

# 5 Basic Rules of English Writing That Everyone Should Know

1

## Try to avoid overly long sentences.

Long sentences aren't necessarily bad, but if you lose your audience, they are.

As a rule of thumb, a sentence should not have more than 10 to 15 words.



2

## Each sentence should make a clear statement.

It should add to the statement that went before. A good paragraph is a series of clear, linked statements.

As a rule of thumb, a paragraph should not consist of more than 100 to 200 words.

### Change paragraphs when...

- A new character comes along.
- A new event happens.
- A new idea is introduced.
- The setting changes.
- A new person is speaking.
- Time moves forward or backward a lot.
- The "camera" moves.



3

## Do not use words whose meanings you are not sure of.

Try to avoid wanting to sound super-intelligent by using words that you don't understand. Know the words that you use. If you need to use special words, look them up in a dictionary before, or use words that you understand instead.



4

## Use concrete rather than vague language.

**Vague:** The weather was of an extreme nature on the West Coast. This sentence raises frustrating questions:

- When did this extreme weather occur?
- What does "of an extreme nature" mean?
- Where on the West Coast did this take place?

**Concrete:** California had unusually cold weather last week.

**Reminder:** Try to avoid jargon. Use words that are appropriate for the reader.



5

## Don't use two negatives to make a positive without good reason.



**Terrible:** I don't know nothing about computers.

**Better:** I don't know anything about computers.

**Better:** I know nothing about computers.

**Unnecessary:** He is not unwilling to help.

**Better:** He is willing to help.

Sometimes a not un- construction may be desirable, perhaps even necessary.

**Example:** The book is uneven but not uninteresting.

