



How to write better English

The ideal English text is easy to read and understand. Even scientific texts are usually written in plain English words. So try to keep your sentences plain, clear and well structured.

When writing in English, keep the following rules in mind:

- use simple language
- keep subordinate clauses short
- prefer verbs to nouns (not: *The meaning of this is that ...*, but: *This means that ...*)
- avoid slang and techy language

Sentence

Make your texts interesting by using various types of clauses, e.g.:

- participle clauses
- relative clauses
- conditional sentences
- infinitive constructions, introductory clauses with infinitive or gerund
- prepositional clauses
- passive voice

Note, however:

- Always use main clauses for important statements – use subordinate clauses only for additional information.
- Use passive voice sparingly – prefer active voice.
- Avoid long introductory clauses – always try to put the subject close to the beginning of a sentence.
- Avoid long subordinate clauses – a subordinate clause in the middle of a sentence should have no more than 12 syllables.

Check out the use of participles (<http://www.ego4u.com/en/cram-up/grammar/participles>). They are very useful for shortening lengthy subordinate clauses.

Paragraph

As to paragraphs, keep the following rules in mind:

- Concentrate on one main point per paragraph. Summarize this point in the first sentence.
- All sentences that follow support the main point or limit its scope.
- The last sentence is used as a transition to the next paragraph. Use a criteria that applies for both paragraphs.

Text

The typical structure of a text is as follows:

- (title)
- introduction
- main part
- conclusion

Make your texts interesting. You can achieve this for example by varying the lengths of your sentences. An important statement is best emphasised in a short sentence, especially if that sentence is between two longer sentences. Do also vary the lengths of your paragraphs and avoid one-sentence paragraphs.

There are various possibilities on how to structure your texts, e.g.:

- General to Specific - general statement followed by details and examples
- Specific to General - details and examples followed by a generalization
- Known to Unknown - provide new information based on what readers already know
- Least Important to Most Important – catch and keep readers' attention
- Chronology (ordering by time) - e.g. in biographies

<http://www.ego4u.com/en/cram-up/writing/text>