

Avoiding Common Mistakes When Writing Academic English - German-language based

Here you can learn about

- **some of the common mistakes German native speakers make when writing academic English and how to avoid them.**

This information sheet is connected to Information Sheet 16 on general common mistakes in English texts. An associated worksheet is also available.

Background Information

The mistakes covered in this information sheet arise at the sentence and word level as a result of interference from a non-native speaker's mother tongue (here, German) – the false friends. Mother-tongue-related mistakes are different for each language. Further information about potential interference from a mother tongue is available in Information sheets 17 and 17a on the influence of culture on writing.

Common German-language-based Mistakes

Here are seven mistakes commonly made by German native speakers writing academic English. They may well also be present in the written English of those with a different mother tongue.

1) Using *On the one hand/on the other*

When readers see one of these phrases, they are expecting some sort of contrast between the two topics being discussed. For example, you would be permitted to write *On the one hand, the Coronavirus has been bad for the economy. On the other, it has been good for the environment*. However, it would be confusing if you wrote *On the one hand, the Corona virus has spread globally. On the other, it has caused different problems for each country*.

This phrase is potentially one of the most over-used phrases in academic written English; it might be worthwhile considering alternatives, e.g., *There are two opposing issues connected with these results. First Second Or Not only ... but also ...*



2) Using the verb *to allow*

The verb *to allow* cannot be followed directly by an infinitive verb, e.g., you cannot write *This calculation allows to factor in other items*. You must write *This calculation allows other items to be factored in*, i.e., *to allow* must be followed by a noun/object of some sort. This rule does not apply when writing *to be allowed to* (do something), e.g., *I am allowed to see him daily*.

3) Using *and/as well as*

The word *and* and the phrase *as well as* are not direct synonyms (unlike the German *und/sowie*). *And* joins two elements of equal importance; *as well as* places more emphasis on one of the elements, generally the first one.

4) Using *few/only a few*

English does not have the phrase *Only few*. For the German (*Nur*) *wenige* use *Only a few* or *Few*. For the German *Einige* use *A few*.

5) Using *In case of/in the case of*

In case of is used in an explanation of why you do something, and 'in case' refers to the reason (German = *falls*), e.g., *I will take my umbrella in case of rain*. *In the case of* simply refers to a specific situation (case) (German = *Im Falle von*). *In the case of* can often be substituted by *For*.

6) Using *there exist*

In English, *exist(s)* cannot be preceded by *it* or *there* (unlike the German *Es existieren*). The word before *exist* must be something specific, e.g., *Diverging opinions on the topic exist*.

7) Using *by/until*

When used to express time, *by* and *until* do not mean the same thing (unlike the German word *bis*). *By* is used to express *no later than* (Zeitpunkt). *Until* is used to say how long a situation continues (Zeitraum). For example, *Please reply by tomorrow* (tomorrow is the deadline for your reply). *Please stay until tomorrow* (stay the whole time from now until tomorrow).

Useful Resources

Dretzke, B & Nester, M. 2009. *False Friends: A Short Dictionary*. Leipzig, Reklam.
https://www.englisch-hilfen.de/en/words/false_friends.htm

Final Comments/Tips

- You don't need to focus on these common mistakes while writing your initial drafts. You can pick them up when you edit your texts, often by simply using the Search function in your text software.



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