

Seven Tips for Reader-friendly Writing

Below are guidelines for fine-tuning your writing. Each rule is followed by sample sentences that need revision.

1. Use active verbs whenever possible.

Improve: The data are indicative of the problem.

2. Keep subjects and verbs as close together as possible.

Improve: Dr. Simmons, because she was concerned about safety, recommended additional supervision of the pediatric ward. (GS)

3. Place each modifier next to the word or phrase it modifies.

Improve: Other issues were considered at the final stages of the planning meeting of lesser importance.

4. Avoid long sentences.

Social Entrepreneurship is the adoption of a market-driven mindset by a not-for-profit organization in order to balance the need for fiscal responsibility and sustainability while maximizing its social impact through the pursuit of earned income opportunities as part of an overall revenue strategy.

5. Use explicit transitions for readers' ease of movement.

Improve: Companies wanting to attract new clients to the area are concerned by the rising crime rates. Car break-ins have increased by 20% in the last two years.

6. Eliminate wordiness.

- Avoid descriptions of your thought process.

Improve: When I first broached this subject, I expected to be supportive of the new approach outlined in this report. However, the more I studied the situation, the more I saw how profoundly flawed the proposed policy is.

- **Be concise and modern; use simple language.**

Improve: Many of the top tier universities have come to the considered opinion that the continuous tuition increases over the last ten years are not going to be able to continue because of strong resistance from many Americans to the soaring price of higher education. (JW)

- **Avoid redundancies**

Improve: Each and every operator must participate in the new training program before they operate the equipment.

- **Avoid “There is/are...”; “It is...” constructions**

Improve: It is common knowledge that it has been shown that it is bad economic policy for the federal government to run a large deficit.

7. Learn and use the conventions of incorporating numbers into text.

- **Use the numerical form for numbers above ten.**

Improve: The proposed changes to the federal retirement policies will take place in three stages over 5 years.

- **Appropriately punctuate numerals and numeral-word combinations (when numerals are used as modifiers).**

Improve: The new building will have as its centerpiece a two thousand square foot granite atrium.

(Guidelines adapted from MIT OCW course [21L.020](#), taught by Prof. Margery Resnick and Dr. Joaquín Terrones. License: CC BY-NC-SA.)

Tips for professional writing style

For the rest of the term, we will be working on formalizing our written language. Up to now, the tone of your short, written responses has been relatively informal and conversational. Professional written style differs from conversational style in three main ways.

1. Accessibility—Readability: The goal of good writers is to create reader-friendly documents. Before writing anything, they analyze their purpose and their readers' desires, needs and attitudes. Then, writers choose the document format, organize information, incorporate figures and tables, and refine their language and style to reach their goals. Good writers realize that readers differ from them in their interests and needs.

2. Word choice: The five basic guidelines for choosing the right words are

Be specific.

Focus on the real verb.

Focus on the real subject; avoid “there are” and “it is” constructions.

Avoid clichés and pompous words.

Use formal tone: Match each informal phrase in A with its formal counterpart in B.

A	B
<i>really important</i>	<i>investigate</i>
<i>meanwhile</i>	<i>eliminate</i>
<i>a lot of</i>	<i>seldom occurs</i>
<i>get results</i>	<i>decrease</i>
<i>get bigger</i>	<i>essential</i>
<i>doesn't happen very often</i>	<i>determine</i>
<i>thing</i>	<i>review</i>
<i>get rid of</i>	<i>in addition</i>
<i>look into</i>	<i>obtain results</i>
<i>figure out</i>	<i>increase</i>
<i>go down</i>	<i>at the same time</i>
<i>besides</i>	<i>a great deal of/many</i>
<i>look over</i>	<i>factor, feature, problem</i>

3. Lean style: Use no more words than necessary. Practice on the wordy phrases below.

a majority of	at an early date	at the present time
a number of	at the conclusion of	despite the fact that
at this point in time	based on the fact that	having the capability to
in connection with	in view of the fact that	it is our understanding that
of the opinion that	prior to	so as to
subsequent to	take into consideration	make reference to

Task. After you write your next reading response, evaluate your tone and make adjustments where needed before you hand it in.

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