Writing Forensic Reports

A workshop developed for ICFP
by
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Put it before them briefly so they will read it, clearly so they will appreciate it, picturesquely so they will remember it, and above all, accurately so they will be guided by its light.

Joseph Pulitzer - 19th century journalist and newspaper publisher
Practical tips for

- Punctuation
- Vocabulary
- Verbs
- Planning
- Reviewing
To punctuate or not to punctuate, that is the question.
HUNTERS
PLEASE USE CAUTION WHEN HUNTING PEDESTRIANS USING WALK TRAILS
Abbreviations

- Which is correct?
  - SAA or S.A.A.  SAA
  - Mr or Mr.  Mr
  - etc or etc.  etc
  - ie or i.e.  ie
  - eg or e.g.  eg
Acronyms

- SMART
- UNISA
- Aids
- golf
- posh
- scuba
DATE AND TIME CONVENTIONS

- Date format:
  - 2016 - 11 -23 (ISO8601)
  - 21 November 2016 (letters and emails)
    eg: I will see you on 23 November 2016

- Time format:
  - 13:20 (ISO8601)
Bullet points today

Our discussions included:

- Potential fuel sources
- Use for thermal loads
- Locations of high energy usage
- Areas of wasted energy
- Suitability of technology
Every policy owner is responsible for the following:

- Policy drafting
- Stakeholder input
- Document finalisation

No full stops necessary - points are not sentences.
The responsibilities of the policy owner are as follows:

- A draft policy document is to be prepared.
- Input must be obtained from the various stakeholders.
- The final draft of the policy document has to be written.

Bullets are full sentences so full stops necessary.
The policy owner is responsible for:

- preparing a draft policy document;
- obtaining input from the various stakeholders; and
- updating the document if there are any changes.

Each bullet completes the stem sentence and begins with a GERUND. Use a semi-colon and ‘and’ before last bullet.
The policy owner is responsible for the following:

- Preparing a draft policy document.
- Obtaining input from the various stakeholders.
- Updating the document if there are any changes.

Bullets are gerundial phrases. They do not complete the stem sentence. Use upper case to show each is a complete thought.
Our discussions included:

- Potential fuel sources
- Use for thermal loads
- Locations of high energy usage
- Areas of wasted energy
- Suitability of technology
Q. WHICH EPIDEMIC KILLS 30,000 AMERICANS EVERY YEAR?

A. EBOLA

B. EBULLET
Numbered points

There are three applications for this technology:

1. The insurance industry.
2. The Defence Force.
3. The pharmaceutical industry.
I can't believe I went out with a colon:
I was just another item on his list!
To be born a gentleman is an accident; to die a gentleman is an achievement.
Apostrophes - possession

- John’s books
- The boys’ books
- Thomas’s books
- BUT
DON’T use apostrophes to form plurals!
CHOOSE SIMPLE, SPECIFIC WORDS FOR PRECISE MEANING
Can you spot the errors in the activity on page 15?

Good luck!
We only recently became aware of this specification.
We find ourselves in a unique situation.
This is the better of the two cars.
The machine broke down frequently.
The prize money was divided amongst the three winners.
Inform your clients about our referral programme.
I applied to the licensing department for a driving licence.
There were fewer spectators yesterday at cricket than there were last week.
The doctor’s tone implied the patient’s condition was critical.
I SMSed my results to the committee.
And remember, to write well, always prefer the short vocable to the sesquipedalian...
Prefer the short word to the long word.
What is *technical* jargon?

Words or expressions used by a particular profession or group that are difficult for others to understand.

- *Oxford South African Dictionary*
A Poem about Business Jargon

We beg to advise and wish to state
That yours has arrived of recent date.
We have it before us, its contents noted,
And herewith enclose the prices we quoted.
Attached please find, as per your request,
The samples you wanted, and we would suggest
Regarding the matter and due to the fact
That up until now your order we've lacked.
We hope you will not delay it unduly
And beg to remain yours very truly.

Anon
Rules of thumb for jargon

Does the jargon add meaning?

- No?
- BIN IT!
Rules of thumb for jargon

Ask yourself:

- Would you ever say this to someone?
- No?
- Bin it!
Please be advised that there is a deadline for registration, which should be noted and strictly adhered to.

The deadline for registration is 30 June 2016.

Should you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact me as per my details below.

Please let me know if you have any further queries.

It has come to my attention that various items of equipment are missing from the media room.

Various items of equipment are missing from the media room.
Our previous meeting referred. As mentioned, XYZ will be managing this process going forward.

As we discussed yesterday, XYZ will manage this process in future.

Attached please find the complete documentation for your kind attention as requested.

I have attached the documents as you requested.
Where is our language going to?

2015 Word of the Year
Emojis are no longer the preserve of texting teens - instead they have been embraced as a nuanced form of expression ... which can cross language barriers.

Oxford Words Blog
16 November 2015
How do new words enter the dictionary?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=juwDkP3ovIY

How do we decide when a new word should be added to one of our dictionaries?
CHOOSE THE RIGHT VERBS

tive and passive
ice
rallelism
bject-verb
reement
Prefer the active voice

ACTIVE VOICE

- The Leadership Blog brings you insight, opinion and debate from our senior partners.

PASSIVE VOICE

- You are brought insight, opinion and debate from our senior partners by The Leadership Blog.
Active verbs make writing direct, clear and concise.

Passive verbs can add variety to writing. They can soften commands, emphasise results, help doers escape accountability, and slow the pace of your writing.

(Adapted from Booher & Hill, 1989: 116)
BUT - passive voice can damage meaning

Passive Voice

- It was suggested that the schedules be revised by the project manager.

- It is believed that the city should increase its reserve water supply.

Active Voice

- The project manager should revise the schedules.

- Management suggested that the project manager should revise the schedules.

- The city should increase its reserve water supply.
The following compliance requirements will be included in the onsite assessments.

The onsite assessments will include the six compliance requirements.
The sentence was written in the active voice by the boy.
The boy wrote in the passive voice.

"You're just messing with me, aren't you."
Use parallelism

- Use parallelism to ‘match’ words, phrases or sentences that are similar in structure
- Use the Rule of 3 for emphasis

He came; he saw; he conquered
Over to you

Please observe the following regulations:

- Equipment must be reserved two weeks ahead
- Removing equipment without signing out is not approved
- Equipment must be returned within 48 hours of use
Please observe the following regulations:

- Reserve equipment two weeks ahead
- Sign out equipment before removing it
- Return equipment within 48 hours of use
Match subjects and verbs

“My subject and verb have agreed to disagree.”
Over to you

Choose the correct verb from the pairs in brackets on page 26

Good luck!
PLAN YOUR DOCUMENT

- Brain dump the content of the document
- Organise material logically
Purpose of a document

Transmit information

Motivate
The purpose of your document

- Transmitting information
  - Giving information?
  - Giving bad news?

- Motivating
  - Requesting information?
  - Requesting a favour?
  - Persuading?
  - Advising?
CHECK THE READABILITY SCORE
The Fog Index

- Pick a 100 word sample
- Calculate the average sentence length (A)
- Count the number of words with 3 or more syllables (B) excluding:
  - Capitalised
  - Numbers in numerals
  - Abbreviations
- \[ A + B = C \]
- \[ C \times 0.4 = \text{Fog Index} \]
Some Readability Guidelines

- Email 10
- Blogs 11
- Business 12
- Technical 14
Conclusion

What is the best tip you are taking away from this session?

- Punctuation
- Vocabulary
- Verbs
- Planning
- Reviewing