

Common errors

- Focusing on researchers, rather than findings
 - “So and so (1990) found that infants did XXX. In contrast, so & so (1995), in their first experiment, found the opposite. They found . . .”
- Better:
 - Infants appear to do XXX (so & so, 1990; but see so & so, 1995)
 - There is contradictory evidence regarding infants’ ability to do XXX (so & so, 1990; so & so, 1995).

Common errors

- Focusing on obvious, unnecessary info
 - “In 1990, so & so did a study. They asked . . .”
 - “So & so decided to look at this. They did a study to find out . . . Subjects were asked . . .”
 - “There have been a few studies on the use of motherese in children.”
- The fact that there was a study is implied in giving the results - you don’t need to state it explicitly.

Common errors

- Passive voice
 - *Bad*: “Whether infants can do XXX has been examined.”
 - *Better*: “Prior work has examined whether infants can do XXX.”
 - *Best*: “Infants have been shown to be able to do XXXX.”
 - *Bad*: “There have been many hypotheses about why motherese is used. One reason that has been suggested is that infants seem to prefer motherese.”
 - *Better*: “These speech changes appear to have a number of benefits. In particular, infants appear to prefer listening to this style of speech.”

Common errors

- Laundry list of articles/studies
 - Paragraph 1: “One study looking at this found XXX.”
 - Paragraph 2: “In contrast, so & so found YYY”
 - Paragraph 3: “But in another study, ZZZ was found.”
- Combine related ideas together; do not simply list 1 article to a paragraph
(example on next slide)

Example

- This form of speech (also known as motherese) often contains a simplified, restricted vocabulary and increased repetition sentences (Broen, 1972; Drach et al., 1969; but see Ochs & Shieffelin, 1984; Papousek, Papousek, & Bornstein, 1985; Phillips, 1973; Snow, 1972). IDS is spoken more slowly and with shorter sentences (Broen, 1972; Drach et al., 1969), and pauses tend to be limited to sentence boundaries (Broen, 1972). Important words tend to be placed in salient positions, even at the expense of grammar violations (Aslin, 1993; Fernald & Mazzie, 1991), and words (especially function words) tend to be hyperarticulated (Andruski & Kuhl, 1996; Bernstein Ratner, 1984). However, the most obvious speech alterations in IDS are prosodic ones: IDS is usually produced with higher pitch, greater pitch variability and volume variability, and with a small set of highly distinctive melodic contours (Fernald & Simon, 1984; Fernald et al., 1989; Jacobson, Boersma, Fields & Olson, 1983; Papousek et al., 1985). It is also produced with exaggerated positive affect, even when this violates grammatical principles (Masataka, 1992; Reilly & Bellugi, 1996).

Common errors

- Needing to list everything
 - In their first experiment, so & so found &_
 - But in their second experiment, they found . . .
 - A third experiment extended this finding . . .
 - In their fourth experiment . . .
- Only list those results you ultimately care about; feel free to ignore most of a paper and only report the one little bit you care about, even if they did a lot more.

Common errors

- Self-insertion
 - Try not to insert yourself into the article. (e.g., “I thought that”)
 - Do not insert the reader into the article (“You may be surprised to learn that....”)

Common errors

- Gender bias
 - Do not use the masculine form as the generic, or mix plurals & singulars
 - Bad: “The infant sat on his mother’s lap”, “The infant sat on their mother’s lap”
 - Good: “Infants sat on their mother’s laps” or “The infant sat on his or her mother’s lap”
 - You should use the masculine form when it is appropriate, of course!
 - “A male speaker of English recorded the stimuli. He repeated each target word . . .”

Starting off complicated

- Start off your introduction with broad, global ideas.
 - *Bad*: “Motherese refers to the speech used towards infants and young children. The most obvious characteristics of infant-directed speech to a listener are higher average pitch and greater pitch and volume variability.”
 - *Better*: “As adult speakers, we are constantly taking the listener into account as we speak. For example, we speak more slowly and carefully for young listeners and foreigners than for more experienced listeners . . . (other examples here. Then in later paragraph:) One particularly obvious form of these listener-dependent speech changes is infant-directed speech, or IDS.”

What goes in a paragraph

- A paragraph has a central idea. All other sentences support that idea.
- Thus, if you can’t write a single sentence that summarizes the entire paragraph, then your paragraph contains things that don’t belong together.

Ending the intro

- The intro needs to end with a summary of what your study is about and what you’re actually doing. That is the lead-in to the actual experiment.

Little things

- “Subjects” is not politically correct
 - They are participants, listeners, adults, children, but not subjects
- “Et al.” stands for et alia; so it is “et al.” not “et. al”
- “Data” is a plural term; thus, “the data are” not “the data is”
- A single sentence cannot be an entire paragraph.
- “Due to this result...”
 - Trains & bills are due. If you mean “because”, say so. (Due refers to time.)
- List all authors the first time you mention them.