



# Style - Academic and Professional Writing

Presented by Dr Carol Waites and Breanna Kuypers



# Key resources

1 The presentation, academic writing websites will be available on Breanna's padlet:

<https://padlet.com/breannakuyers/etas2022>

2 Here are Carol's padlets for professional writing:

<https://padlet.com/ckwaites/PlainEnglishRW>

<https://padlet.com/ckwaites/textanalysis>

# Readability statistics

These measure word length, sentence length and passive voice incidence:

[https://www.troy.edu/\\_assets/graduate-school/\\_documents/irb/readability-score.pdf](https://www.troy.edu/_assets/graduate-school/_documents/irb/readability-score.pdf)

If it doesn't work in Word, you can use an online one:

<https://datayze.com/readability-analyzer>

# Writer's Diet

<https://writersdiet.com/>

The Writer's Diet™ is a diagnostic tool created by international writing expert Dr. Helen Sword to help writers shape up their sentences. Based on a simple algorithm, the tool identifies some of the sentence-level grammatical features that most frequently weigh down stodgy prose so that you can learn to communicate more clearly and effectively.

# Useful supplementary guides for grammar and style

- Guide to grammar and writing (US college)

<http://guidetogrammar.org/grammar/>

<http://guidetogrammar.org/grammar/index2.htm>

- Grammar book for punctuation

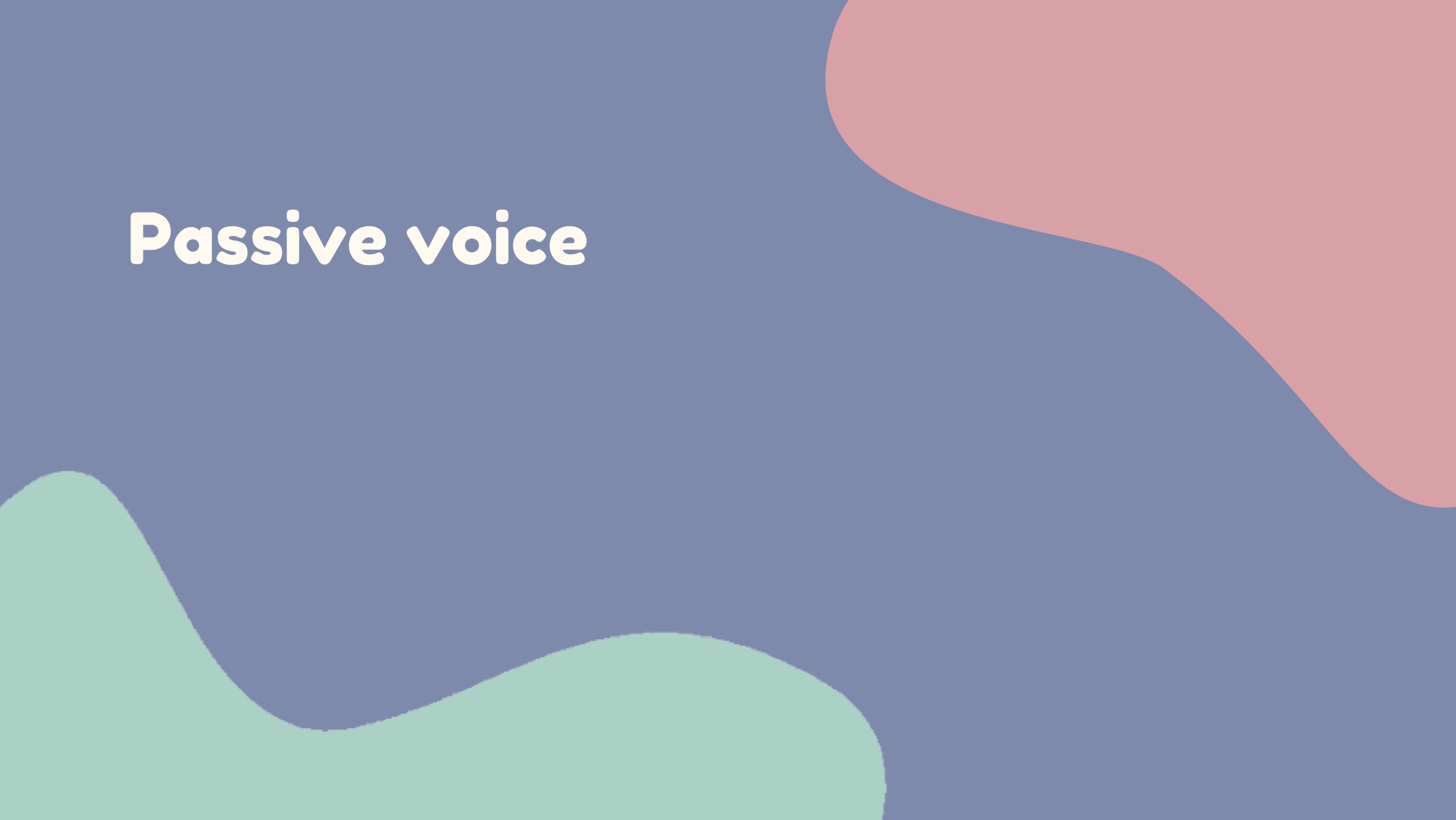


# **Academic Writing Style**

# Features of Academic Writing

- **Passive voice**
- **Nominalization**
- **Cohesive devices**
- **Impersonal language**

# Passive voice

The background features a solid blue field. In the upper right, there is a large, rounded, light red shape. In the lower left, there is a light green shape with a wavy, organic border. The text 'Passive voice' is centered in the upper left area of the blue field.

## **Academic writing: Passive voice**

*'We administered the questionnaire ...'* **(active voice)**

*'The questionnaire was administered ...'* **(passive voice)**

# **Academic writing: Passive voice**

We teach passive voice so that our students can:

- demonstrate objectivity
- emphasize factual information
- adhere to academic norms.

# Academic writing: Passive voice



Problems with passive voice in academic writing include:

- overuse
- difficult to read
- incorrect use.

# **Academic writing: Passive voice**

To help students use passive voice successfully in academic writing.

- Pro-Writing Aid
- Datayze

# Nominalization

The background features a solid blue field. In the upper right, there is a large, rounded, organic shape in a light red or pink color. In the lower left, there is a large, rounded, organic shape in a light green color. The overall aesthetic is modern and minimalist.

## **Academic writing: Nominalization**

**A nominalization is a verb converted into a noun. It often needs an extra verb to make sense. For example, “Please make an application for a personal loan” is longer and less clear than “Please apply for a personal loan.”**

- They have endings such as -ment, -tion, -sion, and -ance.**

# Academic writing: Nominalization

- *This information enables us to formulate precise questions.*
- *This information enables the formulation of precise questions.*

# **Academic writing: Nominalization**

Nominalization allows us to:

- show a more objective and formal tone.

*Note: Expect to see effective use of nominalization in IELTS band 7 or higher.*

# Academic writing: Nominalization



Overuse affects clarity and conciseness.

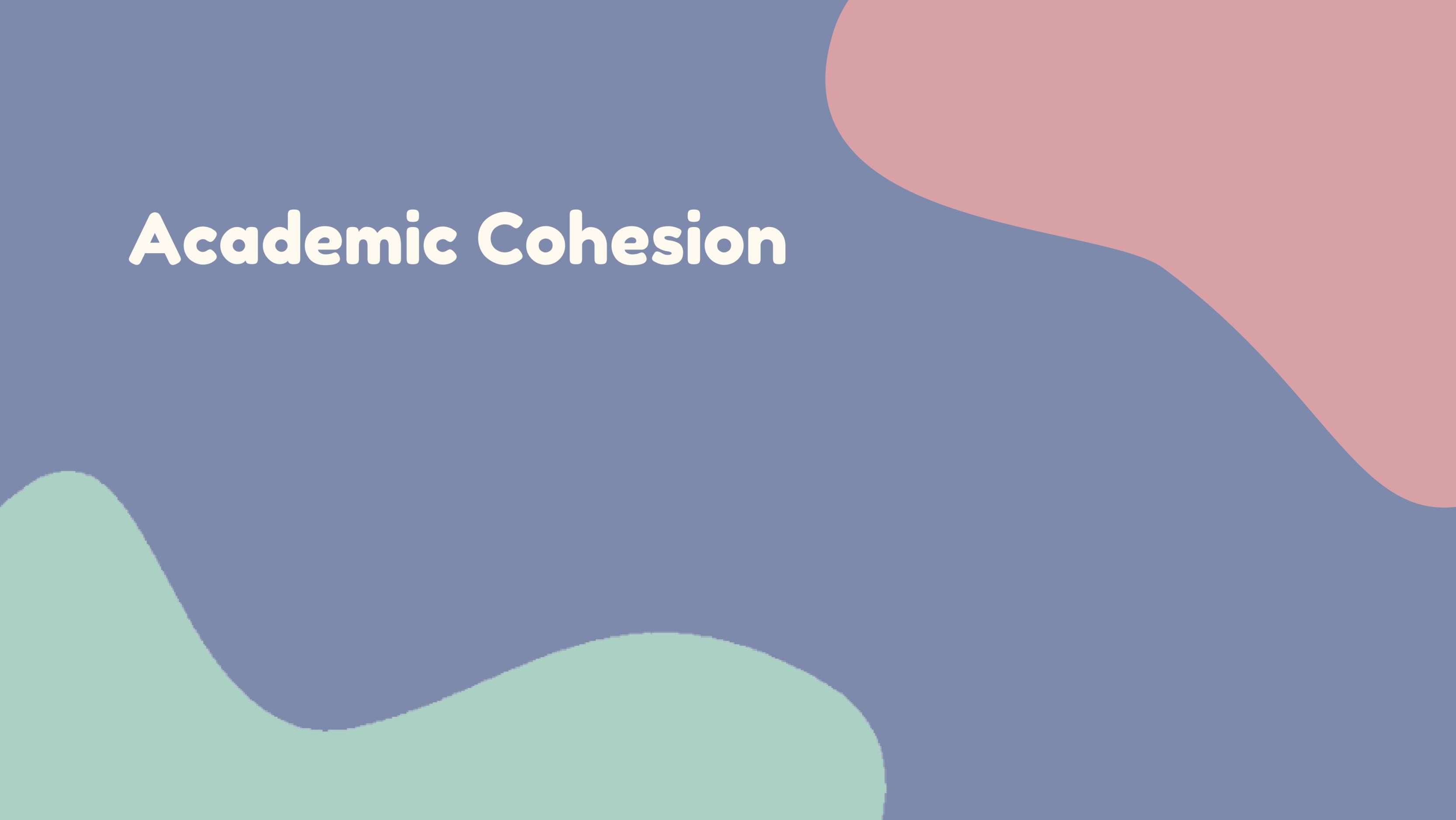
i.e. Long strings of nominalizations are hard to follow.

# **Academic writing: Nominalization**

To help students to use nominalization effectively in academic writing:

- The Writer's Diet.

# Academic Cohesion

The background features a solid blue field with large, organic, overlapping shapes in a muted red and a light green. The red shape is in the upper right, and the green shape is in the lower left, both with soft, wavy edges.

# Academic writing: Cohesion

Cohesive devices connect ideas and sentences and create flow.

For example:

- *alternatively, conversely, however, in contrast, as a result, consequently, due to, subsequently, therefore*

# Academic writing: Cohesion



It can be difficult for students to know which cohesive device to use and where.

# **Academic writing: Cohesion**

To help students to use cohesive devices effectively try:

- Linguae

# Impersonal language

The background features a solid blue field with large, organic, wavy shapes in a muted red color at the top right and a light green color at the bottom left. The text 'Impersonal language' is centered in the upper left quadrant in a white, bold, sans-serif font.

# Academic writing: Impersonal language

To avoid personal forms, 'It' and 'There' are often used as empty subjects.

## Not academic style

- Researchers disagreed
- We can see that →

## Academic style

- There was disagreement
- It is evident that

# **Academic writing: Impersonal language**

To help students to use impersonal language:

- Grammarly - check your tone. Is it 'formal'?
- The Writer's Diet



# **Professional Writing Style**

# Avoid in Professional Writing

- **Passive voice = flat, impersonal**
- **Nominalization = undynamic, soporific**
- **Cohesive devices = use other signposting to help busy readers**
- **Impersonal language = dead beginnings**

# Features of Professional Writing

## Features of Academic Writing

- **Passive voice**
- **Nominalization**
- **Cohesive devices**
- **Impersonal language**

- **Active voice**
- **Dynamic verbs**
- **Headings and lists**
- **Meaningful subjects**

## **Tools and style guides**

- Tools for substantive writing (not so suitable for emails):

the Writer's Diet

readability statistics

- Style guides for professional writing including emails are on this padlet:

[Plain English Campaigns](#)

## **Style guides**

Style guides for professional writing including emails include:

[US Plain Language site](#)

[UK Plain English guides](#)

## **Style guides - UK one**

- Keep your sentences short
- Prefer active verbs
- Use 'you' and 'we'
- Use words that are appropriate for the reader
- Don't be afraid to give instructions
- Avoid nominalizations
- Use lists where appropriate

## **Style guides - UK Government advice**

- Keep your sentences short (according to Ann Wylie)

When average sentence length is:

11 words = easy to read

14 words = readers understand more than 90% of what they're reading

21 words = fairly difficult

25 words = difficult

29 words or longer = very difficult

43 words = comprehension drops to 10%.

## **Professional writing: Passive voice**

- Not used in emails: Please be informed = I would like to inform you that ...
- Used in parts of meeting minutes: The meeting was held in...
- Used in police reports and human rights reports: 25 people were arrested; the village was set alight.

How can we measure passive voice?

## **Professional writing: Passive voice**

- Readability statistics in Word or [datayze.com](https://datayze.com)
- It gives a percentage of sentences in passive voice and lists the sentences.
- Maximum recommended is 15%.

# Professional writing: Passive voice

- Style guides

In the Plain English site, the points include:

- Prefer active verbs
- Use 'you' and 'we'

The EU Commission downloadable booklet:  
How to write clearly, point 8 on page 10.

## **Professional writing: Zombie nouns**

### **What are hidden verbs? (Plain Language US site)**

A hidden verb (or nominalization) is a verb converted into a noun. It often needs an extra verb to make sense. For example, “Please make an application for a personal loan” is longer and less clear than “Please apply for a personal loan.”

## **Professional writing: Zombie nouns**

- Frowned on and referred to as Zombie nouns.
- Makes your text static, not dynamic.
- YouTube video: Zombie nouns by Helen Sword.

Students never forget!

*How to measure it?*

# **Professional writing: Zombie nouns**

How to measure it? Writer's Diet

## **Professional writing: Use dynamic verbs**

What else does the Writer's Diet measure?

Verb 'to be': dead verb - use a dynamic one (associated with passive voice, impersonal beginnings, nominalizations)

See Grammar and Writing Guide

Unnecessary uses of "to be".

# **Professional writing: Avoid impersonal beginnings**

What else does the Writer's Diet measure?

Waste words: this, that, there, it

Examples:

There is/are .... that .....

It was ..... that

It was reported that ....

## **Professional writing: Avoid academic style**

- Using third person can make you sound unconnected, bureaucratic and uncaring. Where possible sound person-oriented.

‘We can see that....’ instead of ‘**It is evident that...**’

The United Nations is known to have ....’ instead of  
**‘It is known that the United Nations ....’**

# Professional writing: Avoid cohesive devices

- Instead of:

Instead of "In reference to ..., Regarding ...", use a heading.

Useful references: Plain Language US  
Organize the information

# **Professional writing: Avoid cohesive devices**

Instead of:

- Also, in addition, as well as, use a list format.
- Firstly, secondly, etc. use a numbered list or numbered paragraphs.

Useful references: Plain Language US

Organize the information

# **Professional writing: Use lists, not cohesive devices**

Lists are useful because they:

- Highlight levels of importance
- Help the reader understand the order in which things happen
- Help readers skim and scan
- Make it easy to identify all steps in a process
- Add white space for easy reading
- Are an ideal way to present items, conditions, and exceptions

# References

The padlets have all the links + this presentation.

<https://padlet.com/breannakuypers/etas2022>



**Thank you!**

Do you have any questions for us?