

Writing Skills

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Ways to Make Writing Clearer

1. Keep your sentences short.

- Keep the average sentence length to 15 to 20 words.
 - Vary your writing.
 - Mix short sentences with longer ones.
 - Stick to one main idea in a sentence.
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Ways to Make Writing Clearer

2. Prefer active verbs.

Active verbs make your writing

- crisp and professional
- lively and clear.

Passive verbs make your writing

- stuffy and bureaucratic
 - confusing and long-winded.
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Passive-Active Verbs

This matter will be considered by us shortly. (P)

- **We will consider this matter shortly. (Active)**

The riot was stopped by the police. (Passive)

- **The police stopped the riot. (Active)**

The mall had to be closed by the authorities. (P)

- **The authority had to close the mall. (Active)**
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Some good uses of passives

- **To make something less hostile.**
‘The bill has not been paid’ (passive)
is softer than
‘You have not paid the bill’ (active).
 - **To avoid taking the blame.**
‘A mistake was made’ (passive)
rather than
‘We made a mistake’ (active).
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Some good uses ...

- **When you don't know who or what the doer is, or if that is not important.**
'The Indian team has been announced.'

So, passive verbs have their uses.

But make 80 to 90% of your verbs active.

Ways to Make Writing Clearer

3. Use 'you' and 'we'

- Call the reader 'you'.
 - Call your organization 'we'.
 - Try to imagine talking to your reader across a table.
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Use 'you' and 'we'

Applicants must send us...

- **You must send us...**

The Company will inform the customers...

- **We will inform you...**

Advice is available from...

- **You can get advice from...**
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Ways to Make Writing Clearer

4. Use words appropriate for the reader
 - First, consider who your reader is.
 - Next, consider what the reader needs to know.
 - Organize your writing to answer the reader's questions.
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Use words appropriate ...

- Write to the appropriate reading level.
 - Say exactly what you mean, using the simplest words that fit.
 - Try to avoid using specialist jargon on the general public.
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Ways to Make Writing Clearer

5. Don't be afraid to give instructions

- **Please send it to me.**

I should be grateful if you would send it to me.

- **Please park your vehicles ...**

Visitors should park their vehicles...

- **Please wait!**

Visitors are requested to wait.

Commands (or imperatives) are the fastest and most direct way of giving someone instructions.

Ways to Make Writing Clearer

6. Avoid nominalisations

- Nominalisations are formed from verbs.
 - Often nominalisations are used instead of the verbs they come from.
 - Nominalisations sound as if nothing is actually happening in the sentence.
 - Like passive verbs, too many of them make writing very dull and heavy-going.
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... nominalisations

Verb

complete

provide

introduce

fail

arrange

investigate

Nominalisation

completion

provision

introduction

failure

arrangement

investigation

... nominalisations

We had a discussion about the matter.

- **We discussed the matter.**

There was a stoppage of buses by drivers.

- **Drivers stopped the buses.**

The implementation of the method has been done by a team.

- **A team has implemented the method.**
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Ways to Make Writing Clearer

7. Use positive language

- Always try to emphasise the positive side of things.

If you don't send your payment, we won't be able to renew your membership. (N)

Please send your payment so that we can renew your membership. (P)

Ways to Make Writing Clearer

8. Use lists where appropriate.

There are two main types of lists:

- You can have a continuous sentence with several listed points picked out at the beginning, middle or end.
 - Or you can have a list of separate points with an introductory statement.
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Use lists ...

If each of the points in the list is long
start each one with a capital letter and
end with a full stop.

(See previous slide)

Use lists ...

For a list with short points, it is better to set it out like this.

Please bring with you

- books
 - CDs
 - Paintings.
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Use lists ...

With a list that is part of a continuous sentence, put semicolons (;) after each point and start each with a lower-case letter.

If you can prove that:

- you were somewhere else at the time;
- you were not related to Mary; and
- you are over 21;

you should be all right.

Summary

- **Stop and think** before you start writing. Make a note of the points you want to make in a logical order.
 - **Prefer short words.** Long words will not impress your readers or help your writing style.
 - **Use everyday English** whenever possible. Avoid jargon and legalistic words, and explain any technical terms you have to use.
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Summary

- **Keep your sentence length down** to an average of 15 to 20 words. Try to stick to one main idea in a sentence.
 - **Use active verbs as much as possible.** Say 'we will do it' rather than 'it will be done by us'.
 - **Be concise.**
 - **Imagine you are talking to your reader.** Write sincerely, personally, in a style that is suitable and with the right tone of voice.
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Ways to Make Writing Clearer

1. Keep your sentences short.
 2. Prefer active verbs.
 3. Use 'you' and 'we'.
 4. Choose words appropriate for the reader.
 5. Don't be afraid to give instructions.
 6. Avoid nominalisations.
 7. Use positive language.
 8. Use lists where appropriate.
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Thank
you
