

# Miscellaneous copy-editing tips

# 1. How to refer to existing work in your writing

Try to avoid phrases such as:

- has been shown
- has been demonstrated
- is believed
- is predicted

# For established results, give facts and a reference

Protein A binds to protein B (Smith 2003).

Antibody X increases in response to infection with this virus (Miller 1999).

Mice are more active when they are fed well (Jones 1995).

# For unclear or disputed results, name the actors

Smith (2003) argued that protein A binds to protein B, but others disagree (Fullerton 2004).

Miller (1999) observed that antibody X increases in response to infection with this virus.

Jones (1995) claimed that mice are more active when they are fed well.

## 2. Avoid missing agents

Picking up her backpack, Lyn's vacation started as she ran to the bus.

Roasted to perfection, you can serve this ham to your boss.

### 3. Avoid missing antecedents

We increased our profits. This made our shareholders happy.

I bought a book, which is something I rarely do anymore these days.

## 4. Put a comma before the final “and” in enumerations (Oxford Comma)

I like apples, pears, and bananas.

Compare:

I like apples and pears, peaches and prunes, and bananas.

to:

I like apples and pears, peaches and prunes and bananas.

## 5. Be aware of the difference between restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses

Restrictive: Use “that” without comma

I own the house that is red.



## 5. Be aware of the difference between restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses

Non-restrictive: Use “which” with comma

My house, which is red, cost me a fortune.

## 6. There are exactly three valid ways to use quotes

(i) We can use quotes to indicate text that is being cited:

“Veni, vidi, vici,” said Caesar.

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(ii) We can use quotes to refer to an expression itself rather than to its meaning:

The word “this” is a pronoun.

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(iii) We can use quotes to indicate irony:

Miller writes “exciting” stories. They almost equal the phonebook in suspense.

## 6. There are exactly three valid ways to use quotes

All other uses of quotes don't work. They usually cause unintended irony.

We used the procedure outlined by Jones as the “gold standard” by which to assess experimental success.

## 7. Articles are not optional

Definite article (“the”): Refers to a particular member of a group.

The cat is on the roof.

I have to feed the dogs.

## 7. Articles are not optional

Indefinite article (“a”, “an”, “-”): Refers to any member of a group.

A cat is a fierce predator.

An elephant eats foliage.

Dogs give us unconditional love.

## 7. Articles are not optional

No article: Names, countries, things that can't be counted.

Martin likes ice cream.

England borders Europe.

But: The Netherlands lie west of Germany.

(“the Netherlands” originally referred to a geographic location, like “the Alps”, “the Sierra Nevada”)



## 7. Articles are not optional

Finally:

We don't use articles in prepositional phrases referring to places that require a distinct set of social behaviors.

I go to school.

I go to college.

I will see you in court.