

Five ways to improve your writing - HBR

When writing, do you...

...sometimes fumble for words?

...feel pressed for time?

If so, what can we do to make writing more efficient and less stressful?

You'll hear some tips on business writing. Before watching, match the definitions to the terms below.

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| 1. treat as unimportant | win people over |
| 2. something insignificant | lean heavily on |
| 3. convince people | a frivolous thing |
| 4. use too much | jargon |
| 5. rely on | dismiss |
| 6. catch readers' attention | defaulting to |
| 7. prevent the excess of formality | pull readers into a document |
| 8. using as the standard choice | throw in |
| 9. complicated | overuse |
| 10. specialized language, i.e. from a professional group | counteract stuffiness |
| 11. abbreviations such as NASA | tiresome |
| 12. boring; monotonous | convoluted |
| 13. add | acronyms |

Now watch and take notes. What are the five tips given by prof. Bryan Garner?

Watch again and fill in the gaps.

When you're fumbling for words and pressed for time, it might be tempting to _____ good business writing as _____. But it's a skill you must cultivate to succeed. As an editor-in-chief and author, I believe that it takes only a few words to make a strong impression, good or bad. Here's how to _____ with your writing:

First, use personal pronouns skillfully. Don't _____ "I". Instead, _____ 'we,' 'our,' 'you,' 'your.' Those are personal friendly pronouns that _____.

Second, use contractions. 'Won't,' for example, instead of 'will not,' 'don't' instead of 'do not.' Many writers are afraid of contractions because they were taught in school to avoid them, but you won't break any real rules if you use them. And they _____, a major case of poor writing. Relax. If you'd say something as a contraction, then write it that way. If you wouldn't, then don't.

Also, try to avoid passive voice. Don't write, *The closing documents were prepared by Sue.* Instead, write *Sue prepared the closing documents.* This guideline isn't absolute. Sometimes passive voice is the natural way to say what you're saying. But _____ active voice is the best way to prevent _____, backward-sounding sentences.

Next, be sure to vary the length and structure of your sentences. You want both short sentences and long, main clauses and subordinate ones. You want variety. And finally, avoid _____ and _____. Most readers will find them _____.

It may be convenient to refer to COGS, instead of spelling out 'cost of goods sold,' but if you _____ too many of these terms, you'll lose everybody's attention. Clear, concise writing isn't some mysterious art. It's a skill you can learn, starting with these five principles.

