

Effective Writing



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Guidelines

Vigorous research, an original thesis, intriguing insight, and effective grammar alone are insufficient to write clearly and convincingly. Writing is effective if it causes appropriate results. These parameters outline effective writing.

Note: The following guidelines apply to formal composition. This doesn't apply to dialogues, poetry, or objective instructions.

Convincing

Use the active voice (emphasizes who does what) instead of the passive voice (emphasizes what is done).

Format:

passive sentence format: [subject acted upon] [action] [actor]

active sentence format: [actor] [action] [subject acted upon]

Example:

passive - The prison lawn is mowed by the inmates.

active - The inmates mow the prison lawn.

passive - Inexpensive cheese will be studied by the science students.

active - The science students shall study inexpensive cheese.

passive - A large for sale sign was knocked down by the wind.

active - The wind knocked over a large for sale sign.

passive - The consequences were known by each member.

active - Each member knew the consequences.

Comprehensible

Eliminate words that are nonessential to meaning or mood.

Example:

Words that weakly emphasize adjectives include: very, really, terribly, and awfully.

See Words to Avoid for more help eliminating ineffective words.

Easy to read

Combine short sentences to consolidate ideas, but don't ramble. Consecutive lengthy sentences burden readers and appear intimidating.

Example:

ineffective - I dropped an egg and it landed on my dog. The egg was boiled and it did not crack open.

effective - When I dropped a boiled egg, it landed on my dog without breaking.

ineffective - The boy had orange hair color and freckles. Because of these traits, he looked very much like his mother.

effective - The boy, with his orange hair and freckles, strongly resembled his mother.

ineffective - His wet sneakers squeaked on the tile. This noise annoyed the teachers.

effective - The squeak of his wet sneakers on the tile annoyed the teachers.

Interesting throughout

Vary the structure of your sentences.

Example:

dull - We own seven barns in that town. We also own forty-two horses there. We like to ride horses in that countryside.

intriguing - Riding horses is enjoyable for us in that country town. We own seven barns and forty-two horses there.

Exhibits a clear voice

Reword redundant or wordy phrases.

Phrase: It is a _____ one.

Replacement: It is _____.

Example:

ineffective - It is a [musical] one.

effective - It is [musical].

Phrase: It is something that _____.

Replacement: It _____.

Example:

ineffective - It is something that [makes your pet sleepy].

effective - It [makes your pet sleepy].

Phrase: He is a man who ____ / She is a woman who ____

Replacement: He ____ / She ____

Example:

ineffective - He is a man who [plays baseball].

effective - He [plays baseball].

ineffective - She is a woman who [spends most of her time in the office].

effective - She [spends most of her time in the office].

Phrase: of a ____ nature

Replacement: ____

Example:

ineffective - [Her performances] are of a [stellar] nature.

effective - [Her performances] are [stellar].

Phrase: A person who is _____

Replacement: A ____ person

Example:

ineffective - Only a person who is [healthy may donate blood].

effective - Only a [healthy] person [may donate blood].

Phrase: He is a man of _____. / She is a woman of _____.

Replacement: He is _____. / She is _____.

Example:

ineffective - He is a man of [importance].

effective - He is [important].

ineffective - She is a woman of [wisdom].

effective - She is [wise].

Phrase: the question as to whether

Replacement: whether

Example:

ineffective - [Only one person asked the] question as to whether [there is evidence that lip balm prevents sunburned lips].

effective - [Only one person asked] whether [there is evidence that this lip balm prevents sunburned lips].

Phrase: no _____ and without _____

Replacement: _____ less

*This guideline does not always apply.

Example:

ineffective - without [hope]

effective - [hope]less

ineffective - without [shame]

effective - [shame]less

ineffective - without [doubt]

effective - [doubt]less

Phrase: the reason why is

Replacement: because

Example:

ineffective - The reason why [my paper is late is that I am a procrastinator].

effective - [My paper is late] because [I am a procrastinator].

Phrase: In spite of the fact that

Replacement: Although

Example:

ineffective - In spite of the fact that [Ben loved to smoke, he quit for the health of his beloved wife].

effective - Although [Ben loved to smoke, he quit for the health of his beloved wife].

Phrase: Due to the fact that

Replacement: Because

Example:

ineffective - Due to the fact [that I did not properly close the van's sliding door, the door slid open and my groceries rolled into the street].

effective - Because [I did not properly close the van's sliding door, the door slid open and my groceries rolled into the street].

Phrase: _____, which are _____

Replacement: _____

Example:

ineffective - [Students wear moccasins], which are [leather, to class].

effective - [Students wear leather moccasins to class].

Phrase: He/she is a _____ character.

Replacement: He/she is _____.

Example:

ineffective - Oliver is an [especially silly] character [when he walks to school on his hands].

effective - Oliver is [especially silly when he walks to school on his hands].

Phrase: The fact that he/she _____

Replacement: his/her _____

Example:

ineffective - The fact that the basketball player [jumped caused him to hit his head.].

effective - The basketball player's [jump caused him to hit his head.].

Phrase: A person who plays _____ / A person who _____

Replacement: A(n) _____ player / A(n) _____er

Example:

ineffective - A person who plays [soccer is often as fit as] a person who [runs].

effective - A [soccer] player [is often as fit as] a [runn]er.

Phrase: in a _____ manner

Replacement: _____(ly)

Example:

ineffective - [When guests are present, a hostess acts] in a [cordial] manner.

effective - [When guests are present, a hostess acts cordial]ly.

May impact the reader emotionally

People can have different opinions about an author's work. Therefore, an author should consider the target audience (i.e. the audience's interests and literacy).

Example:

If you are trying to excite an environmentalist about a paper product then emphasize that it is recyclable, instead of its annual consumption.