




## COMMON MISTAKES IN ACADEMIC TEXTS

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If you want to learn the techniques to easily correct these common mistakes, I would recommend you to:

**Attend my workshop.** The following is my schedule as of the date I wrote this e-book:

- a. 12 March 2016: UIAM Kuantan
- b. 26 March 2016: UiTM Shah Alam
- c. 27 March 2016: Fatehah Learning Centre, Wangsa Maju
- d. 1 April 2016: UIAM Gombak
- e. 2 April 2016: MPWS Kajang
- f. 9 April 2016: SLEU Gombak
- g. 27 May 2016: MPWS Kajang
- h. 28 May 2016: UiTM Shah Alam

**and/or**

**Purchase the e-book** entitled “HOW TO CORRECT THE COMMON MISTAKES IN THESE” at only RM10. Send a blank email with the subject “EB PU” to [proofreaders.united@gmail.com](mailto:proofreaders.united@gmail.com). My assistant, Syed will provide you with additional information on how you can purchase the second e-book.

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# COMMON MISTAKES IN ACADEMIC TEXTS

MUHAMMAD ZAKI RAMLI

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## Common Mistakes in Academic Texts #1

The problem is when a thesis writer uses a comparative adjective without comparing the subject with anything.

If you do not know what comparative adjectives are, they are a group of adjectives that have been added with the suffix "-er" for one-syllable adjectives or have the word "more" in front of two-syllable adjectives.

*old – older*

*fat – fatter*

*pretty – prettier*

*clever – more clever*

*sufficient – more sufficient*

*significant – more significant*

One simple example:

---

*Ali is younger.*

---

The question is: *Younger than whom?*

That is easy to understand, right? Now, let me give you an academic example:

---

*Studies have found that young adults are more intelligent.*

---

The question is: *More intelligent than whom?*

Whenever I find comparative adjectives in an academic text, I will make sure that the comparisons are clearly defined.

In a setting such as this, you can clearly see the problem, but when you are swamped with words, even a good proofreader may miss it.

I am against the practice of using comparative adjectives that do not offer any comparisons.

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Sometimes, the author would use “easy” or “easier”, “heavy” or “heavier” willy-nilly, when in fact each word with a suffix has its own meaning.

As a conclusion, use comparative adjectives only when you have a clear comparison to give.



## Common Mistakes in Academic Texts #2

We are still discussing comparisons.

Note #1 is regarding comparative adjectives. The correct way to use comparative adjectives is by clearly stating the comparison.

Note #2 is going to be about the use of superlative adjectives, and this is to an extent related to comparative adjectives.

If you are not sure what a superlative adjective is, it is an adjective that has the suffix "-est" at the end or "most" at the front.

Examples:

strong – strongest  
heavy – heaviest  
cheap – cheapest  
significant – most significant  
sophisticated – most sophisticated

One common mistake that authors would make is using a superlative adjective where a comparative adjective should be used, instead.

In other words, he/she uses “most”, when in fact, the correct word should be “more”.

Or, it could be that even the author is confused between wanting to say “more” or “most”. Then, he/she would assume that the proofreader is going to rectify it.

All right. A simple example:

---

*The blue dress is the most appropriate than the red and yellow dress.*

---

Hey, wait a minute! Are you trying to say “more appropriate” or “most appropriate”? Isn’t that sentence confusing?

If the intended word is “most”, then, the correct sentence is:

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---

*The blue dress is the most appropriate.*

---

If the intended word is “more”, then the correct sentence is:

---

*The blue dress is more appropriate than the red and yellow dresses.*

---

When we are making a comparison, the issue or subjects in question should be clear. We need to have two of something: one thing is “more \_\_\_insert a comparative adjective\_\_\_” than the other thing.

When we say, "He is the most \_\_\_insert a superlative adjective\_\_\_...", there is no need for a comparison.

Other example:

---

*The people in country A are the strongest than the people in country B and C.*

---

The sentence should, instead, be:

---

*"The people in country A are stronger than the people in country B and C."*

---

This is when you actually want to make a comparison: You compare between two things.

However, if you want to state one is the highest, biggest, strongest, etc., use a superlative adjective instead. Thus, the sentence sounds:

---

*The people in country A are the strongest.*

---

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### Common Mistakes in Academic Texts #3

...and others.

...etc.

If you have either one of the above phrases in your thesis, I urge you to repent. This practice is considered a sin in thesis writing.

This is because the use of “and others” and “etc.” gives the impression that the writer lacks ideas. Moreover, academic writing requires each sentence to be precisely objective.

Example:

---

*Many chemicals are used in the reaction, such as hydrogen peroxide, carbon monoxide, sulphur dioxide, and others.*

---

Why would you need to write down “and others”?

You have stated that there are “many chemicals” at the beginning of the sentence. Readers would have understood that there are indeed many chemicals, too many to mention. Thus, it would be sufficient to give a few examples by writing as such:

---

*Many chemicals are used in the reaction, such as hydrogen peroxide, carbon monoxide, and sulphur dioxide.*

---

Done!

Note that there is a comma before the word "and" in the last paragraph above. Should there be a comma or not?

So, better stay tuned for the next series of Common Mistakes. Insya-Allah.



## Common Mistakes in Academic Texts #4

We mention that "there are many", but we give only ONE example. That is not correct.

If "there are many", then we should provide more than one example. At the very least, two.

Example:

---

*Many authors such as Zaki (2016) state that...*

---

Hey... It is said "many authors", yet only Zaki (2016) is given as the example. Why is that?

So, how can we fix that sentence?

There are two ways:

1. Give at least a second example.
2. Do not use "such as". Change it to "including" instead.

Thus, the better sentence would be:

---

*Many authors such as Zaki (2016) and Ani (2016) state that...*

---

OR

---

*Many authors including Zaki (2016) state that...*

---

In conclusion, when you mention "there are many", give many examples.





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## Common Mistakes in Academic Texts #5

*I dedicate this award to my parents, John and Mary.*

How many persons are being dedicated to? Think of an answer before scrolling down.

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There are two, right?

Eh?

But, what if the parents' names are not John and Mary? Then, there would be four persons, right?



Well... isn't it confusing when we are unsure of the author's actual intentions? Is it two or four individuals? This is why I strongly encourage thesis writers to use this type of punctuation:

### **OXFORD COMMA**

In terms of appearance, it is similar to the normal comma. The only characteristic that differentiates a normal comma and an Oxford comma is their usage.

For example, based on the dedication above, if we are confident that the parents' names are not John and Mary, then we should apply the Oxford comma. Thus,

---

*I dedicate this award to my parents, John, and Mary.*

---

A reader would immediately understand that this dedication is addressed to four persons.

How about this next sentence:

---

*There are three compounds, namely nitrogen hydroxide, carbon dioxide, and hydrogen peroxide.*

---

Do you need to include the Oxford comma? It is clearly mentioned that there are three compounds. With or without the Oxford comma, it will not affect the meaning of the sentence, right? Or would it?

My advice as an avid user of the Oxford comma, once you use the Oxford comma, use it as consistent as possible.

However, not all publishers use the Oxford comma. So, be aware of the in-house style of the publisher.



## Common Mistakes in Academic Texts #6

If you write "such as", please list A FEW examples. If you write "namely", please list EVERYTHING.

The problem here is that some thesis writers think 'such as' and 'namely' can be used interchangeably. That is not true!

For example:

---

*Three pesticides were used, namely A, B, and C.*

---

The writer mentions that there were three pesticides. Therefore, all THREE pesticides must be listed.

This is correct.

This means that, there were only three pesticides used in the process.

A second example:

---

*There were many pesticides such as A, B, and C.*

---

The writer mentions that there were 'many' pesticides used, and he lists down three. Yes... this is again the correct usage of 'such as'. Do you recall Note #4?

This sentence is trying to convey that, other than pesticides A, B, and C, there were other pesticides used.

Now, let us change these two sentences:

---

*Three pesticides were used, such as A, B, and C.*

---

*There were many pesticides namely A, B, and C.*

---

Don't you feel guilty if you don't fix those sentences? Heh.

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## Common Mistakes in Academic Texts #7

Would you be fine if your name is spelled incorrectly?

For example: muhammad zaki ramli

What is wrong with this name? Yes... each of the first letters should be capitalised.

The same principle applies when we are NAMING figures, tables, and graphs.

For example:

---

*See Figure 1 for further details.*

---

Now...this is the correct way to name a figure.

The mistake I always encounter is when a NAME is spelled with the first letters of each word written in small letters, instead of capital letters.

Common mistakes:

---

*See figure 1 for...*

*As shown in table 2...*

*The peak in graph 10 illustrates...*

---

I think this problem occurs when thesis writers are unsure when to write something as a NAME and when not to.



Look at the following sentence:

---

*See Figure 1. The figure shows...*

---

The first sentence mentioned a NAME, while the second sentence did not.

Is that understood?



## Common Mistakes in Academic Texts #8

This time we will discuss the use of hyphen after a prefix.

What is a prefix? Some might say that a prefix is similar to the use of affix in Bahasa Melayu. But I beg to differ. The concept of affix (BM) and prefix-suffix (English) is actually quite different.

Prefix is an additional word that is inserted before a word. Examples of a prefix include a, un, de, ab, sub, post, and anti.

Example:

---

*Graduate*

---

If we add to it the prefix “post-“, it becomes postgraduate.

So, what is the mistake commonly done?

It is when we introduce a hyphen between the prefix and the original word.

Common examples:

pre-test  
ultra-violet  
anti-politics  
hyper-active

Correct words:

pretest  
ultraviolet  
antipolitics  
hyperactive

It is just a simple note on a simple mistake this time. But this simple mistake is what I usually see done time and time again.



This is different when it comes to these cases:

anti-Obama  
post-test

It's spelled anti-Obama due to the meeting between the prefix with a proper noun.

Thus,

anti-Israel  
sub-Malaysian  
post-Renaissance

It's spelled post-test because t meets another t. Same alphabets meet each other.

Thus,

pre-examination  
anti-inflammatory  
sub-basal



## Common Mistakes in Academic Texts #9

Participants in my workshop should remember one of the topics that I shared, which is:

one of the...  
each of the...  
among the...

The above phrases are also often wrongly written in theses. But...where is the mistake?

In the following NOUN.

That's right. These phrases must be followed by a noun. Let me give you the CORRECT examples:

One of the objectives...  
Among the respondents...  
Each of the following points...

Notice that each noun has 's' at the end. In other words, they are plural nouns.

The problem is that I often encounter singular noun after each of the above phrases. For example:

One of the objective...  
Among the respondent...  
Each of the following point...

Why must the noun be plural, Zaki?

The reason is that we are talking about ONE among MANY in "one of the" and "each of the", while we are talking about SEVERAL among MANY in "among". If there are MANY, use plural nouns.

But, that is not all. Other than the nouns, a few more mistakes that are common have been commonly committed. I'll continue to use the above examples:

One of the objectives is/was/has...  
Among the respondents are/were/have...  
Each of the following points is/was/has...





I want to emphasise on the following two examples:

One of the objectives is/was/has...

Among the respondents are/were/have...

Why are there differences between "one of the" and "among"? To be safe, if you are sure that you are talking about ONE subject, please use "one of the". If you are sure that you are talking about SEVERAL subjects, then use "among".

These two examples have the same rules:

One of the objectives is/was/has...

Each of the following points is/was/has...

That was understandable, right? :)



## Common Mistakes in Academic Texts #10

Wow, we have reached Note #10. Bummer. Nonetheless, all that begins must end. So, here is the final note for this series.

Regarding the use of the following phrases:

a number of...  
the number of...

What is the common mistake regarding these phrases?

The followings are examples of the WRONG usage:

---

*A number of respondents was called to the interview.*

*The number of respondents were 100.*

---

The correct ones are:

---

*A number of respondents were called to the interview.*

*The number of respondents was 100.*

---

Try to memorise these formulas:

---

*a number of... (FOR PLURAL)*

*the number of... (FOR SINGULAR)*

---



Want a simplified version?

---

*a PLURAL*

*the SINGULAR*

---

So, here are the correct phrase matches:

---

*a number of \_\_\_\_ (noun) \_\_\_\_ are/were/have/go*

*the number of \_\_\_\_ (noun) \_\_\_\_ is/was/has/goes*

---

**END OF THE E-BOOK.**

**THANKS FOR READING.**

**MAY IT BE USEFUL, PRACTISED AND SHARED.**

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### THIS IS MY CHALLENGE TO YOU

If you find any spelling or punctuation mistakes in this free e-book, do contact me immediately. It would be a shame for me, a proofreading coach, to have mistakes in my own proof. :P

I will reward your effort with a special present. Jeng jeng jeng...

Do contact me if there are any mistakes. My phone number and email address are on the first page of this e-book.

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