

## Refining one's style and expression

### 1. Verbs

#### 1.1. Modals

What is the standard or default interpretation of *could*?

We could perform the experiment.

The researchers could distinguish the main effects and interaction effects.

What is the difference between these modal verbs?

He could be lying.

The experiment could be a fluke.

He may be lying.

The experiment may be a fluke.

He might be lying.

The experiment might be a fluke.

He must be lying.

The experiment must be a fluke.

#### 1.2. Light verbs

Common verbs should be replaced when possible with more specific, formal verbs, particularly Latinate verbs. This is especially so for the most common, basic, high frequency verbs, which are very general in meaning, which linguists call “light verbs<sup>1</sup>.” However, these are useful for speaking, lecturing and conversing. The following are light verbs in English:

be, come, do, get, give, have, make, put, run, set, take

light verb	alternatives
do	conduct, perform, carry out, act, accomplish, engage in, effect, undertake, suffice, succeed, complete, create, determine, serve, behave, portray, appear, manage, render, enact ...
give	yield, donate, contribute, supply, transfer, accord, administer, allow, bequeath, cede, commit, confer, deliver, dispense, entrust, furnish, gift, grant, abdicate, present, permit, provide, relinquish, remit, subsidize, transmit, communicate, supply, proffer, demonstrate, extend, evidence, display ...
make	create, build, form, accomplish, assemble, constitute, effect, fabricate, generate, produce, prepare, induce, compel, constrain, drive, designate, appoint, enact, execute ...

1 See [www.thesaurus.com](http://www.thesaurus.com) to find synonyms and better terms for these or other words.

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put	place, locate, position, concentrate, deposit, embed, establish, install, plant, repose, propose, advance, express, formulate, posit, propose, present, render, propound, transpose, suggest, commit, assign, constrain, impose, employ, require, subject, exhibit, arrange ...
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Some Korean light verbs include 하다, 이다, 있다, -나다 (e.g., 화나다), 내다, 되다, -지다 (become), 오다, 가다, 주다. Some of these do not translate well into Korean (especially 있다, -나다), so it is best to avoid trying to render these in English, which can lead to overuse of *be, have, there is/are*. Instead, use more specific expressions.

### 1.3. Phrasal verbs

When possible, phrasal verbs should be replaced with more formal Latinate verbs. For example, many ESL students use *find out* when a better expression for formal writing would be *discover, determine, ascertain*.

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phrasal verb	slightly formal or more formal
go out	exit, diminish, leave, depart, extinguish, cease, die, dim, expire, subside, decline, dwindle, recede, quit, retire, withdraw
go around	circumvent, circumnavigate, sidestep, ignore, rotate, gyrate, orbit, circumduct, twist, revolve, meander, ramble

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### 1.4. Reporting & communication verbs

Certain verbs of reporting and communication are misused by Asian ESL writers.

**Mention** does not mean ‘discuss’ or ‘describe’ but to briefly refer to something, e.g., a minor point. *Mention* and *discuss* take direct objects (not *mention about, discuss about*).

His study only mentions a few ideas for connecting the concepts together, but does not develop these ideas in any detail.

**Find out** is colloquial; in formal English, *ascertain, find, determine* are better.

**Recommend** can take a simple noun phrase as an object, a gerund phrase, or a *that*-clause (specifically, a contrary-to-fact *that*-clause)<sup>2</sup>.

We recommend they increase required number of days in school.

- ✓ We recommend that they increase the required number of days in school.
- ✓ We recommend increasing the required number of days in school.

**Support** does not take a *that*-clause (complement clause) but a noun phrase as an object.

The findings supported that consumption of the drug could lead to liver damage.

- ✓ The findings support the claim / the view / the hypothesis that consumption of the drug could lead to liver damage.

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2 Notice that when the main verb is a verb of ordering, suggesting and similar verbs, then the verb in the following dependent clause is not a regular verb, but a special verb form known as a subjunctive – similar to a conditional – which makes a difference with the verb for a 3rd person singular subject; one can use *should* + Verb, or the older subjunctive verb without *-s / is* for 3rd person.

- The judge ordered that bail be lowered / that bail should be lowered.
- The school ordered / suggested / demanded that he stop the experiment / that he should stop the experiment immediately.

**Stress** or **emphasize** are not used like ‘describe’ or ‘mention’, but are used to actually put emphasis on an important point.

**Blame cf. criticize.** Koreans also confuse these two words, using *blame* when *criticize* would be more suitable. To *criticize* is more general in meaning, as it refers to pointing out faults (including general faults or failures), negatively evaluating, or negatively judging someone, while *blame* refers to with assigning specific fault, cause, or liability for a particular problem or mistake, i.e., ‘blaming someone for something.’

### 1.5. Experiencer / Stimulus verbs

For verbs of emotion, states, and mental states, one needs to distinguish [1] the present participle and other adjectives – indicating the source, cause or stimulus of the condition – from [2] the past participle, indicating the experiencer – describing the feeling or state that one experiences.

Experiencer: bored, interested, excited, scared, afraid, pleased, amused, disgusted

Source: boring, interesting, exciting, scary, pleasing, pleasant, amusing, disgusting

### 1.6. State and state change verbs

A common problem with Korean (and Japanese and Chinese) writers is the incorrect use of some passive verbs, namely, [1] verbs indicating a state or change of state, which are intransitive [자동사, 自動詞] and cannot be made passive; and [2] some verbs that can be either intransitive or transitive [타동사, 他動詞], whose passive use sounds awkward in some contexts.

verb type	verbs	notes
existence or state [intrans.]	be, exist, happen, appear, tend, occur, seem, remain, consist of	Indicates presence, existence, stat, or status of items There exist only a few fundamental particles in the universe, from which all atomic particles are built.
change of state or appearance [intrans.]	go, come, die, arise, appear, disappear, vanish, arise	Indicates change in position or state of an item, or appearance of an item upon the scene or to the discourse – the sentence subject undergoes a change by itself (no outside agent is specified or relevant) There arose such a clamor in the room that I woke up.
change of state or appearance [intrans. & trans.]	break, change, increase, decrease, grow	1) [intrans.] The subject undergoes a change by itself. The caterpillar changed into a beautiful butterfly. 2) [trans.] The subject undergoes a change due to a force or agent acting on it. The oil filter was changed by a rather slow mechanic.

Some English intransitive verbs indicate a change of state in the subject; that is, the subject undergoes the change. The transitive form of the verb indicates an agent (e.g., a person, other agent, or force) acting upon an object to bring about the change; a good example is the verb change. For simply describing the subject undergoing a change of state, it is better to use the regular intransitive active, rather than the passive of the transitive verb. The passive would be better used only if the agent (person or thing causing the change) has been mentioned, is somehow significant, or is to be inferred from the context.

The monitor was suddenly changed. [This sounds strange as a sentence, as if some magical force changed it.]

? The monitor was suddenly changed into a screen full of “illegal operation” messages.

✓The monitor suddenly changed.

✓The monitor suddenly changed into a screen full of “illegal operation” messages.

✓The monitor was suddenly changed into a screen full of “illegal operation” messages by the evil operating system. [This makes sense because there is a logical force or agent causing it.]

## 2. Nouns and pronouns

The following nouns are often misused by East Asian writers.

chapter (cf. section)

part → section, aspect, sector, etc.

thesis, dissertation, article

The following nouns are usually singular (non-count or more abstract nouns), not usually plural.

equipment, faculty, furniture, homework, literature, research, staff, vocabulary

However, *data* is usually plural in academic English, while it is treated as a singular noun in informal English, e.g., “the data were conclusive.”

When possible, more colloquial sounding indefinite pronouns and similar expressions can be avoided: *someone, something, somewhere, anyone, anything, anywhere, everyone, everything, everywhere*.

We sought ~~someone who~~ could... → those who, some subjects who, ...

## 3. Collocations

Collocations are typical word combinations – words that usually go together in normal use – such as the following.

Verb + Noun	inflict a wound, withdraw an offer, make a lot of money, make a lot of friends, ease tension, override a veto
Adjective + Noun	a crushing defeat, a rough estimate
Noun + Verb	a bee buzzes, a bomb explodes
Noun 1 + Noun 2	a flock of sheep, a pack of dogs

Adverb + Adjective	deeply absorbed, closely acquainted, hopelessly addicted
Verb + Adverb	appreciate sincerely, apologize humbly
Noun + Prep	apathy toward, influence on
X + Comp	an agreement that, recommend that

Particular collocation difficulties for ESL include:

- Light verbs, e.g.,
  - take a chance, take liberties with the results, run aground, run an experiment, go bungee jumping, take notice, set an example
- Prepositions and phrasal verbs, which are often metaphorical
  - working (in) → working at the university ['in' is possible in certain contexts, but 'at' is generally preferred]
  - The work environment has ~~cut down~~ diminished our motivation, especially when team members have been split ~~apart~~ up.
- Prep. combinations: [1] Verb + Prep.; [2] Adj. + Prep.; and [3] Noun + Prep.; these can involve metaphorical uses of prepositions
  - is different ~~than~~ → different from
  - apply X ~~into~~ Y → apply X to Y
  - influence ~~to~~ X → influence on X
- Noun + Prep. combinations, and their Verb counterparts with no prepositions.
  - X has an influence on Y cf. X influences ~~on~~ Y
  - a discussion about X cf. to discuss ~~about~~ X
- Use of *speaks, talk, tell, say* (see the handout on reporting verbs). One speaks a language or a statement; one says words, discourse, or something general; one tells a story or information.

## 4. Other terminology

### 4.1. Konglish expressions

Avoid Konglish terms like *next next, last last, Y-shirt* (=dress shirt), *cunning* (=cheating), *event, condition, consent* (=electrical outlet), *hand phone, Hotchkiss* (=stapler), *MT, service, after-service, AS, one-room, well-being* and many others; also, the German-Japanese term 아르바이 ㄸ. (See the website handout on Konglish).

Other problems result from using an incorrect word when their meanings and use differ between English and Korean, e.g.,

I have a ~~promise~~ → an appointment

### 4.2. Gender bias

Avoid using *boy* or *girl* when referring to adults. Avoid using *he, him* or masculine nouns (mailman, policeman) when the one referred to is generic, unknown, or could be female. Instead, use the following.

1. Plural nouns and pronouns, if possible, to refer to specific persons, instead of singular nouns and pronouns; thus, the gender-neutral *they* can be used.
2. The generic pronouns *one*, *one's* in written English for generic and gender-neutral discussion (if not referring to specific people; but this is not common in spoken English).
3. Gender-neutral nouns, e.g., *mail carrier*, *police officer*, *business person*.

### 4.3. Colloquial expressions

Some of the terms below are more informal, general, or vague, and are less commonly used in academic writing; the more formal alternatives are preferred.

informal	more formal alternatives
anyway	This is used informally for changing topics; in formal writing, simply starting a sentence with a full noun topic, or starting a new paragraph, will often suffice.
besides	More formal alternatives are 'in addition to' or 'furthermore' - e.g., "In addition to these factors, ...".
bad	negative, pejorative, poor, ineffective, adverse...
big, huge	large, significant, enormous, incredible, gargantuan, gigantic, massive
good	sufficient, excellent, optimal, ideal, studious, prime, positive, effective, beneficial
kind of, sort of	somewhat, slightly
kind(s) of, sort(s) of	type of, form of, variety of
like	is similar to; for example, such as
like this	for example, for instance
lots of	many, numerous, a large number / amount of
nowadays	currently, recently
stuff, thing(s)	matter, issue, affair, object, factor, device
way	manner, method, means, methodology, instrument, aspect

Some common nouns and adjectives that are general or vague in meaning can be replaced in more formal contexts<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Substituting *human* or *human being* as a noun for person/people is possible, but may sound unnatural outside of an appropriate scientific context.

colloquial	more formal
thing	object, device, item, situation, circumstance, subject, element
person, people, someone	individual, Canadians, researchers, subjects, voters, males, participants
man	males, (male) participants / subjects, male voters, etc.
women	females, (female) participants, etc.

#### 4.4. Contractions and abbreviations

Abbreviated forms like *approx.* or *gov't* are not used in formal writing. Full forms instead of common contractions are preferred in formal academic writing, e.g., *can't* → *cannot*, *doesn't* → *does not*. However, academic abbreviations from Latin are acceptable, such as *e.g.* 'for example,' *i.e.* 'that is, in other words,' *cf.* 'compare,' and *c.* 'approximately' before numerals, e.g., "c. 500 participants signed up."

#### 4.5. Fillers

Avoid overusing filler terms like *etc.* or *and so on*. Avoid such terms after beginning a list of items with *for example* or *e.g.*, as these filler terms then become redundant.

We tried a number of factors in our model, e.g., X, Y, Z, ~~etc.~~ → ... , e.g., X, Y, and Z.

### 5. Flow of clauses and sentences

*How would you improve the following comma splices (fused sentences)?*

1. Lobsters are cannibalistic, this is one reason they are hard to raise in captivity.
2. Normal people need eight hours of sleep per night, graduate students only need four.

*How are the colons and semi-colons used in these examples?*

1. The tissue was cut into 0.1 mm strips; the slices were then examined for the effects of the drugs on the neural tissues.
2. There is something that graduate students simply cannot live without: coffee.
3. Floodwaters have closed the following sections of the city: the downtown district, the Garden Street district, the valley area, and sections along the highway.
4. Traffic light: a device that turns red as you approach it.
5. There was only one possible conclusion: the ship had sunk.

#### 5.1. Punctuation

1. So, to go further, it is necessary to research the effects of cultural factors on English learning, including Korean culture.
2. Then, they might have some problems in making various kinds of English sentences, because they tend to make easy, short sentences to avoid making grammar mistakes.
3. However when the four skills are advanced together the capacity of language could grow.

4. He planned on a fruitful day of on-line trading, however, he did not anticipate the stock market crashing that day.
5. Therefore bilingual education in preschooler age is effective.

Comma patterns for *so, then, but*:

Comma patterns for *however, therefore, moreover, furthermore*:

Comma patterns for *i.e., e.g.*:

## 6. Resources

### 6.1. Websites

1. [www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com)
2. [www.thesaurus.com](http://www.thesaurus.com)
3. [owl.english.purdue.edu](http://owl.english.purdue.edu): Online Writer's Lab at Purdue University
4. [www.tinyurl.com/kentlee7](http://www.tinyurl.com/kentlee7)
5. OCW sites: Many universities host online courseware sites, especially in North America, which can be found via simple Google searches; see also [www.ocwconsortium.org](http://www.ocwconsortium.org) and [ocw.korea.ac.kr](http://ocw.korea.ac.kr)
6. **TED.com**: Online speeches by popular speakers from academia, business, and other fields; often, transcripts and subtitles are available; subtitled videos can be downloaded

### 6.2. Reference books

6. Cowan, Ron. (2008). *The Teacher's Grammar of English*. Cambridge Univ. Press. [A linguistically informed grammar book, mainly for ESL teachers; strangely organized, but good contents.]
7. Lindstromberg, Seth. (2010). *English Prepositions Explained*. John Benjamins Pub. [This explains the core meaning and other meanings of prepositions; also applicable to phrasal verbs.]
8. *Oxford Collocations Dictionary*. (2009). Oxford Univ. Press. [& other collocations dictionaries, such as Collins-Cobuild]
9. *Oxford Phrasal Verbs Dictionary*. (2006). Oxford Univ. Press. [The appendix explains the meanings or uses of the verb particles like *up, on, over*, etc.]
10. Swales, John M. & Feak, Christine B. (2004). *Academic Writing for Graduate Students*. Univ. Michigan Press. [The presentation seems a bit dry or boring, but it has good information on advanced academic writing.]