

Writing for Results
 ...BECAUSE IT'S ALL ABOUT THE AUDIENCE
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The Elements of Effective Writing 2

- ▶ Identify and know your audience
- ▶ Plan and structure your writing
- ▶ Follow the principles of "plain language"
- ▶ Write simply, clearly, and concisely
- ▶ Review and edit:
 - ▶ Use readability as an editing tool
 - ▶ Use MS Word features as an editing tool
 - ▶ Choose and follow a style guide/sheet

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Know Your Audience 3

- ▶ Who is the document, email, etc. really for?
→ A quick story...
- ▶ What do you want them to do or say after reading?
- ▶ How much time do they have to read and respond to your document?
- ▶ Two-step process: Why, Who, What
 - ▶ Write a purpose statement
 - ▶ List the intended, likely, and worst-case audiences

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4

Plan Before Writing


- ▶ It takes time (initially) to save time
- Ever painted a room...?
- ▶ Outlines and talking points:
 - ▶ Manage document length and flow
 - ▶ Manage expectations of reviewers
 - ▶ Create a structure
 - ▶ Reduce repetition
 - ▶ Ensure completeness
 - ▶ Easy to reorganize

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5

Think of an Outline as a Road Map

- ▶ Provides structure to your documents
- ▶ Ensures nothing is left out
- ▶ Enables you to avoid duplication
- ▶ Serves as a document planning and coordination tool



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6

Follow the Principles of Plain Language

- ▶ Use active voice
- ▶ Employ action verbs
- ▶ Minimize clauses
- ▶ Write in first/second person
- ▶ Reduce adjectives and adverbs
- ▶ Make simpler word choices with minimal jargon
- ▶ Minimize "-ly" words
- ▶ Plan effective emails

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7

Passive (before) versus Active (after) Voice

<p>Before</p> <p>In order to be considered for any position, the candidate must have complete qualifications. No phone calls will be accepted. All résumés are to be sent as PDFs in emails that have a clear subject line. It is strongly preferred that all prospective candidates have reviewed the organization's website before a résumé is sent to the website.</p> <p><small>57 words. 100% passive voice. Formal tone.</small></p>	<p>After</p> <p>We welcome applications from fully qualified candidates. Provide your résumé in PDF format. Give your email a clear and fitting subject line. Take the time to review our website before sending your résumé. Please, no phone calls.</p> <p><small>36 words. No passive sentences. Welcoming, less formal tone.</small></p>
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8

Action Verbs

<p>Change this</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ ...are planning to... ▶ ...have budgeted for... 	<p>...to this</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ ...plan... ▶ ...budget...
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9

Clause Avoidance

- ▶ Avoid lead-in clauses/justification:
 - ▶ Except as described in paragraph b (3) , the Division Manager cannot start the statutory review process until your submission is complete.

Change to:

- ▶ The Division Manager cannot start the statutory review process until your submission is complete. The only exception is when it falls under the exception in paragraph 3 (b).
- ▶ Avoids unnecessary sentence length

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10

First/Second Person vs Third Person

- ▶ First/second person engages readers—draws them in
- ▶ Ok to mix "persons":
 - ▶ The mission of XYZ Company is threefold:
 - ▶ We strive to increase your employee retention by 20%
 - ▶ Your company sees the increase in the form of reduced turnover and lower recruitment costs
 - ▶ XYZ Company has a 20-year track record of supporting our clients' growth

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11

Eliminate Extra Words; Change Complicated Words

- ▶ Yesterday was an amazingly, fabulously, stunning and gorgeous day.
versus
- ▶ Yesterday was beautiful.
- ▶ Terminate
versus
- ▶ End or stop

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12

Minimize "-ly" Words

Avoid words ending in -ly (these are qualifiers)
Examples: usually, mostly, greatly, fully, generally...

Why?

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13

Plan Effective Emails

- ▶ Accurate subject
- ▶ Upfront mention of attachments
- ▶ Consider viewing medium
- ▶ Avoid all caps/lowercase – Why?
- ▶ Consider the actual, likely, and intended/unintended readers
- ▶ Make sure addresses are correct
- ▶ Three chances to avoid problems...

- ▶ Chose "to," "cc," and "bcc" carefully – Why?
- ▶ "Forward" is the scariest action
- ▶ Recall! Does it work?
- ▶ Never email in anger
- ▶ 80-90% of computer data is recoverable
- ▶ A note on social media...
- ▶ Draft an effective email

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14

Write Simply, Clearly, and Concisely

- ▶ Be: Clear, Concise, Correct, Considerate, Complete, and Consistent
- ▶ Sentences: 10-15 words
- ▶ Paragraphs: 2-6 sentences; one sentence can be good
- ▶ Bullets: punctuation, capitalization, when to use
- ▶ Employ readability
- ▶ Watch those modifiers

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15

Which Would You Rather Read? ...

The first special project of the Metro Vision Implementation Task Force, the "Boomer Bond," will help local governments understand the impacts of an aging population and arm them with strategies and tools that can support healthy, independent aging, allowing older adults to remain in their homes and communities for as long as they desire.

One sentence...

Readability: Ease = 11; grade level = 25

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16

Or this?

The first special project of the Metro Vision Implementation Task Force, the "Boomer Bond," will help local governments understand the impacts of an aging population. The project will then arm them with strategies and tools to support healthy, independent aging. This approach allows older adults to remain in their homes and communities for as long as they desire.

Three sentences...

Readability: Ease = 48.6; grade level = 11

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17

Which Would You Rather Read?

Scientific knowledge is not only uncertain, but also dynamic. Through research that is designed to reduce uncertainties, our understanding increases and, as a result, we change our assumptions about the impacts of environmental problems and how they should be addressed. For example, for many years we have been concerned mainly with removing large particles of toxic pollutants from airborne emissions, but recent research indicates that small particles of air pollutants may cause greater damage to human lungs than larger particles. This new information not only changes our understanding of the effects of air pollution, but also may significantly impact future pollution prevention and removal strategies.

Readability: Ease = 26; grade level = 1.6

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18

Or this?

Scientific knowledge is not only uncertain, but dynamic.

Using research that is designed to reduce uncertainties, our understanding increases. This may change our assumptions about the impacts of environmental problems and how they should be addressed.

For many years we have been concerned mainly with removing large particles of toxic pollutants from airborne emissions. Recent research indicates that small particles of air pollutants may cause greater damage to human lungs than larger particles. This new information not only changes our understanding of the effects of air pollution, but may also significantly impact future pollution prevention and removal strategies.

Readability: Ease = 34; grade level = 12.5

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19

Why Use Bullets? [1/3]

Does this make sense?

Common sources of air leaks into a home include cracks around windows and doors, gaps along baseboard, mail chutes, cracks in brick, siding, stucco or foundation, or where any external lines (phone, cable, electric, and gas) enter the home.

Read it carefully and problems appear...

Source: www.energy.gov

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20

Why Use Bullets? [2/3]

Modified—shows the problems:

Common sources of air leaks into a home include:

- ▶ Cracks around windows and doors
- ▶ Gaps along baseboards
- ▶ Mail chutes
- ▶ Cracks in brick mortar, siding, stucco or foundations
- ▶ *Entry points* for external lines (phone, cable, electric, and gas)

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21

Why Use Bullets? [3/3]

Now put it back together:

Common sources of air leaks into a home include cracks around windows and doors; gaps along baseboards; mail chutes; cracks in brick mortar, siding, stucco, or foundations; and entry points for external lines (phone, cable, electric, and gas).

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About Readability [1/2] 22

- ▶ Who uses this feature?
- ▶ Average (non-expert) audience reads at 5th/6th or 10th/11th grade level (Example: Newspaper)
- ▶ Aim for 20–25% passive (or less)
- ▶ Readability range 40–70 (audience-driven)
- ▶ Integrated with Microsoft Word spell check
- ▶ Apply selectively

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About Readability [2/2] 23

- ▶ What the numbers mean
- ▶ Not effective with bullets unless punctuated
- ▶ Skewed results when acronyms being created
- ▶ How to install

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Misplaced Modifiers 24

This rule proposes the Spring/Summer subsistence harvest regulations in Alaska for migratory birds that expire on August 31, 2018.

versus

This rule proposes the Spring/Summer subsistence harvest regulations for migratory birds in Alaska. The regulations will expire on August 31, 2018.

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25

Why is Plain Writing so Important?

- ▶ "How to Write Really Badly"
- ▶ Used with permission of Professor Gerald Grow
- ▶ Source: <http://www.longleaf.net/ggrow/Badly.html>

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26

1. Start with a simple statement

We quit because nobody knew how to program the computer.

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2. Put it in passive voice to dilute responsibility

It was decided to quit.

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3. Expand with terminology that does not add meaning

28

It was decided to **terminate**.

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4. Build in noun strings

29

It was decided to terminate **project processes**.

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5. Add a qualifier of uncertain relation to the original statement

30

On account of the status of the computer, it was decided to terminate project processes.

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6. Add noun strings and terminology to the qualifier

31

On account of the status of the computer **program assessment planning development effort**, it was decided to terminate project processes.

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7. Separate related words

32

On account of the status of the computer program assessment planning development effort, it was decided to terminate **until a later date** project processes.

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8. Equivocate (use ambiguity)

33

On account of the uncertain status of the computer program assessment planning development effort, **it was proposed and tentatively adopted to suspend temporarily** until a later date project processes.

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34

9. Obfuscate (make obscure and unclear)

Due to uncertainties in the status of the computer program assessment planning development effort, proposals were **carefully considered** and tentatively adopted to suspend temporarily until a later date project processes.

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35

10. Cover your tracks to make yourself look good

Due to unavoidable uncertainties in the status of the computer program assessment planning development effort, a number of contingency proposals were carefully considered and one was tentatively adopted to suspend on a temporary basis until a later date those project processes deemed unessential to the expeditious fulfillment of contract requirements.

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36

And what did they mean to say?

We decided to quit.

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37

Bring it Together

- ▶ Create talking points or outline for an email or memo
- ▶ Allocate page, paragraph, and word counts

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