Avoiding Colloquialism

Colloquialism is a fancy word for informal, conversational, or non-literal (cliché) language, when used inappropriately in academic or professional writing.

**Informal example**​:

*Most people don’t have any idea if Edgar Allen Poe meant what he said.*

What to avoid:

-The use of a contraction (“don’t” as opposed to “do not”)

-“have any idea” and “meant what he said” are very informal

Avoid because: ​It is desirable as an academic or professional writer to come across to one's audience as professional and trustworthy. In order to do this, writers should choose words that reflect intelligence and knowledge of the subject matter.

How to fix:​ *Despite the extensive amount of literature produced by Edgar Allen Poe, it is not possible to actually know what he truly believed.*

**Conversational example:**

*Those guys aren’t ever gonna figure out what made the dam to break*.

What to avoid:

* “Those guys” is ambiguous and conversational
* use of contraction (“aren’t” as opposed to “are not”)
* “gonna” is not a word, but a phrase used in informal conversation

Avoid because: ​In order for a writer to demonstrate their authority in the subject matter, it is important that the writer’s competency is clearly conveyed to the their audience. Using only words found in the dictionary, as well as maintaining an academic tone, are effective ways to do this.

How to fix:​ ​*Scientists will most likely never be able to exactly say what truly caused the damage that led to the failure of the dam*​. .

**Non-literal language example:**

*After the surgery the patient was feeling blue and acting like a couch potato.*

What to avoid:

-”blue” does not actually mean the color

-”couch potato” does not mean a potato that grows out of a couch

Avoid because: ​The goal of an academic writer is to reach the audience through the use of unambiguous language. Using cliché, or non-literal language can limit the audience’s comprehension, because there is no officially agreed upon definition for these expressions. People from different backgrounds may not understand, be confused by, or have different definitions for non-literal words and phrases. This vagueness can create possible misunderstandings between writer and audience.

How to fix: ​*Following his surgery, the patient suffered from symptoms of depression, including a lack of motivation.*