

## Gunning's Ten Principles of Clear Writing (Adapted)

### 1. Keep sentences short.

Tests show that reading tends to become hard when sentences average more than 20 words. Sentences in *Time* and *Reader's Digest* average 16-17 words. Average sentences of business writing exceed 25 words (which is too long).

### 2. Prefer the simple to the complex.

This applies to sentence structure and the choice of words. Write, "try to find out" rather than "endeavor to ascertain." Avoid excessive use of capital letters.

### 3. Prefer the familiar word.

If the reader doesn't understand the words you use, he is likely to miss your meaning. This does not suggest that you should have a small vocabulary. You need all the words you can master.

### 4. Avoid unnecessary words.

Nothing weakens writing more than words that you don't need. Read your copy over closely. Make every word carry its weight. Never write, "It goes without saying that..." since this admits that what you'll say is unnecessary.

### 5. Put action into your verbs.

Active verbs put life in writing. Don't smother action with too many participles and gerunds (an "ing" word functioning like a noun). Write, "We aim to write clearly" rather than "Clarity in composition is our intention." Avoid the passive voice and "to be" verb as much as possible.

### 6. Write the way you talk.

Well, anyway, a little that way. A conversational tone is one of the best avenues to readable writing. Don't lapse into a stuffy business jargon that has no relation to the way business people talk face-to-face.

### 7. Use terms your reader can picture.

Be aware that abstract terms tend to make writing dull and foggy. Prefer the short, concrete words that stand for things you can see and touch.

### 8. Tie in with your reader's experience

Link your new idea with some old idea already known to your reader. This keeps his attention and leads to greater understanding.

### 9. Make full use of variety.

Don't smother your individual writing style. Develop a fresh form of expression that represents you. Avoid clichés. Avoid stilted patterns of writing.

### 10. Write to express—not impress.

Don't show off with complexity. Make your ideas clear with simple, direct writing. The writer who actually makes the best impression is the one who can express complex ideas simply.