



Cassie Hart Copywriting
& Editorial Services



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INTRODUCTION

Ahhh, March. Doesn't the name have a fresh, spring-like sound to it? Never mind that we may very well experience at least one more massive snowfall before the month's end, or that we still have to bundle up every time we head outdoors. The important thing is that warmer weather is on its way and before we know it, we'll be in the midst of backyard barbecues and pool parties. Now *that's* something to look forward to!

So in the spirit of keeping a positive attitude during the last few weeks of winter, I'm going to urge that same outlook to carry over into all personal and professional aspects of my life—and I'm going to count on it to inspire new ideas and instill fresh creativity for my work. Here's to hoping a change of pace (and weather) will do the same for you!

All the best,

Cassie Hart

Feature Article

5 tips for better prose (part I)

The key to writing effective business communications is to keep your text clear, concise, and to-the-point. No matter how brilliant an idea may be, writing that sports second-rate sentences or relinquishes the rules of punctuation will cause readers to have a tough time deciphering the author's message, which can, unfortunately, cost you the businesses you've worked so hard to obtain.

The following tips can be used as a checklist to help produce informative, effective content. Reviewing your materials before sending them to the printer or posting them online may take a little extra effort, but it's worth it to make sure your documents—and your business—appear as professional as possible.

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#1 Break up run-on sentences.

Think back to your high school English class and you'll probably recall discussing run-on sentences. A run-on sentence is occurs when two or more sentences merge without any sort of punctuation separating them. For example:

The department supervisor scheduled a meeting to discuss new procedures this meeting will be held tomorrow morning.

Help readers process content more easily by simplifying lengthy sentences. The sentence above can be amended by (a) adding a semicolon to separate each idea or (b) creating an entirely new sentence.

1. The department supervisor scheduled a meeting to discuss new procedures; this meeting will be held tomorrow morning.
2. The department supervisor scheduled a meeting to discuss new procedures. This meeting will be held tomorrow morning.

#2 Vary sentence lengths.

Just as sentences that are too long can be difficult to read, a series of short, choppy sentences also makes it tough to translate text. Varying sentence lengths within each paragraph will allow your words flow much more smoothly.

Choppy: Jack's playgroup meets on Mondays. It begins at 10:00 am. The group meets at Hanover Park. Eight to ten children usually participate.

Better: Jack's playgroup, which meets on Mondays, begins at 10:00 am at Hanover Park. Eight to ten children participate each week.

#3 Use the active voice.

Active voice occurs when the subject of the sentence performs the action. (E.g., The president attended yesterday's meeting.) *Passive voice* is when the subject is acted upon. (E.g., Yesterday's meeting was attended by the president.) Sentences that employ the active voice are typically easier to read than those using passive voice. Use the active voice whenever possible.

#4 Avoid ambiguous phrases.

Ambiguous words or phrases can be interpreted in two or more ways, leaving readers

confused about the true meaning of a sentence. Make sure your words and sentences don't allow readers to second guess your meaning.

Ambiguous: Our study group has been discussing English dialects. It's fascinating.

The reader is left to determine what exactly the writer means by *fascinating*. Is he intrigued by the study group or by the discussion about English dialects?

Specific reference to the group: Our study group has been discussing English dialects. The group is fascinating.

Specific reference to the subject matter: Our study group has been discussing English dialects. This topic is fascinating.

#5 Condense wording when possible.

Another common problem occurs when more description than is really necessary is included in a sentence. Wordy sentences can often be pared down to eliminate redundancy and provide clearer meaning.

Wordy: Our trip to the beautiful, scenic Yellowstone National Park was absolutely wonderfully fabulous!

Condensed: Our trip to scenic Yellowstone National Park was fabulous!

Imprinting these guidelines in your mind—or tacking this article to your bulletin board for a quick reference point—will help keep your prose polished as you write future projects. Stay tuned for five more handy tips in the next issue of *WriteTips!*

RESOURCES

Are you responsible for writing duties at work or for your organization? These basic desktop references are good for everyone to have on hand—they'll make the writing process easier!

Dictionary - A good dictionary is indispensable, and a must-have reference tool for your desk, no matter what profession you're in. Merriam-Webster is a good bet, and an online version is also available at www.m-w.com/home.htm.

Thesaurus – Looking for another way to say it (whatever *it* is)? Crack open *Roget's International Thesaurus* for a variety of

wording choices. Over 330,000 words and phrases in 1,075 categories are included, and updated editions (most recent: 6th edition) keep up with trends in today's ever-expanding vocabulary.

Style manual - Your company might have a corporate style guide, but it may not address every issue that tends to crop up when writing. One source I like to use *The Chicago Manual of Style*, which provides guidelines for creating lists, special characters, punctuation, plurals, acronyms, and much, much more.

FEEDBACK CENTRAL

Have suggestions or comments about how to make this ezine even better? I'd love to hear from you! Are the articles useful? Have any of these tips helped with your own writing? Send me an [email](#) and let me know how I'm doing!

ABOUT CASSIE HART

Over nine years of professional writing experience has afforded me the opportunity to learn the finer points of writing efficient, effective, and creative copy. Press releases, brochures, newsletters, website content, and articles are among the many types of marketing and promotional communications I regularly generate for clients. To discuss potential projects not listed here (or to obtain more information about any project types listed above) please [contact me](#). All initial consultations and estimates for projects are FR*E!

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