

Hints on style for scientific and technical writing

Use sentences which are reasonably short and not too complex.

Too much information in a single sentence makes it difficult to understand. It also increases the likelihood of grammatical errors and ambiguity.

Vary the sentences.

Use a mixture of short, simple and longer, more complex sentences.

Avoid 'roundabout' phrasing.

NO Combustion of this material can be accomplished in the presence of oxygen.

YES This material can be burned in oxygen.

NO One of the problems encountered with Glug is the difficulty experienced in extruding the material out of 30ml tubes.

YES It is difficult to squeeze Glug out of 30ml tubes.

Be as specific as possible.

NO ... shall carry out measurements of certain parameters.

YES ... shall measure weight and temperature.

NO There will be three vertical pedestrian access points.

YES There will be three lifts.

Avoid excessive pre-modification.

NO If there are adverse covenant violation consequences . . .

YES If the violation of covenants has adverse consequences. . .

NO ... highly structured knowledge development explanations . . .

YES ... highly structured explanations of how knowledge develops . . .

Avoid excessive use of nouns as pre-modifiers.

NO ... soil nutrient supplying capacity evaluation . .
YES . . .evaluation of the nutrient supplying capacity of soils . . .

NO The aim is treatment effectiveness measurement.
YES The aim is to measure the effectiveness of the treatment.

Use active verbs rather than abstract nouns.

NO Contraction of the tree stems occurred rapidly.
YES The tree stems contracted rapidly.

NO ... brings about the characteristic response of emergence.
YES ... usually makes them emerge.

Avoid excessive nominalisation.

NO The functions of allocating and apportioning revenue are performed by the ABC.
YES The ABC allocates and apportions the revenue.

Avoid excessive use of passive voice.

In some situations, the use of passive voice is required, but overuse increases 'roundabout' phrasing and length.

Avoid ambiguity.

The most common causes of ambiguity are careless use of pronouns, poor punctuation and vagueness.