**Principles for Good Writing**

You will notice that some guidelines appear in multiple sources, perhaps reworded a bit. That just proves how many people think those points are important!

**Source 1: The Science of Scientific Writing (SSW)**

(From the article “https://www.americanscientist.org/blog/the-long-view/the-science-of-scientific-writing” by George Gopen and Judith Swan.)

**[SSW1]** Follow a grammatical subject as soon as possible with its verb.

[SSW2] Place in the stress position the “new information” you want the reader to emphasize.

**[SSW3]** Place the person or thing whose “story” a sentence is telling at the beginning of the sentence, in the topic position.

[SSW4] Place appropriate “old information” (material already stated in the discourse) in the topic position for linkage backward and contextualization forward.

**[SSW5]** Articulate the action of every clause or sentence in its verb.

[SSW6] Usually, provide context for your reader before asking that reader to consider anything new.

[SSW7] Usually, try to ensure that the relative emphases of the substance coincide with the relative expectations for emphasis raised by the structure.

**Source 2: Style: The Basics of Clarity and Grace (BCG)**

(From the book “Style: The Basics of Clarity and Grace” by Joseph M. Williams and Joseph Bizup)

**[BCG1]** Make main characters the grammatical subjects in sentences. Put these near the beginning of sentences.

**[BCG2]** Specify important actions as verbs, not nouns. Use verbs to convey the most significant information.

**[BCG3]** Get to the main verbs quickly. Avoid long introductory phrases and clauses. Avoid interrupting the subject-verb connection.

[BCG4] Open your sentences with information familiar to your reader, such as what you've already been talking about. Push new complex information to the ends of sentences, climaxing the sentence. In the sentence, move from familiar to new.

[BCG5] In a passage of related sentences (e.g. developing an idea), begin sentences with consistent subjects or topics.

**[BCG6]** Be concise. Cut meaningless or repeated words with obvious implications. Compress the meaning of a phrase into one or two words. Prefer affirmative sentences to negative ones.

**[BCG7]** Control sprawl. Don't tack more than one subordinate clause onto another. Extend sentences with resumptive, summative, and free modifiers. Extend sentences with coordinate structures, arranging elements from shorter to longer.

[BCG8] Use parallel structures to create a sense of balance and elegance.

**Source 3: Ideas mentioned in Publishing English lessons (PE) (and some just given here for your benefit)**

(Some from Matthew Might, some from Murray, some from elsewhere)

[PE1] Avoid weasel words: salt & pepper, beholder, lazy, overuse of adverbs. Be as objective and precise as possible. Replace or delete words that make the meaning less precise unless you want to be imprecise to indicate the limits of your knowledge.

[PE2] Be concise. If the same accuracy of meaning can be conveyed with fewer words, use fewer words. E.g. Do not use “In order to” at the beginning of a sentence because “To” means exactly the same thing and is more concise. (In the middle of a sentence, “in order to” is sometimes needed.)

[PE3] Avoid redundancy. “In the following Table 3 below” (triply redundant!) can be just “in Table 3”. “such as x, y, z, etc.” says “the list is incomplete” twice.

[PE4] Avoid overly long noun phrases as grammatical subjects or objects. Also avoid verbs with long adverbial clauses or more than two adverbs. (Related to BCG3: Avoid long introductory clauses and phrases.)

[PE5] Use pronouns like “it”, “they”, “that”, and “which” only when there will be no doubt in the reader's mind the things they refer to. When in doubt, name the thing specifically, but do not let the writing get too clunky. You need a balance of clarity and elegance – ideal wording has both.

[PE6] Look for convenient ways to rewrite sentences whose main verbs are “is/are” or “has/have” to use more interesting verbs. You don’t have to eliminate all such overused verbs, but you should not have too many instances of them, particularly if there’s a nice way to avoid them.

[PE7] Look for cultural bias and subjective terms like “foreign” or “our government”. Do not assume your readers know the “obvious” things that are known by “everyone” in your own culture. These are like beholder words but, even worse, may be meaningless or insulting to many readers: “During the reform and opening, …”, “After Liberation, …”, “It is obvious that proximity to India gives Pakistan <something>.”

[PE8] To check for logic in a sentence, express the main idea of [parts of] the sentence in a few words. Is it clear what the sentence focuses on? Does the main idea make sense? Is the idea so obvious that it does not need to be stated? Are you being wimpy? (Example of wimpy: “**Some** researchers **believe** that this **may** be a **possible** factor.”) Are the ideas logically connected? Is the argument circular? (Check your definitions.)

[PE9] Transitions between sentences and conjunctions between clauses are good ideas but make sure that you understand subtleties of what the transitions/conjunctions mean, particularly those that imply a difference or similarity with what went before. Consider “whereas”, “nevertheless”, “although”, “because”, “so”. Be careful with “as” because “as” means both “when” and “because”. What does it mean in “As I went to the store, I got warm.”? Do not overuse transitions; Many sentences do **not** need a transition at the start!

[PE10] “And”, “But”, or “So” are conjunctions that connect ideas. They should be used to connect clauses within sentences but avoid starting sentences with “And”, “But”, or “So”. (Once or twice in an entire article is OK for “shocking” connections.)

* To start sentences, “Thus,” (= “so”) is fine and “However,” (= “but”) is good but do not overuse it; for variety you can sometimes put it further in the sentence: “The next step, however, can introduce larger errors.”
* When you are tempted to use “And” to start a sentence, you can use “Moreover”, “In addition”, or “Also”, or just combine the sentences (“*…enjoy sports. And they also…*” becomes “*…enjoy sports and they also…*”).
* Avoid run-on sentences; Do not use so many conjunctions in a sentence that the main thrust of the sentence is obscured.

[PE11] The passive voice is bad when it hides relevant or explanatory information, but fine if the agent does not matter or the sentence reads well with “by” to specify the agent.

[PE12] (Related to BCG6) Beware of double/triple negatives like: “The survey failed to prove that Hypothesis 1 was not false.” Look for positive ways to express the same ideas.

[PE13] When using comparison terms like “larger” or “more profit”, make sure that your readers will know which things are being compared. It may be clear to you but not to them.

[PE14] Avoid informal terms like “a lot of”, “nowadays”, “more and more”, and “lab”. Do not use contractions: “don’t”, “it’s”, “they’ll”, etc. Do not try too hard to use fancy formal terms like “hereafter” and “heretofore”.

[PE15] Always, *always*, ***always*** run the final version of your paper through Grammarly (or some similar grammar/spelling checker). Grammarly gives a nice, free second opinion to supplement the functions built into MS Word. Do not, however, completely trust Grammarly. It does miss some errors and some of the things it thinks are errors are actually good writing.