



# Effective Writing

## Rule 1: Be concise.

Resist the temptation of writing superfluously merely for the sake of reaching a word minimum. Choose your words thoughtfully and purposefully.

- **Inferior sentence:** The supporters put forward the argument that building a new park would make the community look more beautiful and feel more alive. (22 words)
- **Superior sentence:** The supporters argued that a new park would beautify and enliven the community. (13 words)

As you write, analyze each of your sentences and consider the following question: How can I rewrite my sentences to express the same ideas in fewer words?

## Rule 2: Avoid sentence starts like “There is,” “There are,” “It is,” etc.

The overuse of sentence starts like “There is,” “There are,” “It is,” etc., indicates lazy writing. In most cases, a bit of additional thought and care on your end will result in a better sentence.

- **Inferior sentence:** It is clear that the narrator of “The Tell-Tale Heart” is insane.
- **Superior sentence:** The narrator of “The Tell-Tale Heart” is clearly insane.

## Rule 3: Avoid passive voice.

In active sentences, subjects do actions (e.g., “Jane watches a movie.”). In passive sentences, subjects do not perform actions; instead, actions are done to them (e.g., “A movie is watched by Jane.”).

- **Passive sentence:** Taxes were increased by the government.
- **Active rewrite:** The government increased taxes.

Passive sentences often hide important information, lacking transparency and accountability.

- **Passive sentence:** A bad, controversial law was passed. (Who passed the bad, controversial law?)
- **Active rewrite:** The politicians passed a bad, controversial law.

## Rule 4: Watch for misplaced/dangling modifiers.

Be careful to place descriptive words and phrases next to the person or thing it is meant to describe.

- **Incorrect sentence:** Lying on the grassy hill, the stars shone brightly as my wife and I watched them. (Does it make sense to say that the stars lied on the grassy hill? No!)
- **Correct rewrite:** Lying on the grassy hill, my wife and I watched the stars as they shone brightly.

## Rule 5: Write using parallel construction.

When writing lists, maintain a consistent grammatical form as it is clearer and easier to read.

- **Inferior sentence:** During her free time, Louise likes to hike in forests, visiting her friends, and her cat cuddling with her. (not parallel)
- **Superior sentence:** During her free time, Louise likes hiking, visiting her friends, and cuddling with her cat. (parallel)

When listing modifiers in a series, use words that belong to the same word class:

- Marguerite is patient, beautiful and introspective. (all adjectives = parallel construction)