5 Tips for Clear Writing

These tips highlight what Style Sheets Editorial Services does for business writers, policy professionals, and researchers. Email us soon to find out how we can help you! —Cynthia Williams, MPA

1. Use active voice.

Strong verbs make your point concisely. Search for weak verbs — be, is, was, were — and replace them with active ones.

Original: The second phase is for each team to gather data.

Revised: In phase two, each team gathers data.

2. The early verb gets the worm.

Place the verb early in a sentence. Without action to provide context, readers may get confused by sentences that start with a string of nouns.

Original: The accomplishments focused on in this report for the Family Support Agency show a successful fiscal year.

Revised: This report outlines the accomplishments that led to a successful fiscal year for the Family Support Agency.

3. Hyphens and "-ation" and "-ize" — oh my!

Jargony prose often contains too many hyphenated terms and words ending in "-ation" or "-ize." Make sentences more readable by using simpler words.

Original: The teams operationalized resource-efficiency goals.

Revised: The teams set benchmarks to measure whether resources were used efficiently.

4. Be stingy with prepositional phrases.

A writer's point can get lost in a jumble of prepositional phrases (e.g., those starting with "from," "in," "of," "to," and "with"). Reducing such phrases results in stronger prose.

Original: The team designed and directed a national initiative to test a framework to develop community collaboration around the use and sharing of data to inform strategies to end health disparities.
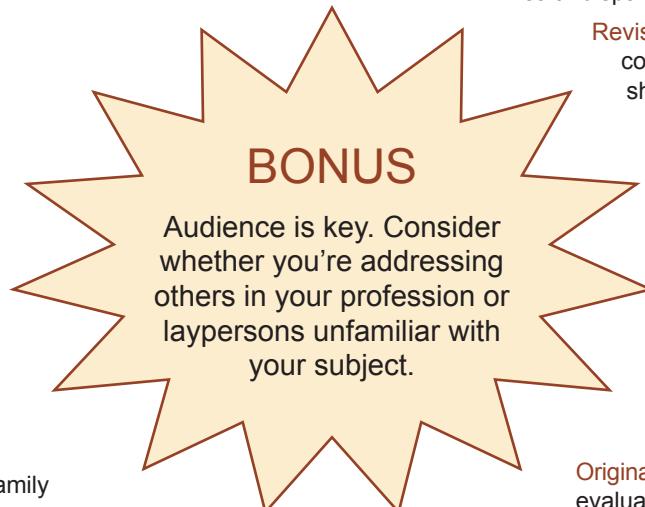
Revised: The framework will help develop community collaboration for using and sharing data that informs strategies to end health disparities. The team designed and directed a national initiative to test that framework.

5. Run on; run on.

It helps to rephrase or break up sentences that include too many clauses, commas, dashes, or parentheses.

Original: The team of researchers and evaluators is working with grantees on a multisite project involving organizations at different levels of progress and assessing their needs, according to the evaluation plans specific to each site and goals outlined at the summit.

Revised: The multisite project involves organizations at different progress levels. At the summit, each organization created site-specific evaluation plans and goals. The team plans to assess each organization's needs.

BONUS

Audience is key. Consider whether you're addressing others in your profession or laypersons unfamiliar with your subject.

We're here to help you. Email info@stylesheetseditorial.com today!