

# Unit 1

## 1.1 Introduction

- Good writing communicates an idea clearly and effectively
- Good writing is elegant and stylish (not so important as communicating clearly and effectively)
- Good writer:
  - Has something to say
  - Logical thinking
  - A few simple, learnable rules of style
- **Good writing can be learned**
  - Read, pay attention, and imitate
  - Write in a journal
  - Let go of "academic" writing habits
  - Talk about your research before trying to write about it
  - Write to engage your readers - try not to bore them!
  - Stop waiting for "inspiration"
  - Accept that writing is hard for everyone
  - Revise. Nobody gets it perfect on the first try
  - Learn how to cut ruthlessly. Never become too attached to your words
  - Find a good editor (Somebody that has nothing to do with the research)

## 1.2 Examples of what not to do

- Hard and not understandable sentences
- A lot of information in one sentence, but not engaging the reader
- Turning *verbs* into *nouns* ⇒ makes the sentence clunky and heavy

## 1.3 Overview: Principles of effective writing

1. Cut unnecessary words and phrases; learn to part with your words!
2. Use the active voice (subject + verb + object)
3. Write with verbs: use strong verbs, avoid turning verbs into nouns, and don't bury the main verb.

## 1.4 Cut the Clutter



- Cut unnecessary words
  - **Be vigilant and ruthless**
    - After investing much effort to put words on a page, we often find it hard to part with them
    - Try the sentence without the extra words and see how it's better - conveys the same idea with *more power*.
- Common clutter:
  1. Dead weight words and phrases (e.g. "As it is well known", "It can be regarded that",...)
  2. Empty words and phrases (Don't add information)
  3. Long words or phrases that could be short (e.g. "This is due to the fact that" ⇒ *Because*)
  4. Unnecessary jargon and acronyms (Reader has to figure out what you mean. Slow reading down.)
  5. Repetitive words or phrases
  6. Adverbs

## 1.5 More tricks to cut the clutter

- Eliminate negatives
- Eliminate superfluous uses of "there are/there is"
- Omit needless prepositions (*For example "that" and "on" are often unnecessary*)

## 1.6 Practice cutting clutter

## Examples

<u>Aa</u> No	 Original sentence	 Decluttered sentence
<u>1</u>	Anti-inflammatory drugs may be protective for the occurrence of Alzheimer's Disease	Anti-inflammatory drugs may protect against Alzheimer's Disease
<u>2</u>	Clinical seizures have been estimated to occur in 0.5% to 2.3% of the neonatal population	Clinical seizures occur in 0.5% to 2.3% of newborns
<u>3</u>	Ultimately p53 guards not only against malignant transformation but also plays a role in developmental processes as diverse as aging, differentiation, and fertility	Besides preventing cancer, p53 also plays roles in aging, differentiation, and fertility
<u>4</u>	Injuries to the brain and spinal cord have long been known to be among the most devastating and expensive of all injuries to treat medically	Injuries to the brain and spinal cord are among the most devastating and expensive
<u>5</u>	An IQ test measures an individual's abilities to perform functions that usually fall in the domains of verbal communication, reasoning, and performance on tasks that represent motor and spatial capabilities	An IQ test measures an individual's verbal, reasoning or motor and spatial abilities
<u>6</u>	As we can see from Figure 2, if the return kinetic energy is less than 3.2 eV, there will be two electron trajectories associated with this kinetic energy	Figure 2 shows that a return kinetic energy less than 3.2 eV yields two electron trajectories