

Diction

Diction is the effective use of specific words that give the exact meaning intended by the writer. There are several things that writers can do to work on this important characteristic of writing.

The first step is to build on existing vocabulary by using more specific words instead of more general ones. For example, “dog” can be replaced by “collie” or “dachshund,” two specific breeds. Using “dachshund” or “collie” gives a clearer picture to the reader than the word “dog.” Below is another example of how the sentence “We did things today.” was revised to be more specific.

We did things today.

We planned an essay today.

We formed a thesis statement and constructed an outline for the essay today.

Besides revising sentences and making the vocabulary more specific, there are other rules that you should follow when writing.

Avoid conversational styles- this is writing which resembles spoken English. It is acceptable for writing a letter to a friend, for example, but is not appropriate in formal essays. For instance, someone would not use “Whoa dude, did you see that gnarly wave?” when writing a formal paper.

Avoid jargon- jargon is specialized language that has been adopted for certain fields. People from outside that specific field will probably not understand the related jargon. An example of using jargon would be something like, “Attendance at the national convention topped out at 1,500.” “Topped out” is an expression used in the stock market.

Avoid slang-slang is not proper in formal essays because it is constantly changing. What one person uses for slang, another person might not. Examples of slang in English might be saying “joint” instead of “place” or “no sweat” instead of “no problem.”