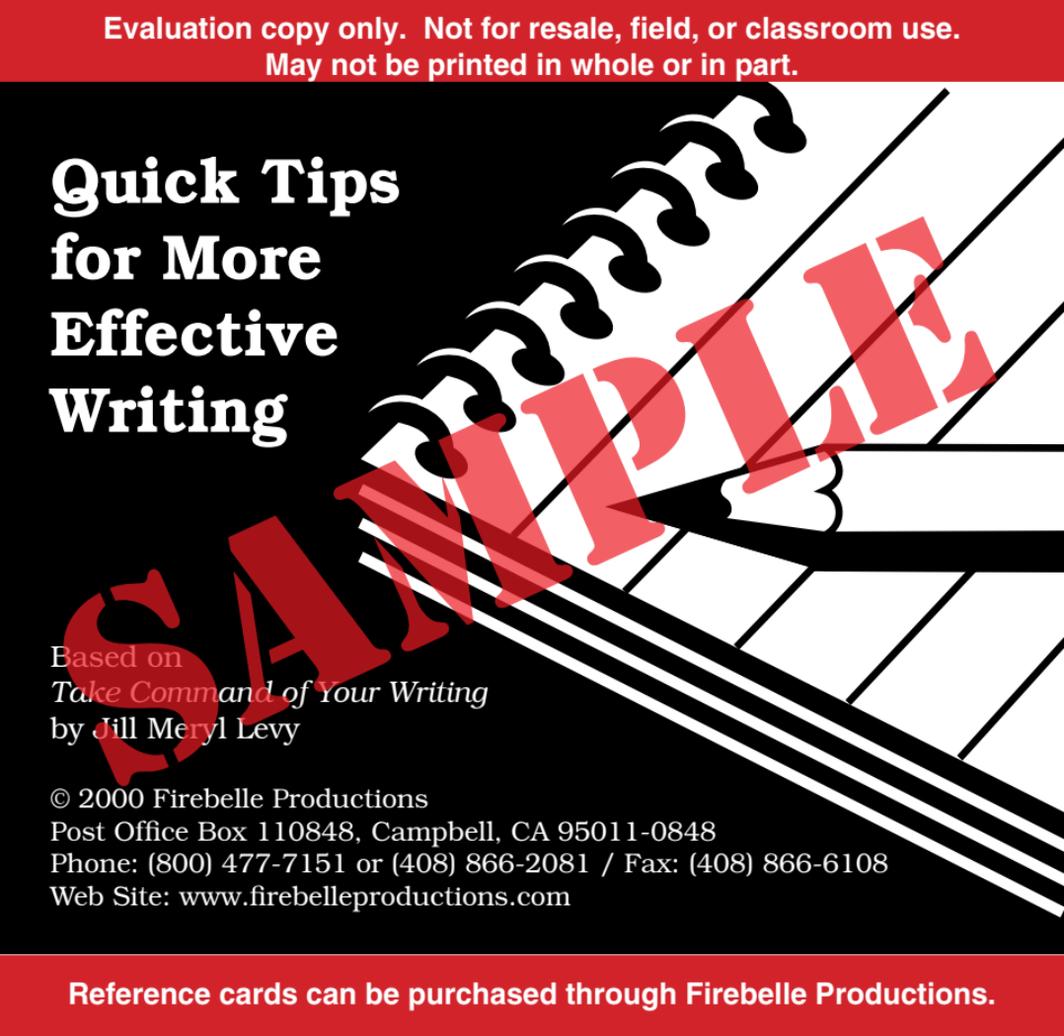


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# Quick Tips for More Effective Writing



Based on  
*Take Command of Your Writing*  
by Jill Meryl Levy

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## Use the Appropriate Voice

**Use the active voice to emphasize the one doing the action.**

*Active: John found the gun hidden in a desk drawer.*

**Use the passive voice to emphasize the person or thing being acted upon.**

*Passive: The gun was found hidden in a desk drawer.*

The active voice is more powerful, more interesting, and usually more concise. However, there are times when the passive voice is preferable.

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**Use the passive voice when the one doing the action is either unknown or less important than the one being acted upon.**

*Active: A man attacked Susan in the parking lot this morning.*

*Passive: Susan was attacked in the parking lot this morning.*

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**Use the passive voice when you want to protect the identity of the one doing the action.**

*Active: The bartender reported seeing the suspect with the murder victim an hour before the shooting.*

*Passive: The suspect was seen with the murder victim an hour before the shooting.*



## Avoid Needless Shifts



### **Avoid shifts in number (e.g., from singular to plural).**

*Inconsistent:* If a person drinks and drives, they may end up in jail.

*Revised:* If a person drinks and drives, he or she may end up in jail.

### **Often the best solution is to make everything plural.**

*Revised:* If people drink and drive, they may end up in jail.

*Better:* People who drink and drive may end up in jail.

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### **Avoid shifts in person (e.g., from third person to second person).**

*Inconsistent:* If a person stops breathing, you can suffer permanent brain damage in four to six minutes.

*Revised:* If a person stops breathing, he or she can suffer permanent brain damage in four to six minutes.

*Revised:* People who stop breathing can suffer permanent brain damage in four to six minutes.

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### **Avoid shifts in voice (e.g., from active to passive).**

*Inconsistent:* We followed the suspect and his position was radioed to officers on the ground.

*Revised:* We followed the suspect and radioed his position to officers on the ground.

## Use Parallel Structure

**Use parallel structure when two or more items are combined with words such as *and*, *but*, *or*, *nor*, or *yet*.**

*Nonparallel:* Playing with fireworks can lead to *fires* and *getting burned*.

*Parallel:* Playing with fireworks can lead to *fires* and *burn injuries*.



**Use parallel structure when presenting lists.**

*Nonparallel:* Our objectives are to (1) *ensure* our personal safety, (2) *isolate* the area, and (3) *identifying* the hazardous material.

*Parallel:* Our objectives are to (1) *ensure* our personal safety, (2) *isolate* the area, and (3) *identify* the hazardous material.

**Use parallel structure with elements being compared or contrasted.**

*Nonparallel:* Roger decided *to become* a police officer rather than *a career* in the fire service.

*Parallel:* Roger decided *to become a police officer* rather than *a firefighter*.

*Parallel:* Roger decided on a career in *law enforcement* rather than *in the fire service*.



## Be Concise



### Avoid careless and unnecessary repetition.

*Repetitious:* Her *fractured* clavicle was *broken* in two places.

*Revised:* Her clavicle was *broken* in two places.

### Omit unnecessary words.

*Wordy:* I pulled him over *for the reason that he made* an illegal U-turn.

*Concise:* I pulled him over *because* he made an illegal U-turn.



### Omit discretionary expressions that don't add value.

*Discretionary:* It is *my opinion that* Bob is an excellent dispatcher.

*Revised:* Bob is an excellent dispatcher.

### Use strong verbs that get directly to the point.

*Weak:* We *made a search of* the woods all afternoon *with the hope that we might find* some clue that would lead us to the missing child.

*Strong:* We *searched* the woods all afternoon, *hoping to find* some clue that would lead us to the missing child.



## Use Coordination and Subordination Correctly

**Use coordination to give equal emphasis to two or more ideas.**

The manager directed one of her employees to call 911, *but* the employee fled the building instead.



**Use subordination to de-emphasize less important ideas so that the more significant ones stand out.**

*Although* the patient didn't appear to be in any distress, he insisted on going to the hospital for further tests.

**Put your most important idea in the main clause, not in the subordinate clause.**

*Wrong:* The passenger, who was ejected from the vehicle, was not wearing his seat belt.

*Revised:* The passenger, who was not wearing his seat belt, was ejected from the vehicle.

*Revised:* The passenger was ejected from the vehicle because he was not wearing his seat belt.



## Avoid Mixed Sentences



**Avoid mixed constructions - sentences with two or more incompatible grammatical structures.**

*Mixed:* By doubling your distance from a radioactive source reduces your risk of exposure by 75%.

*Revised:* Doubling your distance from a radioactive source reduces your risk of exposure by 75%.

*Revised:* By doubling your distance from a radioactive source, you reduce your risk of exposure by 75%.

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**Make logical connections - subjects and predicates that make sense together.**

*Faulty:* It was a math teacher who first suspected that Shelly's welfare was being abused by her stepfather.

*Revised:* It was a math teacher who first suspected that Shelly was being abused by her stepfather.

*Better:* A math teacher first suspected that Shelly was being abused by her stepfather.



## Avoid Run-Ons and Comma Splices

**Avoid run-on sentences - two independent clauses joined without any punctuation whatsoever.**

*Run-On:* The smoke was thick they had trouble advancing.

**Avoid comma splices - two independent clauses joined by a comma alone, rather than by a comma and a coordinating conjunction (e.g., *and*, *but*, *or*, *so*).**

*Comma Splice:* The smoke was thick, they had trouble advancing.



**Either punctuate properly, . . .**

*Revised:* The smoke was thick. They had trouble advancing.

*Revised:* The smoke was thick, so they had trouble advancing.

**Use a semicolon and transitional expression, . . .**

*Revised:* The smoke was thick; as a result, they had trouble advancing.

**Or make one clause subordinate to the other.**

*Revised:* The smoke was thick, making it difficult for them to advance.

*Revised:* They had trouble advancing because the smoke was thick.



## Avoid Sentence Fragments

A sentence fragment is part of a sentence that is incorrectly punctuated as if it were a complete sentence.

**Ensure your sentence has a subject.**

*Fragment:* Arrived on scene at 1357 hours.

*Revised:* We arrived on scene at 1357 hours.



**Ensure your sentence has a verb.**

*Fragments:* Her eye irritated. She complaining about pain.

*Revised:* Her eye ~~was~~ irritated. She ~~was~~ complaining about pain.

**Pull fragmented phrases and clauses into nearby sentences.**

*Fragment:* We finally figured out who the killer was. Thanks to a tip from an anonymous caller.

*Revised:* We finally figured out who the killer was, thanks to a tip from an anonymous caller.

**Or create two independent sentences.**

*Revised:* We finally figured out who the killer was. We credit a tip from an anonymous caller.



## Take Command of Your Writing

*Take Command of Your Writing* by Jill Meryl Levy is the first comprehensive guide to more effective writing geared specifically for emergency services personnel.

- ◆ Each chapter provides a thorough coverage of the rules, answering many questions that other grammar books leave unanswered.
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