

How to edit your employees' writing, 30 easy rules

THREE MAIN RULES

1. Avoid the verb "to be."

Original: Our supervisor and town board are in the process of making appointments to a Historic Preservation and Landmarks Board...

Edited: Our supervisor and town board are appointing a Historic Preservation and Landmarks Board...

2. Express yourself in as few words as possible.

Original: A day does not go by without a media story on America's overwhelming obesity problem...

Edited: America faces an overwhelming obesity problem...

3. Do not use subordinate clauses.

Original: We support this ongoing project that is vital to our community's heritage. Accordingly, we have funded...

Edited: We support this ongoing project, vital to our community's heritage, and have funded...

WRITING

4. Use infinitives to create a more compact structure, eliminate subordinate clauses and demonstrate cause and effect.

Original: The Department of Education has announced a five-year program that will provide free planners for students.

Edited: The Department of Education has announced a five-year program to provide free planners for students.

5. Use relational terms, such as how, where, why, when and what, for a more compact style.

Original: Most people don't know the best tips and techniques for future-proofing their investments.

Edited: Most people don't know how to future-proof their investments.

6. Avoid auxiliary verbs such as hope to, want to, and help to, and use the primary verb instead.

Original: We hope to design special courses to involve students in the My Soldier program.

Edited: We will design special courses to involve students in the My Soldier program.

7. Use transitional words, such as also, in addition, nevertheless, meanwhile and therefore, to create a flow to the writing.

Original: This lack of availability and quality has not deterred some segments of the jewelry trade from capitalizing on Burma's historical image...

Edited: Nevertheless, some segments of the jewelry trade capitalize on Burma's historical image...

8. Combine two related sentences into one.

Original: Our clients rely on our

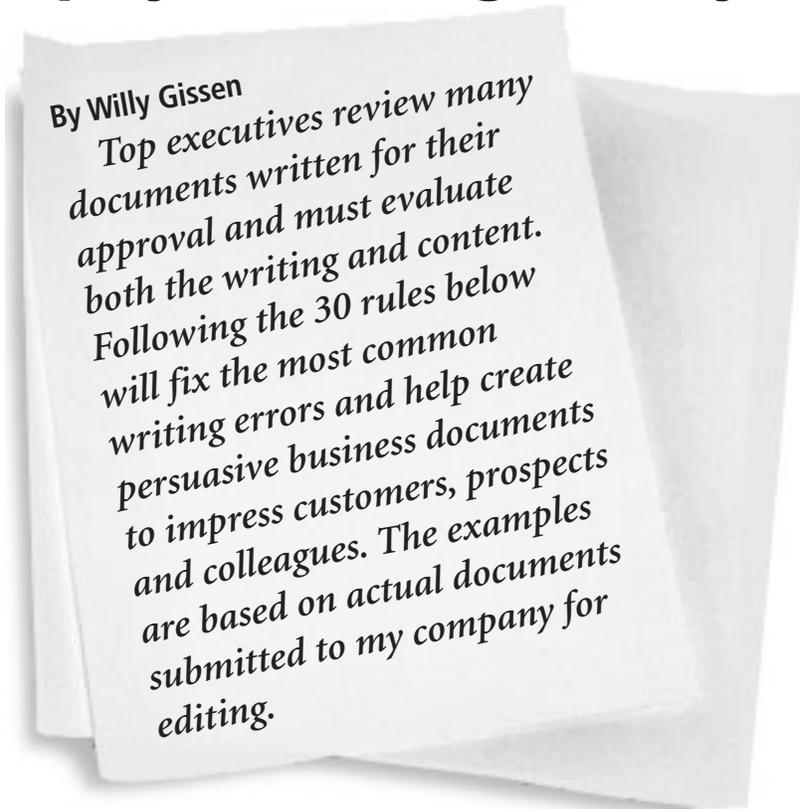
strengths in project management on both the micro and macro levels. We pride ourselves in creating well-developed programs from conception to completion.

Edited: Our clients rely on our strengths in project management on both the micro and macro levels and our ability to create well-developed programs from conception to completion.

9. Express your ideas in a positive instead of a negative construction.

Original: We not only craft the client's message, we also select the best medium for its delivery.

Edited: In addition to crafting the client's message, we select the best medium for its delivery.



Continued

10. Avoid gender prejudice or awkward constructions by changing singular references to plural ones.

Original: Each team member contributes his/her talents and expertise to the customized needs of every client.

Edited: Our team members contribute their talents and expertise to the customized needs of every client.

11. Use parallel construction and/or statement length when possible.

Original: This is our most popular tube. Comes with plastic clips. This tube is meant for pool or calm lakefront. Don't recommend for ocean usage.

Edited: Our most popular tube. Plastic clips included. Use for pool or calm lakefront only. Not recommended for ocean usage.

REPETITION

12. Avoid repetition of words through consolidation.

Original: sFlt-1 induces endothelial dysfunction by adhering to the receptor-binding domains of the placental growth factor and vascular endothelial growth factor.

Edited: sFlt-1 induces dysfunction by adhering to the receptor-binding domains of the placental and vascular endothelial growth factors.

13. Use the word "one" to avoid repetition.

Original: 22 handholds for easier gripping. Two oversize handholds at bottom.

Edited: 22 handholds for easier gripping with two oversize ones at bottom.

14. Do not use the word "I" too often. Change the construction to include the word "my" instead.

Original: As a minority, I am also very interested in the impact and effectiveness of community integration in retaining blacks, Asians and Hispanics.

Edited: As a minority, my personal interests include the impact and effectiveness of community integration in retaining blacks, Asians and Hispanics.

BREVITY

15. Sometimes you can eliminate a whole phrase by using just one word.

Original: We know that many of our patrons may not know why this project is so desperately needed.

Edited: Here's why this project is so desperately needed.

16. Use prepositional phrases to eliminate unnecessary words.

Original: Should you require any additional information, please contact...

Edited: For additional information, please contact...

17. Headlines, photo captions and subheads should be as brief as possible.

Original: Parts of this farmhouse, today used for faculty housing, may date from the Holladays' era. The farmhouse provided a business office for the manager, a residence for his family and a wing for farm workers to eat and relax. Further research needs to be completed to determine the architect and builder.

Edited: The farmhouse provided a business office for the manager, a residence for his family and a wing for farm workers to eat and relax. Today, it is used for faculty housing.

WORD USAGE

18. Use the word "may" instead of "can" to describe a product's capabilities.

Original: The technology can be applied to reduce inefficiencies in the use of XML.

Edited: The technology may be applied to reduce inefficiencies in the use of XML.

19. Only use the phrase "as well as" to link totally unrelated items. Otherwise, just list them with the word "and" as a link.

Original: A landscaping consultant should be hired to review these materials for professional documentation as well as landscape restoration.

Edited: A landscaping consultant should be hired to review these materials for professional documentation and restoration.

20. Avoid using phrases such as "there is" or "this means."

Original: By 1902, there were 18 buildings adjacent to a new farmhouse...

Edited: By 1902, 18 buildings adjoined a new farmhouse...

GRAMMAR

21. Do not use the ampersand (&) or percent sign (%). Write out the word "and" or "percent" instead.

Original: The funding request represents 50% of the total budget...

Edited: The funding request represents 50 percent of the total budget...

22. Do not capitalize words unless they are a proper name.

Original: Its inventory, as filed with the

United States Department of the Interior, notes three Areas of Significance: Architecture, Landscape Architecture and Political.

Edited: Its inventory, as filed with the U. S. Department of the Interior, notes three areas of significance: architecture, landscape architecture and political.

23. Write out numbers less than ten.

Original: Of every 100 samples evaluated, only 5 would be the same.

Edited: Of every 100 samples evaluated, only five would be the same.

PUNCTUATION

24. Include hyphens between adjectives describing each other.

Original: The facility will contain a video production studio.

Edited: The facility will contain a video-production studio.

25. Only two complete sentences both joined by the words "and" or "but" should be separated by a comma.

Original: Simple fats are similar, but have long chains, and proteins contain nitrogen.

Edited: Simple fats are similar but have long chains, and proteins contain nitrogen.

APPEARANCE

26. Choose either bold or underline for emphasis, not both.

27. Avoid using all capital letters in headlines or for emphasis. Use both capitals (at the beginning of the word) and small letters instead.

28. Use frequent subheads in a long document.

29. Keep paragraphs short, about four-to-five lines.

30. Justify only the left margin to avoid uneven gaps between words.

Of course, other talents for a good editing job include word selection, the sequence of ideas and the style of writing. Still, the rules above provide an elementary guideline for the executive to follow.

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