

## EDITING FOR CLEAR AND PROFESSIONAL LANGUAGE: TEN HINTS

1. Know your audience. In many cases, you'll be writing for an audience that is familiar with your field, but perhaps not with the details of your particular project or expertise. Give your audience the information they need—don't dumb it down for a six-year-old, but don't write overly dense prose filled with jargon, either.

2. Write complete sentences. Avoid fragments, avoid sentences spliced together with commas, and aim for sentences of about 15-20 words. Lots of short, choppy sentences can be distracting, while lots of long, convoluted sentences can be confusing. Try to strike a balance between extremes for optimal reader comprehension.

3. Replace the broad "this" as a subject.

not: The tool is at a default, guarded position both before and after the milling process. This allows the cutting to be done only at the time the operator chooses.

but: The tool is at a default, guarded position both before and after the milling process. This default position allows the cutting to be done only at the times the operator chooses.

4. Avoid piled-up modifiers (*i.e.* "approximate minimum safe specific capacity").

not: a slope stability and piping failure analysis

but: an analysis of slope stability and piping failure

5. Trimming down phrases makes your prose more readable and concise. Try to replace longer phrases with single words or shorter phrases that mean the same thing:

In order to = to

For the purpose of = to

In the event that = if

Prior to = before

Subsequent to = after

Serves to illustrate = illustrates

Is in compliance with = complies with

Has responsibility for testing = tests

At this point in time = now

Because of the fact that = because

At a temperature of 298K = at 298K

At different temperature values = at different temperatures

6. Use the past tense when reporting specific actions, observations, and procedures that took place in the past. Use the present tense to describe things that are always or generally true.

past: After construction and modification, the mower assembly was field tested at the fruit orchard in Illinois.

present: The mower is capable of cutting heavy grass up to one foot high.

past and present: Aluminum was used for the prototype because it is easily available and machinable.

7. To build coherent paragraphs, repeat the same subject (or a synonym) in almost every sentence.

8. Never start a sentence with a numeral or an abbreviation—write it out.

9. Find someone to read your report critically before you have to hand it in.

10. Check your spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. Remember the limits of spell-checkers and grammar-checkers.