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# **English Revisited: Tips, Tidbits & Tutorials**

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## EDITORIAL

### GLOSSARY

*perish:*  
die

*commendable:*  
to be praised

*perennial:*  
occurring annually or  
regularly

*the former:*  
referring to the first of  
the two items  
mentioned before (the  
latter refers to the  
second of the items)

Publish or perish is often heard in academia. While it is commendable to preserve academic traditions around the world by publishing in one's own mother tongue, it is often the case that researchers and scholars are expected to publish in English if they wish to be read outside of their home country. In this issue of our newsletter we examine various citation styles used in academic publishing as well as the role bias might play unconsciously in teaching, research and university life in general. To round out our issue, we have a perennial topic of interest to our readers, namely the difference between present simple and present continuous, the former being overused by German speakers of English. Read this article to learn what the most common mistakes are.

John Nixon

## Style Guidelines for Writing Official University Texts in English

[Guidelines](#)

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  - [From Headlines to Impact: How to Write Press Releases that Work](#) NEW
  - [Dealing with the Press: How to Get Your Scientific Ideas Across with Mainstream Media](#) NEW
  - [Science Communication and Democracy](#) NEW
  - Special Event:** [Zac and Zack on Intercultural \(Science\) Communication \(Germany-USA\)](#)

## CURRENTLY ON OFFER



### Comments

Do you have any ideas for future issues or would like to give us feedback? Please contact us.



### Subscription

## Present Simple vs. Present Continuous

In English there are two verb tenses that refer to present actions: present simple and present continuous. While present perfect could strictly speaking be considered a present tense, it relates a past event with the present and so will not be dealt with in this article.

Present simple is used to refer to actions and states that are regular or are generally true.

I drink an espresso every morning.  
The sun rises in the east.

Present continuous on the other hand refers to actions that occur at the time of speaking.

What are you doing now? (Person A)  
I am doing my homework. (Person B)

### State Verbs

With so-called state verbs, e.g. own, love, hate, belong, mean, know and taste, present continuous is generally not used.

I am owning a car. (incorrect)  
I own a car. (correct)

I am knowing your name. (incorrect)  
I know your name.

For some state verbs, e.g. taste, be and have, the present continuous usage has a different meaning to the present simple verb.

I'm tasting the soup now to see if it is good. (action of tasting)  
Does the soup taste good? (the state of the soup)

You are being rather arrogant, you know! (right now and not always)  
He is an arrogant snob. (all the time)

She's having a baby. (she is pregnant)  
She has a baby and an older child. (members of her family)

There are a few cases in spoken English where the present continuous is used nowadays with state verbs, typically with love and like.

Are you enjoying the course? (Person A)  
Yes, I'm loving it / I'm liking it a lot. (Person B)

### Criticism and Present Continuous

As was stated earlier, present simple is used for actions that occur regularly.

I always take the bus to work.

When criticizing something, however, the present continuous is typically used.

She is always making noise at night.  
They are constantly complaining about how busy they are.

### Future Uses of Present Simple and Present Continuous

Generally, present tenses are not used in English to refer to the future. However, there are two instances where they are allowed.

For arrangements in the near future, you can use present continuous.

I'm getting my hair cut tomorrow.  
We're seeing a film later today.

If one is referring to timetables or schedules, present simple is often used even though the statement might refer to the near future.

My class starts in 10 minutes.  
The train to Paris leaves on Friday at 9 am sharp.

### Common Mistakes for German Speakers

In German present simple is used much more often than in English. Here are a few cases, where it would be incorrect to use present simple in English.

- I am a member of the committee for five years. (incorrect)  
I have been a member of the committee for five years. (correct, **present perfect**)
- Don't worry if you forgot your wallet.  
I pay for you. (incorrect)  
Don't worry if you forgot your wallet.  
I will pay for you. (correct, **will future** for spontaneous decision at the moment of speaking)
- When does she go on holiday this year? (incorrect)  
When is she going on holiday this year? (correct)  
I get my hair cut tomorrow. (incorrect)  
I'm getting my hair cut tomorrow. (correct, **present continuous** for intentions and arrangements)

If you follow these simple rules, you will avoid making common mistakes.

John Nixon

### GLOSSARY

*strictly speaking:*  
to be exact

*snob:*  
a pretentious person

*sharp:*  
at an exact time (in this context)

## Reflecting on (Cognitive) Unconscious Bias

### GLOSSARY

*collar stud:*  
an old-fashioned  
button-like device to  
fasten a shirt collar to  
a shirt

*spring to one's mind:*  
a thought one  
becomes spontane-  
ously aware of

*Anglo:*  
English speaker  
whose first language  
is English

*tell a white lie:*  
a minor lie to keep up  
appearances

*poignant example:*  
a clear-cut example  
that has an emotional  
side to it

*dichotomy:*  
two opposites

*allude to sth.:*  
make reference to

*insurmountable  
threshold:*  
a threshold so high  
one cannot get past it

*succinctly:*  
clearly stated with few  
words

*cut a long story short:*  
summarize sth briefly

When I hear the word cognitive bias, a passage from E.M. Foster's *A Passage to India* springs to my mind: When one of the main characters, Fielding, a white Victorian male, meets Dr. Aziz, an Indian male medical doctor, for the first time, Fielding breaks his collar stud. Dr. Aziz, keen to help and please his new friend, gives the Anglo his own collar stud, telling him a white lie about always having a spare one. Consequently, Dr. Aziz's shirt collar is loose in the back when the two men meet other Brits, which prompts one of these other Brits to comment, "There you have the Indian all over: inattention to detail" [1]. The incident is a poignant example of a biased perception that created the dichotomy of "us versus them" and has excluded people of various cultural and social backgrounds from Victorian times up until now.

Reason enough to ask: What are biases? And what is their role when it comes to creating equal opportunities in our society? First things first. "In academic research, bias refers to a type of systematic error that can distort measurements and/or affect investigations and their results" [2]. This research bias is well known in the STEM disciplines. The APA defines another type of bias as an "inclination or predisposition for or against something" [3]. This definition alludes to the fact that, similar to the Victorians, we too judge the world around us based on stereotypes and with the help of cognitive biases that we acquired in our socialization. This is to say, we first recognize a stereotype and then evaluate it to react to it using a cognitive bias. Examples of such cognitive biases are the halo and horn effect we experience in job interviews, an overconfidence bias, an anchor effect, a confirmation bias, the Dunning Kruger effect, an authority bias and many more.<sup>1</sup>

A quite good summary of cognitive biases can be found on Wikipedia [4]. The illustration there places cognitive biases into four categories: "What should we remember", "Need to act fast", "Too much information" and "Not enough meaning" [5]. These are four archetypal situations we all find ourselves in on a daily basis. Hence, we need biases to communicate. However, we should be aware of them, as unconscious cognitive biases can create insurmountable thresholds, are hugely influential when we make choices, can exclude others from social participation, and create imbalances and disadvantages.

The most prominent test to reflect your biases is the Harvard Implicit Association Test developed by Greenwald et al. [6]. Though there is some criticism of the test [7], it has undoubtedly inspired numerous studies and books over the last two and a half decades and the book *Blindspot* is definitely worth a read [8]. Also a good read and eye-opener is Caroline Criado Perez's book *Invisible Women*, in which the author succinctly outlines gender data gaps (that lead to misdiagnosis in the medical field). She also outlines biases in healthcare, the workplace, infrastructure planning, disaster response as well as male-centered biases in AI [9]. Those who are not convinced by this book should look at the 2020 McKinsey Report *Diversity Wins: How Inclusion Matters*, in which the authors compile a compelling argument for diversity in the workplace and point out that unbiased hiring and communication practices are the basis for truly productive teams. Or to cut a long story short, in order to make progress in the world, the dichotomy "us versus them" ought to make way for a multilateral/multifaceted "we".

### References

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- [6] "Implicit Association Test." 2011. Project Implicit. Harvard. 2011. <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>.
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- [8] Banaji, Mahzarin R, and Anthony G Greenwald. 2013. *Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People*. New York: Bantam Books.
- [9] Criado Perez, Caroline. 2020. *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men*. Vintage, London.
- [10] "Diversity Wins How Inclusion Matters." 2020. <https://www.mckinsey.de/~media/mckinsey/locations/europe%20and%20middle%20east/deutschland/news/presse/2020/2020-05-19%20diversity%20wins/report%20diversity-wins-how-inclusion-matters%202020.pdf>.

<sup>1</sup>Click [here](#) for definitions of bias types.

Dr. Ines Böhner

## Some Tips on Citation

### GLOSSARY

*acknowledge:*  
recognize

*scholarship:*  
academic study or research

*encounter:*  
come across

*preliminary:*  
said of sth. done in preparation of sth. else

*minute:*  
very small  
(pronounced like "my newt")

*derived from:*  
originate from

*primarily:*  
mostly

*erroneously:*  
mistakenly

*retroactively:*  
taking effect for sth. that occurred before

*purported:*  
said to be true though it is not necessarily so

Citation, or the method of acknowledging where information in a research article originates, is a fundamental aspect of scholarship as it allows others to trace and verify the steps one took to come to a given conclusion. However, students are often expected to either already know how to cite or are simply provided a template to follow, which has led to some common problems. The following article will discuss a few of the issues I have encountered with my students and how to avoid them.

1. Choose an established citation style. One of the preliminary steps is knowing which citation style to adopt. This can be an overwhelming decision given that there are thousands of them, which are based on the field, institute, or even the journal ("Styles [Zotero Documentation]" 2024). The differences between these many styles, however, are relatively minute so that ultimately consistency is the most important factor.

Nevertheless, there are some advantages that certain style guides have over other ones. For established styles such as MLA, APA, Chicago, or IEEE, there is a central committee of editors who makes decisions about their guidelines, thus standardizing the style. This is not the case with the Harvard citation style, which does not have a central committee, thereby leading to some inconsistencies with the formatting from institute to institute. For example, the University of Sheffield in the UK shows that there should be a comma before the year in an in-text citation while the University of New South Wales in Australia recommends no comma (University of Sheffield 2010; University of New South Wales, n.d.). Many seem to choose Harvard because of the reputation that the name carries, but the university actually has nothing to do with current guidelines. The name is derived from the style of citation used by some faculty members who were associated with Harvard in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century ("What Is the Harvard System?" 2019). While the name comes from an American university, these days the style is primarily used in the UK and Australia.

2. Be careful of the citation placement. One of the most common issues I have seen with my students is citation placement. Very often students place the citation at the end of a paragraph, erroneously thinking that this shows

that the entire paragraph is based on that source. However, citations function chronologically and not retroactively, meaning that the citation should appear in the text as soon as a source is referenced, which in many cases is in the beginning or middle of a paragraph. For some styles the in-text citation should appear at the end of the sentence right before the period. For other styles the in-text citation can appear right after the information that is being referenced, and thus you can have citations towards the beginning, middle, or end of a sentence.

Occasionally, I have had students who place the in-text citation at the end of the paragraph after the period as they were told that this is the universal signal that the entire paragraph comes from that source. I have not been able to track down this purported rule in any of the established guides, and I believe it is simply an in-house rule, the origin of which is unknown to me. I would therefore avoid this as well.

Lastly, sometimes students will enter the same citation several times within a paragraph, which can be excessive. If the first, second, and third sentences in a paragraph come from the same source, e.g. (Williams and Smith 2019), then you only need to enter the citation in the first sentence. However, if the first and third sentences come from (Williams and Smith 2019) and the second sentence comes from a different source, e.g. (Jin et al. 2020), then your citations would look like this:

sentence one (Williams and Smith 2019)  
sentence two (Jin et al. 2020)  
sentence three (Williams and Smith 2019)

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