Samples of Bad Writing

There are two simple solutions to improve writing. One is to take greater care in the preparing materials; another is to make certain that written materials undergo detailed scrutiny. Never have the grant reviewers be the first to evaluate your proposal. If you have any doubt about something you have written, be prepared to change it. If the meaning is ambiguous to you, it will certainly be difficult for somebody else.

The most common causes of bad writing include:

- Use of jargon
- Poor punctuation
- Weak grammar and syntax
- Long, complex sentences
- Burying the lead
- Density
- Lack of specificity
- Undocumented references
- Verbosity

Use of jargon: Jargon can be distinguished from terminology in that it is informal and essentially part of the oral culture of a group, with limited formal or written expression. Many jargon terms have non-jargon equivalents, which would be used in print or when addressing non-specialists. For example:


Translation: I used my fork to eat a potato.”

Punctuation: Poor writing often involves an incorrect punctuation mark being substituted for another. The most frequent error is the use of a comma to string together statements that are grammatically separate. For example:

> 'The senator's reaction was only outrage that a man's career should be threatened, it was her word against his, they chose to believe his.”

There are three separate statements in this sentence. The first comma should be a period (followed by a capital letter) and the second a colon.

Weak grammar and syntax: In linguistics, syntax is the study of the rules, or "patterned relations" that govern the way words combine to form phrases and sentences. Common errors in syntax and phrasing can change the meaning of your writing. For example:

> "She wore a dress the same color as her eyes her father brought her from San Francisco."
**Long complex sentences:** Long sentences should be avoided. This is a common problem when authors start their subject, add qualifying clauses or explanations, and then forget the original intent of the sentence. For example:

> “If we contrast the past situation where although a doctor may not have been able to cure a patient, he would have visited the patient regularly giving emotional support; with a situation that might occur today, such as the impersonal treatment of a patient using highly sophisticated technology, it could be argued that this transition has produced a less humane or compassionate system.”

In another example, the weakness is caused by its length, and also by its poor grammar and confusing repetitions.

> “The Program is of vital importance, and would assist in creating a significant improvement in the quality of life of disabled people of all ages, not least as access to transport is a key requirement in education and employment, as well as for social, leisure, health, shopping and other activities.”

It starts with the active verb and is switched to the conditional 'would'. The use of the word “of” three times in quick succession makes the sentence clumsy; and 'not least as' should be 'because'. Like other examples, it would be improved if it were split into two separate sentences.

**Burying the Lede:**

The project we are proposing is based on an excellent idea developed in Australia during the 1990’s. The first person to realize that this was a good idea died some time ago. In the event we are funded, we hope to continue the project until it is no longer needed. The way we look at it is, “nothing ventured, nothing gained.” That is why we are proposing to conduct an advanced algebra workshop for high school Math teachers using hand-held puppets so they can use this art form to introduce math concepts to their students.

**Density:**

Existing is being unique. Existence, reality, essence, cause, or truth is uniqueness. The geometric point in the center of the sphere is nature’s symbol of the immeasurable uniqueness within its measurable effect. A center is always unique; otherwise it would not be a center. Because uniqueness is reality, or that which makes a thing what it is, everything this is real is based on centralization.”

**Lack of Specificity:**

My research plan is to go to one of the many research libraries that exist in the United States and read poetry. I will analyze the poetry I like and keep notes on what I read. This process could take anywhere from one month to a year. I hope to develop a play or a novel or a
cookbook based on my readings at a later date. I am requesting $10,000 for travel, lodging, and meals during this time. I may want to take a research assistant with me, so an extra $5000 would help.

Undocumented references: In later research, it was proven that Jones was incorrect and science rejected his theories about light until the next century. Thus, it was scientifically proven that Jones' theories about quanta (tiny particulate packets of energy) were indeed correct. The wave formulation was also correct.

1. When was this "later research?" References are required to indicate who performed the research and discussing whether someone was proven incorrect or not, it is a good idea to fully explain who did the proving when, and possibly even how they came to their conclusion.
2. These sentences contradict each other. Was Jones proven incorrect or correct? Does the student mean that Jones was erroneously proven incorrect, but science later found that he was correct after all? Or was Jones correct about some things and not others?
3. The use of "Thus" implies causality. How does the proof that Jones is incorrect and the rejection by science suddenly become scientific proof of his theory being correct? Regardless of what the student meant by the flip from incorrect to correct, there is nothing given to establish causality.

Verbosity: Rather than make direct statements, writers often use elaborate constructions, phrases, and words that are not clearly understood. For example:

When the electricity supply is cut off, it causes a power surge to be put in the circuit and this can lead to a loss of data being suffered in the financial data that has been collected by the company.

Words: 40

If the electricity supply fails, a power surge can lead to a loss of the company's financial data.

Words: 18

The Agency cannot meet this additional work primarily because it comes at a time when a 15 percent reduction is faced in budget resources, and no growth is being considered.

Words: 30

The Agency cannot meet this extra work because we face a 15 percent cut in our budget and we cannot consider any growth.

Words: 23
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BAD</th>
<th>GOOD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The product is not of a satisfactory <strong>nature</strong></td>
<td>The product is unsatisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After specification we <strong>are in a position to</strong> begin detailed design</td>
<td>After specification we can begin detailed design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We are now <strong>in the situation of being able</strong> to begin detailed design</td>
<td>We can now begin detailed design</td>
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URL:  [http://instruct.westvalley.edu/lafave/writsamp0.htm](http://instruct.westvalley.edu/lafave/writsamp0.htm)