

Language barrier

Five tips to making your writing more accessible.



1. Find your own Doris and Bertie

When US investor Warren Buffett **writes his annual reports**, he imagines writing to his sisters, Doris and Bertie – they're smart, but they're not experts in finance.

To get out of your academic bubble, think of your favourite non-academic (like a friend, family member or partner), and write to them.



2. Cure acronymitis

Plenty of acronyms make your writing look like hard work, so use as few as possible.

Say you're writing about the BPS, the British Psychological Society. The first time you use it, explain it. But any time after that, you could just say 'the society...' rather than repeating the acronym.



3. Watch out for zombie nouns

Academics love turning verbs into nouns: the utilisation of, the implementation of. Higher education professor Helen Sword calls them **zombie nouns**: they suck the energy out of your writing, and make it hard to see what's happening. Use more verbs instead.



4. Swap the passive voice for the active

What's easier to understand: a trend was observed or we observed a trend? The first is in the passive voice – we don't know who's doing the action. The passive voice makes your readability worse, so stick to the active.



5. Shorten your sentences

When your average sentence length is 14 words or fewer, readers take in 90% of your content on a first read. When your sentences stretch up to 43 words, that understanding drops to 10%. Add in a few more full stops to keep it readable.

Bonus tip: track your readability score in Microsoft Word. Find out how to **switch it on here**.