Research and Academic Writing

The Structured Composition of Academic Writing

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Undergraduate Diploma in Business Administration

In today's lecture we will cover:

-Structuring paragraphs clearly and cohesively
-Introducing and linking paragraphs to create a logical flow
-Writing effective introductions and conclusions for the essays
-Structuring introductions to provide clear context and purpose
-Developing substantial opening sections to engage the reader
-Crafting well-rounded conclusions that summarise key points
-Rewriting
-Proofreading

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Linking paragraphs

Recapitulating

(a) A paragraph is a group of sentences that deal with a single topic.

(b) The length of paragraphs varies significantly according to text type but should generally be no less than four or five sentences

(c) Normally (but not always), the first sentence introduces the topic. Other sentences may give definitions, examples, information, reasons, restatements and summaries.

(d) The parts of the paragraph are linked together by the phrases and conjunctions. They guide the reader through the argument presented.

- Development of ideas….
- In groups of 3 use the sentences below to form a paragraph about the topic of home ownership.

(i) When this burst, millions of people lost their homes, which for many had contained their savings.

(ii) These had been developed to allow higher-risk poorer families to buy their own homes but contributed to a property price bubble.

(iii) Many economists now argue that there is a maximum level of home ownership which should not be exceeded.

(iv) All these claims were challenged by the economic crash of 2008, which was in large part caused by defaults on American sub-prime mortgages.

(v) Even households which had positive equity still felt poorer and reduced their spending.

(vi) Others were trapped in their houses by negative equity, in other words their houses were worth le than they had paid for them.

Answer

Topic sentence	(iv) All these claims were challenged by the economic crash of 2008, which was in large part caused by defaults on American sub-prime mortgages.
Definition	(ii) These had been developed to allow higher-risk poorer families to buy their own homes but contributed to a property price bubble.
Result 1	(i) When this burst, millions of people lost their homes, which for many had contained their savings.
Result 2	(vi) Others were trapped in their houses by negative equity, in other words their houses were worth less than they had paid for them.
Result 3	(v) Even households which had positive equity still felt poorer and reduced their spending.
Conclusion	(iii) Many economists now argue that there is a maximum level of home ownership which should not be exceeded.

(b) Indicate **the phrase used to** link the paragraph to the previous one.
(c) Indicate the words and phrases used to link the sentences together.

Linking paragraphs together….

In order to begin a new topic, use phrases such as:

Turning to the issue of . . .

Inflation must also be examined . . . . . is another area for consideration

Paragraphs can also be introduced with adverbs:

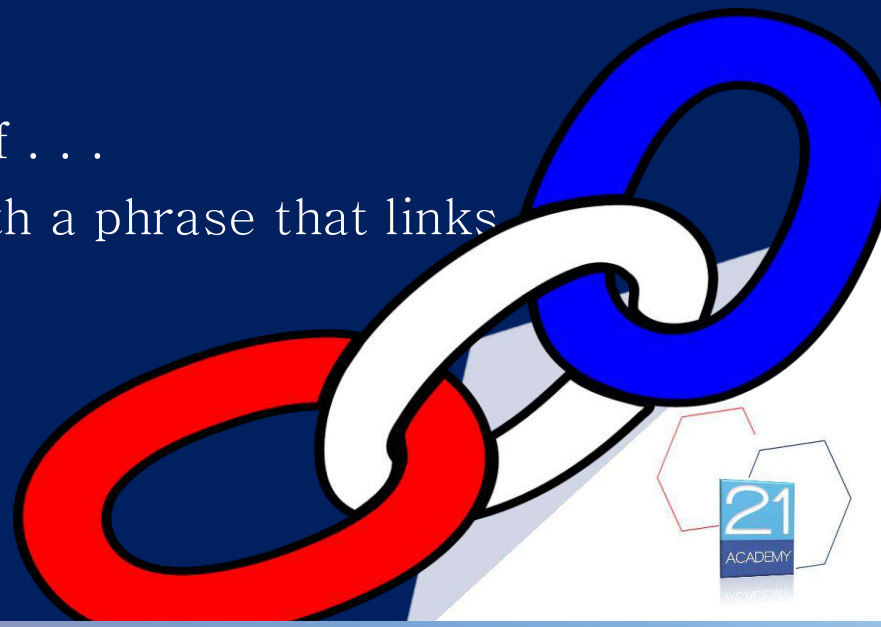
Traditionally, few examples were . . .

Finally, the performance of . . . Currently, there is little evidence of . . .

To maintain continuity of argument, each new paragraph begins with a phrase that links it to the previous paragraph:

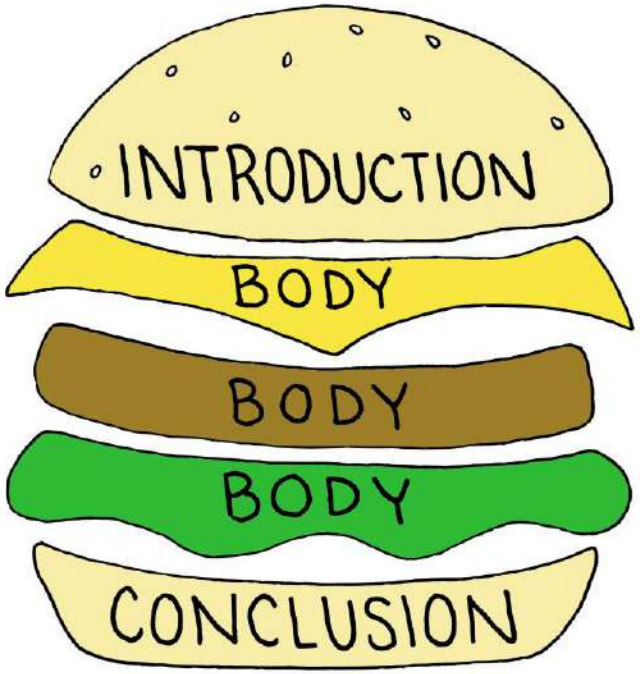
Despite this (i.e. the lack of a conclusive link)

All these claims (i.e. arguments in favour of …



Introductions and Conclusions

- An effective introduction explains the purpose and scope of the paper to the reader.
- The conclusion should provide a clear answer to any question asked in the title, as well as summarising the main points.
- In coursework, both introductions and conclusions are normally written after the main body.



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Introduction contents are usually no more than about 10% of the total length of the assignment.

What is normally found in an essay introduction?

Components	Yes/No
(i) A definition of any unfamiliar terms in the title	
(ii) The conclusions you reached on the topic	
(iii) Mention of some sources you have read on the topic	
(iv) A provocative idea or question to interest the reader	
(v) Your aim or purpose in writing	
(vi) The method you adopt to answer the question (or an outline)	
(vii) Some background to the topic	
(viii) Any limitations you set yourself	

Introduction structure

- Relevant background information
- Review of work by other writers on the topic
- Purpose or aim of the paper
- Your methods
- Any limitations you imposed
- The organisation of your work

Opening sentences of Introductions

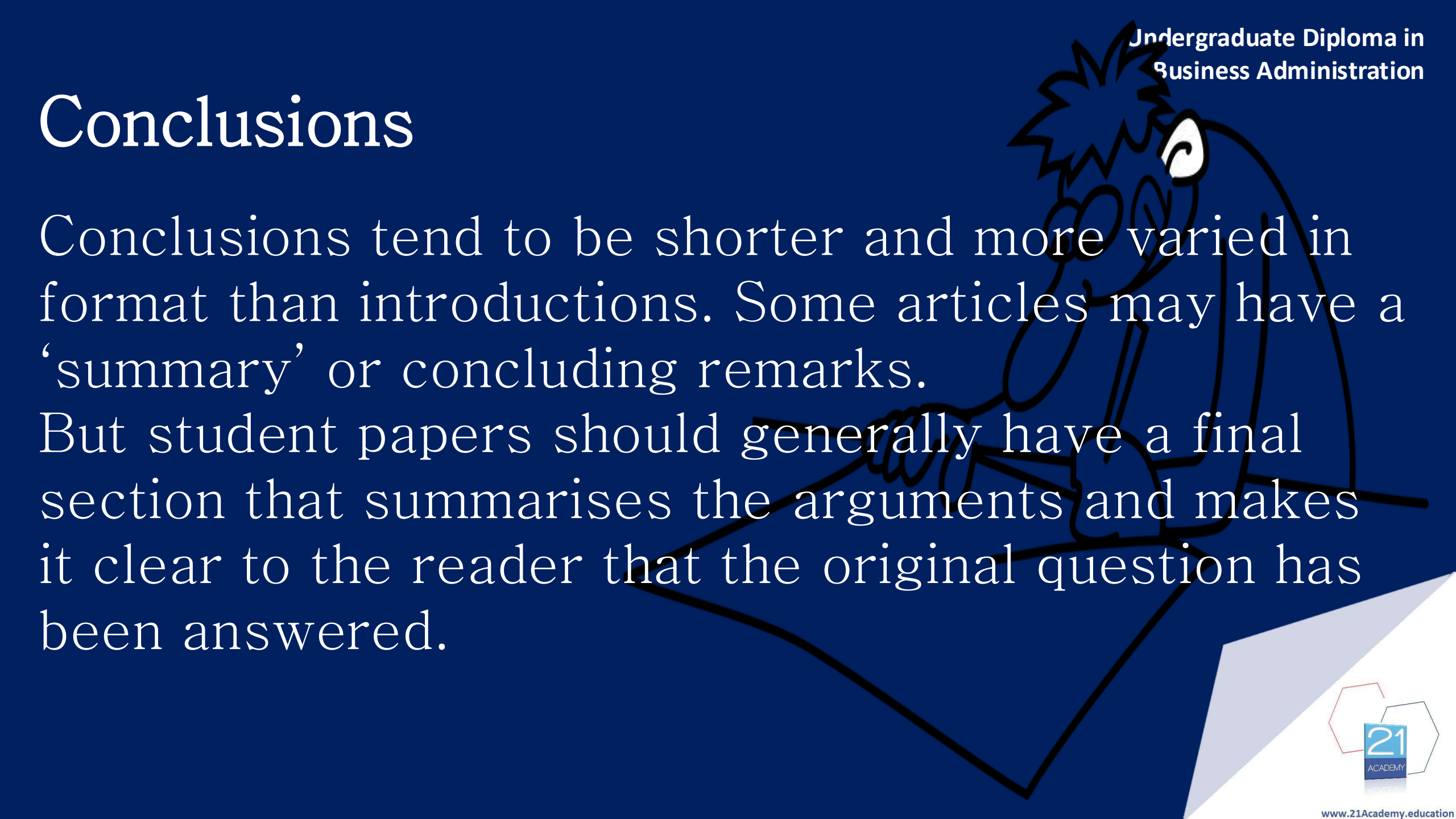
It is important to avoid opening sentences that are too general.

Compare:

Nowadays, there is a lot of competition among different business providers.

Newspapers are currently facing strong competition from rival news providers such as the internet and television.

Conclusions



Conclusions tend to be shorter and more varied in format than introductions. Some articles may have a 'summary' or concluding remarks.
But student papers should generally have a final section that summarises the arguments and makes it clear to the reader that the original question has been answered.

Which of the following are generally acceptable in conclusions?

(a) A statement showing how your aim has been achieved.

(b) A discussion of the implications of your research.

(c) Some new information on the topic not mentioned before.

(d) A short review of the main points of your study.

(e) Some suggestions for further research.

(f) Mention of the limitations of your study.

(g) Comparison with the results of similar studies.

(h) A quotation that appears to sum up your work.

Simple and Complex Definitions

Definitions are usually found in introductions .

They are not needed in every case, but if the title includes an unfamiliar phrase, or if the writer wants to use a term in a special way, it is worth making clear to the reader exactly what is meant in this context.

Simple definitions

Basic definitions are formed by giving a category and the application:

Word	Category	Application
An agenda	is a set of issues	to be discussed in a meeting.
A Master’s Degree	is an academic award	for postgraduate students, given on successful completion of a dissertation.
A grant	is a sum of money	given for a specific purpose.

Complete the following definitions by inserting a suitable category word from the following:

organisation period financial instrument loan agreement costs

(a) A mortgage is a type of _____ used for buying property in which the lender has the security of the property.
(b) A multinational company is a business _____ that operates in various countries.
(c) A recession is a _____ of negative economic growth.
(d) A cartel is an _____ between a group of companies for the purpose of price-fixing.
(e) Overheads are the fixed _____ of a business, not related to production.
(f) A bond is a _____ offering a fixed rate of return over a limited period.

Write definitions for the following:

(g) A trades union _____.
(h) A monopoly _____.
(i) Marketing _____.
(j) A dividend _____.
(k) A hostile takeover _____.

1. Simple definitions
(a) loan
(b) organisation
(c) period
(d) agreement
(e) costs
(f) financial instrument Model answers:
(g) A trades union is an organisation of workers formed to protect its members' interests.
(h) A monopoly is a market in which one company has total or near-total control.
(i) Marketing is a process that focuses on identifying and satisfying consumer demand profitably.
(j) A dividend is a payment made by a company to its shareholders.
(k) A hostile takeover is the acquisition of a firm despite the opposition of its management board.

Complex definitions

Study the examples and indicate the term being defined.

(a)The definition for a failed project ranges from abandoned projects to projects that do not meet their full potential or simply have schedule overrun problems.

(b) Development is a socio-economic-technological process having the main objective of raising the standard of living of the people.

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When writing introductions, it is often useful to define a term in the title, even if it is common, in order to demonstrate your understanding of its meaning.

Study the following titles, underline the terms that are worth defining, and try defining them.

(a)Do ‘managing diversity’ policies and practices in Human Resource Management add value?

(b) How can the management of an entrepreneurial business retain its entrepreneurial culture as it matures?

Answers

- (a) Managing diversity policies are a systematic and comprehensive managerial process for developing an environment in which all employees, with their similarities and differences, can contribute to the organisation, and where no one is excluded due to unrelated factors.
- (b) An entrepreneurial business is set up by somebody who demonstrates effective application of a number of enterprising attributes, such as creativity, initiative, risk-taking, problem-solving ability, and autonomy, and will often risk his or her own capital.

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Rewriting and Proofreading

For coursework it is important to take time to revise your work to improve its clarity and logical development.

It is essential to avoid the small errors that may make your work inaccurate or even difficult to understand.

Rewriting

Although it is tempting to think that the first draft of an essay is adequate, it is almost certain that it can be improved.

After completing your first draft, you should leave it for a day and then reread it, asking yourself the following questions:

(a) Does this fully answer the question(s) in the title?

(b) Do the different sections of the paper have the right weight (i.e. is it well balanced)?

(c) Does the argument or discussion develop clearly and logically?

(d) Have I forgotten any important points that would support th development?

Proofreading means checking your work for small errors that may make it more difficult for the reader to understand exactly what you want to say.

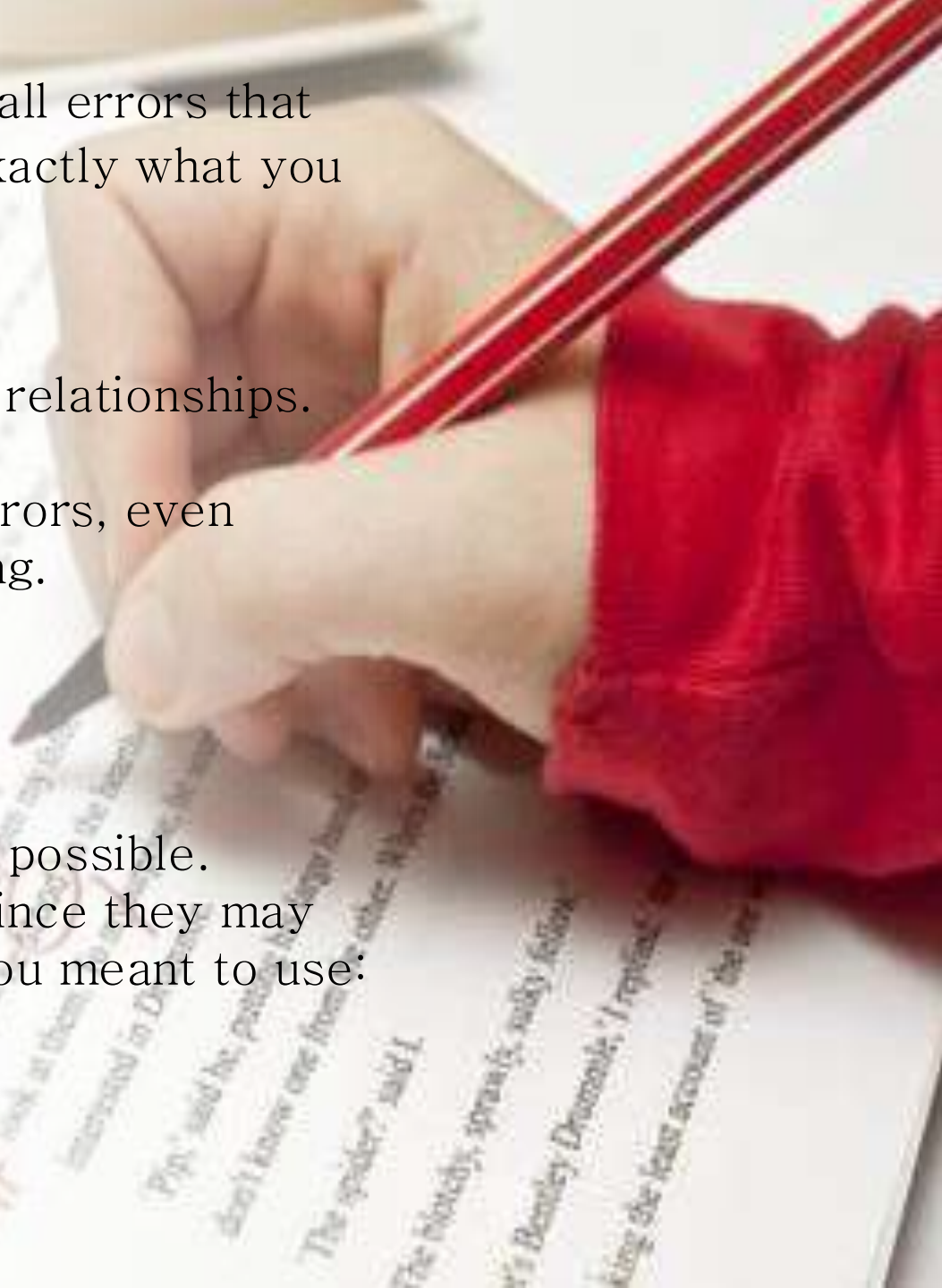
If a sentence has only one error:
She has no enough interpersonal skills to handle different relationships.

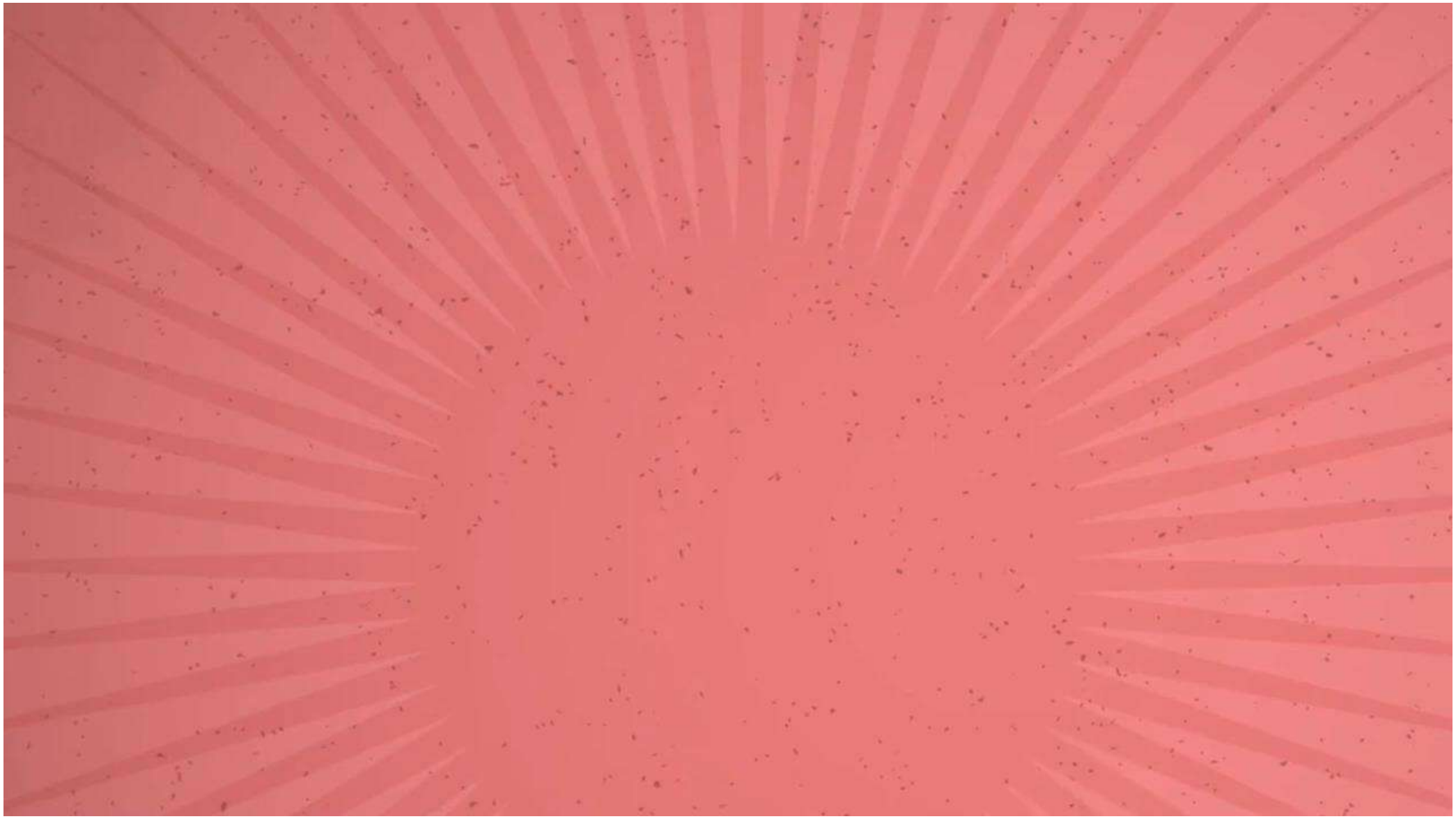
It is not difficult to understand, but if there are multiple errors, even though they are all quite minor, the effect is very confusing.

As keynes, the Bitish economic, siad, 'In the long run . . ..
we are all ded'.

Clearly, you should aim to make your meaning as clear as possible.
Note that computer spellchecks do not always help you, since they may ignore a word that is spelt correctly but is not the word you meant to use:

e.g. : Tow factors need to be considered . .



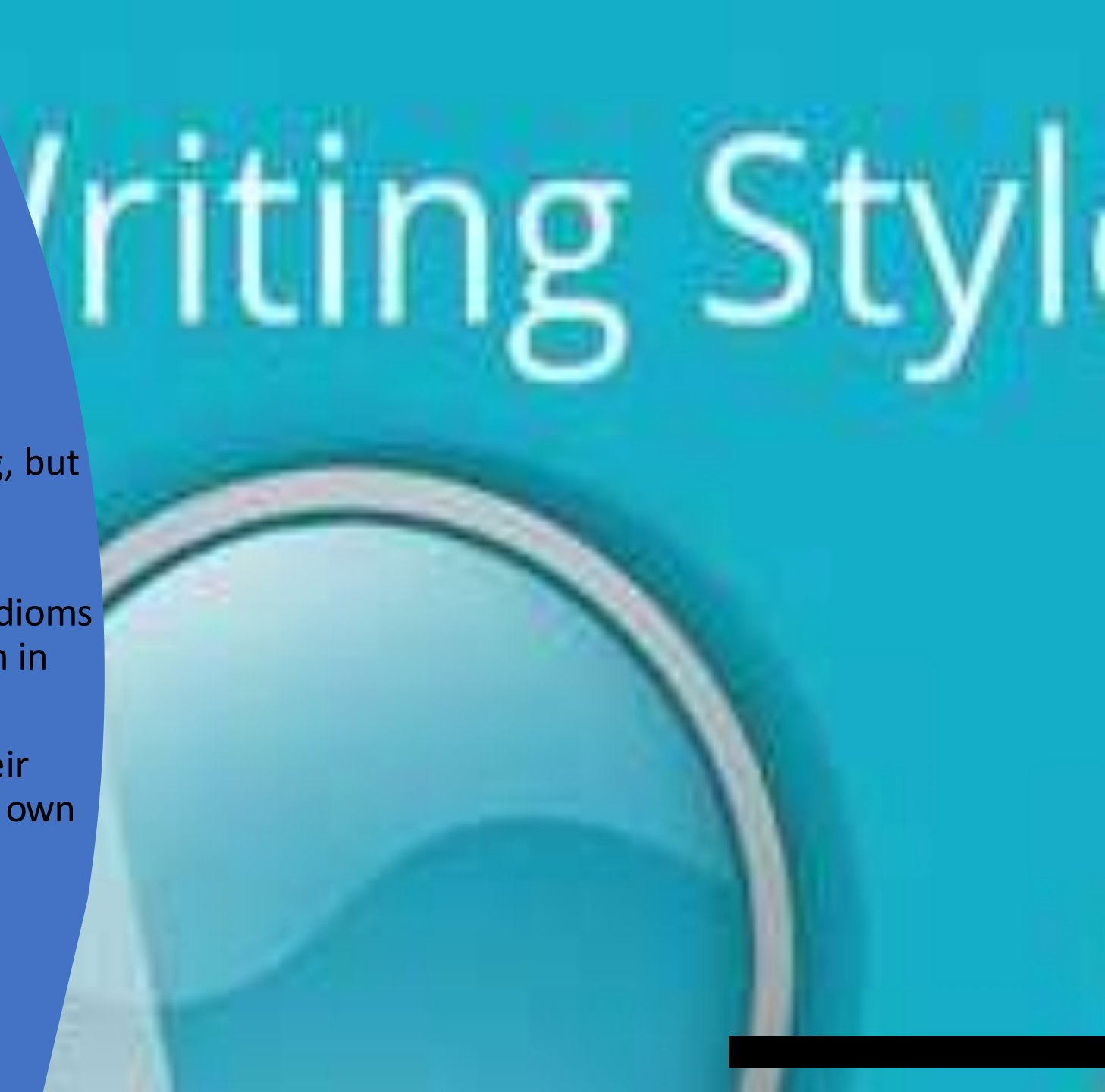


The academic writing style..

There is no one correct style of academic writing, but in general it should attempt to be accurate, impersonal and objective.

For example, personal pronouns such as ‘I’ and idioms (i.e.: informal language) are used less often than in other kinds of writing.

Students should study examples of writing in their own subject area, and then aim to develop their own ‘voice’.



Components of academic style

- Study the below paragraph and discuss what you consider as poor style:

How to make people work harder is a topic that lots of people have written about in the last few years. There are lots of different theories etc. and I think some of them are ok. When we think about this, we should remember the old Chinese proverb, that you can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink. So how do we increase production? It's quite a complex subject but I'll just talk about a couple of ideas.

Poor style	**Reason**
How to make people work harder . . .	Imprecise vocabulary – use 'motivation'
. . . lots of people . . .	Vague – give names
. . . the last few years.	Vague – give dates
lots of different . . .	Avoid 'lots of'
. . . etc . . .	Avoid using 'etc.' and 'so on'
. . . I think . . .	Too personal
. . . are ok.	Too informal
When we think about this . . .	Too personal
. . . the old Chinese proverb . . .	Do not quote proverbs or similar expressions
So how do we increase production?	Avoid rhetorical questions
It's quite a . . .	Avoid contractions
. . . I'll just talk about a couple . . .	Too personal and informal

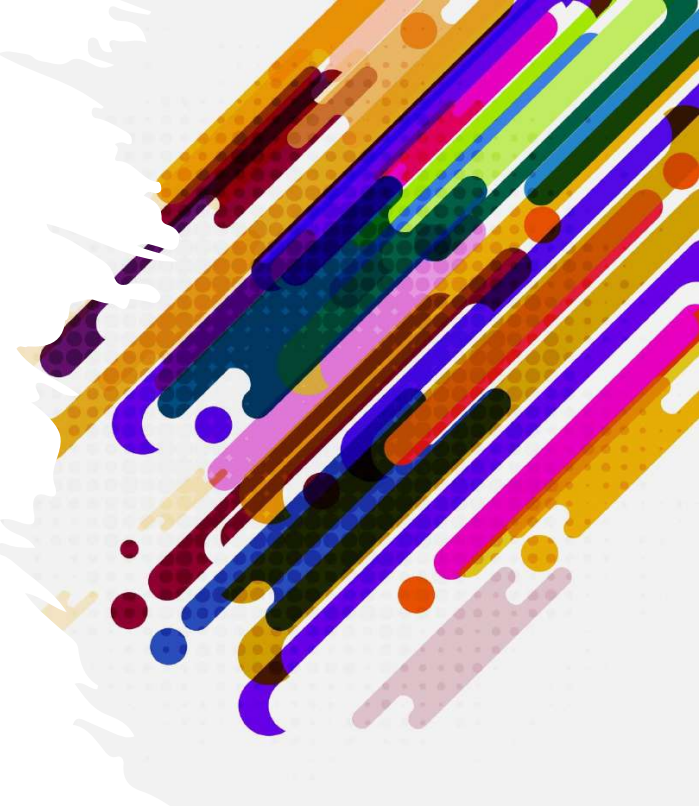
The following are **guidelines** that should help you develop a style of your own.

(a) Do not use idiomatic or colloquial vocabulary: kids, boss. Instead, use standard English: children, manager.

(b) Use vocabulary accurately. There is a difference between currency and money, or governance and government, which you are expected to know in your subject area.

(c) Be as precise as possible when dealing with facts or figures. Avoid phrases such as about a hundred or hundreds of years ago. If it is necessary to estimate numbers, use approximately rather than about.

(d) Conclusions should use tentative language. Avoid absolute statements such as unemployment causes crime. Instead, use cautious phrases: unemployment may cause crime or tends to cause crime.



(e) Avoid adverbs that show your personal attitude: luckily, remarkably, surprisingly.
(f) Do not contract verb forms: don’t, can’t. Use the full form: do not, cannot.
(g) Although academic English tends to use the passive more than standard English, it should not be overused. Both have their place.

Compare: Manners (1995) claims that most companies perform worse when . . .
It is widely agreed that most companies perform worse when . . .
In the first case, the focus is on the source, in the second on what companies.

Guidelines…

(h) Avoid the following:

-like for introducing examples- use such as or for instance
-thing and combinations like nothing or something- use factor, issue or topic
-lots of- use a significant/considerable number
- little/big- use small/large
-'get' phrases such as get better/worse- use improve and deteriorate
- good/bad are simplistic- use positive/negative

More style……

More tips on style…..

(i) Do not use question forms such as

What were the reasons for the decline in wool exports?

Instead, use statements: There were four main reasons for the decline . . .

(j) Avoid numbering sections of your text, except in reports and long essays.

Instead use conjunctions and signposting expressions to introduce new sections (Turning to the question of taxation . . .)

(k) When writing lists, avoid using etc. or and so on. Insert and before the last item:

The main products were pharmaceuticals, electronic goods and confectionery.

(l) Avoid using two-word verbs such as go on or bring up if there is a suitable synonym. Use continue or raise.

Avoiding repetition and redundancy

Instead of repeating the same word in a short text:
e.g.: Most family businesses employ less than ten people. These businesses . . .
Try to make the text more interesting by using synonyms: Most family businesses employ less than ten people. These firms . . .

Repeating an idea or including an irrelevant point (redundancy) suggests that the writer is not fully in control of the material. It gives the impression that either he/she does not properly understand the language or is trying to 'pad' the essay by repeating the same point.

Avoid phrases such as: Business schools in Spain are cheaper than business schools in the UK. Good writing aims for economy and precision: Business schools in Spain are cheaper than in the UK.

Varying sentence length..

Short sentences are clear and easy to read:

E.g.: Car scrappage schemes have been introduced in many countries.

But too many short sentences are monotonous: Car scrappage schemes have been introduced in many countries. They offer a subsidy to buyers of new cars. The buyers must scrap an old vehicle. The schemes are designed to stimulate the economy. They also increase fuel efficiency.

Long sentences are more interesting but can be difficult to construct and read:

Car scrappage schemes, which offer a subsidy to buyers of new cars (who must scrap an old vehicle) have been introduced in many countries; the schemes are designed to stimulate the economy and also to increase fuel efficiency.

Effective writing normally uses a mixture of long and short sentences, often using a short sentence to introduce the topic.

Rewrite the following paragraph so that instead of six short sentences, there are two long and two short sentences

Worldwide, enrolments in higher education are increasing. In developed countries over half of all young people enter college. Similar trends are seen in China and South America. This growth has put financial strain on state university systems. Many countries are asking students and parents to contribute. This leads to a debate about whether students or society benefit from tertiary education.

Let's practise..

Model answer: Worldwide, enrolments in higher education are increasing. In developed countries, over half of all young people enter college, while similar trends are seen in China and South America. This growth has put financial strain on state university systems, so that many countries are asking students and parents to contribute. This leads to a debate about whether students or society benefit from tertiary education.

USING MODIFIERS

A cautious style is necessary in many areas of academic writing to avoid making statements that can be contradicted. Using modifiers is a way to express caution.

One may of doing this is by using quite, rather or fairly before an adjective:

e.g. a fairly accurate summary, a rather inconvenient location, quite a significant discovery

NB: Quite is often used before the article. It is generally used positively, while rather tends to be used negatively.

Insert quite/rather/fairly in the following to emphasise caution.
(a)The company's efforts to save energy were successful.
(b)The survey was a comprehensive study of student opinion.
(c)His second book had a hostile reception.
(d)The first-year students were fascinated by her lectures.
(e)The latest type of mobile phone is expensive.

Using modifiers

(a)The company's efforts to save energy were quite/fairly successful.

(b) The survey was (a fairly/ a quite) comprehensive study of student opinion.

(c) His second book had a rather hostile reception.

(d) The first-year students were quite fascinated by her lectures.

(e) The latest type of mobile phone is rather expensive.

Further Elements of Writing: Punctuations

Accurate punctuation and use of capital letters help the reader to understand exactly what the writer meant. While some aspects of punctuation, such as the use of commas, can be a matter of individual style, correct punctuation in areas such as quotation is vital.

Apostrophes (’)

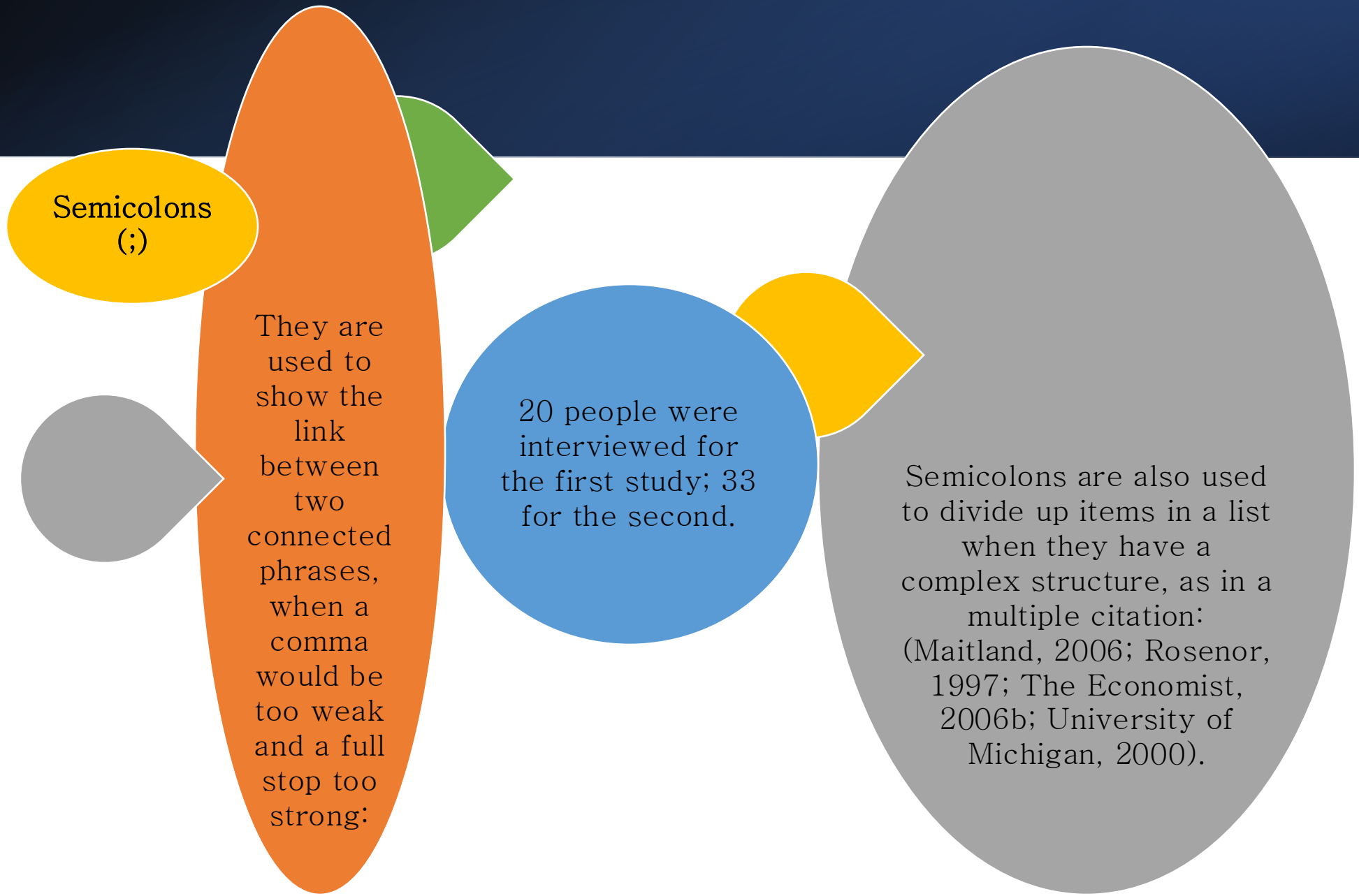
These are one of the most confusing features of English punctuation. They are mainly used in two situations:

(a) to show contractions
He’s the leading authority on tax reform
NB: contractions are not common in academic English

(b) with possessives
The professor’s secretary (singular)
Students’ marks (plural words ending in ‘s’)
Women’s rights (for irregular plurals)

NB: It’s is the contraction of it is
It’s possible the course will be cancelled

The possessive form is its
Civilization and its Discontents


Semicolons (;)
They are used to show the link between two connected phrases, when a comma would be too weak and a full stop too strong:
20 people were interviewed for the first study; 33 for the second.
Semicolons are also used to divide up items in a list when they have a complex structure, as in a multiple citation: (Maitland, 2006; Rosenor, 1997; The Economist, 2006b; University of Michigan, 2000).

Colons (:)

Colons are used:

(a) to introduce explanations

The meeting was postponed: the Dean was ill.

(b) to start a list

Three aspects were identified: financial, social and ethical.

(c) to introduce a quotation As the Duchess of Windsor said: 'You can never be too rich or too thin'.

Commas (,)

These are one of the most common punctuation marks, but also the hardest to provide guidance for, since comma use is partly a matter of individual style.
It is useful to think of commas as providing a brief pause for readers, to give them a chance to make sense of a chunk of text. Overuse can slow down the reader, but equally a lack of commas can cause confusion.

Some instances of necessary comma usage are:
(a) after introductory words or phrases: However, more cases should be considered before reaching a conclusion.
(b) around examples or comments: Certain investments, for instance shares, are highly volatile. Nationalism, it is widely recognised, has a positive and negative side.
(c) with some conjunctions: Three hundred people were interviewed, but only half the responses could be used.
(d) in lists: Apostrophes, colons, semicolons and commas must all be used with care.

Others

Hyphens (-) are used with certain words, such as compound nouns, and certain structures:

Hyphens (-) are used with certain words, such as compound nouns, and certain structures:

A well-researched, thought-provoking book.

Her three-year-old daughter is learning to read.

Exclamation marks (!) and question marks (?):

‘Well!’ he shouted, ‘Who would believe it?’

Brackets or parentheses ( ) can be used to give additional detail:

Employee attitudes do not affect other dimensions of customer satisfaction (price and quality).

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