



English Grammar

A Student's Guide to Using 'This' in Academic Writing





Disclaimer

Please note that the authors' names used in example sentences are for illustrative purposes only. The information in examples is not based on real academic evidence.





'This' can be a 'demonstrative pronoun'. It can be used in place of a noun

Definition

The word 'this' can be used to point out, show, or demonstrate a specific person or thing (Adapted from Alexander, 1988, p.85)





'This' can be a 'demonstrative adjective'. It can be used to qualify a noun

Definition

The word 'this' can be used to point out, show, or demonstrate a specific quality or characteristic of a person or thing (Adapted from Alexander, 1988, p.85).





'This' is also a 'referring expression'. It can link 'referents' within and between sentences

Definitions

- A 'referring expression' is a word or phrase that points to a 'referent' expressed as a word, phrase, clause, or whole sentence
- A 'referent' is a person, thing, or idea being talked about in a sentence



Adjectival 'This'



'This' as an adjective is usually singular and used with a countable or uncountable noun

Examples

This (adjective, singular) + book (noun, countable, singular)

This (adjective, singular) + anarchy (noun, uncountable)



Adjectival 'This'



'This' can be used with a plural countable noun

Examples

This three weeks, This five years, ... (Fowler, 1965, p.636)

Note: The words 'weeks' and 'years' are plural, countable nouns and 'These' could also be used (e.g. These three weeks, These five years). According to Fowler (1965) both 'this' and 'these' are correct.



Summarising (1)



'This' (+ a noun) can be used to summarise information in a clause (i.e. part of a sentence)

Example:

- Increased use of i-phones may simply be due to a desire to have the latest gadget. **This explanation** has been suggested by several authors (Jones, 2012; McTavish, 2011; Smith, 2014).

Note: 'This explanation' summarises 'a desire to have the latest gadget'



Summarising (2)



'This' can be used without a noun to summarise information in a clause (i.e. part of a sentence)

Example:

- Increased use of i-phones may simply be due to a desire to have the latest gadget. **This** has been suggested by several authors (Jones, 2012; McTavish, 2011; Smith, 2014).

Note: The reader may be confused about what 'This' refers to. A noun may be necessary to avoid confusion (e.g. This explanation).



Emphasising



'This' + a noun can emphasise information

Example:

- **This** latest **explanation** has been put forward by several authors (Jones, 2012; McTavish, 2011; Smith, 2014).

Note: 'This' helps to emphasise the fact that the explanation contrasts with earlier explanations



Referring (1)



'This' can refer (i.e. point) back to a noun

Example:

- Computer scientists are concerned with encryption. **This** is a significant issue in the field of software development.

Note: 'This' is used here as a demonstrative pronoun. It 'refers' (i.e. points) back to the uncountable noun 'encryption'



Referring (2)



'This' can refer (i.e. point) back to a phrase

Example:

- Valuable research on obesity has been carried out in the last decade. **This** has been well documented in the relevant literature (Jones, 2006; McTavish, 2010; Smith, 2014).

Note: This refers (i.e. points) back to the phrase 'Valuable research'



Referring (3)



'This' can refer (i.e. point) back to a clause

Examples:

- A potential response lies in avoiding infringement of privacy through the use of encryption. **This** has received considerable attention (e.g. Jones, 2012; McTavish, 2013; Smith, 2014).

Note: 'This' refers to the idea in the clause 'avoiding infringement of privacy through the use of encryption'



Referring (4)



'This' can refer (i.e. point) back to a sentence

Example

- The results of the study showed that teenagers aged 15-19 accounted for the highest percentage of i-phone users. **This** can be seen in Figure 1.

Note: 'This' refers to a whole idea: the idea that the highest percentage of i-phone users in the study described were aged between 15-19.





Using 'this' can avoid long sentences

Explanation:

- Long sentences (e.g. more than 25 words) are acceptable but should be grammatically accurate
- However, international students often make grammatical errors in long sentences
- 'This' can be a very useful word for dividing one long sentence into two shorter sentences



Academic Style (2)



'This' can replace relative pronouns (e.g. which, that) to avoid long sentences

Long Sentence!

- Valuable research on fast food, **which** has established a link between fast-food consumption and obesity in young people, has been carried out in the last decade (e.g. Jones, 2014; McTavish, 2008; Smith, 2013).

Note: The sentence is long (25 words) but can be re-written using 'this'



Academic Style (3)



'This' can replace relative pronouns (e.g. which, that) to avoid long sentences

Compare:

- Valuable research on fast food has been carried out in the last decade. **This** has established a link between fast-food consumption and obesity in young people (e.g. Jones, 2014; McTavish, 2008; Smith, 2013).



Glossary



| | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| <i>Demonstrative adjective</i> | A word or phrase that qualifies or modifies a noun and expresses the idea of being 'near' (adapted from Alexander, 1988, p.85) |
| <i>Demonstrative pronoun</i> | A word or phrase that can replace a noun and expresses the idea of being 'near' (adapted from Alexander, 1988, p.85) |
| <i>Referent</i> | A person, place, or thing that a phrase or sentence is about |
| <i>Referring expression</i> | A word or phrase that can be used to replace a person, place, thing, or idea that a phrase or sentence is about |

References



Alexander, L. G. (1988). **Longman English Grammar**. New York: Longman

Fowler, H. W. (1965). **Fowler's Modern English Usage: A Dictionary of Modern English Usage, 2nd Edition**. Oxford: Oxford University Press.



Thank you for watching!



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