

ELT Concourse

Writing for Delta:

a guide to style and structure



Formality
Stereotyping
Referencing
Avoiding accusations of plagiarism
Latinisms
Hedging
Reporting verbs
Syntax error
Misused words
Jargon and terminology
Structure
Presentation



ELT Concourse guide to academic writing for Delta and other courses

This guide is concerned mostly with style.

Delta is, according to Ofqual (the UK Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation) at Level 7 on its scheme, at the same level as a master's degree. It is also, of course, a qualification for **teachers** of English. You are expected, therefore, to be able to write accurately, accessibly and in an appropriate style.

The study of second-language pedagogy, which is what Delta is about, requires academic writing in a social science genre.

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Formality

Contractions

Unless you are citing directly or giving an example of language use, the simple rule is to avoid contractions altogether. So, do not write:

My students can't often remember to use contractions so don't sound natural.

and prefer:

My students cannot often remember to use contractions so do not sound natural.

Abbreviations

Standard abbreviations in the field are acceptable but any abbreviations that you would have to explain to someone on an initial training course should be written in full the first time. So, do not write:

A TTT rather than a PPP approach to the area often allows for more S-S interaction

and prefer:

A TTT (Test-Teach-Test) rather than a PPP (Presentation-Practice-Production) approach to the area often allows for more student-to-student interaction.

Never use abbreviations which simply save typing such as *Ss* for *students*, *T* for *teacher*, *esp.* for *especially* and so on. See below for conventional Latin abbreviations which you should use.

Colloquialisms

Using colloquialisms in academic writing is not acceptable. Do not, therefore, write:

Learners need a bit of time to figure out the meaning of the lexis from the bits of language around it.

and prefer:

Learners need adequate time to infer the meaning of the lexis from the co-text.

Colloquial language is often prefabricated cliché. In academic writing, informal clichés should be avoided so do not write:

Uncontextualised language should be avoided like the plague.

and prefer:

Uncontextualised language should certainly be avoided.

Other more formal clichés, often conjuncts, such as *by the same token*, *on the contrary*, *under these circumstances* etc. are acceptable.

Comparisons, similes and metaphors

In informal language frozen or clichéd similes are frequently used to add spice to what is said. For example:

it went like the wind

a new approach will be like a breath of fresh air

they talk like a machine gun

etc.

In academic writing, you should avoid formulaic comparisons and make yourself clear in other ways. For example:

it went very rapidly

a new approach will be refreshing and engaging

they speak in a staccato fashion

In general, simple similes, using, e.g., *like* or *as ... as*, should be avoided although metaphor is often very effective, albeit sometimes difficult to handle. So, for example, avoid formulations such as:

The students are like those I taught in France.

or

These materials are just as good for this purpose.

and prefer:

These students have similar characteristics to those I am familiar with in France.

or

These materials are equally effective for this purpose.

Metaphor is, as noted, often effective but try to avoid overly colloquial expressions such as:

The students fish for the answers.

and prefer, e.g.:

Students trawl the text for the answers.

If you are in any doubt about the suitability of a metaphor you have used, delete it.

Multi-word verbs

It is not invariably the case that multi-word verbs are less formal than the one-word, often Latin-derived, equivalents. Nevertheless, that is often the case so do not use multi-word verbs where a reasonably synonymous alternative exists. Do not write:

The learners' task is to switch the items around to make a text which holds together and is linked up.

and prefer

The learners' task is to re-order the items to make a coherent, cohesive text.

Generic and colloquial adjectives and adverbs

While everyday, especially spoken, language is littered with adjectives such as *good, fine, great, super, OK* etc. and adverbs such as *incredibly, astonishingly, fantastically, unbelievably* etc., this is language to avoid in formal writing. Do not, therefore, write:

This is an incredibly useful exercise which is great for getting learners to spot good collocations.

and prefer:

This is a very effective exercise which is beneficial in encouraging learners to identify appropriate and conventional collocations.

In particular, the use of *incredible / incredibly*, to mean, usually, *good* or *very*, is a recent innovation in English. The word properly means *impossible or very difficult to believe* (Cambridge International Dictionary of English, 1995). Do not use *incredibly* to mean *extremely*.

At all events, avoid the use of meaningless adjectives such as *nice* and do not use *fun* as an attributive adjective. Do not write, therefore:

This is a nice, fun exercise which has good outcomes.

and prefer:

This is an effective, engaging exercise which has positive outcomes.

Exaggeration and understatement

Hyperbole, or exaggeration, is common in colloquial English but jarring in academic writing so avoid expressions such as:

There are thousands of ways to present new language.

and prefer

There is a large number of ways to present new language.

etc.

At all events, avoid ever writing something like:

This is an incredibly good technique with millions of uses.

Less often, litotes, or understatement, is used in colloquial speech for effect but is rarely acceptable in formal, academic writing. Avoid, therefore, writing, e.g.:

Students encounter a bit of a snag using the English tense system accurately.

and prefer:

Using the English tense system accurately is a serious issue for most learners.

The use of the first person

While it acceptable to use the first-person pronouns and determiners when referring directly to your own experience, their use in academic writing is usually disparaged. The use of the first person can be interpreted as evading presenting proper evidence, so try to avoid it where you can. It is fully in order to write, for example:

It is my experience, working with learners from many Slavic language backgrounds, that the accurate use of the definite article is a consistent problem which is difficult to address.

but not:

I find that my learners who speak Slavic languages can't use the definite article properly and I have found that dealing with it is hard.

Avoid stating, for example:

I do not believe that delexicalisation is a useful concept.

and prefer:

It may be argued that delexicalisation is not a sustainable concept.

First-person pronouns **are** often appropriate in the suggestions for the teaching section of a Background Essay or in the description of research methodology for Module Three because this is where you describe and interpret your work or experience.

The passive

In an effort to be seen as academic, there is a tendency to overuse the passive. While passive-voice structures are frequently useful, not least because they remove the need for a subject pronoun, they can be overused to the point at which it is unclear what the subject of a verb in the parallel active sentence would be. Avoid, therefore:

It has been seen that my students are frequently unable to use dictionaries effectively to select appropriate lexis.

because that disguises who did the seeing. Prefer, in this case:

I have noticed, by observation in class, that some of my learners are unable to use dictionaries effectively to select appropriate lexis.

Shibboleths

A shibboleth may be defined as: *A belief or custom that is not now considered as important and correct as it was in the past* (Cambridge International Dictionary of English, 1995).

1. The split infinitive:

While there is no historical or stylistic justification for derogating the use of a split infinitive, it is still generally avoided in academic writing. So, for example, avoid:

It is necessary to carefully monitor this activity.

and prefer:

It is necessary carefully to monitor this activity.

2. The end-of sentence preposition (also known as an Addisonian termination):

There is also little historical or stylistic basis for disparaging sentences which end with a preposition, or which use a preposition to end a clause with, but this formulation is still considered inappropriate in academic writing. Therefore, avoid, for example:

This is a good device to focus learners on the topic with.

and prefer:

This is an effective device with which to focus the learners on the topic.

Gradability

In informal speech and writing, it is common to find adjectives which are nominally ungradable being used gradably. For example, *more unique, totally complete, completely perfect* etc.

In formal, academic writing, such uses are better avoided.

Concord

In informal speech and writing, it is common to find singular nouns followed by plural verb forms and *vice versa*. For example:

The class have similar aims and motivation.

The data is clear.

In more formal writing such formulations should be avoided. If you use a singular noun phrase, make sure the verb is also singular (and *vice versa*) so prefer, e.g.:

The group has similar aims.

The data are clear.

Concord issues also apply to quantifiers such as *a range of*, *a variety of* and so on. These are, in colloquial usage, often paired with a plural verb form, a phenomenon known as proximity concord because of the proximity of the plural noun to the verb, as in, e.g.:

A range of techniques are available

However, in formal writing we should be careful to maintain the grammatical accuracy of the concord and prefer, e.g.:

A variety of problems arises with ...

A range of techniques is available

The expression *a number of* is an exception and is almost always used with a plural verb form.

Pronoun and modifier use

In informal speech and writing, it is common to find singular entities represented by plural pronouns in order to avoid accusations of genderism. We see, for example:

When a student hands in their essay.

which is not acceptable in formal writing because a singular noun should be represented by a singular pronoun. So, if you want to avoid clumsy formulations such as:

When a student hands in his or her essay.

prefer the plural:

When students hand in their essays.

Cambridge English Assessment is, incidentally, not immune to this kind of semi-literate clumsiness.

An allied point is that in colloquial language, the quantifier *less* serves to modify both countable and uncountable noun phrases. In more formal writing, we need to distinguish *less* and *fewer* and reserve the second for countable noun phrases. Prefer, therefore:

There are fewer students in the group who need basic literacy training.

to

There are less students in the group who need basic literacy training.

The apostrophe

This is a simple, well-known issue but one which is regrettably carelessly handled in some candidates' writing.

The apostrophe denoting possessive, origin or descriptive meanings comes after the singular noun, so we get, e.g.:

the class' preference (or *the class's preference*, if you prefer)

the student's progress the learner's rights the school's materials

etc.

The apostrophe follows the plural ending in other cases, so we have:

the classes' preferences the students' progress

the learners' rights the teachers' material base

etc.

Only if the plural is irregular does the apostrophe occur elsewhere as in, for example:

these people's inputs into the learning process

the children's sponsors demand a syllabus which includes ...



Stereotyping

There is a temptation to pigeonhole learners which is worth avoiding.

Most of us are quite sensitive to casual sexism or racism but less perceptive when it comes to classifying learners by nationality, culture or personality.

Statements such as the following should be avoided without clear and careful justification for them (and for some, there is no obvious justification which could be proposed):

These learners generally have a mix of auditory and kinaesthetic learning styles

because the whole area of learning styles theories has been comprehensively debunked and even if there were any truth in the theories, this is still unacceptable stereotyping because we all have a mix of learning preferences.

Asian learners may be less willing to take risks

because this describes all learners from Istanbul to Vladivostok and Northern Siberia to New Guinea, some 4 billion people with hugely varying first languages, cultures and histories. It is the case that some cultures are more or less risk averse and have more or less extreme power distances and so on but you need to be precise and aware of the exceptions and variations.

Germans tend to expect teachers to be authoritative

because this borders on racism by proxy of nationality and cannot possibly describe every person of that nationality.

Arabs are accustomed to learning by rote in schools

because this assumes that all Arabic speakers, around 250 million people, share an educational culture and that within those cultures no variety exists. It is worth remembering that Arabic is better described as a macro-language or a language group because many varieties are not mutually comprehensible. The differences between varieties of Arabic are as great as the differences between, e.g., Spanish and Portuguese or German and Dutch.

Cultural differences across the nations which use a variety of Arabic are very marked.

and so on.

The morals are do not assume that:

1. nationality and first language invariably coincide (although they often do)
2. those members of a culture you have encountered are representative of all its members
3. language and cultural borders are contiguous
4. you can classify all learners by continent, area or nation

Be careful because casual stereotyping like this has no place in our profession.



Referencing

Nobody expects you to originate everything that you discuss in any part of the Delta course. It is inevitable, therefore, that you will be referring to authority as you write and presenting the ideas of other people. You will need to make sure that the in-text referencing and the bibliography follow a standard convention.

For in-text references

Books and articles

At every point in the text where there is a particular reference, include the author's surname and the year of publication with page numbers if you are quoting specific words – for example:

In his survey of the social habits of Delta tutors, Bloggs (1998) refuted that ...

or

In his survey of the social habits of Delta tutors, Bloggs (1998: 19) states that, "I can assert without fear of successful contradiction that ..."

Make sure that it is 100% clear where your writing stops and a quotation begins, either by using inverted commas or indenting the citation etc.

Websites

You may not know the author's name or date (but give them as above if you do) so this is acceptable:

It has been suggested (Wikipedia (2013)) that ...

For the bibliography

For ease of access, you may like to divide your bibliography into Books and Articles, Teaching Materials and Electronic resources.

Books

List references in alphabetical order by the surname of the first author. If the author is unknown you should use "Anon"

For up to three authors include all names; if there are more than three, give the first author's surname and initials followed by *et al.*

Provide, in this order and format: Author surname/s and initial/s + ed. or eds. (if editor/s), Year of publication, *Title in italics*, Edition (if not the first edition) as ordinal number + ed., Place of publication: Publisher

For example:

Jones, D, ed., 1995, *My Teaching and Other Fiascos*, 5th ed., London: Concourse publications

Articles

Include also: full journal title, volume number (issue number) and page numbers, for example,

Bloggs, T, 1997, *Developing fluency through ferret keeping*, English Language Teaching Journal, 41, 3 pp. 18-83

Electronic resources

E-journals – include full URL and date of access, for example:

Bloggs TA & Brown GC, 2012, *Spoken English in Weston super Mare*, in The Wandering Linguist [online], p. 105. Available from: <http://www.wanderling.com/1111> [Accessed 23/08/2017]

Websites

Supply author/s or corporate body, date of publication / last update or copyright date, available from: URL [Accessed date], for example:

eltconcourse.com, *How to write a Delta Background Essay*, available from: <http://www.eltconcourse.com/this page> [accessed 02/11/2017]

or:

Bloggs, T, (no date), *Ideas for a Creating a Happy Classroom*, available from <http://eltconcourse.com/training/happiness.pdf> [Accessed 03/07/2017]



Avoiding accusations of plagiarism

Plagiarism is a form of fraud. It can be defined as presenting someone else's work, thoughts or words as if they were yours. Downloading and using unacknowledged material from the internet is included, of course.

1. You are expected to do wide reading and research on the Delta course so never be afraid to show that you have accessed a range of other people's work – nobody is expecting you to originate all the ideas and information in your work.
 2. Read your assignments and check whether everything that is not entirely in your own words or from your own resources has been acknowledged.
 3. Make sure that you include in your bibliography anything you refer to in the text and exclude any reading to which you do not make explicit reference. This includes materials that you put in appendices and use in lessons and plans, by the way.
 4. Don't be tempted to think that if you have changed a few words from a source you have read that you don't need to acknowledge it – you do.
 5. Even if you paraphrase to the extent that the author's original words are drastically changed, the idea is still not your own. Reference it.
 6. If in any doubt, reference it.
-



Latinisms and conventions

Using abbreviations derived from Latin is a feature of most academic writing and you should be aware of and use the most common ones. However, using them wrongly is deeply unimpressive. Here, the examples are all in italics. In your writing, only the Latinisms should be, except where noted for the first two items.

i.e.

means *that is*, being the abbreviation of the Latin *id est*. It should not be confused with *e.g.* Use it to link parallel ideas as in, for example:

All the students are at approximately the same pre-intermediate level, i.e., A2 on the CEFR.

This abbreviation is not usually italicised.

e.g.

means *for example*, and is the abbreviation of the Latin *exempli gratia*. In full, it should be written as *for example* and not the overly colloquial *for instance* or *say*.

This abbreviation is not usually italicised.

cf.

means *compare with* or *consult*, being short for *conferre*. In Latin, it was an invitation to the reader to consult an alternative source to compare with what is being said. In English, it usually simply means *compare*. Use it to direct the reader to compare something else in your text as in, for example:

One student has little instrumental motivation (cf. comments above concerning the course aims in general).

et al.

means *and others* and comes from the Latin *et alia*. Use it in in-text references after the first author when there are more than three authors. For example:

(Smith et al, 1997:14)

et seq.

This is the Latin abbreviation for *et sequens* and it means *and what follows*. It is used to direct the reader to a page or paragraph in a text and note that this is where the relevant section starts. For example:

See Smith, 1992:350 et seq.

sic

This is the Latin for *so* or *thus*. If you want to quote something that is incorrect or oddly phrased, use this in brackets after the words or phrase to show that this is how it appears in the original text. That way, the reader will not think it is your mistake. Do not correct anything that you are citing directly. For example:

The teacher in the home institution informed us that "this class are mixed of reading level (sic)".

viz.

is the usual abbreviation for *videlicet* which means *namely, that is to say* or *it may be said*. It should, in theory, not be confused with *i.e.* although most writers use them interchangeably. Use *viz.* when you want to give more detail or be more exact. For example:

Most students in the group have similar motivations for learning English, viz., to study in an English-speaking institution.

q.v.

stands for *quod vide*, which means *which see* and refers to a term that should be looked up elsewhere in a document. It is often used for cross referencing. For example:

The end-of-course test includes two items which appear in the pre-course test (q.v.) for comparison purposes.

ibid.

stands for *ibidem*, Latin for *in the same place*, and is used in citations to refer to the immediately preceding citation. For example:

Jones (ibid.)

op. cit.

stands for *opere citato*, Latin for *in the work cited*. It is used to refer to any previously cited work, not just the last one. For example:

Jones (op. cit.)

pace

means something like *With all due respect to* and is used by authors to show respect for the holder of a view with which they disagree (often disrespectfully). For example:

It does not seem from my experience that (pace Smith, 1994:200) the problem arises from over-generalisation.

passim

means very approximately *throughout* or *frequently* and refers to an idea or concept that occurs in many places in a cited work so a particular page reference is inappropriate. For example:

(Smith, 1994, passim)

Conventions

There are some conventions you should use in your writing:

1. Place * before any malformed or erroneous form, like this:
**I go yesterday*
2. Place a ? before any questionably correct formulation, like this:
?There are less people here
(Combining * and ? indicates a form which is almost unacceptable.)
3. Use italics for examples of language use and language items, like this:
The modal auxiliary verbs *might* and *could* are polysemous.
4. Use brackets around any optional items in a form, like this:
Help her (to) do it
5. Use *AmE* and *BrE* to refer to American Standard and British Standard English.
6. Use slash marks around phonemic symbols and transcriptions, like this:
The expression *like this* is transcribed as: /'laɪk.ðɪs/
(Note the use of ' before the syllable to mark the main stress. Use ' to mark a secondary stress.)
7. Use square brackets around phonetic symbols, like this:
The allophone in English of /l/ (the light /l/) is the dark sound at the end of, e.g., *lull*, transcribed as [ɫ].
8. Use either a raised schwa or a mark below the consonant to mark syllabic stress, like this:
The word *responsible* can be transcribed either as: /rɪ.'spɒn.səb.ɪ/ or as: /rɪ.'spɒn.səb.əɪ/.



Hedging

The purpose of hedging what you say is to avoid challenging the reader to think of all the times that you are probably wrong. Here are some guides to how to do it:

Modal auxiliary verbs

The pure modals, *could, may, might, would* are common hedges.

Three marginal modal verbs also play a role and these include *seem to, tend to, be likely to*.

Other modal verbs make you sound too assertive and the reader may well feel challenged to disagree.

Therefore, avoid, for example:

This must be because ...

This has to be a result of ...

This can't be an example of ...

etc.

and prefer:

This could easily be because ...

This may, quite arguably, be a result of

This may well not be an example of ...

or:

This seems to be because ...

This tends to result from ...

This is likely to occur if ...

The modal verb *would* is a versatile and useful one in functioning to distance you slightly and make what you write appear suitably hedged so avoid, for example:

I argue that ...

and prefer:

I would argue that ...

Modal adverbs and adjectives

Avoid being too assertive in the use of adjectives and adverbs. Doing so simply challenges the reader to think of all the times you are wrong. So, for example, do not write:

It is certain that ...

Students always ...

Learners invariably ...

There is an obvious tendency to ...

and prefer:

It is (clearly) arguable that ...

Students frequently ...

Learners very often ...

There is a perceptible tendency to ...

Boosters and Downtoners

Boosters are commonly used in informal speech to add strength to a message but should be used sparingly in academic writing. Try to avoid, therefore, adverbials such as *invariably, extremely, astonishingly, definitely, certainly, of course, predictably* etc.

Downtoning adverbials are, on the other hand, common in good academic writing to present a modest case so be unafraid to use, e.g., *usually, frequently, arguably, in my experience, from experience, in this case* etc.

Modal nouns

Although these are less frequently used, their misuse or non-use is most glaring. Again, they challenge the reader to think of times when what you say is not the case.

For example, avoid writing:

The fact is that ...

or

The truth of the matter is ...

and prefer:

The supposition is that ...

or

The (strong) possibility is that ...

Verb forms and tenses

Anything stated in the present simple usually carries the connotation that you believe something to be invariably the case. So, unless this is what you mean, avoid:

Speakers of Romance language use single-word verbs instead of multi-word verbs

and prefer:

Speakers of Romance language (may) tend to use single-word verbs instead of multi-word verbs.



Reporting verbs

This is an area in which you need carefully to read what the authority you are citing really said. There are levels of certainty which you should reflect in how you report a writer and you need to reflect the writer's stance in the language you use to introduce citations.

For example, if you are reporting that a writer is agreeing with another authority, it is an error to state:

Smith clarifies this view by stating, "..."

because the verb should be something like *supports, concurs with* or *endorses*.

In other words, make the function match the verb and vice versa.

When you read an author's text you need to be clear whether the writer is:

1. speculating or suggesting, in which case use, for example:

Smith suggests ...

Jones postulates ...

Guru implies ...

2. discussing or examining, in which case use, for example:

Smith notes ...

Jones sets out ...

Guru comments ...

3. claiming or asserting, in which case use, for example:

Smith claims ...

Jones shows ...

Guru proves ...

You also need to use a range of reporting verbs when you cite or paraphrase authority. Avoid always writing, e.g.:

Jones (1990:230) states, "..."

or

Jones (1990:230) says that "..."

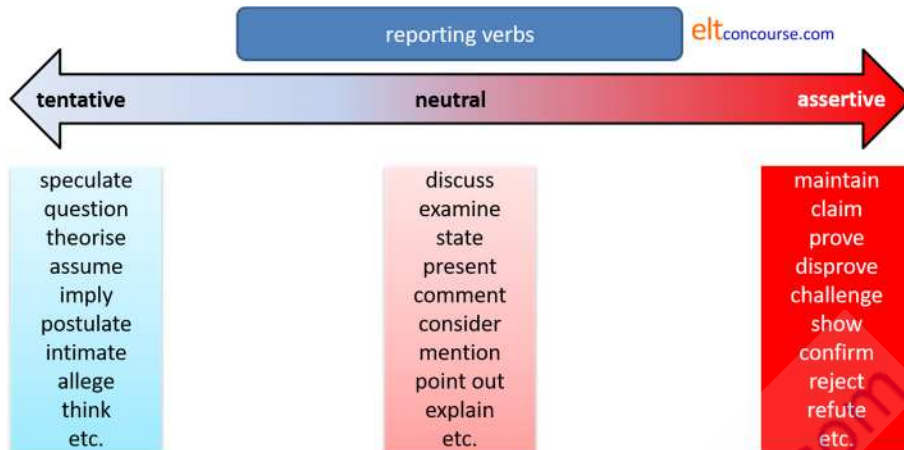
and consider something more accurate and meaningful such as:

Jones (1990:230) cautions us that "..."

or

Jones (1990:230) observes / notes / makes the point that "..."

When you cite a source, it is useful to consider which reporting verbs will best express the level of certainty that the author intended.



Reading critically

In all you write for Delta, you are expected to draw on authority. That does not absolve you of the need to think, sometimes.

The authors you cite may well know more than you (about some matters) but they are not necessarily, or even probably, cleverer or more insightful than you.

So, if you see an internal inconsistency, a contradiction, an unsupported assertion of simply something which does not seem logical or consistent with the data you have, do not be afraid to point it out. Do the same if and when you discover that two or more authorities you have consulted disagree about something and then include what you think. It shows you are reading critically and not allowing yourself to be intimidated by the views of someone lucky enough to get themselves into print.

That, of course, applies equally to what you access in printed form, from presentations at training and conference sessions and on the web (including eltconcourse.com).



Syntax error

Perspicuity, n. lucidity, clearness of style or exposition, freedom from obscurity.

The whole point of avoiding grammatical *faux pas* is make sure that your writing is clear and accessible. Forcing the reader to re-phrase for you and correct the grammar in order to retrieve your intended meaning is poor practice and reduces the credibility of what you write. It also irritates the reader.

When you write at this level, your intention, presumably, is to persuade the reader that you have mastered your topic area and write from authority.

Very little undermines this impression as much as errors in syntax, lexical choice and grammar. You are, after all, a teacher of the language and you should be able to write it effectively, accurately and clearly. All written work at this level must be free from errors, typographical or otherwise.

Here is a selection of the usual issues to avoid.

The run-on sentence or comma splice

Joining what should be two sentences with a comma (or not) creates a run-on sentence which is clumsy and unclear. For example:

We can also use shall with the future perfect simple and continuous forms, this however, is usually a matter of formality.

in which we have two different subjects for different verbs. The sentence should be re-written as two separate statements:

We can also use shall with the future perfect simple and continuous forms. This is, however, usually a matter of formality.

Often less satisfactorily, you can use the semi-colon or a dash to separate the clauses:

We can also use shall with the future perfect simple and continuous forms; this is, however, usually a matter of formality.

We can also use shall with the future perfect simple and continuous forms – this is, however, usually a matter of formality.

Using conjuncts as conjunctions (or *vice versa*)

A conjunction joins clauses, either to coordinate or subordinate, and is integral to the resulting compound or complex sentence, but a conjunct links separate ideas, often in separate sentences but always in separate clauses. Using a conjunct as if it were a conjunction makes another form of run-on sentence. For example:

These learners will have to use English in the workplace, moreover, they will need to operate in an English-speaking society.

in which the word *moreover* has been used as if it were a conjunction. It is not, so the sentence should be re-written. This can be achieved either by

- a. using a proper coordinating conjunction used to create the compound sentence into which the conjunct can be inserted. For example:

These learners will have to use English in the workplace and, moreover, they will need to operate in an English-speaking society.

or

- b. as two separate sentences with the conjunct performing its proper function. Like this:

These learners will have to use English in the workplace. Moreover, they will need to operate in an English-speaking society.

or

These learners will have to use English in the workplace. They will, moreover, need to operate in an English-speaking society.

Used accurately, conjuncts perform a very useful cohesive function in academic writing. They can:

- enumerate (*firstly, finally*)
- add (*moreover, furthermore, additionally*)
- signal exemplification (*for example*)
- signal apposition (*in other words, by which I mean*)
- sum up or conclude (*in conclusion, to sum up*)
- show results (*consequently, as a result, therefore, in view of that*)
- replace (*alternatively, instead*)
- express an opposite meaning (*in fact, indeed, on the other hand*)
- concede (*however, at any rate*)
- equate (*likewise, similarly*)

All these are examples of conjuncts, not conjunctions.

The hanging or dangling participle or prepositional phrase

A dangling participle is usually defined as one for which there is no obvious subject for the verb. For example:

Talking to my students they tell me that they need more listening practice.

Here, the reader is forced mentally to adjust the sentence to discover who is talking to the students. It would, therefore, be better phrased as, for example:

When I have canvassed my students' views, they all report that they believe they need more listening practice.

Readers of a text will expect the subject of a verb to be the closest appropriate noun phrase to it. So, for example, in:

Using top-down strategies in combination with bottom-up strategies, learners can infer some of the meanings of unknown lexical items.

it is clear that it is *learners* who will use the strategies even though the subject of the verb is separated by nine words from the verb (*using*). However, in this sentence we have a hanging participle:

Reading my students' essays, it is clear that they use a limited range of appropriate adjectival phrases.

in which the reader has to sort out who is doing the reading and who the using. The sentence needs re-writing as, for example:

Reading my students' essays, I have noticed that they use a limited range of appropriate adjectival phrases.

in which the proper subject of the verb has been inserted so it is clear who is doing the reading and who the using.

This also happens, less frequently, with the past participle as in, e.g.:

Brought up and educated in Greece, his writing tends to be inaccurate in terms of orthography.

which seems to imply that his writing was brought up and educated in Greece rather than the student.

It would be better phrased as, e.g.:

Brought up and educated in Greece, he has difficulty with accurate use of orthography and spelling.

where it is clear who was brought up and educated in Greece.

An allied grammatical *faux pas* is the dangling prepositional phrase. For example:

At the age of 25, her formal education is now complete.

which appears to imply that her formal education is 25 years old and that is not what the writer means.

Much simpler and clearer would be:

She is 25 years old and her formal education is now complete.



Misused words and homophone corner

There are many of these and a complete list would fill a small book.

In what follows there is occasional reference to differences in English-language varieties, especially American English (AmE) and British English (BrE). Whichever variety you use, be consistent.

Here are some favourite confusions and misuses to avoid:

adverse and averse

The adjective *adverse* means *harmful* as in, for example:

This may have an adverse effect on learning.

The adjective *averse* means *disliking* as in, for example

My students are averse to taking risks in public.

affect and effect

The verb *affect* means *to change*. The noun *effect* refers to *the result of a change*. More rarely, the verb *effect* means *to bring about a change*.

So, for example, we can have:

The setting may affect learners' motivation.

The setting's effect on the learners' motivation was negative.

In order to effect a change in the learners' motivation, the setting needs to be changed.

By the same token, the adjectives, *affective* and *effective*, mean different things. The first refers to changing someone's emotional state as in:

There are a number of affective factors in the plan to take into account.

The second means successful in producing the result you want as in:

This is an effective consolidation activity.

aural and oral

These two words are pronounced the same (as /'ɔː.rəl/) but the first refers to listening and the second to speaking. To distinguish, some people pronounce the first as /'aʊ.rəl/.

born and borne

These are pronounced the same but the first refers to *having started life* and the second means *carried* so do not write:

The marker for singular, third-person subjects is born on the verb suffix.

and prefer:

The marker for singular, third-person subjects is borne on the verb suffix.

chord and cord

The first of these refers to *a group of musical notes* but the second is the one you should use to refer to *the vocal cords* which contribute to voicing of a consonant because it means a length of something like string or rope. It is nowadays more accurate, some aver, to refer to **vocal folds**.

communicative and talkative

The term *communicative* does not only apply to spoken language so do not confuse it with *oral*. If you mean that some learners do not talk much then say so rather than imply that they do not communicate.

complement and compliment

The first of these refers to the grammatical item which completes a phrase as in, for example, *the complement of a verb*. The second means *praise*. Both can be nouns or verbs.

continual and continuous

The first of these means recurring regularly as in, e.g.:

He continually makes mistakes with past-tense endings.

The second of these means unceasing or non-stop as in:

She talked continuously and without interruption.

A class into which new students arrive regularly should be described as having *continual enrolment*, not *continuous enrolment*, whatever the school prospectus may say.

discreet and discrete

The first of these adjectives means *without attracting attention* as in, for example:

I try to monitor discreetly.

The second adjective means *separate and distinct* as in, for example:

A discrete-item test was administered to assess the students' ability to distinguish these phonemes.

disinterested and uninterested

The first of these means *impartial or unbiased* as in, for example:

The tests were marked anonymously by disinterested markers.

The second adjective means *bored or not engaged* as in, for example:

These students would be uninterested in a text about kangaroos.

elicit, illicit and evince

The first verb means *to draw out by questioning or other means* as in, for example:

The task naturally elicits the past perfect form.

The second is an adjective meaning *illegal*.

The verb *evince* is not the same as *elicit*. It means to *show clearly or demonstrate* as in, e.g.:

The test results evinced the learners' unreadiness to take the examination.

ellipsis and elision

Ellipsis is a syntactical phenomenon in which a word or phrase is omitted because it is known and can be recovered uniquely. For example, in:

John can't help but I can.

we have ellipsis in the second clause of the verb *help* because it is clearly recoverable by the listener or reader. Technically, ellipsis can only refer to an element that is uniquely recoverable so, for example:

I liked the shirt so I bought three.

is not an example of ellipsis but of the omission of an object phrase. There are a number of possible items which have been omitted: *of them, shirts, items, types, colours* etc. An alternative is to call this substitution by zero or substitution of the noun phrase by the determiner *three*. The verb is *ellipt*.

Elision is a phonological phenomenon in which a sound is omitted in normal or rapid speech. For example, the word *secretary* may be pronounced /'se.krə.tə.ri/ or, eliding the third vowel sound, as /'se.krə.tri/. Consonants, too, are frequently elided from clusters as in the pronunciation of *glimpse* as /glɪms/ with elision of the /p/.

imply and infer

The first of these means *to suggest* as in, for example:

The evidence strongly implies that the students need more practice in this area.

The second verb means *to reach a conclusion* as in, for example:

Learners can infer the meaning from the co-text.

insure and ensure

In British English, the first of these words refers to protecting something with a policy that will indemnify you in the event of loss or damage (hence an insurance policy). The second of this pair means to make certain of something. For example:

To ensure that students are working alone on the task, I separate them physically in different parts of the room.

In AmE these verbs are sometimes used interchangeably.

The word *assure*, incidentally, means *to promise*.

invariably and usually

The first adverb means *always, without variation or exception*. The second does not. Beware the use of the first of these because you are setting yourself up for the reader to think of an exception. For example, writing:

Two clauses joined by the coordinator and can invariably be reversed.

invites the reader to object:

What about "Bring the food and I'll cook the dinner"?

it's and its

If you are obeying the rule not to use contractions in formal writing, the first of these should never occur. *It's* is an abbreviation of either *it is* or *it has*.

Its is the possessive modifier for the pronoun *it*.

Correct, therefore, are:

The activity has its uses in this respect.

and

It's been demonstrated that ...

Wrong, therefore, are:

**The activity has it's uses.*

and

**Its been demonstrated that ...*

nor

That the word *nor* is paired with *neither* is not a mystery so we are all happy to accept, for example

He neither noticed the mistake nor corrected it.

The problem comes when we have a sentence such as

He didn't notice the mistake nor correct it.

Which is wrong because the negation of the first clause is carried forward to negate the second verb phrase, making, in effect, a double negative, so it should be

He didn't notice the mistake or correct it

The rules are:

1. When the second item is a verb phrase, a noun phrase, an adverb phrase or an adjective phrase then use *or*, not *nor*, so we get:

She hasn't eaten or drunk anything.

He didn't study French or German at school.

She never went happily or quickly.

The pie wasn't well cooked or hot enough.

2. When the second item is a full clause, negation needs to be reiterated because it cannot safely be assumed to carry on from the first clause, use *nor*, not *or*:

The teacher didn't notice the error, nor did anyone else correct it.

My students weren't late to class and nor were most of their colleagues.

She didn't come happily to the theatre, nor did she enjoy the play when she got there.

and in the third example we have the inversion of operator and verb in the second clause.

If in doubt, re-phrase with *neither ... nor* or *either ... or*.

on behalf of and on the part of

The term *on behalf of* means *for* or *representing* as in, for example:

One student speaks on behalf of the group.

The term *on the part of* means *done by, responsible for* or *carried out by* as in, for example:

The silence on the part of the teacher in this methodology may sometimes disorientate the learners.

ones and one's

The pronoun *ones* is the plural form of *one* and *one's* is the possessive modifier of the impersonal *one*.

Correct, therefore, are:

One should be careful with one's grammar.

and

I select the easier ones.

Wrong, therefore, are:

**One should be careful with ones grammar.*

and

**I select the easier one's.*

In AmE, the pronoun *one* is often followed by a personal pronoun as in, e.g.:

One should look after his belongings.

In BrE, that is considered wrong and should be:

One should look after one's belongings.

phase and faze

The first of these is a noun or verb referring to the *stage* of something or a verb referring to the *staging* of a procedure. For example:

This phase of the lesson is designed to provide formal practice (q.v.) of the usage (q.v.) of the tense.

or as a verb

The target lexis will be phased in over a series of three lessons.

The second of these is a verb only and means to *confuse*, *discomfort* or *bewilder*. For example:

These learners are sometimes fazed by being asked to provide a spontaneous opinion.

The verb *faze* is informal, best avoided and almost always, incidentally, used in the passive.

phonetic and phonemic

The first of these applies to the study of all human language. The International Phonetic Alphabet contains 107 symbols and letters, 31 diacritics and 19 additional signs to indicate sounds which the human voice can produce. You are not likely to be analysing anything with this level of detail.

What you are interested in is phonemic analysis which applies to only one language, English. To do that, you will need the 21 ways of representing the vowels and the 24 consonant symbols. You may need a few bits and pieces such as syllabic consonant markers, the glottal stop and stress marks but that's all.

plethora

does not mean large range; it actually means a larger amount than necessary so if you write, e.g.:

There is a plethora of coursebooks on the institution's shelves.

you are actually saying

There are too many coursebooks on the institution's shelves.

The word is, incidentally, a mass noun so **there are a plethora* is always wrong, whatever you mean.

pour over and pore over

The first of these refers to putting ketchup on your chips. The second verb is the one to use in, e.g., *pore over a text (study)*.

practice and practise

If you are writing in AmE, the only word you need is *practice* as this does service as a noun and a verb. In BrE, on the other hand, the verb is *practise* and the noun is *practice*. The same applies to *license / licence*, but AmE uses the first of these for both grammatical functions.

principal and principle

The first means *most important* and the second refers to *a fundamental rule*. It is possible, therefore, to write *the principal principle* to mean *the most important basic rule* (but don't).

support, help and scaffolding

The term *scaffolding* is not simply a sophisticated way to mean *support*. The term derives from Vygotsky, originally, and refers to the stage of learning in which the learner can almost but not quite achieve a task without help. This is the Zone of Proximal Development. The term *support* is often simply synonymous with *help*.

usage

is not a more sophisticated way to say *use*. In language teaching, it refers to formal accuracy rather than communicative use. For example:

Usage will be the target of the first two phases (q.v.) of the lesson and use will be tackled later.

whose and who's

whose is the possessive relative pronoun and *wh-* question word:

Whose money is that?

She's the woman whose house I painted

who's is the contracted form of *who is* / *who has* (and should, therefore, be avoided in formal writing):

Who's lost the money?

Who's laughing?



Jargon and terminology

Jargon may be defined as the use of language specific to a field or group of professionals (a register). Its use is, therefore, not only acceptable, but required. In fact, some jargon is designed to lock out non-professionals from a particular field of enquiry.

Jargon, or terminology, often represents a specific meaning attached to some words and phrases which differ from the ordinary, everyday use of the word. For example, *genre* in lay terms refers to a specific type of artistic work, such as science fiction or impressionism, but in text-type analysis to something much more precisely defined. The terms *usage*, *aspect*, *conditional*, *subordinate*, *communicative*, *marked*, *structural*, *contingency*, *passive*, *covert*, *connotation* and many others are used in specific ways which differ from how they are used in non-technical domains. Make sure you know what they mean because using them in their everyday instead of technical sense can confuse and irritate the reader. It also reveals that you are ignorant of the specific, technical meaning.

On the other hand, the overuse of terminology, especially if you fail to define what specific authors mean by the terms you use can be equally frustrating and irritating.

As has been noted when considering abbreviations (a subset of jargon), you need to define all the terms you use if they would be unfamiliar to someone on a pre-service training course such as CELTA. For example:

One use of the present perfect progressive less commonly taught at this level is for the iterative aspect (referring to repeated actions) as in, for example:

People have been taking a shortcut through my garden to the pub.

In which the tense form is marked (i.e., distinguished from the simple form) to emphasise the repetition of an event.

Here, the writer has not defined the tense description (because that has already been done in the analysis of form) but has defined the word *iterative* because this is a technical term unlikely to be familiar to non-specialists and defined *marked* because the word is being used in a technical sense rather than its everyday one.



Structure

This is not the place to discuss the overall generic structure of your writing. That concerns the big picture in terms of information staging and how that differs between, say, an information report and a discussion.

You cannot, however, hope that coherent structure will somehow magically evolve from your writing so a few basic rules are important.

Rule 1: Headings, subheadings and relevance

Within any piece of extended academic writing, readers will expect to be able to navigate through the text by following clues that you provide. Most of these will come in the form of headings and subheadings.

As you write, make sure you use these devices but also keep an eye on the content of the heading and maintain relevance. If you are getting off the topic, perhaps it is time for a new subheading.

Rule 2: Topic sentences

Readers also expect that the first sentence of each paragraph will reflect that paragraph's content. When you come to proofreading your text, check that this is the structure of each paragraph. If it is not, it is time to re-write or rearrange.

Rule 3: Bullets and lists

Use bullet points sparingly and not as a substitute for connected prose. Lists and tables are helpful but you must discuss their content.

Numbered lists may often imply some kind of prioritisation but bulleted lists do not. However, numbered (or lettered) lists are convenient if you want to make internal referencing because they avoid the need to refer to, say, *the fourth bullet point above*, or whatever.

Rule 4: Cohesion

Cohesion is maintained by a combination of understanding the generic structure that you are aiming for and a combination of Rules 1 and 2. Cohesion is maintained by making sure that conjunctions and conjuncts are used in the way you intend and lead to the connections you want to make.

As you proofread, keep asking yourself if this is invariably the case. If cause and effect is the link you want to make, for example, are you using structures which allow that to be clear to the reader? If, on the other hand, exemplification is what you want to signal, how have you signposted that?

Cohesion can be enhanced by careful use of shell nouns (to which there is a guide on the site). Briefly, shell nouns such as *problem, idea, issue, fact, information, difficulty* and so on allow you to encapsulate a number of propositions in the shell of the noun. Thereafter, you can simply refer to *this* or *it* to direct the reader to all the propositions within the shell.

Rule 5: Get someone else to read your work

When you proofread your own work you may read what you thought you wrote rather than what you actually wrote. Someone else won't. You can simulate this effect by reading your text aloud to yourself. Infelicities, lack of coherence and cohesion and other faults become more apparent that way.



Presentation

Most centres and institutions will have rules about how you need to present your work including the niceties of typefaces, line spacing, margin widths and other requirements. You need, of course, to follow them.

Even if your institution does not do this, at the very least, insert a header and footer identifying the document and its author and use page numbering.

For Module Three of the Delta, the following are required and the same sort of presentation should be used for all written work for Module Two as well.

- 2.5 cm. margins all round
- a title page with your identifiers (candidate number and centre number included)
- a contents page
- page numbering throughout
- a footer with your name, candidate number and the title
- no footnotes

Avoid quirky and hard-to-read or childish typefaces such as *Comic Sans MS* and stick to popular, serious-looking fonts such as Arial, Tahoma, Times New Roman or Calibri.
