

Very important writing advice for life and work: trying hard to sound smart (or official, or grown-up, or professional, or scholarly, or scientific) almost always backfires... and makes you sound less smart.

Adapted from *Economical Writing* by Deirdre N. McCloskey

Ten General Rules for Economical Writing

- 1. Write simple, direct sentences whenever possible.**
Absolutely no one is impressed by a sentence they cannot understand. The quality of your economic logic is what counts, not big words or complicated sentences.
- 2. Rewrite and edit your first draft—and your second one, too.**
Easy writing makes difficult reading. Revise your words if you want others to read them.
- 3. If its possible to cut out a word (or sentence), cut it out.**
Cut material no matter how brilliant you consider it, if it does not advance the topic of your paper.
- 4. Make sure that every sentence has the three required parts: subject, verb, and object.**
When possible, place the main idea (emphasis) of each sentence at its end.
- 5. Avoid excessive introduction and summary, over-elaboration, or restatement of well-known ideas.**
Once you have stated in direct terms what you intend to do in your paper, do it. Many of the things that people write do not move the discussion along to its ultimate objective, but merely take up space.
- 6. Use active verbs rather than passive ones to add life to your writing.**
Delete the word "is" whenever possible and rewrite the sentence using an active verb.
- 7. Be concrete—give examples rather than discussing things in vague terms.**
Discuss the supply and demand for gasoline, rather than the supply and demand for good X.
- 8. Do not use a lot of different words to express the same idea just for the sake of variety.**
It is far better to repeat a word than to use synonyms and confuse your reader. Repetition of important terms adds cohesion to your writing.
- 9. Minimize use of doublets.**
Doublets are two words that mean essentially the same thing, used alongside each other in a sentence. Using the same *ideas or phrases* when a *single of solitary* one would do is a *certain and sure-fire* way of writing an *unreadable and confusing* report. Pick the best word and use it; do not say everything twice.
- 10. Avoid excessive use of This, That, These and Those.**
In most cases "the" will do nicely. Instead of saying "this," try repeating the word it represents instead.

Avoid These Words that Bad Writers Love

Vague nouns and pronouns

Concept	Consider “idea”, “notion”, or “thought” instead.
Data	Remember that “data” are plural. Not a synonym for “facts”, “observations”, “statistics”, etc.
Function	Not to be used in the sense of “role.”
Situation	Consider using “position” or “condition”, depending on the meaning.
Individuals	Don’t use when you just mean “people.”
Agents	Don’t use when you just mean “people.”
Structure	Vague and meaningless. Avoid.
Process	Usually meaningless, and can be struck out (sometimes without its “the”) without changing the meaning: “the economic development process” or “the transition process” become plain “economic development” or “the transition”
The existence of	Strike out, and just name the thing.
Time frame	This just means “time”; this originates in the engineer’s dim notion that “time” means “passage of time” alone, and not “a point in time” (another engineering expression). But the notion is false.

Pretentious and feeble verbs

Critique	Just say “criticize”, “to read critically”, or “to comment on.”
Implement	Washingtonese/Businessese, a rich and foolish dialect of Economese.
Comprise	Fancy talk for “include” or “consist of.”
Analyze	Over- and mis-used as a synonym for “discuss” or “examine.” Look it up in your dictionary. It meant in Greek “cut to pieces.”
Hypothesize	Use “suppose” or “expect” instead. This word tags you as incompetent when used incorrectly.
Utilize	Just say “use”—no need for the extra two syllables. They do not make you sound smarter.
Finalize	Boardroom talk. Avoid.
State	Why not say “say” if that is what you mean? “State” means “assert, with conviction.”
The reason was due to	Avoid!!! Just say “because.”

Pointless adjectives

Former... latter; the above; the preceding These words request the reader to look back to sort out the former and latter things. Don't request the reader to look back, because she will, and will lose her place. Never ask the reader to solve a puzzle because she won't be able to and will get angry.

Aforementioned What are you writing, a will?

Intra/inter Do not use. Do not present verbal puzzles to your reader. Use "within" and "between." "The inter- and intra- firm communication was weak" is silly. Fancy talk to be avoided.

Interesting A weak word, made weak by its common sarcastic use and by its overuse by people with nothing to say about their subject except that it is interesting. Just explain why it is interesting instead of telling us that it is.

Kind of, sort of, type of Vague, vague, vague. Use sparingly.

Useless adverbs

Often you'll find that adverbs can be dropped—look for words ending in -ly. They often convey your opinion, which only your mother cares about.

Fortunately, interestingly Cheap ways of introducing irrelevant opinion.

Respectively As in "consumption and investment were 90% and 10% of income, respectively." Why would anyone reverse the correct order of these numbers? Just drop the word. When the list is longer, distribute the numbers directly: "Consumption was 85% of income, investment 10%, and government spending 5%" is better.

Very The very general rule is to think very hard before using "very" very much, and to very often strike it out. It's a weak word.

For convenience As in, "for convenience, we will adopt the following notation." A silly phrase. All writing should be for convenience. What would be the point of writing for inconvenience?

Clumsy conjunctions

Due to Usually signals a clumsy phrase, due to not arranging the sentence to sound right

Via Use "by" instead.

Thus, hence Use these kinds of "traffic signals" sparingly.

In terms of Clumsy and vague, similar to "due to" in that you can often rearrange the sentence to drop this phrase.

Plus Don't say "plus" when you just mean "and."