Wording in Technical Writing

Wording in Technical Writing: Keep It Short and Simple © 2023 by Joyce Bower is licensed under [CC BY 4.0](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/?ref=chooser-v1)

[Video](https://linnbenton.hosted.panopto.com/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=292a467b-1298-4f2f-8c91-b01a013fabe8&start=0)

[Slide Deck](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1rdVu7OqviDMLj0lFmMaJy1SuAHz2mhNulk2fMbkPHZs/edit?usp=sharing)

Goals

In this presentation, we will be discussing wording used in technical writing.

* Why is word choice important in technical writing?
* How can I write concisely?
* What are the do's and don'ts of wording in technical communication?
* What are some examples of effective word choice for technical writing?

# What wording counts?

When writing technical communication, you want to be concise and precise about your word choices. When we say *concise*, we are referring to using as few words as possible to convey the message. When we say *precise*, we are referring to being clear and explaining what needs to be better understood.

# The Seven C’s of Professional Communication

Clear: The reader should understand the message without confusion. Know your audience and their level of knowledge.

Coherent: One idea should lead to the next, and the connections should be easily understood.

Concrete: Be specific. Use examples, analogies, or whatever will help the reader understand the information fully.

Concise: Why use three words when one would do? Avoid unnecessary adjectives and adverbs. Use action verbs rather than being verbs (is, are, was, were...). Avoid unnecessary repetition.

Complete: Include all information needed and answer all questions that the audience may have.

Courteous: The document should be easy to read and avoid any offensive terms or tones.

Correct: Edit your writing. Make sure to use proper spelling, punctuation, grammar, usage, and sentence structure.

# Precision

Now let’s take a deep dive into precision.

## Avoid Nominalizations

Nominalizations are verbs or adjectives that have been made into nouns. These often end in -ment, -ness, -tion, and -ance. Why avoid these? Because they often lead to wordiness and passive voice, two things that we need to stay away from in technical writing.

## Use Short Words, Not Long Ones

Be direct, not wordy or pompous (which means pretentious, stately, or having excessive self-esteem), so if you can shorten the phrase or simplify the word, do so.

## Avoid Cliches and Idioms

Cliches are phrases and sayings that have been used so many times that they have lost their meaning or allure; for example, “All that glitters is not gold,” and “You can’t judge a book by its cover.”

Idioms are phrases or sayings that mean something other than what the words literally mean; for example, “He climbed to the top of the ladder in the company,” and “I’m going to bite my tongue.” Someone who is unfamiliar with the English language would have a difficult time understanding and would probably interpret them literally.

## Avoid Redundancies

Avoid repeating or using more words than necessary. Simplify whenever possible!

## Avoid Expletives

An expletive in writing is when you use the word *there* plus a being verb, such as *there is, there was, there were.* These wordy constructions add words to the sentence but not to the meaning, thus making it wordy. (Tip: Avoid these in all your writing to make it more impactful.)

## Use Active Voice

Whenever you can, use active voice. (\*Read through the explanations and examples.\*) Sometimes, however, passive voice should be used. Passive voice is sometimes preferred when it does not matter who did the action, such as in a science experiment. For example, “The solution was then poured into beaker two.” Another situation would be when you are avoiding blame. For example, “The lamp got broken when you were at work.” This sentence does not say who broke the lamp, thus trying not to blame anyone.

## Plain Writing Act

The government provides guidelines for using plain language/wording that are also a good guideline for all professional writing, including technical communication.

## Video

Let’s watch an example using these guidelines to simplify an overly complex sentence.

# Main Point

When it comes to technical writing and word choice, “KISS”: keep it short and simple.