

Style - Clarity & Concision

All men are really attracted by the beauty of plain speech [but they] write in a florid style in imitation of this. H. D. Thoreau

It now appears that obligatory ofuscation is a firm tradition within the medical profession [Medical writing] is a highly skilled, calculated attempt to confuse the reader A doctor feels he might get passed over for an assistant professorship because he wrote his papers too clearly - because he made his ideas seem too simple. Michael Crichton, New England Journal of Medicine

With precious few exceptions, all the books on style in English are by writers quite unable to write. The subject, indeed, seems to exercise a special and dreadful fascination over school ma'ams, bucolic college professors, and other such pseudo literates Their central aim, of course, is to reduce the whole thing to a series of simple rules - the over-mastering passion of their melancholy order, at all times and everywhere.
H. L. Mencken.

Two excellent sources:

- 1) Williams, Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace
- 2) Strunk and White, Elements of Style

***These are aids for clearer writing, not rules. What's most important is a good eye and ear.

Clarity

1. Whenever you can, use specific verbs, adverbs, or adjectives rather than abstract nouns to express actions and conditions.

The **intention** of the committee is the **improvement** of company morale.
The committee **intends** to **improve** company morale.

The data **were recorded** with **precision**.
They **recorded** the data **precisely**.

2. When it is appropriate, make the subjects of your verbs the agents of those actions.

A decision on the part of **the dean** in regard to the funding by **the department** of the program must be made for there to be adequate **staff** preparation.
The dean must decide whether **the department** will fund the program if **the staff** is to prepare adequately.

3. Avoid making up new compound noun phrases. Use verbs, adjectives and prepositional phrases.

Administration overrun anticipation capability reviews are being instituted to prevent **surprise military equipment cost prediction problems**.

The administration is reviewing how well it can anticipate overruns so that it will not be surprised by problems with predicting the cost of military equipment.

Concision

1. Watch out for redundant pairs, modifiers, and categories.

Examples of redundant pairs:

fundamental; questions and problems; and so on and so forth.

each and every; first and foremost; any and all; basic and

Examples of phrases with redundant modifiers: personal beliefs, final outcome, end result, basic fundamentals

Examples of redundant categories.- large in size, odd in appearance, in a confused state

During this **period of time**, the birds' beaks turned **black in color** and **shiny in appearance**.

During this **time**, the birds' beaks turned **black** and **shiny**.

2. Watch out for meaningless modifiers.

Examples of meaningless modifiers: kind of, somehow, really, basically, definitely, practically, actually, for all intents and purposes

Most students generally **find** some kind of summer work somehow.

Most students find summer work.

3. Find words for phrases when possible and appropriate.

You should carefully read what you have written to improve your wording and catch small error of grammar and punctuation.

You should edit.

4. Avoid excessive metadiscourse. Metadiscourse is "writing about writing." It is writing that guides the reader rather than informs the reader. Clearly, some metadiscourse is necessary in writing, but if it becomes overbearing, it obscures the meaning of the sentence.

Examples of metadiscourse: most people believe that, allegedly, it is widely assumed, as you can see, consider the problem of ..

The last point I would like to make here is that in regard to men-women relationships, **it is important to keep in mind that** the greatest changes have **in all probability** occurred in the way men and women **seem to** be working next to one another.

The greatest changes in men-women relationships have occurred in the way men and women work next to one another. (The sentence pruned of metadiscourse)

Relationships between men and women have changed most in the way they work together. (An improvement over the previous sentence once pruning occurred).

5. Avoid indirect negatives. To understand many negatives, we have to translate them into affirmatives, because the negative may only imply what we should do by telling us what we shouldn't do. The affirmative states it directly.

Payments should not be forwarded if there has not been due notification of this office.
Before you forward any payments, notify this office.

Edit the following sentences. (Invent subjects where necessary)

Clarity

1. I conducted an investigation of natural selection in the wild.
2. A need exists for more study of natural selection.
3. There is the possibility that the species will not respond to the experimental treatment.
4. An experimental approach to the study of natural selection on the part of evolutionary biologists has become a necessity.
5. There was precision in the preparation of the data.
6. There is a great need for examination of the underlying assumptions **by** anyone interested in this issue.
7. The interpretation of data is determined by the results of statistical analysis..
8. Which group is correct, the creationists or the evolutionists, has not yet been determined.
9. The discovery in regard to transitional fossils has been acknowledged.
10. After the birds are tagged, they will be followed for two weeks.
11. The goal of this article is to describe a bird natural selection study.

Concision

1. We should not try to anticipate in advance those great events which will completely revolutionize our society because past history tells us that it has been the ultimate outcome of little events that has unexpectedly surprised us.

2. During that period of time, the mucous membrane area became pink in color and shiny in appearance.

3. The holes must be aligned in an accurate manner.