

The Two Minutes It Takes To Read This Will Improve Your Writing Forever



You're busy, so I'll keep this quick.

Following are the simplest tips I can give you to easily — and forever — improve the quality of your writing.

Delete the word “that.”

At least 90% of the times you use the word “that” can be removed from your writing and it will instantly make your sentence stronger.

Example: “You believe that I’m lying, but I’m not.” becomes “*You believe I’m lying, but I’m not.*”

Delete the words “I think.”

It adds nothing. Remove it to strengthen your point.

Example: “I think this is a good sentence.” becomes “*This is a good sentence.*”

Avoid words that end in “-ing.”

In most cases, the “-ing” softens your word and adds no value. Your writing will read better if you avoid it.

Example: “The experiences we’re seeking end up being underwhelming and even disappointing.” becomes “*The experiences we seek often underwhelm and disappoint.*”

Short sentences. Short paragraphs.

Most sentences can be cut in half. Don’t be afraid to have a two or three word sentence.

Keep paragraphs to less than three sentences.

White space is your reader’s friend.

Shrink your opening sentence.

Make it compelling, but keep it short and conversational.

Example: “This is a post that’s going to help you become a better writer.” becomes “I can help you.”

From George Orwell's seminal essay "Politics and the English Language" (1946):

- I. Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.
- II. Never use a long word where a short one will do.
- III. If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
- IV. Never use the passive where you can use the active.
- V. Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
- VI. Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.

Active Writing Tips

Before we explore a wealth of examples, let's review some active writing tips. You'll notice that, in the passive examples below, there are a few key words. Examples include:

is - is roamed; is viewed

was - was changed; was run

were - were eaten; were corroded

Pay special attention to the subject in each sentence. Is the subject performing the action? If so, you have a nice, clear sentence, written in active voice.

In sentences containing passive voice, it's sometimes unclear what the subject is about. In fact, the subject often falls to the end of the sentence, instead of the beginning.

Examples of Active vs. Passive voice

Active Voice

Harry ate six shrimp at dinner.
Beautiful giraffes roam the savannah.
Sue changed the flat tire.
We are going to watch a movie tonight.
I ran the obstacle course in record time.
The crew paved the entire stretch of highway.
Mom read the novel in one day.
I will clean the house every Saturday.
The staff is required to watch a safety video every year.
Tom painted the entire house.
The teacher always answers the students' questions.
The choir really enjoys that piece.
The forest fire destroyed the whole suburb.
The two kings are signing the treaty.
The cleaning crew vacuums and dusts the office every night.
Larry generously donated money to the homeless shelter.
The wedding planner is making all the reservations.
Susan will bake two dozen cupcakes for the bake sale.
The science class viewed the comet.
The director will give you instructions.
Thousands of tourists visit the Grand Canyon every year.
The homeowners remodeled the house to help it sell.
The saltwater corroded the metal beams.
The kangaroo carried her baby in her pouch.

Passive Voice

At dinner, six shrimp were eaten by Harry.
The savannah is roamed by beautiful giraffes.
The flat tire was changed by Sue.
A movie is going to be watched by us tonight.
The obstacle course was run by me in record time.
The entire stretch of highway was paved by the crew.
The novel was read by Mom in one day.
The house will be cleaned by me every Saturday.
A safety video will be watched by the staff every year.
The entire house was painted by Tom.
The students' questions are always answered by the teacher.
That piece is really enjoyed by the choir.
The whole suburb was destroyed by the forest fire.
The treaty is being signed by the two kings.
Every night, the office is vacuumed and dusted by the cleaning crew.
Money was generously donated to the homeless shelter by Larry.
All the reservations are being made by the wedding planner.
For the bake sale, two dozen cookies will be baked by Susan.
The comet was viewed by the science class.
Instructions will be given to you by the director.
The Grand Canyon is visited by thousands of tourists every year.
The house was remodeled by the homeowners to help it sell.
The metal beams were corroded by the saltwater.
The baby was carried by the kangaroo in her pouch.