

FREE RESEARCH GUIDE 2026

The Paperpal Toolkit

A practical, step-by-step guide to writing, polishing, and submitting academic papers faster with AI — grammar, paraphrasing, citations, plagiarism checks, and a 30-point pre-submission checklist.

5

Core features covered

30

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6

Common mistakes to avoid

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Why an AI Writing Assistant Matters for Researchers

Writing a paper is rarely the hard part — reviewers know within a paragraph whether English fluency, structure, or citation formatting will slow down the review process. Most desk rejections at journals are not about the science; they're about presentation.

Paperpal is an AI academic writing assistant built by Cactus Communications (the team behind Editage), trained specifically on scholarly language rather than general web text. That distinction matters in practice: a general-purpose grammar checker will "correct" field-specific terminology it doesn't recognize — flagging *in vitro*, *p-value*, or a gene name as a typo — while an academic-trained model preserves it and focuses corrections on genuine clarity and tone issues instead.

23+

Years STM publishing expertise behind it

1.5M+

Researchers & students using it

250M+

Articles & citation records indexed

WHO THIS GUIDE IS FOR

Undergrad and graduate students writing a thesis, PhD candidates preparing journal submissions, and non-native English researchers who want their science — not their grammar — to be judged.

This guide walks through every core feature with a real before/after example for each, ends with a 30-point pre-submission checklist, and covers the mistakes that trip up most first-time users.

Getting Started — Where Paperpal Lives

Paperpal isn't a single app — it follows you into whichever tool you already draft in. Pick whichever matches your workflow; you don't need to install all of them, and switching later doesn't cost you anything since your account and history carry over.

Platform	Best for
Web Editor (paperpal.com)	Quick edits, pasting a section, no install needed
Microsoft Word add-in	Long-form thesis/manuscript drafting
Google Docs add-on	Collaborative writing with advisors/co-authors
Chrome extension	Emails, forum posts, anywhere else you write
Overleaf integration	LaTeX users writing in .tex directly

What the Free plan actually gives you

200 language suggestions/month, 7,000 words of plagiarism checking, 5 generative AI uses/day, and basic citation generation. That's enough to fully test the tool on a real chapter or paper — not just a locked demo — before deciding whether to upgrade.

First 10 minutes: a concrete starting checklist

- Install the Word add-in or open the web editor — don't try to evaluate it from the Chrome extension alone, since the core academic-correction feature works best on a full document.
- Paste in the roughest, least-polished paragraph of your current draft — not your best paragraph. That's where the tool earns its keep.
- Run one Academic Language Correction pass and read every individual suggestion before accepting anything in bulk.
- Note your current plagiarism/AI-detection score baseline before you start editing, so you can measure whether AI-assisted edits are making the score better or worse.

Academic Language & Style Correction

This is Paperpal's core feature: it checks grammar, tone, and clarity the way a subject-matter journal editor would — not the way a generic consumer grammar tool would. It also adjusts run-on sentences, redundant hedging ("it is important to note that"), and inconsistent verb tense across a results section — three issues that are extremely common in non-native English academic drafts and that generic tools rarely catch well.

BEFORE

"The results shows that the treatment have a significant effect on the outcome, which is consistent to previous studies and it can be conclude that the hypothesis was supported."

AFTER PAPERPAL

The results show that the treatment had a significant effect on the outcome, consistent with previous studies. This supports the hypothesis.

How to use it well

- Run corrections paragraph-by-paragraph rather than pasting your whole paper at once — it's easier to judge whether each suggestion preserves your intended meaning before accepting it in bulk.
- Pay special attention to suggestions inside your Methods section — accuracy matters more than style there, so verify nothing about the actual procedure changed.
- If a suggestion flags a field-specific term you're confident is correct, mark it as "ignore" rather than accepting a generic alternative — this also improves future suggestions in the same document.

COMMON MISTAKE

Accepting every suggestion in one click on a full manuscript. A handful of suggestions per 100 will subtly shift meaning (e.g. turning a tentative claim into an absolute one) — always spot-check the results and discussion sections specifically, since that's where overclaiming is most consequential.

Paraphraser — Rewrite Without Losing Meaning

The paraphraser rewrites a sentence or paragraph in a different structure while keeping technical terms and meaning intact — useful for varying sentence structure across a long document, or rephrasing a reviewer's suggested wording into your own voice.

ORIGINAL SENTENCE

"Deep learning models have achieved remarkable performance across a wide range of tasks, but their lack of interpretability remains a major obstacle to adoption in high-stakes domains."

PARAPHRASED (ACADEMIC TONE)

Although deep learning models perform remarkably well across many tasks, limited interpretability continues to hinder their adoption in high-stakes domains.

Choosing the right tone

- **Academic** — for anything going into the actual manuscript body.
- **Fluency** — for cleaning up a translated draft where the ideas are right but the English reads awkwardly.
- **Simple** — useful for writing a plain-language summary or abstract for a general-audience journal requirement.
- **Formal** — for cover letters and correspondence with editors.

Where it's actually useful beyond "rewriting a sentence"

- Escaping repetitive phrasing flagged by a plagiarism or similarity checker (e.g. Turnitin/iThenticate) without changing the underlying data or claim.
- Rewriting a reviewer's suggested replacement text in your own voice so the paper doesn't read as a patchwork of different writing styles.
- Varying sentence openings across a long literature review section, where "This study shows..." repeated 15 times reads poorly.

THIS IS NOT A CITATION SHORTCUT

Paraphrasing does not replace citing your source. If an idea originated elsewhere, it still needs a citation — rewording alone does not make a claim your own, and journals treat this the same as any other citation omission.

Plagiarism & AI-Content Check

Before submission, most journals now run both a plagiarism/similarity check and an AI-generated-content check. Paperpal's Prime plan includes unlimited AI detection and 10,000 words/month of plagiarism checking, so you can catch issues before a journal's own check flags them — and fix them on your own timeline, not the editor's.

Reading a similarity report without overreacting

- A flagged "similarity" match on a standard methods-section phrase ("Data were analyzed using...") is usually fine — reviewers expect boilerplate methodology language, and journals typically exclude these from the substantive score.
- Focus your attention on flagged passages inside the Results and Discussion sections — that's where similarity is actually a meaningful concern.
- A single long flagged block (a full paragraph, not a phrase) is a genuine problem and needs a rewrite, not just a word swap.

Reading an AI-content flag

- If a paragraph you wrote yourself gets flagged, rewrite it in your own natural sentence rhythm rather than running more AI passes over it — over-polished, uniformly-paced text is exactly what detectors key on.
- Vary sentence length deliberately — a mix of short and long sentences reads more human and is genuinely better writing regardless of detection concerns.
- Run the check after your final round of edits, not your first draft — earlier drafts will just waste your monthly word allowance checking text you're going to rewrite anyway.

DISCLOSURE MATTERS MORE THAN DETECTION

A growing number of journals now require an explicit statement disclosing AI tool usage in the methods or acknowledgments section, regardless of what any detector says. Check your target journal's policy before submission — this is increasingly a compliance issue, not just a writing-quality one.

Citations in 10,000+ Styles

Reformatting a reference list because a journal wants Vancouver instead of APA is one of the most tedious parts of resubmission. Paperpal can generate and reformat citations across 10,000+ styles and search 250M+ indexed articles to find the correct source record.

PASTE A DOI OR TITLE

"10.1038/s41586-021-03819-2"

AUTO-FORMATTED CITATION

Smith, J. et al. (2021). Deep learning applications in genomics. Nature, 592(7854), 381-385.

Practical workflow

- Paste a DOI or article title to auto-generate a correctly formatted citation instead of typing it by hand from a PDF header.
- When switching target journals after a rejection, reformat your entire reference list to the new required style in one pass rather than line-by-line.
- Cross-check auto-generated citations against the actual journal for edge cases — conference papers, preprints, and datasets are formatted inconsistently across style guides and are the most common source of citation errors.

VERIFY BEFORE YOU SUBMIT

Auto-generated citations are a massive time-saver but not infallible — spot-check page numbers, author order, and publication year against the original source, especially for older or less-common publication types.

Generative AI Writing Assistant

Beyond correcting existing text, Paperpal can help generate a first draft: outlines, abstracts, and section summaries based on your notes or data description. Treat this as a drafting accelerator, not a replacement for your own analysis and claims.

GIVE IT YOUR RESULTS SUMMARY

"Generate a 250-word abstract from these results: 214 participants, 12-week intervention, primary outcome improved by 18% ($p < 0.01$), no significant adverse events."

WHAT IT DRAFTS

Draft abstract with Background / Methods / Results / Conclusion structure, using your exact numbers — ready for you to edit and verify against your actual data.

Safe ways to use it

- Feed it your results/data summary and ask for a first-draft abstract — then heavily edit for accuracy and your own framing of significance.
- Use it to generate a structural outline for a literature review section before you fill in the citations and analysis yourself.
- Ask it to draft a plain-language summary for a lay-audience requirement, then verify every simplified claim still matches your actual findings.

THE ONE RULE THAT MATTERS MOST

Never let generated text describe a result, statistic, or claim you have not personally verified against your data. This is the single most important rule in this entire guide — generative drafting saves time on structure and phrasing, never on judgment.

The 30-Point Journal Submission Checklist

Run through this checklist before submitting to any journal. It's organized into five categories of six checks each — most desk rejections come from missing something on this list, not from the science itself.

Language & Style (6)

- No grammar or spelling errors in title, abstract, and headings
- Consistent tense throughout (past tense for methods/results, present for established facts)
- No first-person overuse where the target journal prefers passive/formal voice
- Field-specific terminology used correctly and consistently
- Abstract reads standalone — understandable without reading the full paper
- No repeated sentence structures flagged by the paraphraser

Structure & Formatting (6)

- Matches the exact section order required by the target journal's author guidelines
- Word count within the journal's stated limit (including/excluding references as specified)
- Figures and tables numbered sequentially and referenced in text before they appear
- Font, margins, and line spacing match the submission template
- Headings follow the required heading-level hierarchy
- Supplementary materials clearly labeled and referenced

Citations & References (6)

- Reference list formatted in the exact style required (APA/Vancouver/IEEE/etc.)
- Every in-text citation has a matching reference list entry and vice versa
- DOIs included where the journal requires them
- No outdated or retracted sources cited
- Self-citation rate reasonable (avoid appearing to inflate your own citation count)
- Recent literature (last 3-5 years) represented, not just foundational papers

Ethics & Compliance (6)

- Plagiarism/similarity score checked and within journal's acceptable threshold
- AI-content disclosure statement included if the journal requires declaring AI tool usage
- Conflict of interest statement completed
- Ethics/IRB approval number included if human or animal subjects were involved
- Data availability statement included per journal policy
- All co-authors have reviewed and approved the final submitted version

Journal-Specific (6)

- Cover letter addressed to the correct editor and journal
- Suggested reviewers list prepared if requested
- Keywords match the journal's indexing requirements
- Manuscript file named and formatted per the journal's upload instructions
- Highlights/graphical abstract prepared if the journal requires one
- Final proofread completed with Paperpal after all revisions, not before

Suggested End-to-End Workflow

Here's how these features fit together in order, from first draft to submission. Skipping steps or reordering them is the most common reason people don't get full value from the tool.

Step	What to do	Feature used
1. Draft	Write your first draft focused on content and argument — ignore grammar for now.	—
2. Structure pass	Sanity-check section structure and flow against your target journal's template.	Generative Assistant
3. Language pass	Run academic language correction paragraph-by-paragraph, reviewing each passage.	Language Correction
4. Vary phrasing	Paraphrase repetitive sentence openings, especially in the literature review.	Paraphraser
5. Citations	Auto-generate and format all citations in your target journal's required style.	Citation Generator
6. Similarity check	Run plagiarism/AI-content check; revise any genuinely flagged passages.	Plagiarism Check
7. 30-point checklist	Work through every item on the previous pages.	—
8. Final proofread	One last language pass after all edits — new errors creep in during revision.	Language Correction

Free vs Prime — When to Upgrade

	Free	Prime
Language corrections	200/month	Unlimited
Plagiarism check	7,000 words	10,000 words/month
Generative AI uses	5/day	Unlimited
AI-content detection	—	Unlimited
Citation styles	Basic	10,000+ styles
Submission readiness checks	—	30+ checks
Price	\$0	From ~\$11.58/mo (billed annually)

The free plan is enough to fully test Paperpal on one real chapter or paper. Upgrade to Prime once you're actively preparing a manuscript for submission and need unlimited corrections plus the submission readiness checks — the 30-point check alone is worth the upgrade if you're submitting to a journal with a history of desk-rejecting on formatting.

Common Mistakes First-Time Users Make

- **Running the whole manuscript through in one pass.** Paragraph-by-paragraph review catches meaning-shifting suggestions that bulk-accept will miss.
- **Skipping the free plan and going straight to Prime.** You won't know which features you actually need until you've used the tool on a real chapter.
- **Treating generated abstracts/outlines as final text.** They're a structural starting point — every number and claim needs your own verification.
- **Running the plagiarism check too early.** Check after your final edit pass, not your first draft, to avoid burning your monthly word allowance on text you'll rewrite anyway.
- **Ignoring the journal's own AI-disclosure policy.** A clean detector score doesn't exempt you from a required disclosure statement — check policy, not just score.
- **Forgetting to re-run the citation generator after adding new sources late in editing.** A manually-added last-minute citation is the most common source of reference-list formatting errors.

Quick Reference

- **Grammar/tone issue?** → Academic Language Correction
- **Sentence feels repetitive or too close to a source?** → Paraphraser
- **About to submit — need a similarity/AI-content score?** → Plagiarism & AI Check
- **Switching target journal's citation style?** → Citation Generator
- **Staring at a blank page?** → Generative AI outline/abstract assistant
- **Final step before upload** → Run the 30-point checklist on pages 8-9

READY TO START

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https://paperpal.com/?linkId=lp_726731&sourceId=quang-bui&tenantId=paperpal

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