

# Writing tips to make your life easier

(and let you get back to the work you prefer)

by Betsy Hedberg  
Editor, Writer, and Writing Consultant  
hedbergenglish.com

**Do you have to write something important?** Here are some tips to make your life easier.

These tips can help you write in any language, but I focus on English because that's my specialty.

## 1. The Structure and Plan

### ➤ Know your audience.

Picture the people who will read your writing. Who are they? Why are they reading it? How will it help them? Become familiar with who you're writing for, and keep them in mind throughout this process.

### ➤ Plan with the end in sight.

Focus on your goals. What are your main points? What do you want your audience to take away?

Once you've answered these questions, structure your entire document with these answers in mind. Every sentence should directly serve these goals and points.

### ➤ Know the publication and its requirements (if applicable).

Learn the requirements in advance to avoid surprises later.



## Outline the flow, and tell a story.

Do you always spend enough time organizing your writing? If you struggle with how to present your ideas, or if you've been told your writing is not clearly structured, this outlining process may help.

- a. Figure out if there's a required structure. You may be able to find a template to help you.
- b. List your main points, keeping your end goals in mind. What are you *really* trying to say?
- c. Now look at your list. If you were to tell a friend who's not in your field about these points, would she understand what you're saying? Do the points flow logically from one to the next? Reorder them if necessary. (And it really can help to share your outline with a friend).
- d. Make sure your points flow so they tell a *story* that leads to your conclusion. It's nonfiction, of course, but it's still a story. It has a beginning that entices people to read more, a middle that fills in the details, and an end that makes readers curious to know even more. If you approach your writing this way, it will be more interesting to read and more clear.



## Add details.

Return to your outline, and add details to support your points. If you start with the details, it's often harder to see the clear flow. Once you add the details, you may choose to reorder your points, but you'll more clearly understand the logical flow and narrative.

### ➤ Fill in the gaps.

When you've made your outline, look at it carefully. Is anything missing? What questions might your readers have? Do you need to add anything?

### ➤ Eliminate redundancies.

Look at your outline to see where you've repeated yourself. Can you combine two similar statements into one shorter statement?

### ➤ Make sure you have an engaging opening.

From the start, your readers need to know why they should care enough to read your writing. Don't begin with a set of facts, figures, or other details. Begin with a big picture explanation of why your writing matters, or a story that engages their emotions or senses.

## 2. The Language

### ➤ Use as few words as possible.

More words take more time to read, and everyone's busy. This advice is not just for the advertising industry — everyone likes to save time. Use the fewest possible words to say what you need to.

### ➤ Make your sentences shorter.

If a sentence seems too long, it probably is. It's often helpful to divide one long sentence into two. This makes ideas more clear and makes your text easier to read.



## Use simple language as much as you can.

For each long or technical word, ask yourself if a shorter word could substitute. When you do use technical terminology, always define your terms unless you're 100% certain your audience is very familiar with them. And always spell out abbreviations the first time you use them.



## Use active voice.

Active voice is more memorable, less wordy, and easier to read. Use action verbs, like this: "Our team led the 2018 rollout." Not passive voice, like this: "The 2018 rollout was led by our team."



## Be consistent with punctuation, terminology, and spelling.

Lack of consistency can be very confusing, and confusion always wastes time. If you call something "X" in one place and "Y" in another, that may confuse your readers. Here's a simple example: If you say "car" on page 1 and "vehicle" on page 2, will everyone know you're talking about the same thing?



## Pay close attention to style guidelines.

Always refer to your publication's style sheet, when available.



## Are you writing American or British?

Pick one form based on your publication requirements, audience, or personal preference, and be consistent. The two versions of English have some potentially tricky differences, particularly in spelling (e.g. color/colour, traveling/travelling).

### 3. Overwhelmed?

#### ➤ Break the process into small steps.

If you try to do too much at once, your efforts may backfire. You'll think "maybe tomorrow" without ever getting down to business.

#### ➤ Be aware of your "blocks."

Does writing feel like extra or unnecessary work? Do you feel like you have to become a *perfect* writer to get started or to publish anything? Do you think you have to write everything in a couple days or that you should be able to do this easily? Have you had bad experiences with your writing in the past? Do you think this should be someone else's job? Do you feel like you just can't do it?

These are all normal and very common responses, but they're mind games! Don't let them sabotage your writing process. You can handle this writing project. But if it's too hard, you can find someone to help.

#### ➤ Ask your colleagues.

Enlist colleagues to help you brainstorm, review your outline, and review drafts. It's important to choose the right people, but this can also be difficult. Of course, find people who know your field of expertise. But a colleague who is too closely tied to the project might be more likely to miss things. If some of your readers work outside your specific field, it's even more important to consult with people who don't know all the insider terminology and concepts.

#### ➤ Establish a routine.

If possible, dedicate the same time every day to your writing. Write a little each day, even if you don't feel like it. And find a place where you can write comfortably without distractions.

➤ **Work with a group.**

If you can find other people who are also working on writing projects, you can motivate each other and hold each other accountable. These people don't need to be in your field. You can be writing about completely different subjects, as long as you are committed to supporting each other toward your goals.

➤ **Work with an editor.**

Professional editing can make all the difference, especially when you're short on time. A good editor can help you structure your document, state your points clearly and naturally, and perfect your grammar, spelling, and style.

Follow these tips to take charge of your writing. And if you need help, feel free to reach out — I'm happy to help!



*Betsy Hedberg*

**Editor, Writer, and Writing Consultant**

Perfecting English-language content for your global audience.

+31 61 8505055

betsy@hedbergenglish.com

[www.hedbergenglish.com](http://www.hedbergenglish.com)