

Language Tips

Part one: Verbs and Tenses

Mohammad Karamouzian

Research Center for Modeling in Health, Institute of
Futures Studies in Health, Kerman University of
Medical Sciences

A Quick Note on Paragraph Writing

- What is a paragraph?
- A paragraph is a group of sentences that develops an idea.
- The first sentence of a paragraph is called the topic sentence
- The sentences in the paragraph support and give examples of the main idea.
- A paragraph should have a logical structure that is easy to put into an **outline**

Passive? Active?

© Original Artist

Writing Workshop

Reproduction rights obtainable from

www.CartoonStock.com

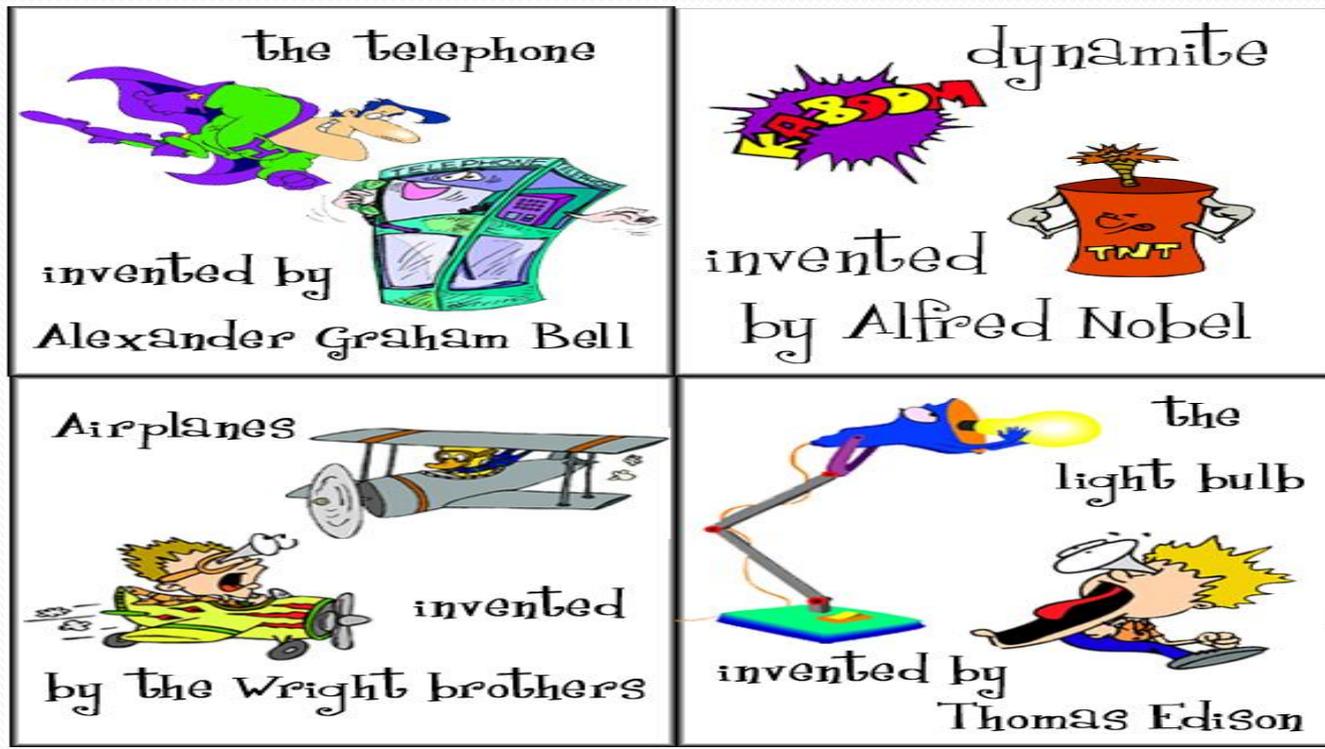


"IT'S A NICE STORY, MR. FERGUS, BUT WHY DO YOU ALWAYS WRITE IN THE PASSIVE VOICE?"

"I SUPPOSE BECAUSE I'VE BEEN A TAXPAYER ALL MY LIFE."

Passive/Active Voice

- Back in **1988** ...“ the researcher should be anonymous”.
- “All of the action within the drama of research revolves around the data; they, and they only, speak.”



Passive/Active Voice (cont.)

- The house style of the *BMJ* is clear: “Write in the active and use the first person [We/I] where necessary.”
- A decade ago, biologist Rupert Sheldrake made an inquiry into the preferences of journals in the biological and physical sciences; he discovered that of 55 such journals, **only two required the passive.**

Passive/Active Voice (cont.)

- Can you find the passive voice used even in the Methods sections of *Nature Medicine*? Or, similarly, anywhere in *Scientific American*?
- **Space** in all established journals is **limited**; **submissions** are **many**.
- Switching most of the passive verbs for active ones will shrink an article considerably

Passive/Active Voice (cont.)

- Making articles shorter so that more can fit into each journal issue
- **Non-native English-speaking** community can more easily understand sentences

Passive/Active Voice (cont.)

- Passive voice, in its most recognizable form, involves two or more verbs
- *These species have appeared in the liver*
- *These have been found in the liver*
- *These have come from Sigma*
- *These have been ordered from Sigma*

Passive Voice

Active Voice

More colloids are needed.

More colloids are necessary/vital.

A slight increase was observed.

A slight increase was observable.

There were no differences in clotting.

No differences appeared in clotting.

Untreated mice were used as controls.

Untreated mice served as controls.

In the same operation, Y was performed.

The same operation included/involved Y.

In X, a Y probe was used on the animals.

Animals underwent X with a Y probe.

This effect has been shown in X.

This effect has been evident/apparent in X.

There was no decrease in X.

X did not decrease.

X was observed in cells.

X was apparent in/occurred in cells.

Results suggesting the opposite have been presented.

Some results suggest the opposite.

Cells were compared using lasers.

Lasers allowed comparison of cells.

ENGLISH TENSES TIMELINE

Conjugated verbs are highlighted in bold. Tenses which are rarely used in everyday conversation are marked by an asterik (*).

SIMPLE ACTIVE	SIMPLE PASSIVE		(PROGRESSIVE) CONTINUOUS ACTIVE	(PROGRESSIVE) CONTINUOUS PASSIVE
		PAST TIME ↑		
She had already eaten when I arrived.	The painting had been sold twice before it was destroyed.	↑ PAST PERFECT	I had been waiting for four hours when he finally arrived.	The house had been being painted for over a month before they began to decorate the interior. *
I bought a new car last week.	The book was written in 1876 by Mark Garland.	↑ PAST	I was watching TV when she arrived.	The problem was being solved when I arrived late for class.
She has lived in Somerset for many years.	The company has been managed by Neil Haines for the last two years.	↑ PRESENT PERFECT	She has been working at Countdown for six months.	The students have been being taught for the last four hours. *
He works five days a week.	Those shoes are made in Poland.	↑ PRESENT	I am working at the moment.	The work is being done by Radek.

Use Tenses Correctly in the Introduction

- **What is known** in present simple tense
 - *Genomics provides crucial information for rational drug design.*
- **Past studies and their results** in past tense
 - *Mohraz et al reported smoking as one of the main...*
- **Past results that are still valid** in present perfect tense
 - *A great deal of research has been conducted on the basic techniques of nuclear transfer*
- **The research aim or purpose** in past tense
 - *We conducted this study to ...*
- **The research question** in present tense
 - *This paper aims to assess the ...*

Use Tenses Correctly in the Methods

- The past simple is required because the actions you describe took place in the past.
- Most Methods sections are written in the **past simple** using the passive form.
- Use active form when it is important **who did what**
 - *Who took the blood samples? Was he/she well-trained?*

Use Tenses Correctly in the Results

- **Past Tense**

- Your results are things that you found before you started writing the paper. They therefore relate to past events, consequently the past simple is used to report them

- Active OR Passive Voice?

- Often a **mixture** of the active and passive forms

Use Tenses Correctly in the Discussion

- **Many tenses** and constructions are used in the Discussion
- What you did during the research (simple past)
- what you did during the writing process of the manuscript (present perfect)
 - We have described a method to extract gold from plastic. We used this method to extract 5 kg of gold from 50 kg of plastic.

Use Tenses Correctly in the Abstract

- Most commonly used tenses in abstracts are the **present simple** (*we show*) and the **past simple** (*we showed*)
- **Present perfect** and the **present perfect continuous** when you describe a situation that began in the past and is still true now
 - *In the last few years there has been considerable interest in ...*
 - *Since 2010 attention has focused on ...*
 - *To date, there has not been an adequate analytical model..*

Use Tenses Correctly in the Abstract (cont.)

- Some authors also use the **present perfect** (in the active or passive) to describe **what they achieved during their research**.
 - *We have found / devised / developed a new approach to X*
 - *A new approach to X has been devised*
 - *We have demonstrated / proved / validated the effectiveness of this approach by ...*

Language Tips

Part two: Common Mistakes

Mohammad Karamouzian

Research Center for Modeling in Health, Institute of
Futures Studies in Health, Kerman University of
Medical Sciences

Should I Write Numbers as Digits or as Words?

- The use of numbers varies from journal to journal and paper to paper.
- All the numbers are written as digits rather than words in some journals.

Should I Write Numbers as Digits or as Words?

- Other journals recommend using words for numbers from **one to ten**, and then digits.
 - However this rule **does not apply** when the number **precedes an abbreviation** for a measurement (*e.g. 9 mm, not nine millimeters*).
- Note also that **abbreviations for measurements** do not have an 's' when they are plural (*e.g. 9 mm, not 9 mms*).

Should I Write Numbers as Digits or as Words?(cont.)

- **Don't begin** a sentence with a number in digits;
 - start the sentence with 'A total of' or 'A number of', etc.
- You can begin a sentence with a written number:
Twenty thousand pulses were applied ...
- Clearly, if you begin a sentence with a number in words, the number has to be a **short number**.
Writing the following would be ridiculous:
Twenty one thousand seven hundred and sixty eight pulses were applied ...

Your Writing Enemies

- Choose the right word

parameter

variable

fat

large

plump obese tubby

between

among

- Be consistent:

- Do not confuse your reader with synonyms

- Choose the simple word and avoid **JARGON**

“vague and misty should be reserved for that novel you are going to write in your old age!!!”

Initiate? Start? Begin?



WE NEED SOME NEW JARGON,
THE PUBLIC ARE STARTING TO
UNDERSTAND WHAT WE'RE
TALKING ABOUT!



Your Writing Enemies (cont.)

- Avoid expressions such as:
 - *On a daily/weekly basis: daily*
 - *At this moment in time: now, currently*
 - *It has been noted/shown/perceived...*

Avoid Empty Words

- The patient was **treated** for XXX.
- The patient **reacted well** to the treatment.
- There was a **high** prevalence of TB.
- We supply **high quality** pharmaceutical products.
- **High/low, large/small, and bad/good, the majority of/a large number**

Important!!! (say in what regard?)

Common Mistakes!

- Units - g, cm, kg, mol - take no full stop, and plurals no s.
- **Do not** use a space between a number and its percent sign
 - In total, 35% of participants had diabetes
- **Do** use one space between a number and its unit
 - The mean height of the group was 170 cm

Common Mistakes!

- A five years old boy!!!!???
- The decrease in FBS was lower in Metformine. (lower than what?)
- Obey typing rules
 - Put a space **after** a comma, full stop, semicolon, **before** parenthesis...
 - Leave generous margins (check a relevant paper)

Prepositions

in	on	at
Parts of the day but not night...	Days of the week	Clock time
In the morning, afternoon, evening...	Dates	Night
Months	Particular days On Maba'as New Year's Day	Holiday periods At christmas, the weekend
Seasons/Years/Decades/ Centuries		Places

Talking about Trends

Going up/ down	Going up a lot	Useful Adverbs
<p>A rise/An increase A fall/ drop/ decline A peak/ growth An improvement/ upturn</p>	<p>A surge An upsurge A jump A leap</p>	<p>Sharp(ly) Dramatic(ally) Considerable (ly) Steady (ily) Slight (ly) Gradual (ly) Relative (ly) Substantial (ly)</p>



many
Thanks!