Fall March 27, 2018

Fatal Mistakes in Academic Writing.pdf

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Fatal Mistakes (in Academic Writing)

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Do you want to ensure that your submitted academic article gets rejected from your chosen peer-reviewed journal, or ensure that your student paper does not receive an A grade? Well here’s how …

1. Define your terms using a standard dictionary, general encyclopaedia, or Wikipedia.

   What to do instead?

   Use established discipline-specific authorities. For example, insert Goffman’s definition of stigma.

2. Over-quote. In other words, use frequent and long passages of directly quoted text.

   What to do instead?

   Use direct quotations as sparingly as possible, and only include the passage with the key kernel of meaning.

   Only insert direct quotations, when you cannot possibly express equivalent meaning in your own words.

   When you do insert direct quotations, use this three-step process.
   i. Introduce the relevance of the quote.
   ii. Insert the quote (with proper in-text referencing).
   iii. Apply the quote through use of example, and/or direct application to your topic.
3. Submit your article or paper with typos, spelling mistakes, and grammatical errors.

What to do instead?

Follow each of these four steps.

i. Carefully proofread your paper using the tools provided by Word or equivalent word-processing software.
   Examine each of the green and red squiggly lines and correct the errors.

ii. Print the paper out and read it slowly, carefully, and multiple times. Watch for unintended homonyms.

iii. Find a trusted colleague, friend, or pay-for-service proofreader to edit your paper.
   This is particularly important if you are not submitting your paper in your first-language.

iv. Read your paper out loud to an audience (even of one).
   Reading your paper out loud will help you to identify awkward grammar and incomplete sentences.

4. Insert unsubstantiated statements and generalizations.
   For example, write, Today’s children are not as healthy as in previous generations.

What to do instead?

First, decide the purpose of your declaration. If you are trying to be controversial, then consider the reason, and whether this approach will work for your desired audience.

Then, determine how you are going to support your statement.

Let us consider the above example.
You have decided that you want to insert the statement – today’s children are not as healthy as in previous generations – in order to compel parent action.

Now, you will have to consider -
Who are the established authors in this domain?
What empirical research has been conducted to substantiate this claim?
Is there statistical evidence comparing generations?
What are the indicators of health?

Answers to all of these questions will need to be inserted into your paper in order to make the claim – today’s children are not as
healthy as in previous generations.

5. Insert other people’s words without rigorous in-text referencing.

Did you know that inserting passages of text directly from the Websites is plagiarism?

Did you know that substituting the odd word, or changing the order of the clauses does not constitute original writing?

What to do instead?

Sometimes it is difficult to write in your own words after reading the text of an articulate author. When I want to ensure that I have not inadvertently used someone else’s words, I follow this process -

i. I read the passage.
ii. I document the source for my in-text and end-text reference.
   Even though I am not going to directly quote, I am still obligated to cite the source of the ideas.
iii. I put the book away, or close the Website.
iv. I go for a quick walk in order to forget the precise words.
v. I write the idea in my own words, remembering to cite the source.

6. Insert improper in-text and end-text referencing.

What to do instead?

Ensure that you purchase the writing style guide indicated in the author’s submission standards or course outline.

For example, many of the articles I submit use APA. This acronym stands for the American Psychological Association. Following this unified style ensures that all reference information can be found in the same location.

http://apastyle.apa.org/

7. Use other than primary sources.

Do you know what secondary sources are? This means that you are using an author’s interpretation of someone else’s work.
For example, Kinash (2006) wrote that Ferguson (2001) traced the decline of Braille instruction.

Another error, is to include someone else’s references as if you have read them yourself. For example, if you read Kinash (2006), you cannot then include Foucault (1972) and Negroponte (1995) in your set of references unless you have read them directly.

**What to do instead?**

*Using one source to find other sources on the same topic is an excellent strategy.*

**Follow these steps:**

i. Read the first article.
ii. Note the author’s sources.
iii. Use an electronic database to locate the key sources.
iv. Print or borrow the articles, Websites, or books.
v. Read the entire document.
vi. Include your own interpretation in your paper.

8. Write off-topic.

For example, your authored paper may not specifically and directly answer the question(s) posed in your assignment.

Or, your submitted journal article may not address the themes identified by that particular journal. Your article might be better placed in a different journal.

**What to do instead?**

*Ensure that you have carefully examined the question and/or author submission guidelines. If you have any questions about what is and is not on-topic, then ask prior to beginning.*

9. Exceed the word count.

**What to do instead?**

*Before you begin the writing process, if you are asking yourself how you are possibly going to confine your paper to the allocated number of words, then you may need to further define your topic. For example, I was given the extremely restricted word-count of 200 for a case study I was writing for "The Educational Technology*
Guide.” I realized that instead of writing about the experiences of all 32 children involved in my research, I would only be able to include the experience of a group of 8 with one specific technology.

Even when you have defined an appropriately focussed topic, papers often exceed the word count in early drafts. For example, “The Education Technology Guide” article that I described above started out at 423 words. This meant that I had to cut more than half of the words. This process took approximately four drafts.

I applied what is called Ockham’s razor. This means that only the core essential of your paper remains. Anything that is extraneous or tangential is deleted. Applying this process ensures that your final product is rigorous and focussed. This makes for a wonderful read!