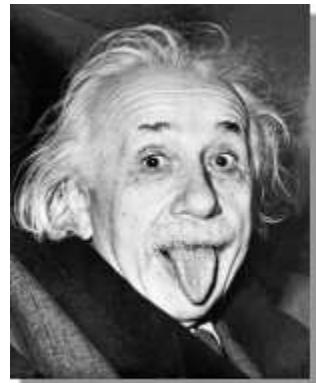


How Einstein Can Help You Write Better Essays

Introduction

The famous scientist Albert Einstein once said, "Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler." He was talking about scientific **theories**, but this way of thinking is also perfect for writing essays in English tests such as TOEFL iBT, IELTS or TOEIC. If you follow Einstein's advice and make your sentences and paragraphs as simple as possible (but not simpler), I believe you can write better essays more quickly and easily.

To see how this idea can benefit you, let's imagine two essays: essay A and essay B. Both essays are around 300 words long, both essays answer the question equally well, and both essays follow the standard academic essay model. However, there is one important difference between the two essays.



The person who wrote essay A tried to write many complicated sentences and use many advanced words. As a result, his essay contained many errors because the grammar and words he tried to use were too difficult. In addition, his essay was hard to read because the errors sometimes confused the reader. Because it contained many errors and because those errors confused the reader, essay A would receive a low score in a test.

The person who wrote essay B, on the other hand, tried to write simple sentences and use basic vocabulary. As a result, essay B was not only much easier to write than essay A but it also contained fewer errors and was much easier to read and understand. Because it contained few errors and because the reader understood it well, essay B would receive a high score in a test. This simple example shows that making your sentences and vocabulary as simple as possible can lead to great results.

But Isn't That Too Simple?

Many students worry about making their essays too simple. They think that an essay which uses simple grammar and vocabulary will not get a good score, but actually this is not true. If we look at the rules for scoring essays for TOEFL iBT, TOEIC, or IELTS, we can see that the scoring rules do not mention advanced English. The scoring rules, also called the scoring criteria, for most English tests can be summarized by these five questions:

1. Does the essay answer the question directly?
2. Does the essay use a variety of grammar and vocabulary?
3. Does the essay use grammar and vocabulary naturally and correctly?
4. Does the essay have enough paragraphs and is it long enough?
5. Is the essay organized like a standard formal essay?

How Einstein Can Help You Write Better Essays

If the answer to these questions is “No”, then the essay will receive a lower score. If the answer to these questions is “Yes”, then the essay will get a higher score. It’s that simple. And notice that none of these scoring criteria ask “Does the essay use advanced grammar?” or “Does the essay use advanced vocabulary?” Even if the test is an advanced test, the scoring rules only ask for a variety of correct, natural grammar and vocabulary, not advanced grammar and vocabulary. In other words, Einstein was right.

“Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler.”

Albert Einstein

How To Make Your Writing Simpler

There are several easy ways to make your writing simpler but, like all types of writing, it takes practice to write simple sentences. If you do not practice often, you will not benefit.

First, you can simplify your writing by using words and phrases that are very common and familiar rather than advanced vocabulary. To add variety, you need to use some synonyms of these common, familiar words. Another easy way to add variety is to use adjectives and adverbs. Look at these two example sentences:

1. One way that humans have damaged the environment is by building factories which have caused pollution.
2. One major way that humans have badly damaged the environment is by building many large factories which have caused serious pollution.

Notice how the second sentence looks more advanced than the first sentence. Actually, the second sentence is as simple as the first one, but it looks more advanced because it uses many adjectives and adverbs. This type of sentence that is simple but looks advanced will probably increase your essay score.

A second way to simplify your writing is to avoid using long sentences whenever possible. Long sentences have a couple of disadvantages: they are harder to read than short sentences, and they usually contain more mistakes than short sentences. Both of these disadvantages may reduce your score. So, a good way to simplify your writing is to write short sentences which have a maximum of around 20 words. Look at these two examples:

1. In my opinion, it is important for society to ban smoking in public places because many people dislike smoking and it causes health problems and they cost society a lot of money.

How Einstein Can Help You Write Better Essays

2. It is my opinion that society should ban smoking in public places. The reason is that many people greatly dislike smoking. Also, smoking causes many health problems that cost society a lot of money.

Notice that the first example sentence, which has 32 words, is a little confusing. The second example uses three simple sentences, none of which has more than 13 words. The second example is easier to read, easier to write and is not confusing at all.

A third way to simplify your writing is to imagine that you are writing the essay for a reader who is only a child. Every child can understand simple ideas that are obviously connected, but may not understand ideas that are indirectly connected. So, before you write a sentence, think about whether a child would understand your idea. If you think the answer is 'no', try to find a different idea. If you cannot find a different idea, try to write short, simple sentences that you think a child would be able to understand. Look at these two examples:

1. For example, my friend recently purchased a new computer. He planned to use it for his job, but actually he spends too much time playing games or chatting with people overseas. Therefore, we can see that progress does not always benefit society.

2. For example, my friend recently purchased an expensive new computer. He planned to use it for his job, but actually he uses it to play games and chat with people overseas. In other words, he uses the computer to waste time not do his job. Many other people in my country use computers for the same reason. Therefore, we can see that progress like computer technology, does not always benefit society.

Notice that the first example makes an indirect connection: my friend uses his computer for playing games so progress does not benefit society. It is unlikely a child would understand why these two ideas are connected. The second example, on the other hand, adds some simple sentences, and makes the ideas much clearer so a child would probably understand the connection. This second example would get a much better score than the first example.

Does It Really Work?

Yes! Making your essay as simple as possible really does work. Many students who have used this system have scored over 25 in TOEFL iBT (the maximum writing score is 30) and over 7 in IELTS (the maximum writing band is 9). Also, many students who have passed the TOEFL iBT or IELTS tests continue to use these ideas because they are suitable for every kind of academic writing.

However, if you need to get a very advanced score such as 28 for TOEFL iBT writing or band 8 for academic IELTS, your essay should include about 20% advanced sentences and about 10% advanced vocabulary. But for almost all students, we can see that when you are writing an essay, everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler, just like Einstein said!



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Useful Words

The following list defines some of the difficult words used in this article.

A **theory** is a scientific idea that explains something about the world.

A **variety of** something means many different types of something, all of which are similar. For example, there are a variety of English tests.

If you make something simpler and less complicated, you **simplify** it.

A **synonym** is a word or phrase that has almost the same meaning as another word or phrase. For example, 'smart', 'clever' and 'intelligent' are all synonyms because they have almost the same meaning.

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