

THE 5 RULES TO CREATING BETTER

Content

&

GETTING THE READER HOOKED

JUSTWORDS

THE CONTENT AGENCY

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Anyone can write, but not everyone is a writer. If there is one common aspect in good and popular writers or bloggers it is that they write clean content or tidy prose, with no loose ends. And that is a skill that one needs to cultivate consciously. A discerning mind and keen eye to tweak content, substitute words, eliminate sentences, or sometimes add relevant punctuation marks can go a long way in getting you back on track, going full throttle on the 'good writer' highway.

So where do you start? Let us take it from the top and try to list down a few points which will help you create tight and crisp content with no messy bits.



1. FIRST THINGS FIRST

It is just like when you meet someone and, whether or not you are conscious of it, you form a first impression from the looks of a person. First impressions matter.

It's the same for a piece of content. Introductions matter. When a reader starts to read content, he decides within the first few seconds whether he will read through the content or leave it right there.

And that's where your headline and the your first paragraph comes into play.

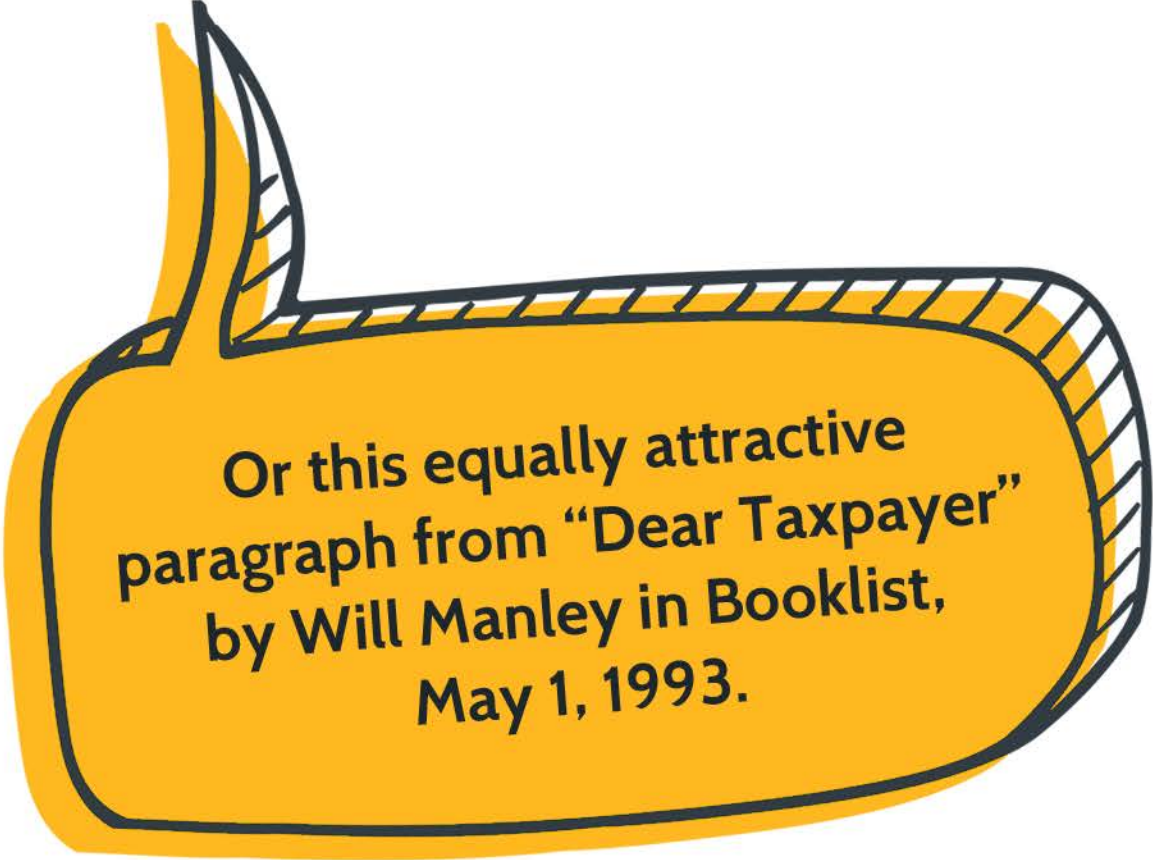
Get the reader hooked with your headline and move him onto the introduction. If he has read the first paragraph, he is most likely to read 80 per cent of the content. Your job is half done with a great headline and a great introduction.

So, now your job is to make the first paragraph or introduction as interesting as you can. Be creative here, as in cases of most content, especially technical content, this is most likely the only place you can be so! Try to get a proper introduction to your story out in as few words as possible while keeping up an interesting flow of words.



For example, look at this interesting first paragraph from “60 Seconds That Could Save Your Child” by Cathy Perlmutter with Maureen Sangiorgio in *Prevention*, September, 1993.

Have a minute? Good. Because that may be all it takes to save the life of a child—your child. Accidents kill nearly 8000 children under age 15 each year. And for every fatality, 42 more children are admitted to hospitals for treatment. Yet such deaths and injuries can be avoided through these easy steps parents can take right now. You don't have a minute to lose.



Or this equally attractive paragraph from “Dear Taxpayer” by Will Manley in Booklist, May 1, 1993.

The most widely read writer in America today is not Stephen King, Michael Chrichton or John Grisham. It's Margaret Milner Richardson, the Commissioner of the Internal Revenue Service, whose name appears on the "1040 Forms and Instructions" booklet. I doubt that Margaret wrote the entire 1040 pamphlet, but the annual introductory letter, "A Note from the Commissioner," bears her signature.

I have found that a sense of impending discovery or a feeling that something exciting is about to be revealed always gets my goat as a reader. If I don't particularly like the headline of a piece or the first paragraph or so, I do not spend more time with the copy. Impatient readers like me might just give up on the content and click on something else. And in these days of online reading, keeping the reader on your page should be your priority.

Check out these links for ideas about writing catchy headlines and first paragraphs.

[5 Easy Tricks to Help You Write Catchy Headlines](#)

[The Formula for a Perfect Headline](#)

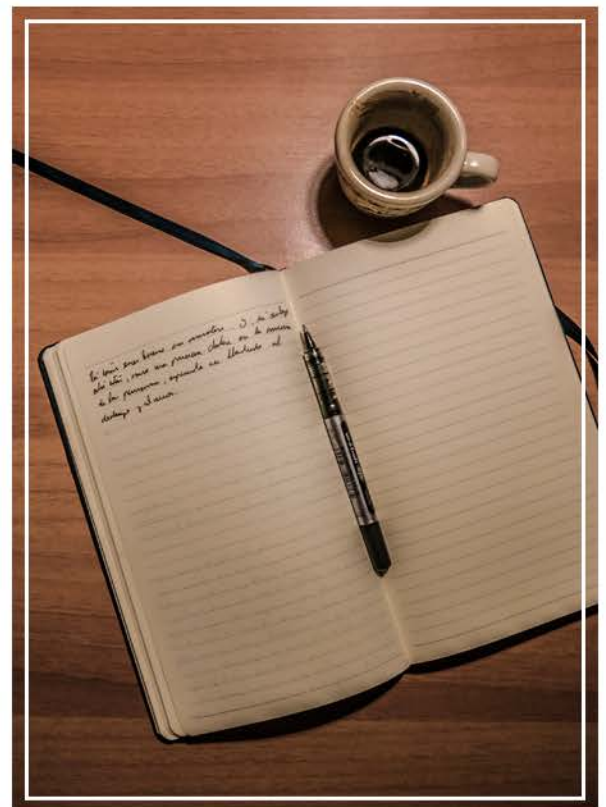
[Introduction Paragraph](#)

2. KEEP IT SHORT

This is the first step to achieving clarity in any piece of prose. Keep your sentences short and succinct. Too long sentences have the tendency of confusing the reader. Break up long sentences the best you can. But when you do that, make sure you do not make them so short that they give a feel of jaggedness. The words should flow smoothly and with logic. Try to keep a certain rhythm in your prose.

The best way, I think, to do this, is to use short sentences and make sure that each sentence is of the same length throughout. If not exactly with the same number of words, at least with close to the same number of words. This keeps the content free of rough edges and ensures that it reads well. Keep the same thing in mind, in case of paragraphs. Don't make your paragraphs ramble on and on. Also, try to maintain paragraphs of the same length throughout your text.

Reading the sentences aloud helps you to identify these issues. When your ears hear it, you will automatically know where you should break it up or add more words. You can best identify the mismatch of rhythm in your own prose. So, you will know exactly where you are going wrong or where you need to tighten the bolts of your writing.



Check out these links to find out more about keeping it short:

[9 Ways to Write Brilliant Short Sentences](#)

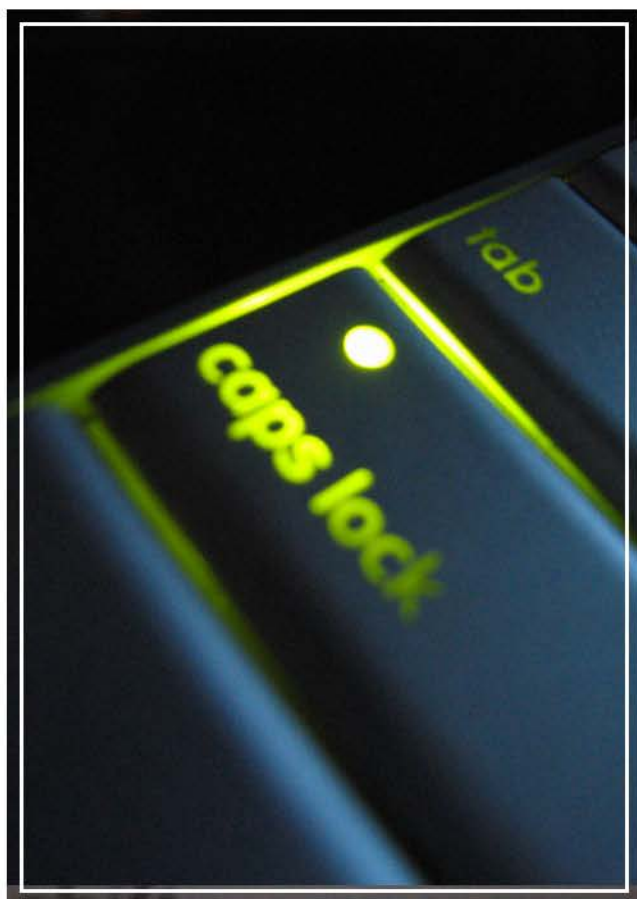
[6 Simple Exercises to Help You Write Better Short Sentences](#)

[Writing Concise Sentences](#)

3. TURN OFF THAT CAPSLOCK

Unnecessary capitalization breaks the flow of the reading. Limit your usage of the same. For example, there is no need to capitalise the title of a job a person, when it comes at the heels of his name, such as in P. Chidambaram, the finance minister. The 'f' and 'm' need not be capitalised. Similarly, within a sentence, you should not capitalise generic names of entities, such as school, college, station, etc. or majors in academics, like economics, statistics, geography, etc.

However, if the subject includes a proper noun, you should always capitalise it. For example, 'English Studies', 'French Literature', 'Dramas of Shakespeare' and so on. There is a simple rule about remembering what to capitalize. For that, remember these sentences: Susan Sarandon bought my wife fancy toilet paper in Boston.



- S - Names of streets
- S - Names of schools
- B - Names of buildings and other structures constructed by man
- M - Names of mountains
- W - Names of waterbodies
- F- First letter in a sentence
- T- Titles before a person's name
- P - Names of people
- I - The word 'I'
- B - Names of borders of countries, regions etc.

There is also the aesthetic aspect behind why limiting capitalisation helps to make your writing look good. More capital letters you use within your sentences, the more jagged the screen or page looks. This can prove to be a turn-off for the reader, something no writer would ever want.

When you are in doubt about whether or not to capitalize a word, use restraint and first check online. And then turn that caps lock on!

For more to read up on this topic, try the following links:

[Capitalization Rules](#)

[Why do we use capital and lower case letters, and how did both types come to be?](#)

[Grammar Rules: Capitalization](#)

4. PUSH THAT PUNCTUATION MARK

Punctuation marks literally make or break sentences. This makes their importance in the entire writing business more than crucial. Use punctuation marks to the best of your ability. Your attempts might not be perfect, but that does not mean you will not try.



A misplaced punctuation mark can not only make the reading of your sentence jarring, it also has the disastrous power of entirely changing the meaning of what you are trying to express. So be doubly sure of where you are placing that comma, that colon, or that period.

Be wary, mainly, of your period and comma placements. Serial commas are a must, whereas, commas that come after independent clauses and before the coordinating conjunction in a compound sentence, need to be handled with utmost care. You should be certain that these are clauses which need commas in the first place.

For example:

The CEO, the CFO, and the CTO had an emergency meeting.

Mr. Wilcox left his estate to Esther, Amber, and Louis.

Remember to put a period after each sentence and if you are working with a bulleted list, think carefully about whether a period should go at the end of every point. Sometimes the lead-in or shoulder part of the sentence warrants a period at the end of each point.

At other times, a period at the end of each bullet point might be too messy and even unnecessary. Also, make sure to follow the rules or guidelines that you have been given regarding punctuation marks in a particular project or with a particular client.

For example:

You should know
how to:

- write a story.
- write a poem.
- write a news article.

Each child was armed
with skills to:

- play with a toy
- dance to music
- paint with colours

If you want to brush up on your comma and period rules, you could try the following links:

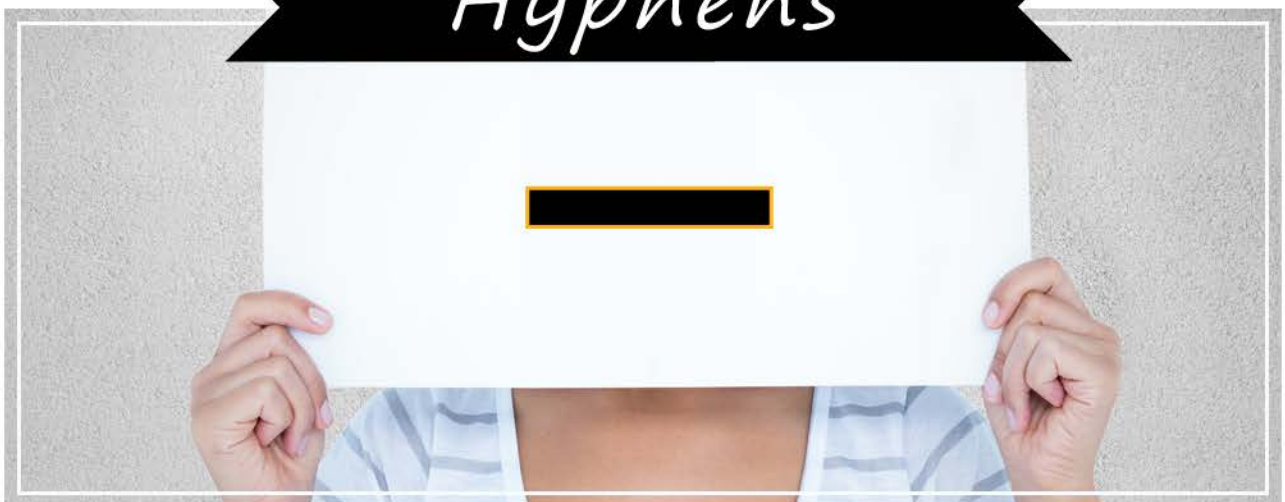
[Commas: Quick Rules](#)

[Quotation Marks with Periods and Commas](#)

[Grammar - Periods and Commas](#)

5. SOME MORE THINGS TO REMEMBER...

Hyphens



Hyphens are a tricky matter for most writers. Should I hyphenate or not? If this question plagues you with any word during the writing process, look it up. That is the cleverest way out of any sticky situation regarding hyphens.

Sometimes, there may not be a right or wrong about the placement of a hyphen between two words. In such cases, check a few sources and come to your own logical conclusion about the usage of the same.

Though hyphen issues are foggy at times, they are by no means unimportant. Placement of hyphens can totally change the meaning of a sentence.

For example, in this example put forth by the @GrammarMonkeys Twitter handle on 15 November, 2012 at 6.28pm:

'Why we need hyphens: Because a small-state senator is not the same as a small state senator'.

Or another example used by the same handle on 5 October 2012, at 5.32 pm: 'Why we need hyphens: Because a violent weather conference isn't the same as a violent-weather conference'.

So be careful.

Adverbs



Easy rule of thumb - get rid of them. This is because adverbs are known to unnecessarily dilute the meaning of your content and weaken your voice. Instead of using more words to facilitate the use of adverbs in your sentence, think of the alternative which might cut it short. Look for a stronger verb to use in place of the combination of a weak verb and that dreaded 'ly' in your copy.

For example, look at the following sentence.

The artist's penmanship was beautifully portrayed in the sketch.

You could avoid the adverb and make the
sentence shorter, like this:

The sketch portrayed the artist's fantastic
penmanship.

Difficult words



If there is one word you want to use but are not sure of the use or meaning of the same, do not use it. If you make your readers run for the dictionary to get the meaning of a sentence you have written, then you should think of ways to avoid that.

Replace big, pretentious words with simple ones. These make you a better writer as these take your writing closer to your end-user, your reader.

For example, look at the following sentence.

The police were carrying out a nation-wide search for the serial killer who was absconding.

Are you a little unsure of the meaning of the word 'absconding'?

Fear not, replace it with something simpler. Like this:

The police were carrying out a nation-wide search for the serial killer who had run away.

That, in order to



To maintain a trotting pace for your copy is one of the keys to good, crisp writing. There are certain words or phrases in a sentence that always make it longer. At the same time, these might not necessarily be of much use in the function of taking your message forward.

'That' and 'in order to' are two such examples. Cutting aspects like these from your sentences will make your writing bolder and more emphatic, with minimum effort. Redundancies tend to make the copy heavy, without pulling it forward.

For example, look at the following sentence.

She took the short route back in order to arrive on time.

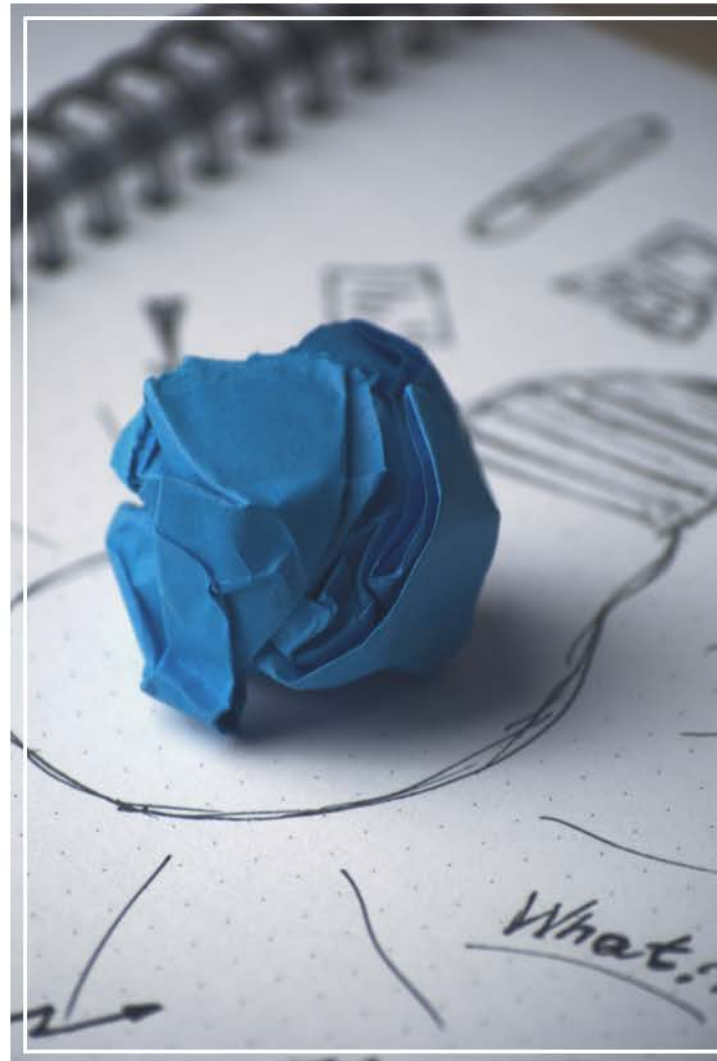
You could replace 'in order to' with just 'to', such that the sentence would read like this:

She took the short route back to arrive on time.

Thing, very, really

While talking as well as writing, some of us tend to use the word 'thing' to substitute a wide variety of words. Laziness gets the better of us and instead of looking for a more descriptive, strong word, we use an insipid alternative which is a reading deterrent for your reader.

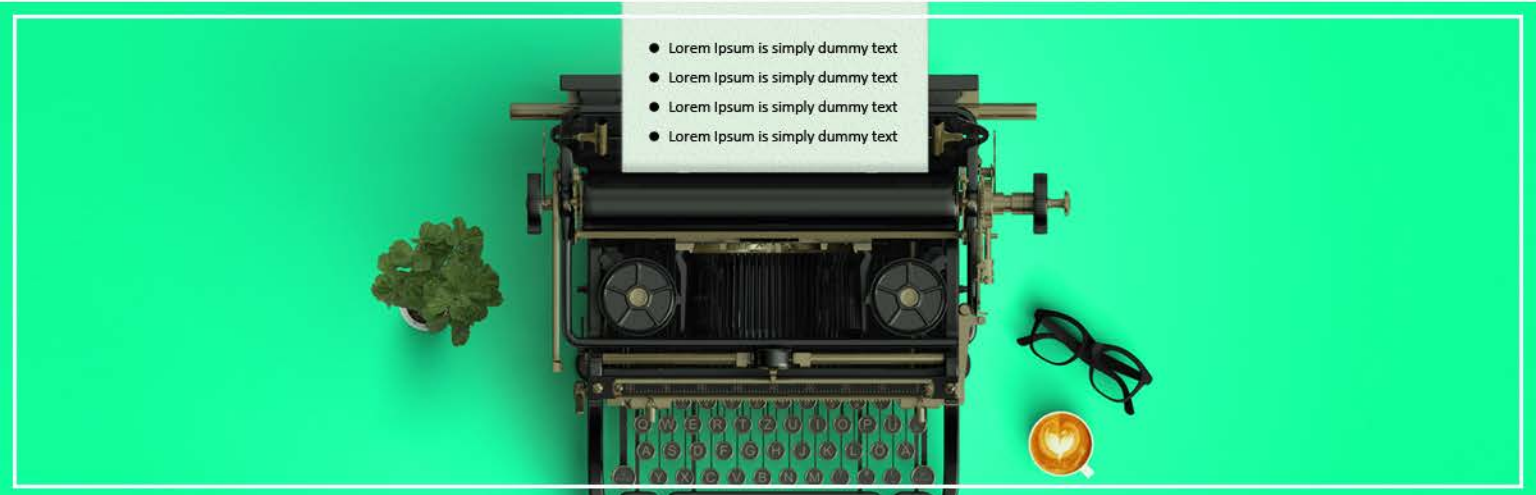
Similarly, for 'very' and 'really'. In most cases, if you put in a bit of effort you will be able to find a strong substitute, like 'magnificent' for 'very beautiful' or 'pathetic' for 'really bad'. In other cases, simply cut these words out, because if you try to measure the value of these words in your sentence, you will often find that they do precious little.



For example, look at this sentence:

Rina ran really fast to catch the train.
You could try to avoid 'really fast' and replace
the words with a strong verb. Like this:
Rina sprinted to catch the train.

Bullet points

- 
- Lorem Ipsum is simply dummy text
 - Lorem Ipsum is simply dummy text
 - Lorem Ipsum is simply dummy text
 - Lorem Ipsum is simply dummy text

Bulleted lists are an effective way to list points and use subheads cleverly to get many similar or parallel ideas across. Use them liberally, whenever they suit your purpose. But, make sure your bullet points are parallel and consistent. If they are not, your content will look carelessly put together and will not be as effective as you might like it to be.

Contractions

CONTRACTIONS

I'm → **I am**

You're → **You are**

Wasn't → **Was not**

Couldn't → **Could not**

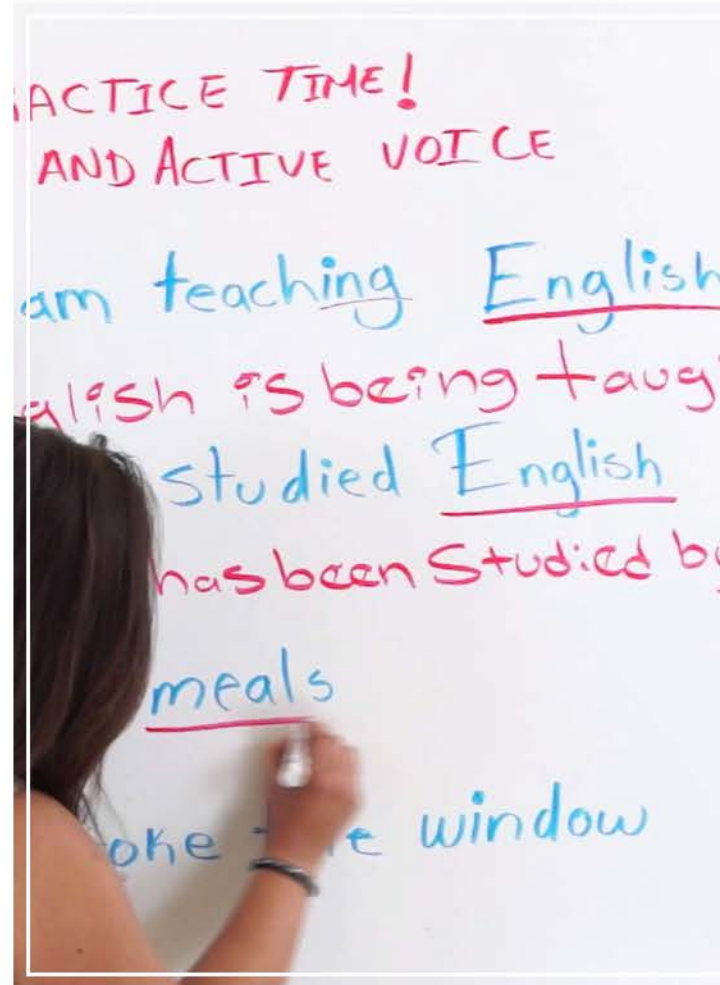
Contractions help make your copy look informal. Readers will be able to read them better. But every time you use a contraction in your copy, make sure it is in keeping with the tone of the rest of the content and the nature of content you are penning in the first place. Contractions do not look too well in formal write-ups. So be careful about using them.

For example, when you are writing a cover letter, you should avoid writing:

I'm pursuing my Masters in Business Administration.
Instead, you should avoid the contraction and write:
I am pursuing my Masters in Business Administration.

Use the active voice

Use the active voice as often as you can. This is because passive voice usage will, in most cases, unnecessarily make your sentences longer, bring in a whole web of prepositions, and may even fog up the meaning of your sentence. Concise writing 101 possibly starts with the victory of active over passive!



For example:

Look at this sentence:

The award was received by Spielberg.

Avoid the passive voice and write:

Spielberg received the award.

Spellings



There has never been a better friend of a writer than spell check. You should always run your copy through it before hitting submit or send. Even if you are sure of an error-free copy, a spell check never did any one any harm. So, go for it. Always.

CONCLUSION

Did you find this list helpful? Maybe you will try to keep some of these points in mind while penning your next article! Do you have any such tips in mind to add to this list? If yes, we will be delighted to hear from you. Please feel free to share in the comments section below.

If you are interested in looking up similar topics, you could also try the following links:

[11 Tips to Clean Up Your Dirty, Wordy Writing](#)

[How to use Revising and Editing to Clean up Your Writing Process](#)

[7 Simple Edits That Make Your Writing 100% More Powerful](#)

About Justwords:

We are an award winning content agency, which aims at becoming a content backyard for anyone seeking out good content at good prices. So if you are looking for content writing services, content outsourcing and content marketing, we would like to help.

We believe that content is the frontline of every business. It goes to battle every day, interacting with the target audience through various platforms like the website design services, social media services, SEO services, blogs & PR services, whitepapers, case studies and through several other marketing products. So, we're here to help win that battle.

Let's talk about your content

And find out if you could be generating more leads online today through content marketing

TALK TO US TODAY



1051- C, 10th Floor, Tower B2, Spaze i-Tech Park,
Sohna Road, Sec -49, Gurgaon- 122018