

Exercise 5. Word Usage: Answer Key for Warning Words & Phrases¹



Student: _____ Date: _____

Scientists have adhered to four general style guidelines in their professional writing:

1. Write simply, concisely, and logically.
2. Check the meaning and relationships of every word.
3. Find and release hidden verbs of action.
4. Split up noun clusters and stacked modifiers.

Often the expressions below are to be avoided, *though not always and not at all costs*. Insert in the table your suggested substitutions. The rule to follow is: If you see these words or phrases in your drafts, think hard about whether you are justified in using them!

Avoid	Usually prefer	Avoid	Usually prefer
anticipate	expect	for the reason that	because (since if time related)
approximate	(only used to mean approach asymptotically)	greater/higher number of	more
approximately	about	if conditions are such that	if
as already stated	(omit)	in a considerable number of cases	often
as can be seen from Fig. 1 growth...	...growth is faster (Figure 1)...	in all cases	always
as far as our own observations are concerned, they show	our observations show	(adjective) in character	(adjective)
as of now	now; from now on	in comparison to	compared to, than
at some future time	later	increased relative to	more, higher than
the authors	I, we	in excess of	more than, above, exceeds
based on	on the basis of (fact or reference to data)	in terms of	(state the exact relationship)
the case	the patient, scenario, background	in view of the fact that	since, because
red in color	red (name for all colors)	it has long been known that	(omit); cite discovery date
commence	begin	it is of interest to note that	(omit)
comparable	similar	it is often the case that	often
conducted inoculation experiments	inoculated (with who did what)	it is possible (probable) that	(omit)
considerable amount of	much	it may however be noted that	however, but
considerable number/proportion of	many/most	it seems to the present writer	I think, we believe
decreased number of	fewer	it will be seen on Table 5	data show x, y, z (Table 5)
decreased relative to	less/fewer/lower than	it would thus appear that	apparently
demonstrate	show	large number(s) of	many
due to	because (unless form of "to be" precedes)	large proportion of	much/most/majority
due to the fact that	because	less	fewer (if qualifying a number not an amount)
during the time that	while	lesser extent/lesser degree	less
elevated	raised/higher/more	level	concentration/content/amount/degree
employ	use	majority of	most
encounter	meet	moment in time	(precise) time
exhibit	show	multiple, number of	several, many/different
fewer in number	fewer	following	after



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of such strength that	so strong that	(Insert your habitually misused words or phrases now in this column.)	(Insert better words to substitute for your habitually misused words.)
order of magnitude greater than	10 times as		
owing to the fact that	because		
parameter	index, criterion, factor, measure, characteristic		
prior to	before		
proportion of	some, fraction, percentage		
quite	(omit)		
rather	(omit)		
relatively	(avoid, unless you are calculating a real quotient)		
respectively	(use only in this correct sense: <i>the values for A, B, and C were x, y, and z respectively</i>)		
reveal	show		
square (round, etc.) in shape	square, round, etc.		
significant	(avoid unless referring to statistical significance with a defined <i>P</i> value) much, appreciable, substantial		
sophisticated	advanced, complex, new, expensive		
sufficient number of	enough		
terminate	end		
there is; there are	recast sentence in active voice		
... are both alike	are alike		
upon	on		
use, using	(test for dangling participle: insert a subject OR recast using <i>by/with/by means of</i>)		
utilize, utilization	(test whether the "use" fits the nature of what is being employed)		
very	(omit)		
while, whilst	although		
with regard to	in, to		
number of	several, some, many		
of large size	large/larger/largest		

¹ Adapted from Peter F. Woodford., *How to Teach Scientific Communication*, "Appendix 3: Warning words and phrases" (Reston, VA: Council of Biology Editors, Inc., 1999), 172–174. Used by permissions granted in the Preface.

