

Quick Guide: Be Brief

When writing we should aim to write as briefly as possible. It will be easier for you to write and therefore easier for your reader to read. By writing briefly you will get your point across more quickly, more precisely and in fewer words. Be careful not to use too few words though as you may sound a little abrupt. You should be aiming to have an average sentence length of between 15 and 20 words. So here are the **top ten tips** to help you achieve this:

1. **Use shorter, plainer and more familiar, everyday words.** For example, say 'repay' instead of 'reimburse'; 'use' instead of 'utilise'; and 'read' instead of 'peruse'.
2. **Use single words instead of phrases.** So, 'if' or 'when' instead of 'in the eventuality of'; 'because' instead of 'as a consequence of'.
3. **Avoid overuse of adjectives and adverbs** in your business writing. Be factual about what you are saying. Then, there can be no argument or misinterpretation.
4. **Avoid clichés**, for example: at the end of the day, in this day and age, move the goal posts, the bottom line.
5. **Swap old fashioned wordy expressions for more familiar words.** For example, say 'although' instead of 'notwithstanding the fact that'; 'thank you for your letter' instead of 'we are in receipt of your recent correspondence'; and 'about' instead of 'in connection with'.
6. **Avoid tautologies**, which means saying the same thing twice. Would you say that you reversed your car backwards? Could you reverse it any other way? So, starting your final paragraph with 'Finally, in conclusion ...' is not necessary. One or the other is enough.
7. **Use the active voice whenever possible.** For example, you will use fewer words if you say 'The secretary typed the letter' rather than 'The letter was typed by the secretary'. Put the subject first in the sentence followed by the action it is doing, ie the verb.
8. **Avoid nominalisation**, which is when the main verb is used as a noun. If you use the main verb as a noun the sentence will be longer and not as direct. It would be briefer to say 'Mr Brown thoroughly examined the computer' rather than 'A thorough examination of the computer was carried out by Mr Brown'.
9. **Cut out useless words** such as: very, quite, really, actually, basically.
10. **Use lists and bullet points** when you have several points to make. It will be much easier on the eye for your reader and therefore quicker to read.

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