

Academic Writing: Free Online Resources

Ruth Belling, PhD



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Using this list

Writing is a major aspect of scholarly life. Whether you need to write an abstract, academic paper, report, thesis, dissertation, or presentation, clarity and accuracy are essential. This is a list of no-cost writing tools and resources, mostly online. The list is intended for researchers, evaluators, academics, scholars and students who want to improve or enhance their academic writing.

Criteria for inclusion in this list:

1. A version of the tool, software or service was available at zero cost when this list was compiled (i.e., NOT a free trial for a limited time, after which you would be expected to upgrade to a paid-for product).
2. The tool, software or service was relevant to one or more aspects of writing for academic and research purposes, in the English language.

Resources are listed according to their main purpose or function.

Some the author has used personally, others have been suggested by researcher and evaluator colleagues.

Some are web-based tools. Others may require the installation of software on your computer. Please note all responsibility in doing so (and in using any of the resources listed in this book) is entirely yours.

Links provided are to each resource's official website.

Several resources listed offer more than one level of service or functionality beyond the free, basic or 'Lite' versions. All information in this guide relates to the free/basic/'Lite' versions only. Free versions may have limits, therefore you should check carefully to see if a free/basic version is sufficient and/or appropriate for your needs.

That said I hope you find this list useful.

Here it is!

Spelling and Word Choice

No writer, academic or otherwise, should be without a good dictionary or thesaurus. A dictionary will give you correct spellings of words, define their meanings, provide examples to show how they should be used in different contexts and even tell you how to pronounce unfamiliar words. A good thesaurus provides words with the same or similar meaning to whatever word you look up, so it's great for finding alternative words or words that may be more accurate in your chosen context.

There are many general English dictionaries and thesauri available online and most are free to consult. They vary in the number of words included, not least because there is no real consensus about what counts as a word or indeed [how many words there are in the English language](#). Language experts estimate there are at least 250,000 distinct English words. (Too many for most people to know the exact meanings of or be able to spell correctly without checking them in a dictionary, so please be assured there is no shame in doing so.)

English is also complicated by the fact that the nations who speak it have their own 'official' versions, so you will need to decide which version of English (UK/British English, US/American, Australian, Canadian etc.) to write in.

It is also worth noting that if you're writing in a technical or specialist field, such as science, engineering, or medicine, it is advisable to have a technical dictionary in addition to a general dictionary, such as the ones listed below.

Cambridge English Dictionary

<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/>

This searchable online version of the Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, the Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary, and the Cambridge Business English Dictionary, is a good all-round choice for academic writers. It includes both UK and US English spellings, and there is also a searchable online thesaurus you can access: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/thesaurus/>

Collins

<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/>

This online version of the Collins Dictionary and Thesaurus claims to include over 500,000 words, making it a useful choice, particularly when you're hunting for that exact word to convey your thoughts and findings to an academic audience.

Grammar and Punctuation

Grammarly

www.grammarly.com

Grammarly is a web-based tool that picks up some of the more common spelling and grammar errors that word processing software tends to miss. The free version claims to spot no less than 100 such errors, notably correctly spelled words used in the wrong context. Since it is linked to your web browser, you can also check emails and social media posts before you send them. Grammarly is a useful learning tool, since it also offers an explanation for grammatical mistakes.

Using English

<https://www.usingenglish.com/>

This website is essentially a mini-dictionary for English grammar terms and explanations. You can search for the meaning of a particular term or browse through the list of categories on-screen. The site was developed mainly for students of linguistics and English as a Second or Other Language and the explanations are short and clear.

Verbix

<http://www.verbix.com/languages/english.shtml>

Verbix is an English verb conjugator. It can help you use most verbs in the correct tense. Just enter a verb and it will provide a complete listing. (The example below is only partial.)

Nominal Forms			
Infinitive: to write Participle: written Gerund: writing			
Indicative		Subjunctive	
Present	Perfect	Present	Perfect
I write you write he writes we write you write they write	I have written you have written he has written we have written you have written they have written	I write you write he write we write you write they write	I have written you have written he have written we have written you have written they have written
Past	Pluperfect	Imperfect	Pluperfect
I wrote you wrote he wrote we wrote you wrote they wrote	I had written you had written he had written we had written you had written they had written	I wrote you wrote he wrote we wrote you wrote they wrote	I had written you had written he had written we had written you had written they had written
Future	Future perfect		
I will write you will write he will write we will write you will write they will write	I will have written you will have written he will have written we will have written you will have written they will have written		

Grammar and Style Guides

Style guides are a set of rules or guidelines. When applied, they give publications, often written by many different people, a consistent look and specify their preferred approach to the use of grammar, punctuation, headings, layout, formatting, citations and references. They are widely used by academic journals, universities and many other organizations.

If you are writing for a particular journal, the author guidelines should tell you which style guide to follow. Certain styles predominate in particular disciplines or fields, such as that of the American Psychological Association (APA) in social sciences, Modern Language Association (MLA) in arts and humanities, and others including Harvard, Chicago/Turabian, and Vancouver for health and medicine.

A web search should guide you to the latest edition of these, though not all are free. Partial (and no-cost) editions, however, are often made available by universities to their students (such as Purdue for APA).

Other grammar and style guides, however, can be very valuable and answer many questions about how to write in clear and precise English.

Strunk's Style Guide (online)

https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Elements_of_Style

This is a transcribed online version of the classic American English reference guide, *The Elements of Style*, written by William Strunk Jr. (1918). It is notable for its advice on how to write clearly and precisely, such as omitting needless words, tightening 'loose' sentences and using the active voice. Keep it to hand as you edit and revise.

Mind Maps

Mind-mapping can be a useful way of transferring and connecting your thoughts and ideas on a topic before you write.

Coggle

<https://coggle.it/>

Coggle is a web-based, collaborative, mind-mapping tool. Being web-based, the resulting diagram can be accessed and shared easily with others, who can make changes without needing to download any software. Drag and drop images to the diagram as well as typing in text. The 'free forever' version allows three private diagrams and unlimited public diagrams. (For more than three private diagrams, you will need to upgrade a paid version.)

The interface is very intuitive to use. The resulting diagrams are visually very appealing since each branch is displayed in a different colour and the text is clear.

Miro

<https://miro.com>

The free plan allows three editable boards and has the advantage of access to pre-made templates, layers so you can show, group, or hide items on the same board, and the capacity to integrate your board into existing workflows using a variety of apps.

Readability

ProWritingAid

<https://prowritingaid.com/>

Web-based. Helps improve readability and remove errors, particularly with similar and often confusing words and phrases (such as lets and let's). Copy and paste the text you want checked up to a maximum of 500 words. Strengthen your writing by finding out where you have used passive verbs, clichés and adverbs. The free version does not support collaborative editing.

Wordcounter

<http://www.wordcounter.net>

This program counts and ranks the most frequently used words in a piece of text, so you can identify overused words. There is no facility, at present, to upload documents, so you have to copy and paste text. Wordcounter allows you to count either individual words or words with the same root (e.g. abstract, abstracts, abstracted and abstracting).

Reference managers

Unlike many project types, research involves the management of substantial amounts of literature. Whether you need to conduct a literature review, keep up-to-date with research in your particular field, or create accurate and consistently formatted reference lists for your own publications, a good reference management system is vital.

Mendeley

<https://www.mendeley.com/>

Free reference manager. You will need to download software to your computer. Mendeley enables you to create a fully searchable personal library. Create notes, cite as you write, and read and annotate your pdfs on any device. An important feature of Mendeley is that it allows you to create bibliographies and reference lists directly in your documents. You can also share articles, notes and references with colleagues.

Writing Timers

If you want to increase your writing productivity, why not try a timer?

Tomighty

<http://www.tomighty.org/>

Tomighty is an online or desktop timer specifically designed for the Pomodoro Technique® and works for both Mac and Windows. The Pomodoro Technique® is a very simple and effective time management technique that helps you keep focused on tasks that require long periods of concentration. It is based on the body's natural rhythms. Tomighty helps you take advantage of the 90 minute periods when your energy is greatest (and to rest during the 20 minute energy lows). The timer sets for 25 minutes. Read more about the technique at the [official website](#).

Ready To Write?

Find out more about our books and online courses at <https://www.evaluationworks.co.uk>

