**Some rules for writing clearly**

1. Focus on actors and actions instead of subjects and verbs
2. Avoid unwanted nominalizations
3. Avoid too many propositions
4. Use the active voice, unless it is necessary to use the passive voice
5. Start simple and then go complex
6. Start with what is known and go to the unknown
7. Start with the old and go to the new
8. Focus on actors and actions instead of subjects and verbs

Place the main actor in the topic position. Actions (verbs) should clearly describe actor’s actions

Closely link Subject / Actor & Verb / Action

What sounds better? Which do you prefer and why?

What is the difference?

“There was continued uncertainty in the Surgeon General’s mind about the intention of the President to pursue policies that would improve public’s health”

“The Surgeon General had doubts that the president intended to pursue policies that would improve public’s health”

1. Avoid unwanted nominalizations

Nominalizations or “abstract nouns” are the noun forms of verbs and adjectives

* Measure – Measurement, react- reaction, conclude- conclusion, analyze- analysis

Readers expect the action of a clause to be in the verb, not the noun. Nominalizations can easily create confusion and wordiness. For example:

“The new drug caused a decrease in heart rate”

“The new drug decreased heart rate”

“A progressive increase in the mortality rate occurred”

“Mortality rate increased progressively”

Be aware that Scientists love nominalizations like “the study processes”, “which they name”, etc. because they can make the work sound more important. However, their overuse invites weak verbs, vagueness and “heaviness”. Nominalizations also make meaning unclear and ambiguous and greatly inflate word count.

Unclear sentences often begin with abstract nouns, not actors and have verbs that are less specific than the actions buried in abstract nouns. It usually takes more than 6 to 7 words to get to the verb.

Nominalizations are important like

“**Taxation** without **representation** became a rallying point for the American **Revolution**”

“**Abortion** continues to be a controversial topic in the USA”

The main problem is their overuse as subjects especially in the topic position

1. Avoid too many propositions

“A revision **of** the program will result **in** increases **in** our efficiency **in** serving patients”

1. Use the active voice, unless it is necessary to use the passive voice

Make active voice your default because it is more clear direct, concise, precise, energetic and reader friendly

The order should be Subjects/Actors-Verbs/actions-Objects. Passive voice reverses this order.

Sentences are easier to read and understand

Active: The Department of Public Health implemented a program for African-Americans suffering from diabetes

Passive: A program for African-Americans suffering from diabetes was implemented by the Department of Public Health

Exemptions to the rule: Passive voice can be the best choice for Methods, Results and Abstracts to indicate ROUTINE USE OF APPROPRIATE METHODS or when readers can easily infer who the actor was, for example:

“All live births in three countries were eligible for inclusion in the sample”

“Height and weight measurements were extracted from clinical records”

“Logistic regression models were used to adjust for confounders”

1. Start simple and then go complex
2. Start with what is known and go to the unknown
3. Start with the old and go to the new

**Something else... BEWARE OF THE DANGLING MODIFIERS**

**“As a child, my mother took me to the zoo”**

**“One morning I shot an elephant in my pajamas. How he got into my pajamas I don’t know” (Groucho Marx)**