

Classic English difficulties and mistakes in science

- Great resource for English grammar: <https://www.grammarly.com/blog/>
- Missing and/or superfluous articles (the indefinite article "a" and the definite article "the"). Yes, the determinants can sometimes be left out, but not always or systematically.
- Double nouns (noun adjuncts): a noun that modifies another noun, like an adjective. This is a very common way of building terms in English. Examples: "RNA polymerase" is a polymerase that makes RNAs; a "deer park" is a park with deers; a "car mechanic" is a mechanic who takes care of cars; a "mouse cage" is a cage with one mouse or multiple mice; or the plurals of all of these, i.e. deer parks, car mechanics, mouse cages. In all of these cases, the first noun serves as an adjective and as such is never in the plural (but of course, there are exceptions....).
- Plural/singular:
 - The term "data" is plural (from its Latin origin); hence, it is "Data are....".
 - Some common scientific terms cannot be used in the plural: expression, transcription, translation, evidence,
 - Plural of time expressions: in the following example, both are correct: three hours' incubation or three-hour incubation (but not: three hours incubation).
- Which and that: which and that don't mean the same thing. In a defining clause, use *that*; in non-defining clauses, use *which*. A non-defining clause is one that you can leave out and the sentence still makes sense. E.g.: "the tubulin gene that has introns is long" (means: this particular tubulin gene is long, i.e. there are other tubulin genes); "the tubulin gene, which has introns, is long" (means: the only tubulin gene there is, is long). See comma rules below.
- Saxon genitive: used to indicate possession (e.g. Alice's bike); used with the nouns for people, animals, countries, expressions of time (i.e. the bird's feathers, today's paper), but not for inanimate objects (e.g. the ~~protein's size~~ should be the size of the protein). For more on this, see e.g. this [link](#).
- Infinitives:
 - Split infinitives: avoid placing adverbs between "to" and the verb, but in some cases, it can be ok. E.g.: "I try to read papers carefully" rather than "I try to carefully read papers".
 - Series of infinitives: it is usually ok to leave out "to" for the second (and third, ...) infinitive in a row. E.g.: "I read papers to know and understand what's going on". Repeating "to" can be appropriate to emphasize each verb in the series.
 - There are exceptions to the "to-infinitive" form, e.g. "help do something", not "help doing" nor "help to do".

- Comma rules:
 - The Oxford comma: the comma used to set off the final item in a list of three or more items as in "I believe in good spelling, grammar, and punctuation". Ironically, the Oxford comma is more commonly used in American English than in British English.
 - "which" (or "who") is always preceded by a comma; "that" is not.
 - "such as" and "including" are preceded by commas when the clause is non-restrictive, i.e. when it adds extra information, which isn't essential to identify the thing you're talking about.
- "However": typically at the beginning of a sentence, and always followed by a comma.
- Overuse of fillers: also, hence, thus, however, similarly, importantly, surprisingly, remarkably, notably,
- Miscellaneous:
 - Punctuation marks: in English (unlike in some cases in French), there is no space before punctuation marks.
 - Use (or overuse) of the past tense to state discoveries/findings that are still true today. For example, "we discovered that DNA formed a double helix" instead of "DNA forms a double helix"..
 - "less" or "very less" instead of "fewer" (or the fewest) or the least (little/less/the least).
 - wrong usage of "probably": probably ≠ perhaps
 - using the verb "to evidence" instead of saying "to provide/show/collect/... evidence" ("to evidence" exists, but it is typically not used, unlike in some other languages).
 - "before to go" instead of, for example, "before going" or "before I go".