

Writing Forensic Reports

A workshop developed for ICFP

by

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Joseph Pulitzer - 19th century
journalist and newspaper
publisher



*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.*

Practical tips for



- ▶ Punctuation
- ▶ Vocabulary
- ▶ Verbs
- ▶ Planning
- ▶ Reviewing

USE PUNCTUATION TO MAKE YOUR POINT

**To punctuate
or not to punctuate,
that is the question.**





HUNTERS

**PLEASE USE
CAUTION
WHEN HUNTING
PEDESTRIANS
USING
WALK TRAILS**



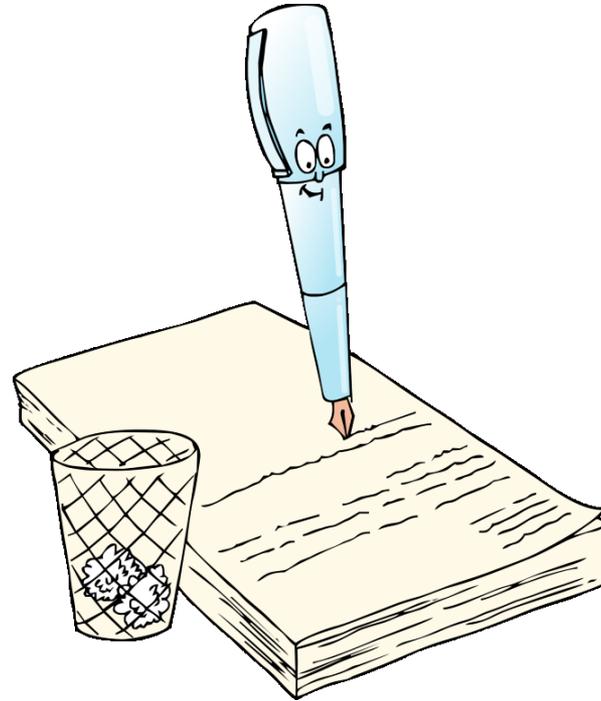
Abbreviations

▶ 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*



Bullets - traditional rule #1

Every policy owner is responsible for the following:

- ▶ *Policy drafting*
- ▶ *Stakeholder input*
- ▶ *Document finalisation*

No full stops necessary - points are not sentences.



Bullets - traditional rule #2

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.



Bullets traditional rule #3

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.



Bullets -traditional rule #4

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.



Bullet points in practice

Our discussions included:

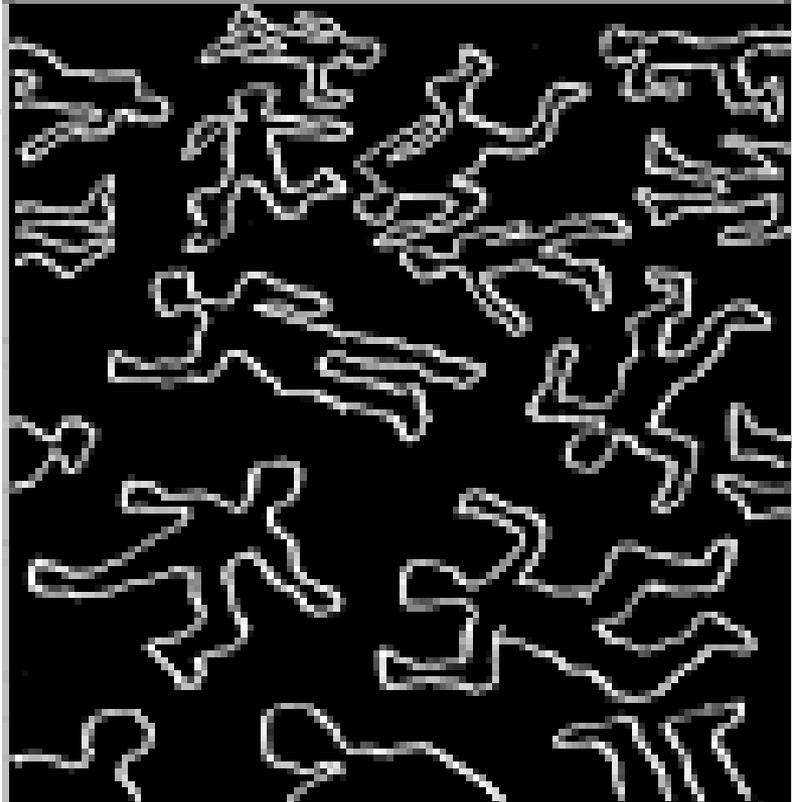
- ▶ *Potential fuel sources*
- ▶ *Use for thermal loads*
- ▶ *Locations of high energy usage*
- ▶ *Areas of wasted energy*
- ▶ *Suitability of technology*

Q. WHICH EPIDEMIC KILLS 30,000 AMERICANS EVERY YEAR?

A. EBOLA



B. EBULLET



www.funtrivia.com © 2004 by Trivia Partners, LLC



Numbered points

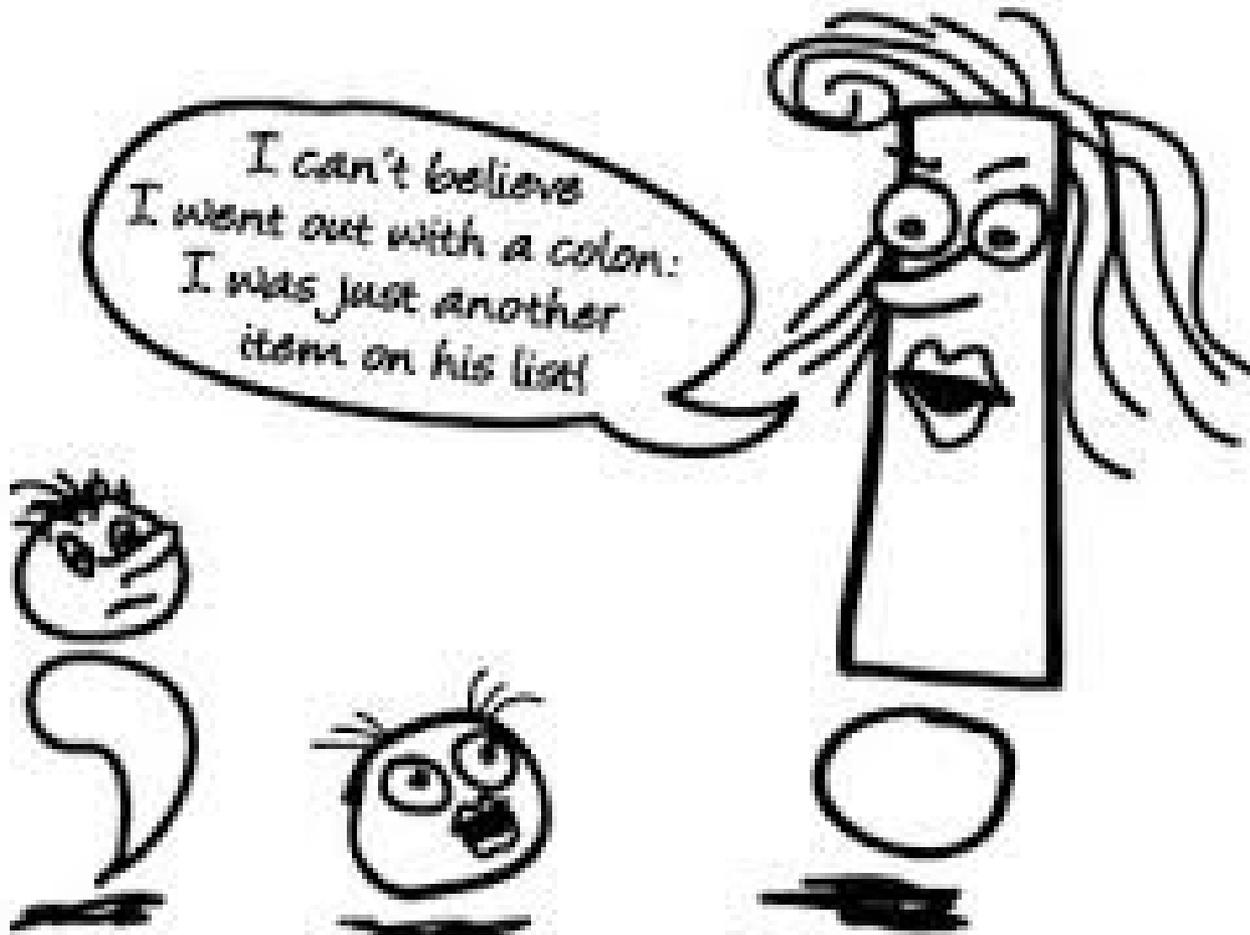
There are three applications for this technology:

- 1. The insurance industry.*
- 2. The Defence Force.*
- 3. The pharmaceutical industry.*





Colon





Semicolon

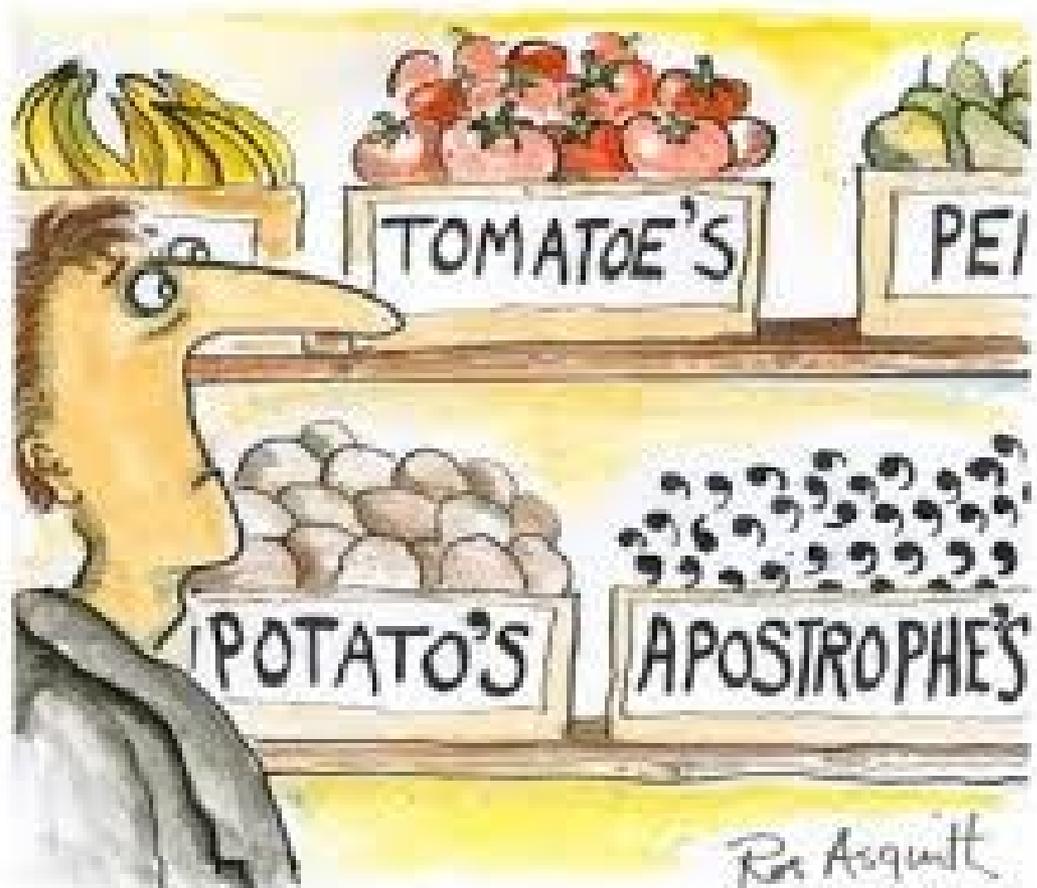
To be born a gentleman
is an accident;
to die a gentleman is an
achievement.



Apostrophes - possession

- ▶ John's books
 - ▶ The boys' books
- BUT*
- ▶ Thomas's books

DON'T use apostrophes to form plurals!



CHOOSE SIMPLE, SPECIFIC WORDS FOR PRECISE MEANING



Over to you

Can you spot the errors in the activity on page 15?

Good luck!



USING THE RIGHT WORDS

- ▶ 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
vocabulary 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

It has come to my attention that...

peruse



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.



More jargon

- ▶ Our previous meeting refers. 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



“

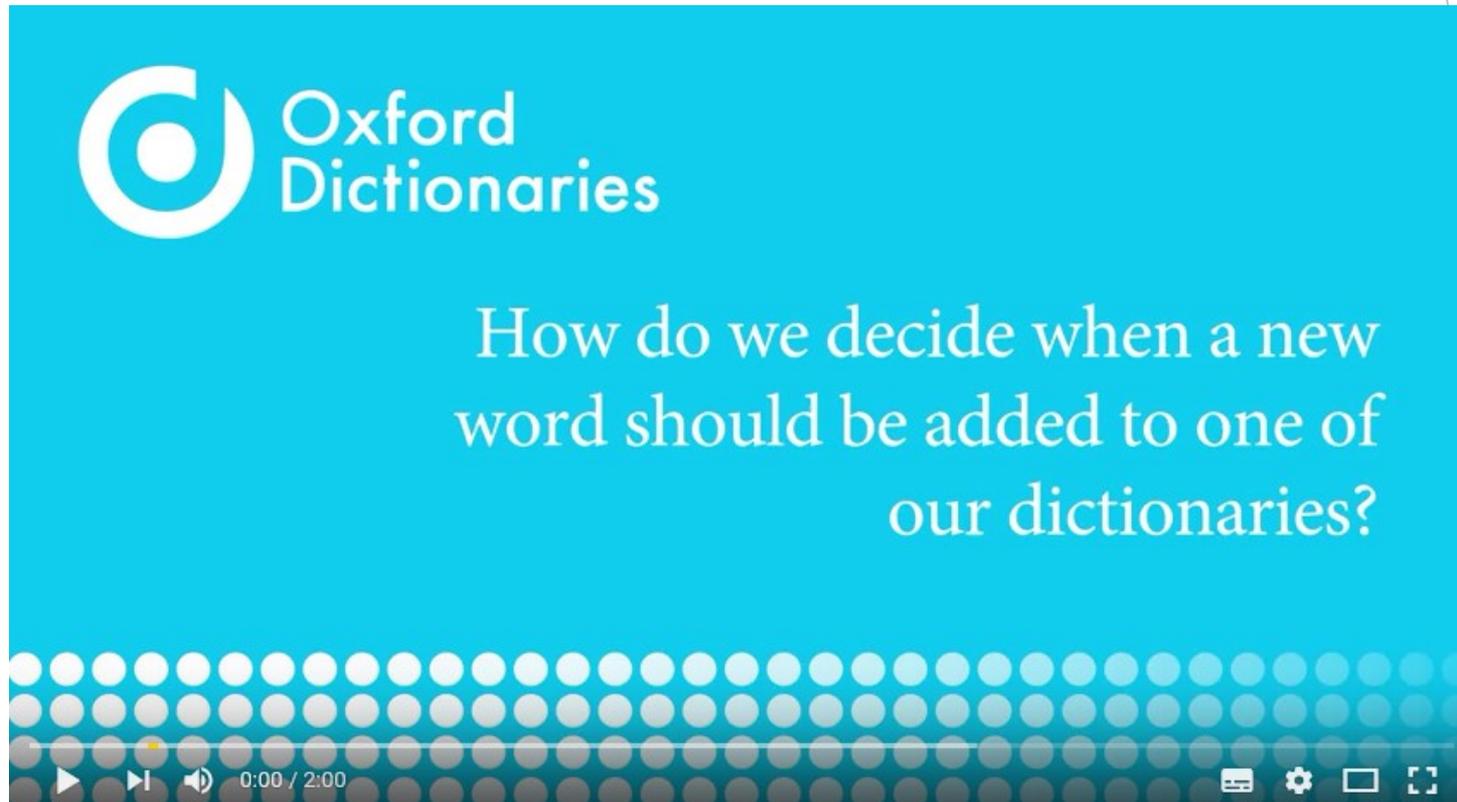
Emojis are no longer the preserve of texting teens - instead they have been embraced as a nuanced form of expression ... which can cross language barriers.

Oxford Words Blog
16 November 2015

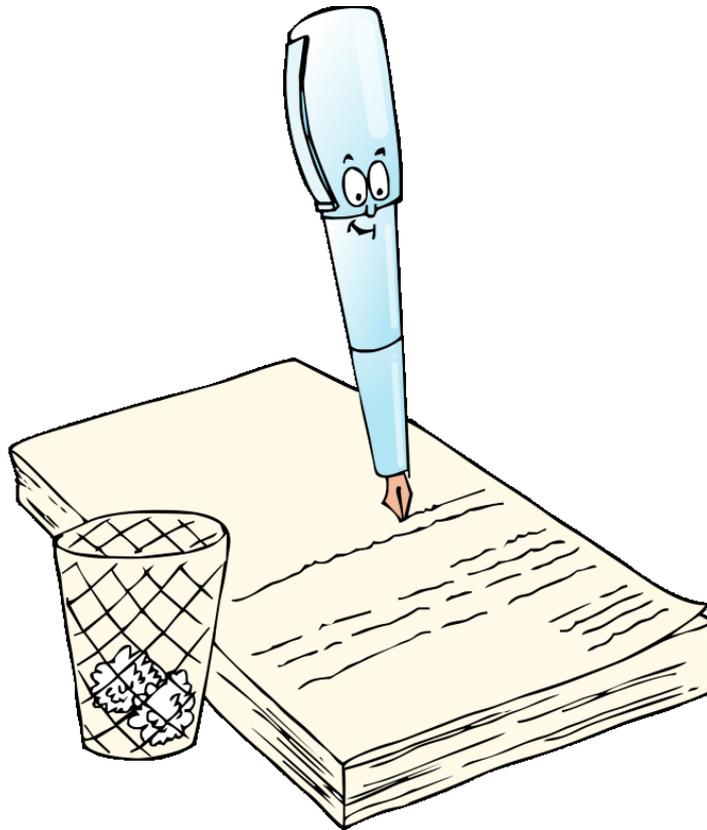
”

How do new words enter the dictionary?

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



CHOOSE THE RIGHT VERBS



active and passive
voice

parallelism

subject-verb
agreement



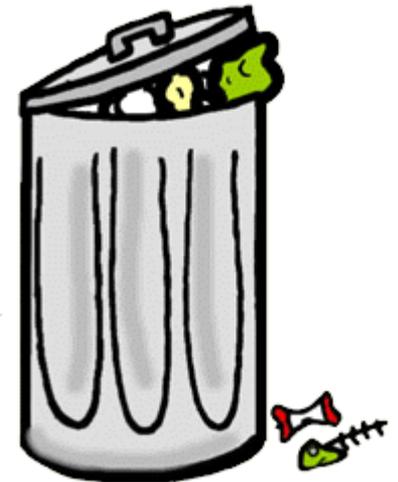
Prefer the active voice

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.

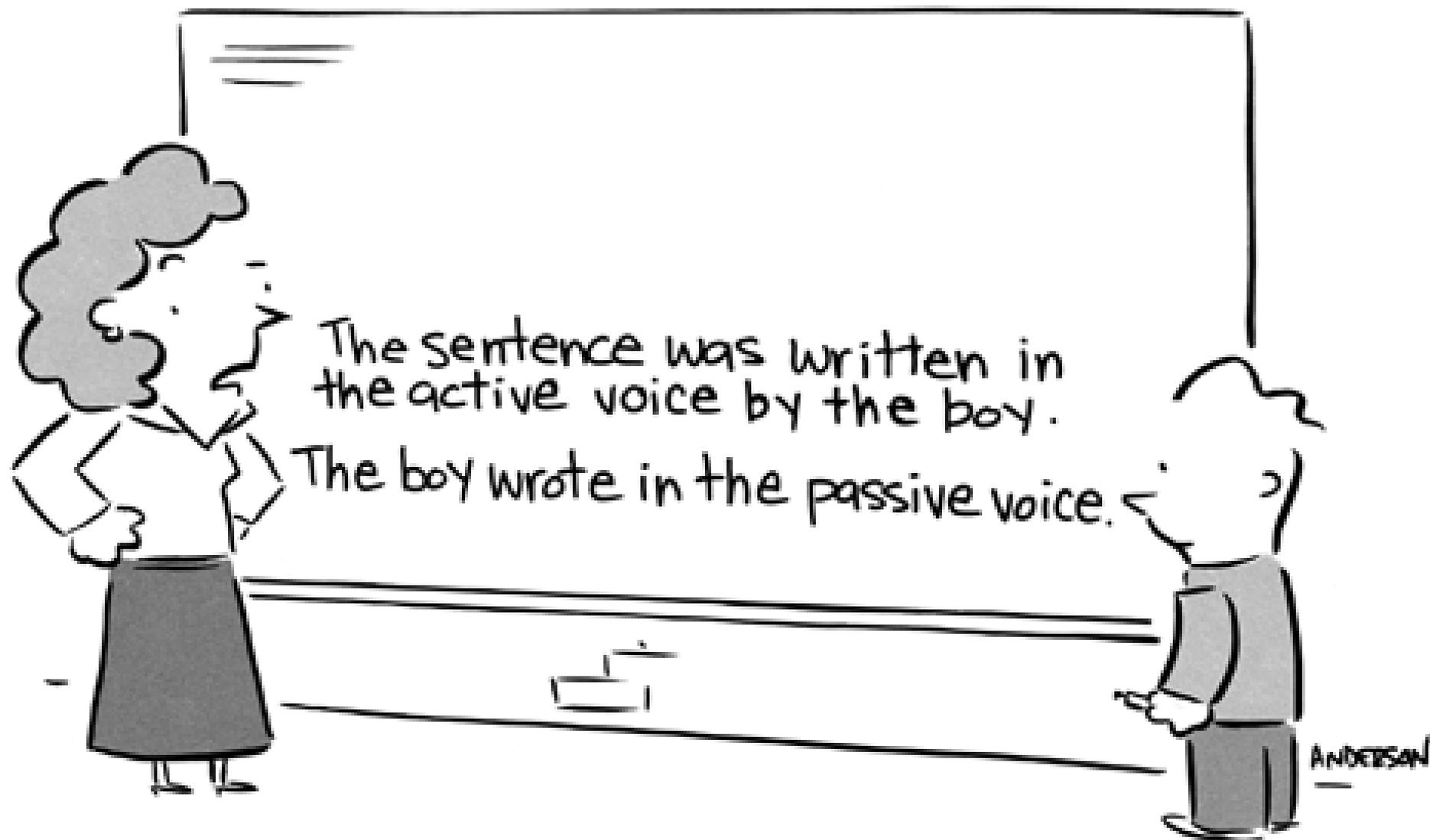
Active Voice

- ▶ 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.

Over to you

- ▶ The following compliance requirements will be included in the onsite assessments.
- ▶ The onsite assessments will include the site compliance requirements





"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



Simpler
Better
Faster



*He came; he saw;
he conquered.*



Over to you

Please observe the following regulations:

- ▶ Equipment must be reserved two weeks ahead
- ▶ Removing equipment without sign out is not approved
- ▶ Equipment must be returned within hours of use





Parallel sentence

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

ANDERTOONS.COM



"My subject and verb have agreed to disagree."

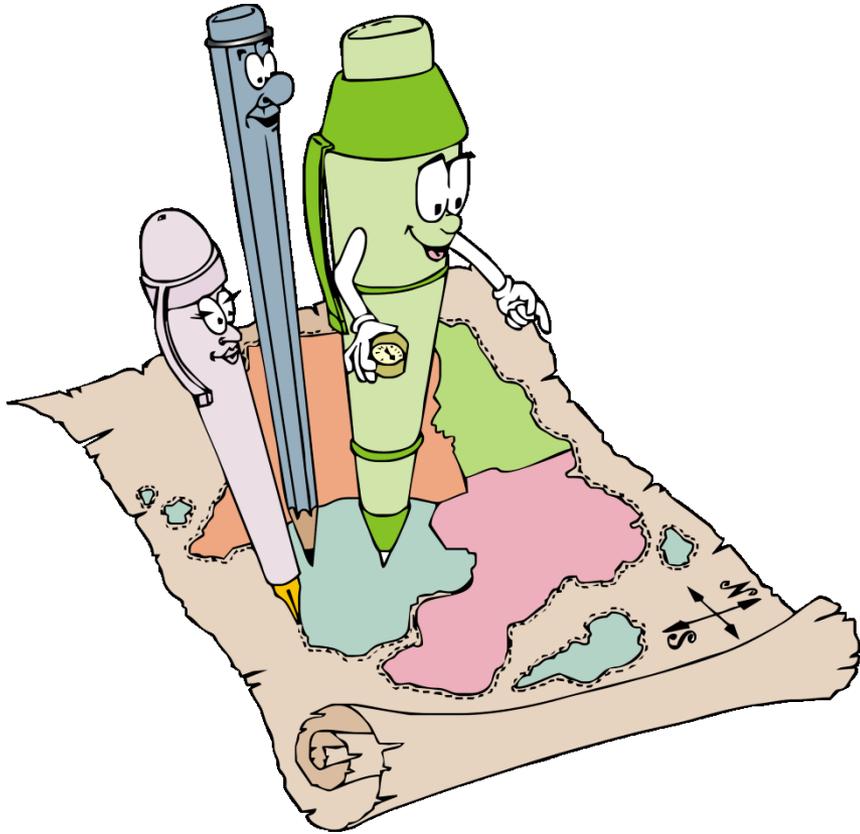
Over to you

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

```
graph TD; A[Purpose of a document] --- B[Transmit information]; A --- C[Motivate]
```

Transmit
information

Motivate



The purpose of your document

- ▶ *Transmitting information*
 - ▶ Giving information?
 - ▶ Giving bad news?
- ▶ *Motivating*
 - ▶ Requesting information?
 - ▶ Requesting a favour?
 - ▶ Persuading?
 - ▶ Advising?

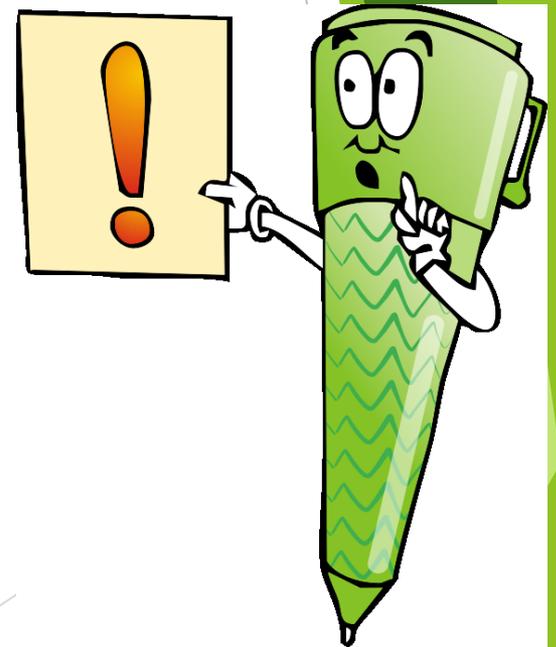


CHECK THE READABILITY SCORE



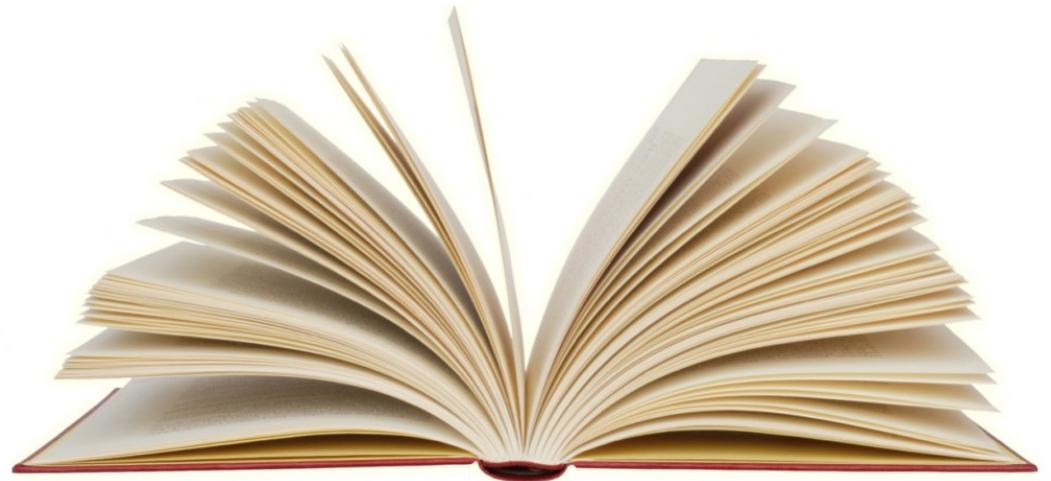
The Fog Index

- ▶ 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**

