Breaking Bad Grammar Habits

Presented by
Academic Enrichment Learning Centre
Grammar for academic writing

‘If you don’t know who I am, then maybe your best course would be to tread lightly.’
Walter, threatening Hank
## The grammar of spoken versus written language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spoken language</th>
<th>Written language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If you don’t know who I am</td>
<td>When individuals are unknown to each other …</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When meeting an unknown individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Then [I think] maybe your best course</td>
<td>… it is advisable/ recommended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>possibly, the most appropriate action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>would be to tread lightly</td>
<td>to use caution/ to be cautious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>would be to avoid risk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- generalised
- abstract
- impersonal
- objective
- formal
Grammar as a choice system

‘If you don’t know who I am, then maybe your best course would be to tread lightly
Clause complex: conditional sentence
You don’t know me. Be careful
2 sentences. Statement. Command
Watch your step because you don’t know who I am
Clause complex: cause effect
I don’t know you so watch out
Clause complex: result

@*! BAD LANGUAGE
"The law I sign today directs new funds... to the task of collecting vital intelligence... on weapons of mass production."

Genre makes sense in context (university discipline)

Creating a whole text: a genre

Creating a paragraph: an idea

Choices in grammar and vocabulary
What is grammar?

1. Grammar as a set of rules, labels for words and structures
   What is this word or structure?
   If you don’t know who I am
   Conjunction pronoun etc.

2. Grammar as a choice system for making appropriate meanings to suit a particular purpose and context
   Why am I choosing this word and structure in this situation?
   What do I want to achieve?
   Indirect warning
What is grammar?

Most importantly:
Grammar is a language to talk about language
- We learn language
- We learn through language
- So it makes sense to learn about language

All language conveys 3 kinds of meanings
- Experiential:
  - how we experience the world, things and events, happenings
- Interpersonal:
  - how we create relationships with each other and how we evaluate or judge
- Textual:
  - how we organise these other meanings so they make sense

What is grammar?

Experiential
If you don’t know who I am, then maybe your best course would be to tread lightly

Interpersonal
If you don’t know who I am, then maybe your best course would be to tread lightly

Textual
If you don’t know who I am, then maybe your best course would be to tread lightly

Language making meaning
What is grammar?

In the earliest times, people carved or painted messages on rocks. Later on, people wrote on pieces of leather, rolled into scrolls. During the Middle Ages, heavy paper called parchment was used for writing, and books were laboriously copied by hand. Then in the middle of the fifteenth century, with the invention of the printing press, the birth of the modern printing industry was possible. Now the advent of computers is rapidly revolutionising the process of communication.

Theme: sentence beginnings: your focus
What is grammar?

Rocks, on which messages were carved or painted, were the earliest medium of written communication.

Pieces of leather, however, had the advantage of being portable when rolled into scrolls and they replaced rock carvings.

These leather scrolls were in turn replaced in the Middle Ages.

Parchment books took over and were laboriously copied by hand until the invention of the printing press.

Printed books have been central to communication for centuries but various forms of electronic media will undoubtedly replace them in the end.

Theme: sentence beginnings: your focus is different
In the earliest times, people carved or painted messages on rocks.

Later on, people wrote on pieces of leather, rolled into scrolls.

During the Middle Ages, heavy paper called parchment was used for writing, and books were laboriously copied by hand.

Then in the middle of the fifteenth century, with the invention of the printing press, the birth of the modern printing industry was possible.

And now the advent of computers is rapidly revolutionising the process of communication.
In the earliest times, people carved or painted messages on rocks.

Rocks, however, were later replaced by pieces of leather rolled into scrolls as these were more portable.

These scrolls were in turn replaced by heavy paper called parchment during the Middle Ages.

Parchment books were laboriously copied by hand until the invention of the printing press.
English Theme Patterns

Thematic Progression

THEME

NEW 1,2,3

THEME 1

NEW

THEME 2

NEW

The materials used for written communication have changed over time in a number of ways.

Rocks carvings were the earliest form of written communication.

Later leather rolled into scrolls were used as these were more portable.
What lecturers are looking for in your writing

**Descriptive**

E.g. description of means of written communication

**Analytical**

E.g. identifying features of these means of communication in order to compare and contrast them.

**Persuasive**

E.g. supporting your position that electronic communication will replace printed communication

**Critical**

E.g. evaluating this position, incorporating the debate, voices of other writers in this area

What is most irritating

Bad grammar

The University of Sydney
Your background knowledge of grammar

1. Is English your second, third, fourth etc. language?
2. If you are a native speaker of English, did you study another language?

This is a good start as you do have some language to talk about language

For example: I feel confident that I understand the following:
- What a clause is
- The possible components of a clause
- The difference between simple and complex sentences
- The difference between subordinate and coordinate clauses
- The difference between defining and non-defining relative clauses
- What a verb is
- The difference between finite and non finite verb groups
- Etc.
The seven most irritating grammar problems

1. Sentence fragments

1. This information will be employed to compare the performance of one firm to another.

2. Interest in keeping an illness from developing at all, through vaccination, genetic counselling and water purification.

3. Whereas the practice of democracy is an educative process.

4. By manipulating the lower back, the physiotherapist was able to reduce the pain.

5. Examiners who were asked to assess this special group made up of high-achieving students.

- You need to know: 1 and 4 are correct
- What is a sentence. What is an independent clause.
- An independent clause must have a verb attached to a time or tense (a finite verb) and this verb must be attached to a subject.
The seven most irritating grammar problems

2. Confusion between active and passive verbs

1. Europeans brought new diseases to the people of the Americas and the Pacific.
2. New diseases were brought to the people of the Americas and the Pacific.
3. Photosynthesis occurs in 2 stages.
4. Photosynthesis is occurred in 2 stages.
5. Looking at the relationship between gender and health, it is clear that health affects greatly by gender.
6. Women are experienced greater depression than men as they tend to be isolated from the community.

- You need to know: 1, 2 and 3 are correct
- Some verbs don’t take a passive (intransitive verbs: they only have one subject/participant)
- You can use the passive when you choose the second (or third) participant as the subject.
- If you know how to use the passive, you can manipulate the information focus of your sentence beginnings and make your writing more impersonal.
The seven most irritating grammar problems

3. Subject – verb agreement

1. Reliability of measures were good.
2. A miscarriage rate of 12% in every thousand women compares with 9% in three adjacent areas.
3. The impacts on the world is overestimated.
4. The hypotheses that girls would use the telephone more frequently than boys and spend more time per call on the telephone were not supported.

You need to know: 2 and 4 are correct

- The structure of the noun group
- You need to identify the Head noun in the noun group and this agrees with the verb
The seven most irritating grammar problems

4. Verb tense

1. The advances in technologies provide us with a variety of digital devices including computers.
2. The major cause of ill-health in Aboriginal communities is overcrowding and unhygienic living conditions.
3. Approximately 98% of Aborigines lived well below the poverty line (Saunders, 1990: 73) and young Aborigines have a life expectancy 20 years less than young whites.
4. About half of the Aborigines in the neighbourhood of the first European settlement at Port Jackson died from smallpox by 1790.

You need to know: 2 is correct

- The meaning behind different tense choices in English
- When you need to make tense changes in your writing
The seven most irritating grammar problems

5. Vague reference

1. Every society is liable to carry forward their beliefs. Some of these are deemed quaint, bizarre or grotesque. A second example of this is a ritual undertaken for a purpose...

2. Also due to variations in genes, the organism might look different as if they are a different species.

3. The flower which reflects ultraviolet light is probably pollinated by insects. In contrast that which does not reflect ultraviolet light is likely to be pollinated by either animals, wind or water.

4. If an accident occurs with AIDS/HIV positive patients, they usually occur from needlestick, non-intact skin or ....

You need to know: 3 is correct

- How to use the reference system so that the reader knows who or what you are referring to
The seven most irritating grammar problems

6. The apostrophe

1. It’s immensely important to know the number of species living on this planet.
2. Australia’s public education system is underfunded.
3. In our society, women’s health is generally different from the health of the rest of the population
4. The disadvantage of this technology is its relatively high price.
5. The articles’ strengths and weaknesses were elaborated.

You need to know: 1, 2, 4 and 5 are correct

- The apostrophe is used to show possession
- The apostrophe is used in contracted forms of the verb (not used in academic writing)
The seven most irritating grammar problems

7. Modifiers: add information to the independent clause

1. Having been bred in captivity for generations, the majority of zoo animals are almost domesticated.
2. Born and brought up in times of war, war is seen as a way of life.
3. If proscribing too often, antibiotics can become ineffective.
4. Grazing on plants which are full of juicy sap, a camel may go for over two months without drinking.
5. Travelling through the desert, dust storms are inevitable.

You need to know: 1 and 4 are correct
- The modifier is a dependent clause
- The ‘subject’ of the dependent clause is implied.
- Make the subject of the modifier the same as the independent clause
A final word

Your choice of language needs to be

- Concise
- Accurate
- Clear

Some tips:

- Don’t rely on the spell check
- Proof read your assignments and look for the seven most irritating grammar mistakes
- Check your sentence beginnings and endings – do your ideas flow
- Read your assignment aloud
- Don’t write your assignment at the last minute. Draft and re-draft your assignment so that you have time to attend to how you are using language to make meaning appropriate for context and purpose.
How the Learning Centre can help you

The Learning Centre provides resources for students to build and extend the skills they need for study and research at university.

The Learning Centre's services include a wide range of workshops throughout the year on academic writing, research and other skills, as well as individual consultations, discipline-specific support programs within some faculties, and both online and print resources for students.

We are located on the Camperdown and Cumberland campuses, and are committed to helping both undergraduate and postgraduate students achieve their academic goals.
Contacting the Learning Centre

Level 7, Education Building
Manning Road

Web: www.sydney.edu.au/lc
Phone: 9351 3853
Fax: 9351 4865
What we can do for you

- Central workshops
- Individual appointments
- Online resources - e.g. *The Write Site*, *WRISE*
- Support programs within specific courses
What we can do for you

LEARNING RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS

Online Resources

- The Successful Writing at Uni website lists resources to help you write better assignments and theses.

- The Getting Your Message Across in Science site provides guidelines and examples of how to give a successful oral presentation and how to make a poster. Authentic footage of student presentations given in the School of Biological Sciences is used to illustrate the skills of presenting. In addition, activities in evaluating both oral presentations and posters are included.

- The Write Site provides online support to help you develop your academic and professional writing skills. There are modules on grammar, using sources and structuring assignments.

- The WRiSE (Writing a Report in Science and Engineering) site is an online learning environment designed to help you develop and improve your report writing skills in science and engineering.

- The iWRITE site contains interactive tutorials to help engineering students to improve their assignment writing across the undergraduate years. It is especially useful for students writing their 3rd or 4th year thesis or project report.
The Write Site provides online support to help you develop your academic and professional writing skills.

Each module provides descriptions of common problems in academic and professional writing and strategies for addressing them. You will see samples of good writing and also do some practice activities in error correction.
Examples of workshops

Academic Writing
- Foundations of Grammar (online version also available)
- Functional Grammar for Academic Writing

Workshops coming soon...

March / April Program
14th March – 22nd April
Online enrolment from: Monday 7th March

Thank you and good luck