

Writing in English as a Foreign Language:

*Tips for Non-Native Speakers
and Those Working with Them*

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Why bother?

- If you're a non-native speaker of English, why become adept at writing in English about your work?
- If you're a native speaker of English, why become adept at working with non-native writers of English?

Some of My Background

- Peking University
Health Science
Center
- China Medical Board
Program in
Biomedical Writing
and Editing
- AuthorAID project
- Other

Language:
Just Part of the Picture

The Essentials

- The essentials are **content**, **organization**, and **clarity**.
- If a paper has excellent content, is well organized, and is clear, it is likely to be accepted even if the English is so-so.
- If a paper has poor content, is badly organized, or is unclear, it is likely to be rejected even if the English is excellent.

Culture Too

- Ability to communicate effectively not only a matter of vocabulary, grammar, etc.
- Also cultural aspects
- What cultural differences have you observed that can affect scientific communication?

Cultural Differences to Consider

- Directness or indirectness of expression
- Amount of detail
- Attitudes toward time
- Attitudes toward using material taken from others' writing
- Other

Language Challenges

- If you're a non-native writer of English, what aspects of the language do you find most challenging?
- If English is your native language, what aspects of English do you find that non-native users have trouble with in their writing?

Some Common Language Challenges

- Verb tenses
- Prepositions
- Articles (the, a, an)
- Sentence structure
- Sentence length
- Spacing
- Other

Some Strategies

Compiling Lists of Words and Phrases Commonly Used in Your Field

Writing Simply

- Relatively simple sentence structures
- Except for technical terms, mainly common words
- Advantages
 - Easier for you
 - Less chance of error
 - Easier for other non-native speakers to read
 - Quicker for everyone to read

Having People with a Strong Command of English Review Your Drafts

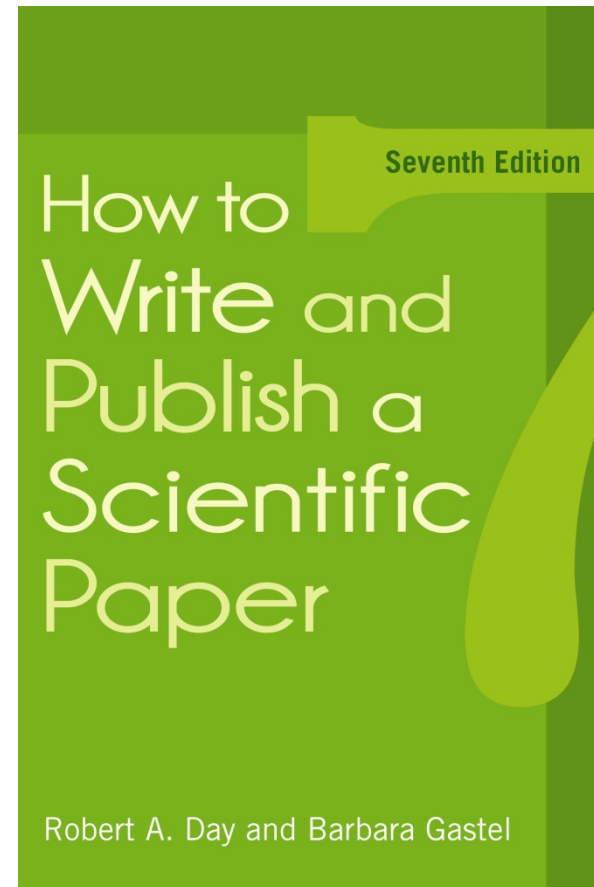
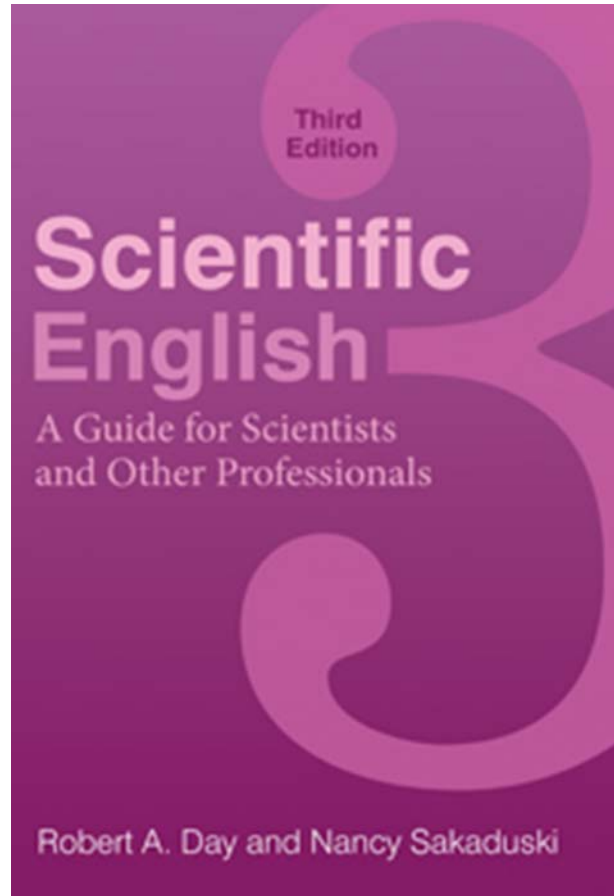
- Some possibilities
 - Supervisors, colleagues, and friends
 - Professional scientific editors
- Need not always be native speakers
- And not every native speaker is qualified
- Keep track of the revisions and learn from them

Other Strategies

- Read, read, read.
- Write, write, write.
- Other

Some Resources

Books Such as These



Videos, Podcasts, etc in Your Research Field

(especially good for pronunciation)

UsingEnglish.com

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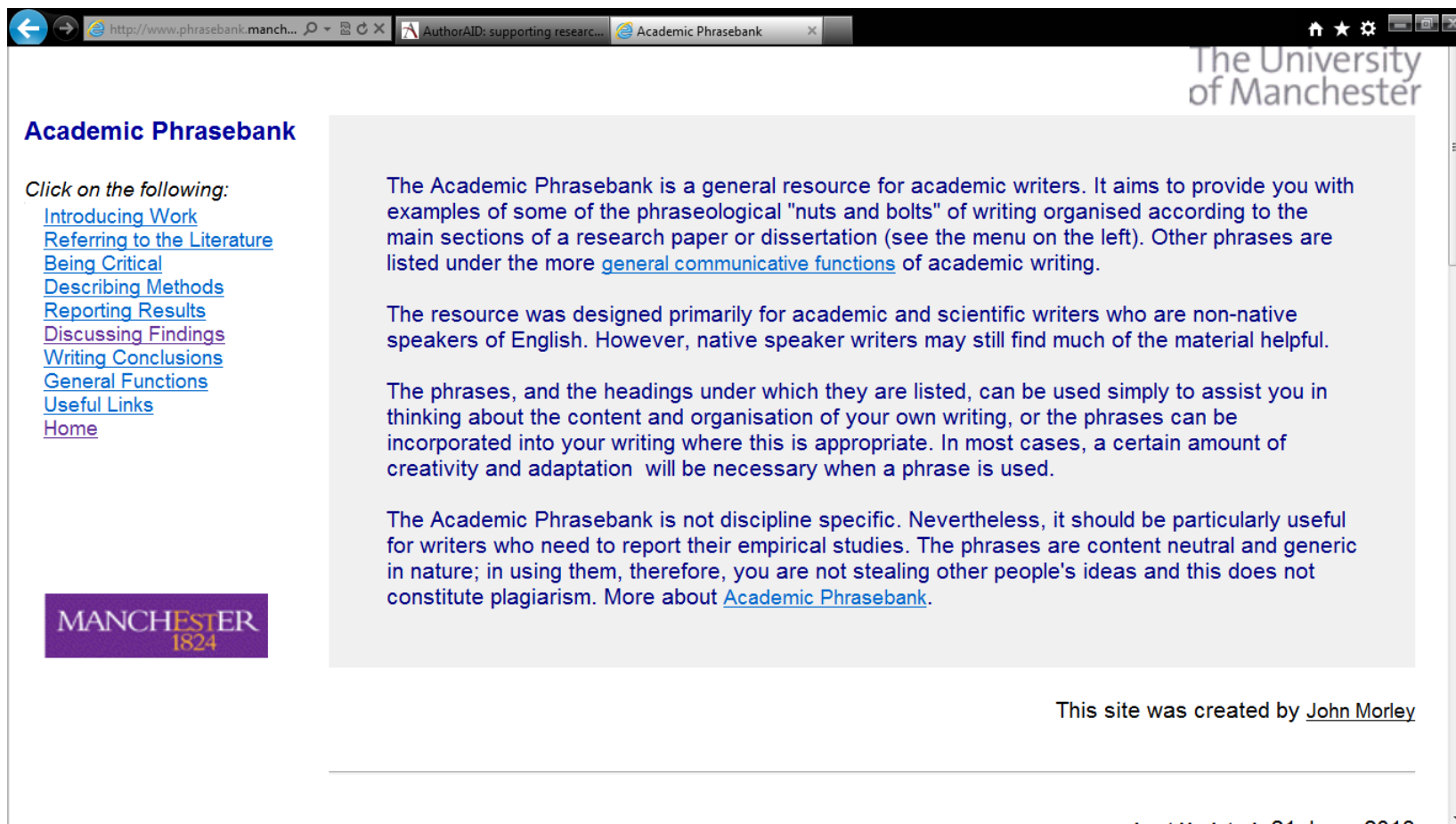
Word or phrase:

☒ Find definitions ☐ Find translations ☐ Search all dictionaries

Example searches

bluebird	Find definitions of <i>bluebird</i>
blue*	Find words and phrases that start with <i>blue</i>
*bird	Find words and phrases that end with <i>bird</i>
bl????rd	Find words that start with <i>bl</i> , end with <i>rd</i> , and have 4 letters in between
bl*:snow	Find words that start with <i>bl</i> and have a meaning related to <i>snow</i>
*:snow or :snow	Find any words related to <i>snow</i>
*:winter sport	Find words related to the concept <i>winter sport</i>
winter	Find phrases that contain the word <i>winter</i>
expand:nasa	Find phrases that spell out <i>n.a.s.a.</i>

Academic Phrasebank



The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL [http://www.phrasebank.manchester...](http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/) and tabs for 'AuthorAID: supporting research...' and 'Academic Phrasebank'. The page header includes 'The University of Manchester' logo. The main content area is titled 'Academic Phrasebank' and contains a list of links on the left and a central text box with four paragraphs. The bottom right corner states 'This site was created by John Morley'.

Academic Phrasebank

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The Academic Phrasebank is a general resource for academic writers. It aims to provide you with examples of some of the phraseological "nuts and bolts" of writing organised according to the main sections of a research paper or dissertation (see the menu on the left). Other phrases are listed under the more [general communicative functions](#) of academic writing.

The resource was designed primarily for academic and scientific writers who are non-native speakers of English. However, native speaker writers may still find much of the material helpful.

The phrases, and the headings under which they are listed, can be used simply to assist you in thinking about the content and organisation of your own writing, or the phrases can be incorporated into your writing where this is appropriate. In most cases, a certain amount of creativity and adaptation will be necessary when a phrase is used.

The Academic Phrasebank is not discipline specific. Nevertheless, it should be particularly useful for writers who need to report their empirical studies. The phrases are content neutral and generic in nature; in using them, therefore, you are not stealing other people's ideas and this does not constitute plagiarism. More about [Academic Phrasebank](#).

This site was created by [John Morley](#)

Last Updated: 21 June 2012

In this study, Xs were found to cause

X provided the largest set of significant clusters of

It is interesting to note that in all seven cases of this study....

Unexpected outcome

Surprisingly, X was found to

Surprisingly, no differences were found in

One unanticipated finding was that

It is somewhat surprising that no X was noted in this condition

What is surprising is that

Contrary to expectations, this study did not find a significant difference between

However, the observed difference between X and Y in this study was not significant.

However, the ANOVA (one way) showed that these results were not statistically significant.

This finding was unexpected and suggests that

Reference to previous research (support)

This study produced results which corroborate the findings of a great deal of the previous work in this field.

The findings of the current study are consistent with those of Smith and

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How to Make Weird Nouns Plural

Episode : 373 June 27, 2013
General Grammar | Word Choice

00:00 00:00

Some simple rules will keep you from being confounded when you're trying to figure out how to make proper nouns such as "iPhone 5," "iPad 4S," and "Blackberry" plural.

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Grammar Girl 37 - Shoot vs 01:31
Grammar Girl 36 - Prostrate 01:13

00:30 / 00:31

“ESL Short Subjects”

- Guest presentations during 2011 Texas A&M Intensive Course in Research Writing
- Speaker: Susan Aiello, DVM (now editor, *Merck Veterinary Manual*)
- Topics: Verb Forms, Verb Tenses, Modals, Sentence Structure, Articles and Connecting Words, Developing an Academic Writing Style and Building English Vocabulary

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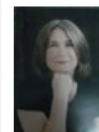
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G Anita Heeren **United States**

Research interests: HIV intervention prevention pilot studies clinical trials Health promotion

AuthorAID

- Project mainly to help researchers in developing countries to write about and publish their work
- Includes materials helpful to researchers elsewhere too
 - From a Japanese scientist: “When it comes to scientific writing, every country is a developing country.”
- Designed for easy use by non-native speakers of English

AuthorAID: A Meta-Resource

- Resource Library—searchable by
 - Subject area (for example, writing scientific papers, preparing oral presentations, preparing poster presentations, writing grant proposals)
 - Resource type (for example, article or presentation)
 - Language
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- E-mail Discussion List
- Mentorships
- Other

Questions and Answers

Wishing you all the best!