples under '[Ensuring consistency](#)' and '[Correcting formatting](#)' below.

Examples of what academic editors can fix

These examples are based on common issues seen in academic writing and are provided as a guide to what academic editors can do. Due to space, these examples are very short and do not convey the full extent of academic editing. The edited solution may vary depending on the style guide being followed. One well-known style guide is 'APA' or 'APA7', referring to the seventh edition of the [Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association](#). Editing work may also be guided by [IPEd's Guidelines for editing research theses](#).

Ensuring academic conventions and tone

Problem description	Original text	Edited solution
Incorrect word choice or commonly confused words	Exasperated the problem	Exacerbated the problem
	principle/principal (depending on context)	principle/principal (depending on context)
	honing in on	homing in on
	Illicit a response	Elicit a response

Overuse of nominalisation (abstract nouns)	made a contribution make an application prior to the commencement of is in alignment with	contributed apply before commencing aligns with
Incorrect word order	significantly statistical difference	statistically significant difference
Inconsistent use of 'data' as singular or plural (plural required in APA style)	An audit trail involves a trail of all data, how it was collected, coded, and analysed, and where it was stored for review. Confidentiality of data and its appropriate storage ...	An audit trail involves a trail of all data, how they were collected, coded, and analysed, and where they were stored for review. Confidentiality of data and their appropriate storage ...
Use of 'while' or 'whilst' to mean 'although'	Whilst a precise answer to this is mutually exclusive with a broadly applicable one, ...	Although a precise answer to this is mutually exclusive with a broadly applicable one, ...
Using both e.g. and etc. in the same parentheses or using them outside parentheses	The definitions of every other unit of measurement in the modern setting, e.g. the mile, degrees Celsius, Teslas, etc. are rooted in the SI definitions.	The definitions of every other unit of measurement in the modern setting (e.g. the mile, degrees Celsius, Teslas) are rooted in the SI definitions.

Formatting references and citations to a specific style

Note: these examples are based on 'APA7' style, the seventh edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*.

Problem description	Original text	Edited solution
Incorrect punctuation of et al.	Jones et al., (2017) Jones, et al. (2017) Jones et. al. (2017)	Jones et al. (2017)
Citations in parentheses not in alphabetical order	(Biggs & Tang, 2007; ACER, 2010)	(ACER, 2010; Biggs & Tang, 2007)
Ambiguity when multiple works with 3 or more authors and same publication year shorten to same in-text citation form	Chang et al. (2015) but two different entries in reference list that could shorten to this form	Chang, Wang, Li, and Chen (2015) and Chang, Wang, Li, and Wu (2015)

Not using a serial comma before 'and' or '&' when 3 authors or more need to be listed in citations to avoid ambiguity	Chang, Wang, Li and Chen (2015) (Chang, Wang, Li & Wu, 2015)	Chang, Wang, Li, and Chen (2015) (Chang, Wang, Li, & Wu, 2015)
Reference list entries don't follow the 'nothing comes before something' rule	Defond, X. (2020). DeGeorge, X. (2019). De Fond, X. (2019).	De Fond, X. (2019). Defond, X. (2020). DeGeorge, X. (2019).

Meeting word limits and ensuring clear communication

Problem description	Original text	Edited solution
Verbosity/wordiness	located where I undertake my professional responsibilities [7 words]	located where I work [4 words]
Verbosity/wordiness	The way in which these disproportionate estimates occur may be in one of a few fashions: ... [16 words]	These disproportionate estimates may occur in a few ways: ... [9 words]
Overuse of nominalisation (abstract nouns)	made a contribution make an application prior to the commencement of is in alignment with	contributed apply before starting aligns with
Use of the grammatical expletive as subject (it is/was; there are/were) instead of actual subject (students)	It was this feeling that students tried to overcome ... [9 words]	Students tried to overcome this feeling ... [6 words]
Grammatical expletive as subject; main subject (energy conservation) does not appear within first 7–8 words; repetition	It is only to a very good approximation that over the length and time scales that we commonly deal with here on Earth that energy conservation holds as an appropriate approximation [31 words including 3 × <i>that</i> and 2 × <i>approximation</i>]	Energy conservation only holds as a good approximation over the length and time scales we commonly deal with on earth. [20 words]
Wordiness and lack of clarity	That is, in cases that there are a very large number of possible outcomes, irrespective of which outcome it is, it is improbable. [23 words]	That is, when a very large number of outcomes are possible, every outcome is improbable. [15 words]

Wordiness and lack of clarity when describing data in a table	In Table 5.3, within the <i>Motive</i> items, there were 3 items statistically significantly different between SPQ1 and SPQ2 being items 3, 9 and 39 and two items in <i>Strategy</i> that were also statistically significantly different, being items 12 and 18. [40 words]	In Table 5.3, items 3, 9 and 39 within the <i>Motive</i> items, and items 12 and 18 within the <i>Strategy</i> items, were statistically significantly different between SPQ1 and SPQ2. [29 words]
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Correcting grammar, spelling and punctuation

Problem description	Original text	Edited solution
Subject/verb disagreement	The purpose of the spatial tests were threefold. Identification of these approaches are important.	The purpose of the spatial tests was threefold. Identification of these approaches is important.
Dangling modifier (introductory phrase does not refer to the subject of the sentence, which is 'early scientists')	At its inception, early scientists used dubious standard units like ...	At measurement's inception, early scientists used dubious standard units like ...
Non-parallel structure when using 'both'	both the learning and teaching of ...	both the learning and the teaching of ...
Non-parallel structure (and incorrect punctuation) when using 'not only ... but also'	It is not only in their limited capacity that our senses can lead us astray, we can also be led away by our interpretation of the sensory input.	Our senses can lead us astray not only in their limited capacity but also through our interpretation of the sensory input.
Non-parallel structure for each item in a list	Participants were 5 years old, female and had no siblings.	Participants were 5 years old, were female and had no siblings.
Not pairing commas around a parenthetical statement or word	Two different analytical approaches (lenses), Anghileri's (2006) "hierarchy of scaffolding practices" and Sfard's (2001) "commognitive approach" to learning are synthesised within this sociocultural stance.	Two different analytical approaches (lenses), Anghileri's (2006) "hierarchy of scaffolding practices" and Sfard's (2001) "commognitive approach" to learning, are synthesised within this sociocultural stance.
	It is important therefore, that the ...	It is important, therefore, that the ...
Using a comma between a verb and its object or between the subject and verb	Much of the literature about school reform sees, moral purpose as characterised by shared goals.	Much of the literature about school reform sees moral purpose as characterised by shared goals.
	The final section of Chapter 3, describes the program.	The final section of Chapter 3 describes the program.
Using a comma before an essential appositive	The survey instrument, Qualtrics was used.	The survey instrument Qualtrics was used.

Using a comma incorrectly with an introductory phrase	In addition, to the number of expected contact hours another important idea was generated.	In addition to the number of expected contact hours, another important idea was generated.
Incorrect use of a comma pair to set off a defining (restrictive) clause beginning with 'that'.	For example, Toptas et al. (2012) found that a three-dimensional modelling program, that assisted students in folding and unfolding three-dimensional objects, had a positive effect on spatial thinking.	For example, Toptas et al. (2012) found that a three-dimensional modelling program that assisted students in folding and unfolding three-dimensional objects had a positive effect on spatial thinking.
Using a comma after 'and' in a list of items separated by commas (also incorrect if the items are separated by semicolons)	Some researchers propose that spatial thinking consists of three spatial skills: mental rotation, spatial perception, and, spatial visualisation.	Some researchers propose that spatial thinking consists of three spatial skills: mental rotation, spatial perception, and spatial visualisation.
	This chapter has concluded with a discussion of verification, ethical issues, and, limitations and delimitations.	This chapter has concluded with a discussion of verification, ethical issues, and limitations and delimitations.
Using a semicolon instead of a colon to introduce a list of items	This study used three data collection strategies; one, two, and three.	This study used three data collection strategies: one, two, and three.
Using a colon in running text after an introduction that is not an independent clause or complete sentence	A philosophy for life would revolve around key concerns of: survival and reproducing.	A philosophy for life would revolve around key concerns of survival and reproducing.
	Perhaps you should tackle grand things on the scale of humanity such as: poverty, politics, climate change, or whatever else faces the future of the human race.	Perhaps you should tackle grand things on the scale of humanity: poverty, politics, climate change, or whatever else faces the future of the human race.

Ensuring consistency

Problem description	Original text	Edited solution
Mixing double and single quotation marks	Uses double quotation marks for direct quotes and single quotation marks for ironic or slang expressions.	Double quotation marks used for both types of usage, with single quotation marks only for quotes within quotes (or vice versa, depending on publication style).
Introducing an abbreviation then not using it consistently thereafter	Introduces an abbreviation but uses the term in full again later.	Introduces the abbreviation on first use and uses it consistently thereafter.
Overusing capital letters or using them inconsistently	The Program was implemented in Schools by the Government.	The program was implemented in schools by the government.

Inconsistently writing numbers as words or as numerals	The project will be implemented across five years ... This 5-year project ... [both 'five years' and '5 years' used]	The project will be implemented across 5 years ... This 5-year project ...
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Correcting formatting

Problem description	Original text	Edited solution
Random changes in font or inconsistent paragraph styles	There were six items.	There were six items.
Using a tab for first-line paragraph indents instead of setting the indent in the paragraph dialog box	The program was implemented in schools. It ran for five years.	The program was implemented in schools. It ran for five years.
Using two spaces after end punctuation of sentences	The program was implemented in schools. It ran for five years.	The program was implemented in schools. It ran for five years.
Using two or more returns after paragraphs to add space	The program was implemented in schools. It ran for five years.	Insert a page break or add spacing to the paragraph style.
Not pasting figures 'in line with text'		Paste figures in line with text so they don't move around the page.
Incorrect footers due to deleting section breaks		Link footers to previous section or, if different footers are needed for different sections, insert section breaks.