How Not to Write

Avoiding the zombification of writing

# Stock phrases, popular fillers, and clichés

Although academic writing style varies somewhat with every discipline, it generally tries to be concise (it doesn’t waffle on), precise (it uses accurate and specific vocabulary), and *not informally conversational*—unless the specific genre calls for that. The stock phrases, popular fillers, and clichés of the day are best left out of any good, thoughtful writing—and that is the case for academic writing as well. We hear people pepper their conversations with such stock phrases as that being said, it’s literally like, to be clear, and in actual fact. Most of these phrases mean little or nothing, and are only easy, immediately accessible fillers in a conversation.

Academic writing, on the other hand, should aim to convey thoughts as carefully as possible. Spend some time choosing and editing your words to say exactly what you mean: be specific and deliberate with your word choice. Words have power: take charge of your vocabulary and use that power well.

### Examples of filler phrases in context

Here is an example of a piece of writing that uses a number of conversational stock phrases, followed by a re-writing that attempts to provide more concise and precise language.

**Original**: So the Covid pandemic was in actual fact a complete derailment of our lives for like a whole 2-plus years. Everything was thrown like 100% out of whack: people quit their jobs, education got Zoomed, and everything just kind of shut down. That being said, however, at the same time everything also kept going like it always had. To be clear, our economy was literally the engine that kept it all going. To be honest, I don’t even know what would have happened if Big Business hadn’t had this vested interest in maintaining the status quo, because at the end of the day that was what propped it all up. Without that, I’m not gonna lie, I probably wouldn’t of gone back to work either! However, for most working people, their paycheck means everything, and so we’ll probably just go on the way we did before Covid, despite everyone wanting something new.

**Edited**: The Covid pandemic was a complete derailment of our lives. For two-plus years everything shut down: people quit or lost their jobs, education was Zoomed. At the same time, however, everything also kept going the way it always had. The economy was the primary engine that kept it going: Big Business had a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. If it hadn’t, I probably wouldn’t have gone back to work either! However, most working people need a regular income to survive, so we’ll probably end up continuing the way we did before Covid, despite everyone wanting something new.

**Hopefully the edited version seems like an improvement to you. At the very least, it has removed many of the zombie-isms that sometimes plague our informal conversations!**