

# Writing Tips

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Writing is about communication. Communication is most effective when we say what we need to say in as few words as possible. It's also important not to bore readers with overused phrases and colloquialisms that mean different things to different people. Finally, the English language is a beautiful framework with which to communicate how we see the world about us. Used as intended, it allows us to convey our deepest sentiments to others, prompting them to see what we see, hear what we hear, and experience life as we do.

To help improve my writing, I used a short list of guidelines by George Orwell. This list hangs on my wall still, providing an occasional reminder when I slip back into bad habits. Here it is.

1. Never use a metaphor, simile or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.
2. Never use a long word where a short one will do.
3. If it is possible to cut out a word, always cut it out.
4. Never use the passive where you can use the active.
5. Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
6. Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.

I've read many books on writing, given that writing is my avocation. However, this short collection of recommendations beats them all.

While writing an academic paper is similar to writing fiction or technical articles and books, the process of creating a set of words, sentences, and paragraphs to prove a case or explain a theory uses different words and phrases. Writing within an academic context requires understanding how "learned" papers differ from every-day writings.

The University of Phoenix provides tools for learning how to write "academically" and well. Located in the Center for Writing Excellence, they are free for student use. I urge you to use them frequently all through your college career. No matter how well you think you write there is always room for improvement.

One of the best tools for direct feedback is WritePoint. The returned paper contains recommendations to help make the paper more academic and more readable. However, remember Orwell's Rule #6. You are the writer, the creator of the work. If you think passive voice works in a sentence, leave it there.

Finally, Microsoft Word includes a grammar checker. See Figure 1. Click on the Office button in the upper left corner. Click on *Proofing*. Change Writing Style to *Grammar and Style*. Click *Settings* to confirm your preferences. Now as you write, Word checks what you put on paper with, among other things, Orwell's rules.

Pay attention to your writing, and it will improve.

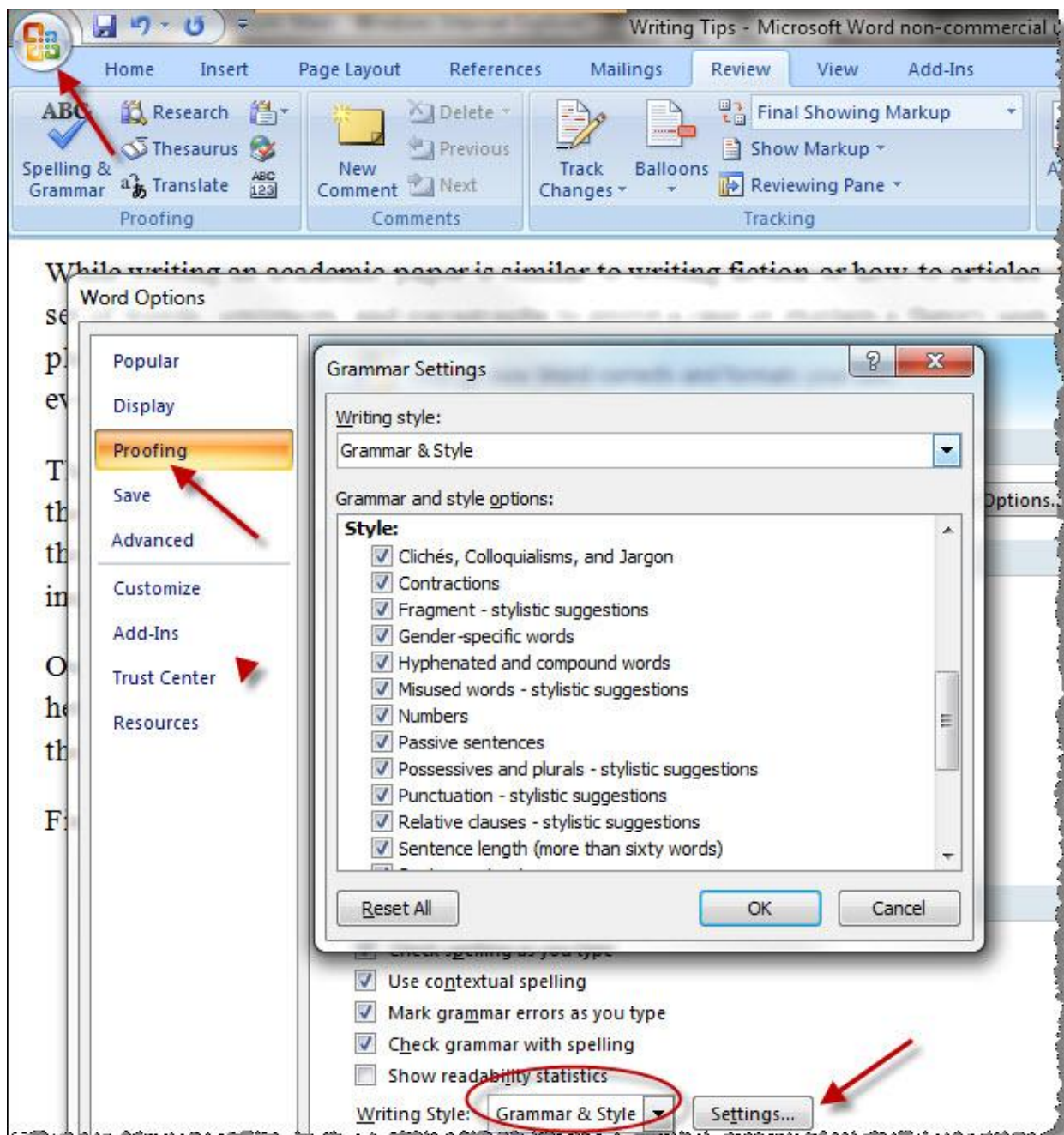


Figure 1