

Words and Phrases to Avoid in College Writing

There are certain words and phrases that should be avoided in formal college essays. It is important to remember that these words and phrases may be appropriate for everyday conversations, but they should **not** be used in academic writing.

Avoid	Why	Use this Instead
get, got, gotten	This is a generic verb form. A more specific verb needs to be used instead.	received, accepted, achieved, earned
alot	This is not a word. A lot should be used, but avoid using this, too. Be more specific when you want to quantify something to express your ideas about degree and quantity.	
very, really, actually	These are vague and overused words that do not describe much at all. Avoid using them altogether and find other words that show emphasis and are more concise. “She was a really good dancer” does not sound like anything special.	She was an exceptional dancer.
could of, should of, would of	This does not make sense. What you are hearing is different than what you write. What you are hearing is actually spelled could’ve, should’ve, or would’ve. It is better to spell out the complete words.	could have, should have, would have
throughout	Students tend to start an essay with a broad generalization using this word, and they get into trouble. “Throughout his entire life he liked to read novels about explorers.” How could this be? This implies he started reading novels in the delivery room. Limit <i>throughout</i> to a specific period of time.	Throughout high school, he read many adventure novels.
whilst, shalt, amidst, amongst	Avoid these archaic words. You are not writing a sermon in the 17 th century.	while, shall, amid, among
Beginning a sentence with <i>And</i> or <i>But</i>	You can begin a sentence with <i>but</i> ; however, do not do this too often. Vary your sentence pattern with transitional words.	however, although, consequently, additionally
Ending a sentence with <i>at</i>	According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) you now can end a sentence with a preposition (in, with, about, etc.). Avoid ending with <i>at</i> and phrases such as “Where did you park the car <i>at</i> ?”	Where did you park the car? What drawer did you put the book <i>in</i> ? What was the lecture <i>about</i> ?

abbreviations: etc., misc.	These can be used when it's clear your list is not all inclusive, and the reader probably could add other items from his or her own experience. For example, "There are many fast food restaurants in San Antonio: McDonald's, Burger King, etc." Your reader surely knows Wendy's, Dairy Queen, Whataburger, and other fast food joints, but try to limit the use of abbreviations in your writing.	Write out your list. Use abbreviations sparingly.
contractions: don't, can't, won't	These are used in everyday conversation, but they should not be used in formal academic writing. Simply spell it out.	do not, cannot, will not
kid, mom, dad	These words are casual and informal. In an academic paper it is best to be formal and specific.	child, mother, father, parent
you, your, yours, yourself	Most formal papers are not written in second person. Avoid these words.	
well, basically, like, honestly	<i>Well</i> and <i>basically</i> are conversational filler. "Well, there are three reasons for this." It is best to leave it out entirely. "There are three reasons for this." Using <i>honestly</i> implies that you are not always honest.	
i, ur	Language suitable for a text is not suitable for academic writing.	I, your
nowadays, often times, in this day and age, good old days,	These words/phrases are not specific enough. <i>When</i> is nowadays? <i>How</i> often? <i>What</i> day and age? Good old days for <i>who</i> ?	In 2015, six times out of ten, in 2015, when I was a child in 1977
a great number of, a large number of	These phrases are not specific and leave questions in the reader's mind. <i>How many</i> ?	618 churches, 822 parents
normal	This word is subjective. What is normal to you may not be normal to others.	
easier said than done, last but not least, so on and so forth, 24/7	Avoid clichés and slang in academic papers.	
In this paper I will show that, It is my opinion that, The fact of the matter is that	These are wordy expressions. Just make the point; don't announce it.	