

The ABC of Technical Writing



The ABC of Effective Technical Writing

- **Accuracy**
- **Brevity**
- **Clarity**



Accuracy

- **2 types**
- **Accuracy of Information**
- **accuracy of expression**

Means grammatical, punctuation, spelling, accent, intonation correctness, non-verbal mannerisms.

- **Now look at the following sentences. Say which sentence is correct and why.**
 - a) Only Muneer scored two goals.**
 - b) Two goals were scored by Muneer only.**
 - c) Muneer scored two goals only.**
 - d) Two goals only were scored by Muneer.**



Techniques Of Precision

- **I – Use simple and familiar words.**

- **Ignite –burn**
- **Retained unenclosed-open**
- **Yielding - producing**
- **Colloquial- informal**
- **Tumultuous- noisy**
- **Exuberant -lively**



Word Choice:



Category	Example	Substitute
nouns	utilization functionality	use feature
verbs	facilitate finalize	cause end
adjectives	aforementioned individualized	mentioned individual
adverbs	firstly, secondly, heretofore	first, second previous

Word Choice:

- ***Avoid too many “to be” verbs***
for example: “is” “was” “were” “has been” “have been”.
- ***Avoid excess words***, which slow comprehension of the main point.

made arrangements for	arranged
made the decision	decided
made the measurement of	measured
performed the development of	developed
is working as expected	works as expected



II-Using exact words And Phrases

- **Stationary-**
- **Stationery-**
- **Complement**
- **compliment**



III-Avoid difficult words and complex Jargon

- **Jargon: a vocabulary** particular to a place of work (*abbreviations, slang*)

- **Audience familiarity** with the topic determines appropriate use of jargon

Ex. 1: For the first year, the links with SDPC and the HAC were not connected, and all required OCS input data were artificially loaded. Thus CATCH22 and MERWIN were not available.

Because some of the links in the computer system were not connected the first year, we could

- **not run all the software codes.**

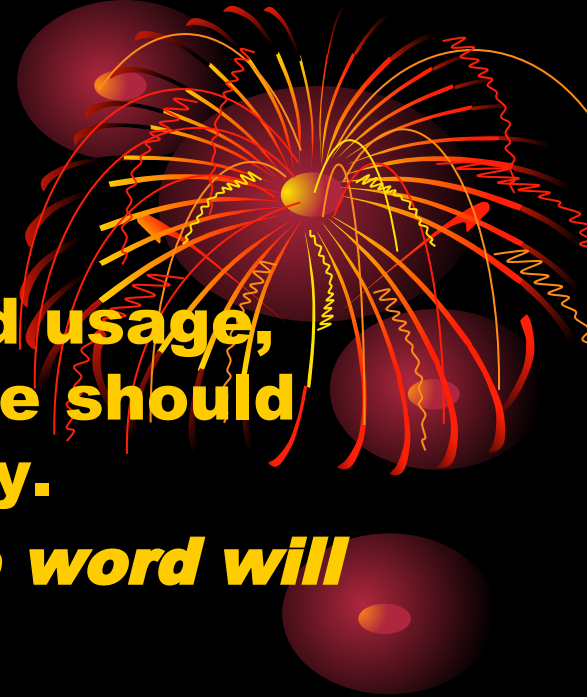


Brevity

- **Brevity means economy in word usage, pruning away useless words. We should avoid repetition and redundancy.**
- ***Never use two words when one word will do.***

Look at the following sentences.

- 1) Maria lives in a city called Bangalore, in a place called Indira Nagar.**
- 2) Maria lives in Indira Nagar in Bangalore.**
- 3) On the face of it: apparently**



Techniques of Brevity

- **Avoid Wordiness**
- **Avoid repetition**



Avoid wordiness

1) X Sexual assault against a child presents a significant problem to society and there is much evidence that sexual assault impacts negatively on the psychosocial development of children.

✓ Sexual assault has a negative impact on the psychosocial development of children.

2) X It may be expected that the prevalence of relatively mild asthma could be underestimated.

✓ The prevalence of mild asthma could have been underestimated.


3) X The severity of this disease has been demonstrated to be associated with age.

✓ The severity of this disease increases with age.

Definitive evidence: has been shown to be → is

Less certain evidence: has been shown to be → may be/can



- 
- **We studied the subsequent development of infection.**
 - **It is equally as important as...**
 - **There is no need to repeat the tests again. OR There is no need to conduct the test again.**
 - **To date, no recent information is available about children who present to hospital with this condition.**
 - **Many risks were prevented thanks to advance planning.**
 - **When designing a study, the primary key issue is to articulate the aims.**
 - **1 ✗ This *questionnaire is likely to produce very* inaccurate estimates of dietary intake.**
 - **✓ Most dietary measurements will be inaccurate if this questionnaire is used.**
 - **2 ✗ We studied our subjects over a considerable period of time.**
 - **✓ We continued to follow our participants for 12 years.**



- *are found to be in agreement*
- *analyses were made* • *make adjustments to* • *give consideration to*
- *take measurements of*
- *in most cases*
- *due to the fact that*
- *in close proximity*
- *with the exception of*

Use **agree**

Use **analyze**

Use **adjust**

Use **consider** Use **measure**

Use **mostly**

Use **because**

Use **near**

Use **except**

- *(more) dominant*
- *(quite) impossible*
- *(very) unique*



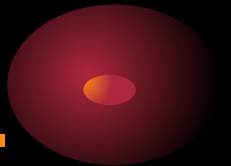
Avoid repetition

- **Repeating key terms throughout a paragraph can also help to maintain thought processes but avoid using the same word twice in one sentence because it becomes clumsy and boring.**
- **1 ✗ We need reliable screening procedures for identifying the signs and symptoms to identify children who are at greatest risk.**
- **✓ We need reliable screening tools to identify children who are at greatest risk.**
- **2 ✗ No adequate clinical measures for quantifying back abnormalities in the clinical setting are currently available.**
- **✓ There are no adequate methods for quantifying back abnormalities in clinical settings.**



Clarity

- **Clarity in writing means the ability to state our thoughts without any ambiguity.**
- **It is unnecessary to use a polysyllabic word where a monosyllabic one will do. Needless use of long words or abstract words result in obscurity**
- **There can be two types of clarity.**
- **grammatical and conceptual.**
- **Meaning clear to audience.Hence,analysis.**



Avoid Ambiguity

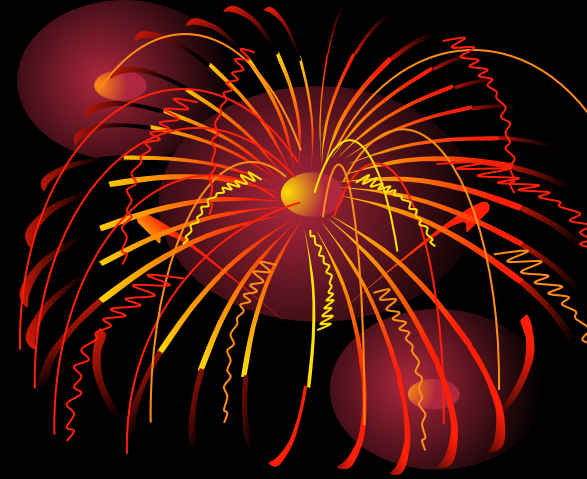
- **Choose words whose meanings are *clear* .**
- ***Order the words* in your sentences carefully.**
- **Ex. 1: In low water temperatures and high toxicity levels of oil, we tested how well the microorganisms survived.**
- **Ex. 2: We tested how well the microorganisms survived in low water temperatures and high toxicity levels of oil.**



- **Ex. 1: In low water temperatures and high toxicity levels of oil, we tested how well the microorganisms survived.**
- **Ex. 2: We tested how well the microorganisms survived in low water temperatures and high toxicity levels of oil.**



Clarity: Define the unfamiliar



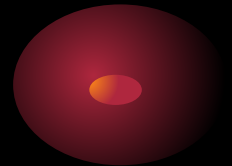
- If you must abbreviate, define the term in its first occurrence, and *put abbreviations in parentheses.*
- *Italicize first occurrence* of unfamiliar terms and define them right away.

Grammatical Clarity

One of the aid to clarity is adequate punctuation.



Look at the following sentence:



- 1) **I wrote a book with Mr.Khalil and Mr. Mabruk and Mr. Nayim edited it**

The ambiguity in the above sentence can be removed only by a comma.

- 2) **I wrote a book with Mr.Khalil, and Mr. Mabruk and Mr. Nayim edited it.**
- 3) **I wrote a book with Mr.Khalil and Mr. Mabruk ,and Mr. Nayim edited it.**

Pronoun reference



He took out his handkerchief and his pen, then wiped his forehead, blew his nose, and put it back into his pocket.

Did he put his nose back in to his pocket(!) or his pen or his handkerchief?

For clarity, each pronoun should not be far away from the noun it refers to.

Conceptual Clarity

- **By conceptual clarity, we mean that whatever concepts we are trying to describe should be such that the reader should be able to easily empathize with what we write.**

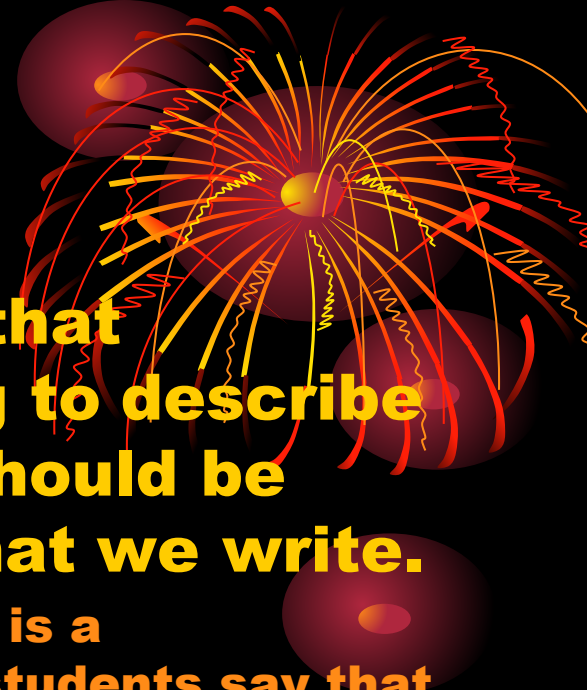
Muna is a teacher at the college level and she is a knowledgeable person. She is thin but her students say that she can keep her class under control.

To show that I liked her I wrote:

Muna is a professor and she is a real scholar. She is slim and her students say that she is a born leader.

To show that I disliked her I wrote:

Muna behaves like a school ma'am and is a real egghead. She is skinny and her students say that he is a Hitler, a dictator to the core.



Techniques of Clarity

- **Use direct language**
No scope for
- ✓ **Roundabout construction**
- ✓ **Indirect expressions**
- ✓ **Exaggeration**
- ✓ **Artificial eloquence**



Avoid roundabout constructions

- ✗ *There are three distinct flow characteristics in these photographs.*
- ✓ These photographs show three distinct flow characteristics.
- ✗ *It might be expected that there would be some flow separation.* ✓ Some flow separation might be expected.
- ✗ *It appears that the flow field over the nozzles is complex.*
- ✓ The flow field over the nozzles appears to be complex. ✗ *It was shown in reference 1 that...* ✓ Reference 1 showed that...
- ✓ Hathwell (ref. 1) showed that...
- => Don't postpone important information.



Denotation and Connotation



- **The denotative meaning of a word is its literal meaning.**
- **Connotation is the underlying feeling that you get , besides the primary meaning of the word.**
- **“Smell”** is purely denotative.
- **“Aroma”** gives you a positive feeling and has favourable connotations.
- **“Stench”** makes you wrinkle up your nose and gives you unfavourable connotations.