Effective Academic Writing

- ✓ **Use a formal tone. Avoid casual / conversational language (e.g., slang, colloquialisms, contractions, clichés, fillers).**
  Casual tone: *Isaiah talks about <u>a lot of stuff</u> that the people of Israel <u>hadn't</u> done to worship God and a <u>whole bunch more</u> that they done that went against his law. <u>I guess</u> they had either gone <u>bonkers</u> or they thought they were the <u>best thing since sliced bread</u>.*
  More formal tone: *Isaiah shared how the people of Israel had failed to worship God and instead committed transgressions that went against his law. Perhaps they had either forgotten to whom they owed their allegiance, or they had started worshipping their own image.*

- ✓ **Present others' arguments fairly, without biased language.**
  Biased language: *Calvinists, with their <u>deterministic view</u> of predestination, <u>undermine</u> the freedom of the human will and make God an <u>arbitrary determiner</u> of human destiny. They read <u>predetermined theology</u> into the text where it has <u>no place</u>.*
  Fair language: *Calvinism emphasizes the sovereignty of God, teaching that God elects individuals to salvation based on his free choice. They understand certain biblical texts as providing robust evidence for their position.*

- ✓ **Use active instead of passive voice.**
  Passive Voice: *Augustine <u>was adopted</u> as a spiritual son by Ambrose.*
  Active Voice: *Ambrose <u>adopted</u> Augustine as a spiritual son.*

  Exception to the rule: when the focus is on the object being acted upon. E.g., "*Augustine was made Bishop of Hippo.*" Here, the focus is not on who installed Augustine as bishop, but on Augustine himself.

- ✓ **Use concise language. If necessary, split your sentence into two, so the reader can more easily comprehend what you are saying.**
  Wordy language: *As a matter of fact, it is possible to baptize a new believer through immersion, or through pouring, or through sprinkling of the water, but baptism always requires the presence of a member of the clergy to baptize the individual; it is therefore not possible for a person to baptize themself in isolation from the body of Christ.*
  Concise language: *Although multiple means of baptism exist (i.e., immersion, pouring, sprinkling), a clergy member must baptize the new believer. Therefore, baptism can only take place in the physical community of Christ.*

- ✓ **Use gender-neutral, non-exclusionary language.**
  When referring to human beings in general: use 'humans,' 'persons,' 'humanity,' or 'humankind' instead of 'man' or 'men'. For the generic singular pronoun, you may use the plural ('they,' 'them,' 'their') and the altered reflexive pronoun 'themself'. Alternatively, you may alter between the use of the masculine 'he' and feminine 'she.'

  Example: *Christ died for all <u>mankind</u>. When a person responds in faith, <u>he</u> acknowledges this fact.*
  Rephrase: *Christ died for all <u>humanity</u>. When a person responds in faith, <u>they</u> acknowledge this fact.*

- ✓ **Introduce a scholar by full name in your first reference and then by last name only. There is no need to introduce a scholar by their title (e.g., "Dr. Sandra Glahn…"). Instead, give a brief description that provides context for their area of expertise:**
  Example: *Theological historian <u>John D. Hannah</u> disagrees with X view. […] In his paper "This Is a Scholarly Title," <u>Hannah</u> suggests that…*

- ✓ **Limit prepositions. A good rule is to avoid using more than 3 or 4 consecutive prepositions.**
  Example: *<u>In the email</u> sent <u>by the pastor</u> <u>of the church</u> <u>about serving</u> <u>in the youth ministry</u> <u>as a volunteer</u>, it says that members can submit an application <u>to the youth minister</u>.*
  Rephrased: *In the last church email, the pastor wrote that members interested in serving in the youth ministry can submit an application to the youth minister.*

- ✓ **Avoid addressing the reader directly—by name or through the second person ("you")**
  Second person: *<u>You can't</u> help noticing that the apostle John makes many references to light and dark imagery.*
  Third person: *The apostle John makes many references to light and dark imagery.*

- ✓ **Avoid using the first person ("I")**
  First-person: *<u>I</u> believe that Jesus is the Son of God who died for <u>our</u> sins.*
  Third person: *Jesus is the Son of God who died for <u>humanity's</u> sins.*

  Exception to the rule: Some professors prefer that students use the first-person pronoun ("I") when writing a thesis statement or an argument (e.g., "*I will argue*" instead of "*This paper will argue*"). A paper may also include a section for personal reflection, which allows for the use of the first person. When in doubt, check with your professor to confirm their expectations.

- ✓ **Avoid ambiguous references**
  Ambiguous: *There are <u>many ways</u> to get involved with your local church.*
  Specific: *An individual may get involved with their local church <u>by volunteering as an usher, a Bible teacher, or a youth leader</u>.*

- ✓ **Don't start a sentence with a conjunction (Think FANBOYS: For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, So).**
  Casual: *Jonah ran from God. <u>But</u> he did not know that he could not outrun God.*
  Formal: *Although Jonah ran from God, he could not outrun God.*

- ✓ **Avoid using "there is," "there are," "it is," "it was," etc.**
  Example: *There is an edition of the NET Bible that was published with a misprint.*
  Revision: *An edition of the NET Bible was published with a misprint.*
  Even better (specificity): *The first edition of the NET Bible was published with a misprint.*

  Example: *It is important for believers to read Scripture and pray.*
  Revision: *Reading Scripture and praying is important for believers.*
  OR *Believers should read Scripture and pray.*