**COMMENTS AND QUERIES**

The following are issues I generally find in research papers written by ESL researchers

**ACTIVE VS PASSIVE VOICE**

Lots of passive voice.

CMoS 5.118: Active voice is preferred in academic writing but this depends on the preferred point of view. In active voice, the subject leads the sentence (The judge levied a $50 fine); in passive voice, the object that is acted upon leads the sentence (A $50 fine was levied by the judge). Sometimes, however, the object is preferred; for example, when it is the main topic of consideration (The federal budget was the opposition’s main topic of debate).

**COMMAS**

Lots of problems here. The following are only a few.

6.46: not only … but also, with an interjected phrase of the type not only …. but also, commas are usually not necessary. This works the same way commas do in respect to subjects and predicates (that is, a comma should not separate a predicate from its subject. The exception is for three or more predicates, when commas as used as in a list.)

CMoS 6.27; 6.50; Commas around restrictive information: Commas around restrictive/essential information are removed because the information is essential. That is, surrounding the restrictive/essential information with commas implies that this information can be removed without changing the meaning of the sentence.

**VERB TENSES**

Some authors write their entire papers in the present tense as if they are going to collect the data and analyse it while we are reading their paper. Some journals are ok with this; others are not. I generally adjust verb tenses for the methodology and some aspects of the literature review.

In academic writing the research methodology is discussed in the past tense because this action took place and was completed in the past; the research findings are discussed in the present tense because they are still relevant today. In the literature review, in reference to prior literature, I generally use the past tense for the approach and methodology, but when discussing the findings, I generally use the present tense unless the findings are really old. This is a judgement call.

**ADVERBS**

CMoS 6.57. Adverbs that join two independent clauses should be preceded by a semi-colon. This applies to however, thus, hence, accordingly, besides, therefore. Again, even though this is a rule, I generally use my judgement here.

**USE OF THE PRONOUNS**

Some journals discourage the use of pronouns (I, we). Papers should be revised accordingly and the reason for the adjustment should be noted in the comments pane.

**EMBEDDED CITATIONS**

Some authors use et al. inappropriately. Harvard style uses et al. with three or more authors. Chicago uses et al. with four or more authors (15.29); 5.9 If a publication is following Chicago style, the first three authors names are included in embedded citations (Hao, Sliuzas, and Geertman 2011) or Hao, Sliuzas, and Geertman (2011). APA names the first five authors on the first instance and uses the first author’s name and et al. subsequent to this; for six or more authors, et al. is used in the first instance.

Editors should check the appropriate journal guidelines to check for the preferred style (APA, Chicago, Harvard, Vancouver, house style).

**PARALLEL STRUCTURE**

Authors sometimes miss the following forms of paired joining terms used in parallel structure:

CMoS 5.244: Correlative conjunctions: not only-but also; either-or; neither-nor; both-and; and some adverbial pairs: where-there; so-as; and if-then. Sometimes they fail to match the verb structure ( as in splitting the infinitive): I’d like to either go into business for myself or else to write freelance travel articles.

CMoS 5.242 The phrase ‘on the other hand’ must be preceded by phrase ‘On one hand’ because this is parallel form in English writing and parallel form must be complete.

**CAPITALIZATION**

CMoS 8.19: Civil, military, religious, and professional titles are capitalized when they immediately precede a personal name and are thus used as part of the name (traditionally replacing the title holder’s first name.) In formal prose and other generic text, titles are normally lower cased when following a name or used in place of a name.

Authors (even native English speaking PhDs) often misuse capitalizations, particularly with civic titles.

Ex. The lieutenant governor of Nova Scotia; Lieutenant Governor Wentworth.

The president of the United States; President Obama.

These titles are treated as common nouns except when they are attached to a person’s name.

In response to a query on capitalization: Titles are only capitalized when they receded the person’s name: President Macron; the president (CM0S 17th ed; 8.51).

Ditto university: Dalhousie University, but the university (CMoS 8.68) and empire or republic: The Republic of France; the republic; the British Empire; the empire (CMoS 8.51).

Names in reference lists:

(CMoS 8.10): van Dyke is capped when it is the first name used for a publication included in a reference list: Van Dyke.

**SYNTAX:**

CMoS 5.210: Syntax is the collective term we use to denote all of the rules that govern how words are arranged into sentences. English uses word order to show word relations. Syntax is particularly important in expressing meaning. In some languages, sentence structure differs from that used in English: the Romance languages, for example. Other languages lack the definite and indefinite articles: Asian languages. Errors I generally see include the following:

Misuse or lack of the definite article; i.e., when an indefinite article is called for;

Ambiguity or lack of clarity

Improper word usage

When making adjustments for any of these issues, it’s always good to explain to the author what the problem was. For example, explain that using the definite article for a data set would imply that the data set includes all possible instances of the relevant factor; for example, in manufacturing data, all possible manufacturing firms for the region represented in the data. Using the indefinite article would imply that the data provides only a sample or a subset of the overall data. Noting this will keep the author out of trouble.

For possible improper word usage, query possible alternatives. For example, if the author notes that the subjects in the study all come from the same region but speak different languages, query: for “languages” does the author mean “dialects”. But if the problem is obvious, as in ‘the meadow of finance’, simply delete and add the proper term ‘the field of finance’.

For ambiguity or lack of clarity, highlight the phrase and provide an alternative in the comments pane, as follows: Would the following work here? [provide the alternative]. If so, please adjust. If not, please revise for clarity of meaning.

**Tables and figures**

Most authors miss the fact that every table and figure must stand alone. This means that readers should not have to refer back to the main text to understand all of the variables/factors presented in the table or figure and what the information the table conveys. Therefore, every table and figure requires an explanatory note for the variables; they also require a source of the data, even when the data is the author’s own (Source: based on author’s own data).

Example of a table that requires an explanatory note and a source. Also missing is the period of the data (Year(s)).

Table VI - Descriptive statistics of the OLS variables (missing values were omitted)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Variable | Mean | Median | Minimum | Maximum |
| EV | 897928 | 745767 | 63668 | 4,62556e+006 |
| R&D | 107800 | 15000 | 3000 | 608509 |
| ROA | 3,366 | 5,65 | -101 | 45,51 |
| EN | 4,809 | 1,00 | 0,00 | 50,00 |
| RPW | 1,095 | 1,00 | 0,00 | 7,00 |
| PN | 0,857 | 0,00 | 0,00 | 5,00 |
| CP | 2,667 | 2,00 | 0,00 | 11,00 |
| AP | 1,619 | 1,00 | 0,00 | 4,00 |
| FIR | 38,959 | 38,535 | -34,45 | 78,93 |
| Variable | Std.Dev. | Variation coefficients | Asymmetry | Curtosis | Missing observation |
| EV | 1,11359e+006 | 1,240 | 2,125 | 4,335 | 0 |
| R&D | 175317 | 1,626 | 1,872 | 2,269 | 4 |
| ROA | 30,335 | 9,011 | -2,104 | 5,345 | 1 |
| EN | 10,902 | 2,267 | 3,619 | 12,525 | 0 |
| RPW | 1,786 | 1,631 | 2,281 | 4,550 | 0 |
| PN | 1,276 | 1,489 | 1,899 | 3,433 | 0 |
| CP | 2,921 | 1,095 | 1,140 | 1,062 | 0 |
| AP | 1,499 | 0,926 | 0,221 | -1,560 | 0 |
| FIR | 29,891 | 0,767 | -0,461 | -0,110 | 1 |

Note:

Source:

Comment: Please provide an explanatory note for the variables and also the source of the data. Every table and figure must be comprehensive. This means that readers should be able to understand the information the table or figure intends to convey without having to refer back to the discussion in the main text.