



Learning Networks  
of Ontario

# Clear Writing Workshop

Facilitated by Judy Barton  
May 25, 2021



Academic Upgrading

# Agenda

1. Introductions
2. What is Clear Writing?
3. The Basics
4. Emailing Clearly
5. Let's Practise!
6. Next steps



# Judy Barton

Coordinator of the Academic  
Upgrading Program



Academic Upgrading



# Introductions

Please give us your

- name
- role
- main reason for being here





What if he had said



“It is with sincere belief that I extend to you all the power, all the strength and all the knowledge you need in this moment of battle against the dark forces, as we pursue against the enemy to win on behalf of our Princess Leia.”



But he didn't. Instead he said

“May the force be with you.”





What is Clear Writing?



## **Clear Writing is**

- concise
- complete, logical and well-planned
- interesting and engaging
- relevant and easily understood
- written as if you are speaking to someone
- specific and direct
- useful for any type of written message



## Possible Barriers to Understanding

- a. language barriers
- b. academic mind set
- c. personal preferences of writing styles
- d. interpretation skills
- e. complex communication styles





## **Possible Barriers to Understanding**

f. time

g. stress

h. reduced cognitive function

i. low overall literacy skills



## **Why do some people not want to use Clear Writing?**

- a. Literacy is not a problem for our audience.
- b. It will insult people who read well.
- c. What we have to say can't be written simply. We have to use technical language.
- d. If I write simply, people will not respect my expertise.

## Benefits

- a. It is inclusive (not gender specific)
- b. It recognizes diversity.
- c. It is efficient and effective.
- d. It benefits the reader (target audience).
- e. It focuses and clarifies the message.
- f. It is attention getting.





Clear Writing saves time because it avoids misunderstanding and errors.

It gets the job done the first time.





# Just the Basics

Language and Tone

Organization

Layout and Design



# Language and Tone



# Think of the Reader First

What do they want to know?

What questions will they have?

What reading level are they at?

How much time do they have to spend reading this?

How will you get their attention right away?

How will you convince them to finish reading your document?







# Language and Tone

1. Use a positive tone.

**Original**      The employee must not start working for the employer prior to registration.

**Better**        The employee must register before they start the job.



# Language and Tone

2. Use the active voice. The subject does the action.

**Original**      Should be taken with meals.

**Better**      Take this with meals.



# Language and Tone

3. Explain difficult words in their context.

**Original** Every season, your sprayer should be calibrated.

**Better** Every season you should calibrate your sprayer by measuring the output of each nozzle to make sure that each one is putting out the same amount of spray.



## Language and Tone

4. Avoid using jargon or acronyms.

**Original** LBS and ES are funded by MLTSD.

**Better** Literacy and Basics Skills and Employment Services are funded by the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development (MLTSD)

# Language and Tone

4. Avoid using jargon or acronyms.

**Rule** When using acronyms, be sure to use the full form once on each page, followed by the short form (as seen above).



Once you turn to a new page, you must use the full form the first time it is used.

## Language and Tone

5. Use the first and second person - not third person.

**Original**      Clients are encouraged to contact the agency if further information is required.

**Better**        If you have any questions please call us.

## Language and Tone

5. Use the first and second person - not third person.

**Original** All staff employees are asked to submit their work reports by the end of the year.

**Better** You must have your work reports in by December 31st.



## Language and Tone

6. Don't change verbs into nouns.

**Original**      Vaccination procedures will be scheduled at the health unit.

**Better**        Vaccines will be administered at the health unit.



# Language and Tone

6. Don't change verbs into nouns.

**Original**      The basic modifications in this program will focus on the development of a positive attitude.

**Better**        We will modify this program to focus on developing a positive attitude.

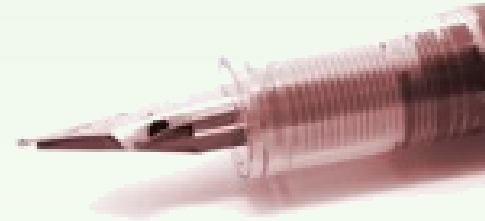
# Language and Tone

1. Use a positive tone.
2. Use the active voice.
3. Explain difficult words in their context.
4. Avoid using jargon or acronyms.
5. Use the first and second person.
6. Don't change verbs into nouns.



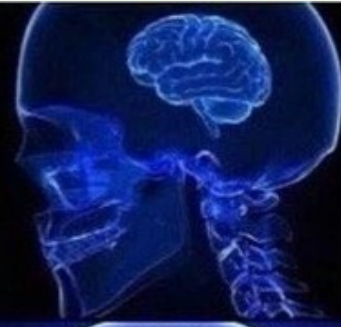


# Activity



Foggy Words and Fuzzy Phrases Exercise

**CAN'T**



**CAN NOT**



**I AM  
UNABLE TO CAN**



**HENCEFORTH,  
I HAVE THE  
UNABILITY TO CAN**



# Organization

# Organization

1. Write instructions in the order that you want them carried out.

**Original**      Go to bed after you've brushed your teeth.

**Better**        Brush your teeth, then go to bed.

# Organization

1. Write instructions in the order that you want them carried out.

**Original**      When returning from sick leave, see your supervisor after you've been to the health and safety centre for approval to return to work.

# Organization

## **Better**

If you've been away on sick leave, report to the health and safety centre to get approval to return to work. Once you have approval, see your supervisor.



# Organization

2. Write sentences that are short and simple.

**Original** We're here to assist employers in finding employees who fit their organization and we can also work with employers who require assistance accessing incentives and grants.

# Organization

2. Write sentences that are short and simple.

**Better** We're here to help employers find employees who fit their organization. We can also help employers access incentives and grants.



## Organization

3. Write complete sentences only when it makes sense to do so.

**Original**      The Annual Spring Clean-up Day will be held on Saturday May the 22<sup>th</sup> from 9:30 am to 3:30pm at the Township Dump. Dumping charges will be \$10 per vehicle.



# Organization

**Better**

**Township Dump**

**Annual Spring Clean-up Day**

Date            Saturday May 22, 2021

Time            9:00 am to 3:30 pm

Where           Township Dump

Cost            \$20 per vehicle



# Organization

4. List critical points apart from the text.

A one day course ideal for board members and directors of an organization.

You will learn about

- liability of directors
- roles and responsibilities of directors
- incorporated vs. unincorporated organizations
- budgeting and controlling expenditures

# Organization

5. List items in the same grammatical form.

## Original

The committee

- reviews the submissions
- if necessary, rewrites without change intent
- if necessary, returns to the association
- will circulate all resolutions to members

# Organization

5. List items in the same grammatical form.

## **Better**

The committee

- reviews the submissions
- rewrites content, if necessary, without changing intent
- returns the submission, if necessary, to the association
- circulates all resolutions to members



## Organization

6. Use headings that summarize the text.

**Original**     Attention!

**Better**     Information on New Government Grants





## Organization

6. Use headings that summarize the text.

**Original**      Expenses

**Better**      Your Expenses will be Paid, Read Carefully



Want to immediately lower the reading level?

Simply increase the number of sentences and decrease the number of multi-syllable words.




# Organization

- a. Write instructions in the order that you want them carried out.
- b. Write sentences that are short and simple.
- c. Write complete sentences only when it makes sense to do so.
- d. List critical points apart from the text.
- e. List items in the same grammatical form.
- f. Use headings that summarize the text.





# Bonus: Readability Indexes




Microsoft Word has a function to show readability statistics. If we had more time, I'd tell you to go set this up right now. 😊



Once you set it up, it will always be there for your reference.

1. Open Word
2. Click File
3. Select Options
4. Choose Proofing
5. Click “Show readability statistics”
6. Click Okay and close



Then write a document, or open an existing doc. To check readability:



1. Click Review
2. Choose Spelling & Grammar
3. Run through a regular spelling and grammar check

At the end, a summary will pop up. There are a few important pieces of info here.



## **Case Study**

There was an announcement on our Staff News on Friday that the college would be closing early for the long weekend.



## **Case Study—Here's how it read:**

Wherever possible, Confederation College operations will be reduced starting at 3:00pm on Friday, May 21, 2021 to get a head start on the Victoria Day long weekend. Core services will remain available until 4:30pm, after which all operations will shut down for the weekend and the Victoria Day holiday on Monday, May 24, 2021. The operational closure includes all online activity, campus buildings and any on-campus activities that are underway. Operations will resume remotely and on campus at regular business opening hours on Tuesday, May 25, 2021.

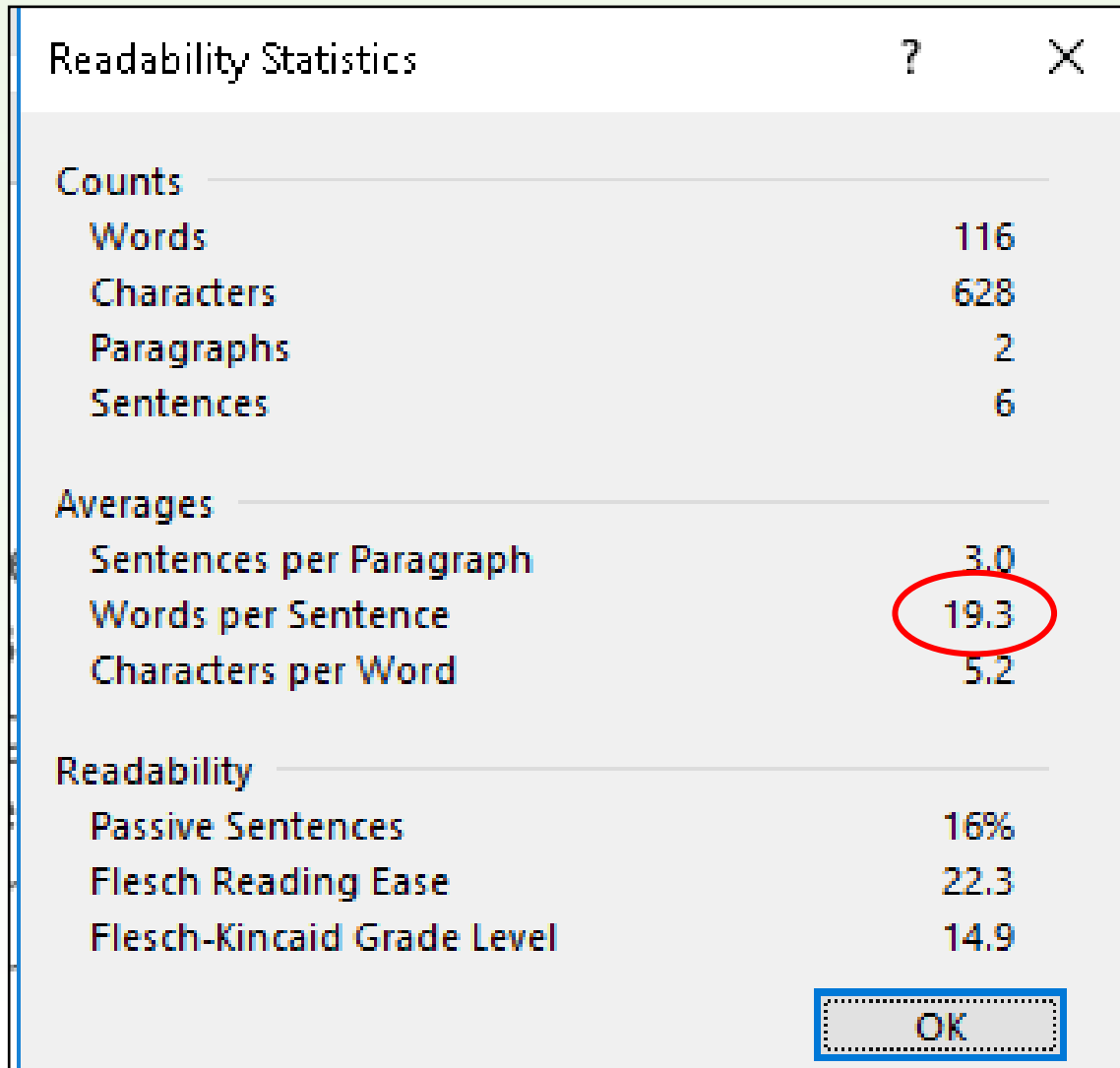




## **Case Study--Readability**

Just for fun, I copied the announcement into Word to check readability.

Here's what I found:

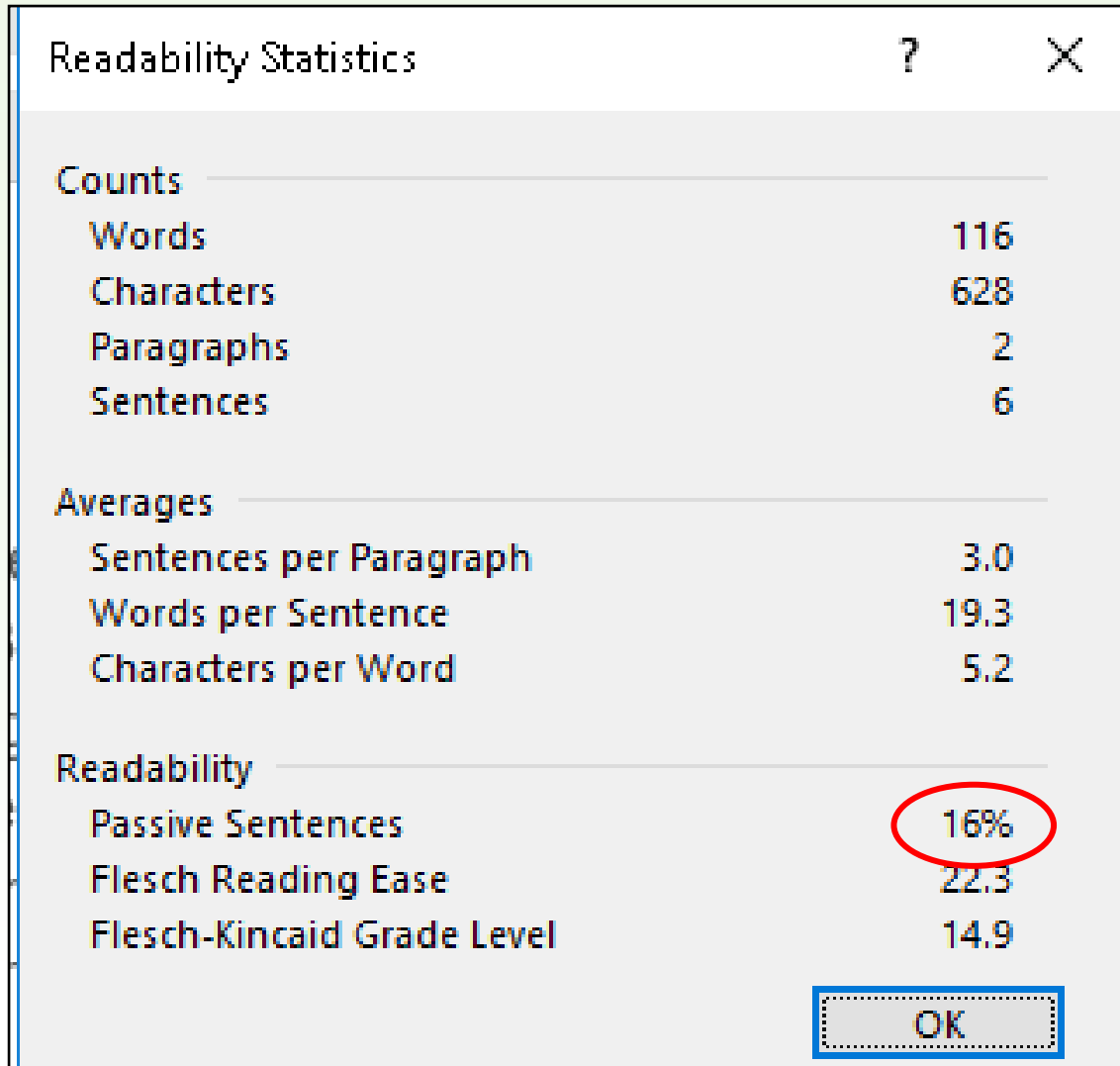


A screenshot of a 'Readability Statistics' dialog box. The dialog box has a title bar with a question mark and a close button. It is divided into three sections: 'Counts', 'Averages', and 'Readability'. The 'Counts' section lists Words (116), Characters (628), Paragraphs (2), and Sentences (6). The 'Averages' section lists Sentences per Paragraph (3.0), Words per Sentence (19.3, circled in red), and Characters per Word (5.2). The 'Readability' section lists Passive Sentences (16%), Flesch Reading Ease (22.3), and Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level (14.9). An 'OK' button is located at the bottom right.

Counts	
Words	116
Characters	628
Paragraphs	2
Sentences	6
Averages	
Sentences per Paragraph	3.0
Words per Sentence	19.3
Characters per Word	5.2
Readability	
Passive Sentences	16%
Flesch Reading Ease	22.3
Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	14.9

Average number of words per sentence:

you want to get this between 10-15 if possible



A screenshot of a 'Readability Statistics' dialog box. The dialog box has a title bar with a question mark and a close button. It is divided into three sections: 'Counts', 'Averages', and 'Readability'. The 'Counts' section lists Words (116), Characters (628), Paragraphs (2), and Sentences (6). The 'Averages' section lists Sentences per Paragraph (3.0), Words per Sentence (19.3), and Characters per Word (5.2). The 'Readability' section lists Passive Sentences (16%), Flesch Reading Ease (22.3), and Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level (14.9). The '16%' value is circled in red, and the 'OK' button is highlighted with a blue border.

Counts	
Words	116
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Sentences per Paragraph	3.0
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Readability	
Passive Sentences	16%
Flesch Reading Ease	22.3
Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	14.9

Passive sentences:

get this % as low as possible



Flesch Reading Ease: try to get as high as possible. Standard for websites is at least 60-70

Readability Statistics

**Counts**

Words	116
Characters	628
Paragraphs	2
Sentences	6

**Averages**

Sentences per Paragraph	3.0
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Characters per Word	5.2

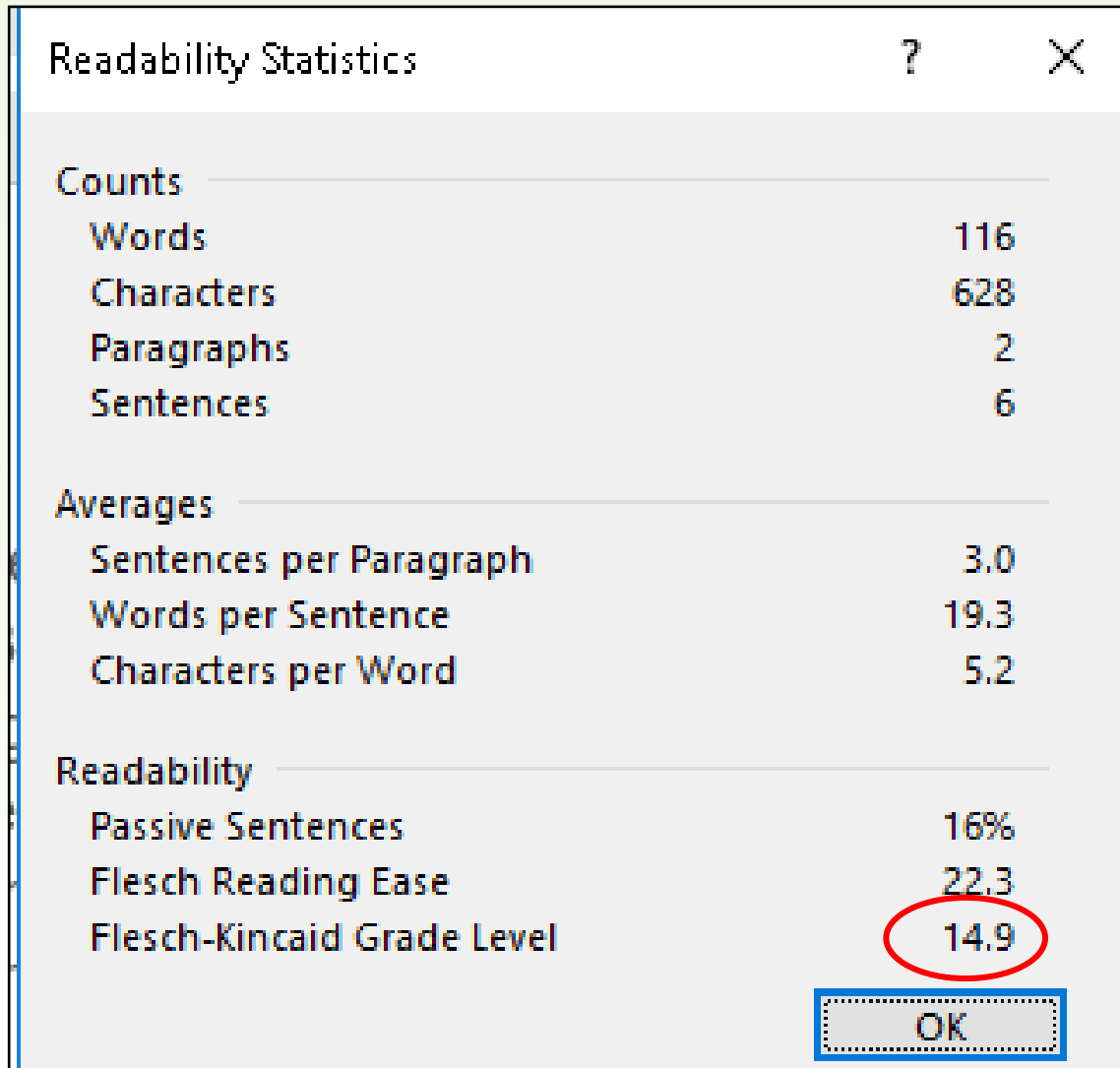
**Readability**

Passive Sentences	16%
Flesch Reading Ease	22.3
Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	14.9

OK

Score	Notes
90-100	very easy to read, easily understood by an average 11-year-old student
80-90	easy to read
70-80	fairly easy to read
60-70	easily understood by 13- to 15-year-old students
50-60	fairly difficult to read
30-50	difficult to read, best understood by college graduates
0-30	very difficult to read, best understood by university graduates

source: [Wikipedia.com](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flesch-Reading_Ease)



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Counts	
Words	116
Characters	628
Paragraphs	2
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Sentences per Paragraph	3.0
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Passive Sentences	16%
Flesch Reading Ease	22.3
Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	14.9

Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level:

depends on the audience, but we should strive for grade 10 or lower.

For community outreach, should aim for lower still.

There are other Readability indexes. I very often will check Gunning-Fog:

<http://gunning-fog-index.com/>

These are the results from the same passage:

THE GUNNING FOG INDEX IS 13.04

- The number of major punctuation marks, eg. [.,], was 8
- The number of words was 116
- The number of 3+ syllable words, highlighted in blue, was 21

You can edit the numbers above and recalculate

Recalculate

THE GUNNING FOG INDEX IS 13.04

Typical Fog Index Scores	
Fog Index	Resources
6	TV guides, The Bible, Mark Twain
8	Reader's Digest
8 – 10	Most popular novels
10	Time, Newsweek
11	Wall Street Journal
14	The Times, The Guardian
15 – 20	Academic papers
Over 20	Only government sites can get away with this, because you can't ignore them
Over 30	The government is covering something up

<https://www.wyliecomm.com/2021/01/measure-readability-with-these-5-readability-apps/>



Readability Indexes don't tell the whole story, but they are definitely helpful. They highlight issues of language, tone (sometimes), and some elements of organization.

My philosophy is that **any improvement is an improvement.** So if that's all you can manage, then just use that to help you make changes.

However, another important element of clear writing is design. So now we'll look at Layout and Design.





# Layout and Design



# Layout and Design—Emphasizing Important Information

- **bolding** is the most effective way
- *italics*, underlining, shading and ALL UPPER CASE are hard on the eyes and deter readers

EMPLOYMENT

Employment



# Layout and Design—Using Bullet Points

Bullet points are used to pull out comments, statements or information from paragraph format.

The purpose of using bullets is to

- decrease number of words used
- increase white space
- pull out important information
- list information



## **Layout and Design—More About Using Bullet Points**

Bullet lists are not sentences. Because of that, they do not need capitals at the beginning or punctuation at the end.

Questions are full statements so they require capitals and punctuation. Especially if you want to ask questions in a specific order, numbering them works well.



# Layout and Design—Emphasizing Important Information

**Put a box around text.**

## **But**

- don't overuse this tool
- make sure there is enough white space

Coloured text can be effective.

## **But**

be aware of how it will print out



## Layout and Design—Font Styles

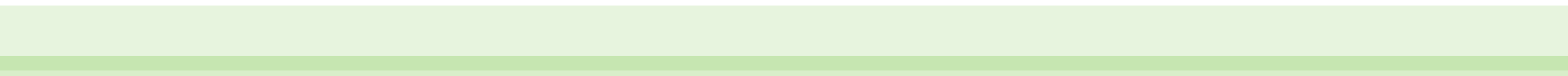
For text, use a font that is clear and easy to read.

Serif means there are small hooks on each letter. These “tails” could make them easier to read.

(For example, Times New Roman or Bookman Old Style)

Sans serif fonts do not have small hooks on each letter.

(For example, Arial or Calibri)





# Layout and Design—Font Styles

- use 12 point size or larger
- be consistent and use no more than two different fonts on a page

# Layout and Design—Font Styles

## **Judy's Tip:**



My college uses Outlook for email, and the default font is 11pt Calibri.

I changed mine to be 12pt Bookman Old Style.

(Also this PPT is written in Bookman Old Style.  
That's not an accident. 😊)



## **Layout and Design—Line Length and Margins**

- make sure margins are 1 inch or larger to create enough white space on the page
- line spacing of 1.5 is easier to read than single spacing
- 1.5 is the best but 1.3-1.5 is okay
- keep sentences short – 10 to 15 words maximum

# Layout and Design—Justification

Correct

This text is left-justified with an uneven right margin. It's the easiest to read.

Not Correct

When each line of text is centered, the eye must “reset” in order to find the beginning of the next line.  
Try to use this only for short titles or headings.

Fully justified provides a straight edge on both right and left sides. Newspapers are formatted this way. It changes the space between words and sometimes even within words. It alters word and phrase shape.



## **Design and Layout—White Space**

To keep the page more inviting and give an impression there is less to read:

- leave enough white space around text - space between paragraphs, headings, in boxes, in margins, bullets, lists, etc.
- make sure there is enough room to write in when creating forms, questions, puzzles, etc.
- leave 2 spaces between sentences



# Layout and Design—Graphics

A picture is worth a thousand words but

- make sure it relates to the text
- put it close to the text, but don't crowd the text
- be sure graphics reflect your reader and are not offensive
- place them beside text, not behind it (no watermarks)
- keep them clear and simple – will they print well?

**Using  
Graphics**

## **Layout and Design—Colours**

- a. Black text on white or soft yellow paper is best.
- b. Avoid dark on dark.
- c. Be careful when using white text on a coloured background – you must make the font bolder because the colour tries to “shrink” the white font.
- d. Use matte paper or low-gloss, not high-gloss paper.



# Emailing Clearly



## **Emailing Clearly - Is it Possible?**

- email can take on two forms - formal and informal
- In our workplaces, it's considered formal documentation
- both formal and informal emailing can benefit from using some simple Clear Writing principles



## **Think About This Before Writing the Email**

1. What does my reader need to know?
2. What does my reader want to know?
3. Do I know my reader? What have my past experiences been like with this reader?
4. Have I considered all my thoughts on this topic?
5. When do I need a response?
6. To whom should I send this email?
7. Have I had my cup of coffee yet? 😊





- get to the point
- answer all questions and answer questions which may arise from your response
- be personal and friendly
- be sure you respond only to those who need to know your thoughts (be careful about criticizing one person or giving negative feedback and cc'ing it to everyone)



- take time to get your thoughts together before emailing
- use cc and request receipts sparingly
- avoid using URGENT and IMPORTANT for subject lines, be specific to the actual topic of the email
- use the Clear Writing principles
- put only 1 or 2 topics in an email

# Email Woes

A key part of communication is

- body language
- visual cues



**\*\*\* Emailing does not allow for either \*\*\***

Misunderstandings happen more frequently through email than through any other form of communication.

There may be times when you will need to let the reader know you are joking or responding lightly.

# Response Time

In most cases, responding to an email should be within a 24 hour timeframe but consider the

- amount of time needed to fully respond to this email
- amount of time needed to accurately respond to this email
- audience to whom you are responding

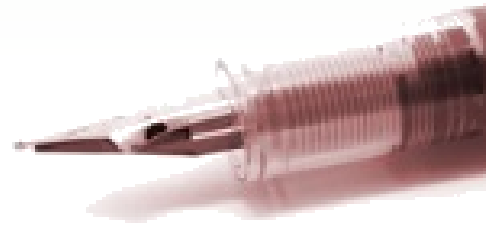
If you cannot respond appropriately within 24 hours, let your reader know you will respond as soon as you are able.



## **If a Response is Needed Now**

- take a few moments to consider what you want to say
- check your level of frustration, your mood or your schedule demands before sending the email
- have a colleague read your response before sending it if it is a sensitive issue
- write your email, set it aside for 5 minutes, re-read and edit your response, set it aside for another 5 minutes, re-read and edit your response – then send your response

# Activity



Let's Practise!



## **Let's see what we think!**

The best way to learn Clear Writing principles is to use them, so let's practise a few together.

1. Using the info we just covered, think of ways these sentences could be re-written.
2. Feel free to leaf through the PPT to remind you. In Dropbox, there is also a resource called "Clear Writing Tips" that might help you.

## **Original (from website)**

ACE Employment Services is offering virtual one-on-one appointments with an Employment Consultant to help job-seekers develop a return to work action plan, write a resume and cover letter, discover careers in line with interests and skills and explore job opportunities and training options.



## **Quick win: bullets!**

ACE Employment Services is offering virtual one-on-one appointments with an Employment Consultant to help job-seekers

- develop a return to work action plan
- write a resume and cover letter
- discover careers in line with interests and skills
- explore job opportunities and training options

## **Original (from email)**

I am currently starting to work on our community magazine and wanted to reach out to departments that regularly advise in the community magazine to update you with the deadlines in order to submit information on courses and advertising for the upcoming spring 2021 edition for distribution to the community.

## **Quick win: find the point!**

You have advertised in the past with the community magazine.  
If you want to advertise again, the deadline for the spring 2021  
issue is \_\_\_\_\_.

## **Original (from student union website)**

### **How Much Does a Bus Pass Cost?**

The bus pass fee is a compulsory ancillary fee that all full-time post-secondary students at the main campus pay. Students are assessed this fee at the beginning of their academic term. Students starting in September are assessed the \$184 fee for the full academic year. Students who start in January are assessed a fee of \$140.

## **Quick win: think about your audience!**

### **How Much Does a Bus Pass Cost?**

If you are starting in September, the bus pass costs \$184. If you are starting in January, it costs \$140. These costs are covered when you pay your student fees.

## Few reminders:



- be careful not to change the meaning of the original
- edit as many times as you can

There are multiple ways to do this work, so your edits may be different from mine. That's okay! There are always multiple ways to achieve the same goal.

## Writing to Your Reader

I've included a Pre and Post Checklist Tool with the resources in Dropbox.

It's really useful and I recommend keeping it handy.



## **In Conclusion**

In Upgrading and Employment Services,  
we pride ourselves in putting the  
student/client first.

So let's commit to doing that in our  
writing as well. Always put your  
reader first and think about what they  
need. I guarantee your message will  
be clearer.





## **Almost done!**

What I'd love to hear in the chat or verbally:

What's one small thing you will start to do right away?

Any other thoughts you'd like to share?



**Interested in more training?**



<https://learningnetworks.ca/clear-writing/clear-writing-online-course/>

Otherwise, reach out if you want to chat more about this.

Thanks!



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Academic Upgrading