

**Federal Emergency Management Agency**  
**EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE**

**Manual**



**WRITING FOR FEMA**

**This manual was prepared by Stephen Sharro, FEMA Training Division and borrows liberally from the Army Training and Doctrine Command's Action Officer Development Course. For more information on the Army course, contact the Army Institute for Professional Development (<http://www.atsc.army.mil/accp/aipd.htm>)**

# Emergency Management Institute

## *Writing for FEMA*

### Overview

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**Introduction** In today's world of information overload, readers don't have time to wade through obscure writing, searching for meaning. If you write well, readers will read what you write, understand it easily, and remember who wrote it.

**As soon as you move one step from the bottom, your effectiveness depends on your ability to reach others through the spoken or written word.**  
**--Peter F. Drucker**

**Purpose** This manual describes a few simple ways to improve your writing. Apply its teaching points and your writing will take on a clear, concise, and vigorous quality.

**Objectives** Using this manual you should be able to-



- Prepare writing that meets FEMA standards.
- Package writing so it's easy to read.
- Use editing tools to ensure correctness.

**In this manual** This manual contains the following topics:

Topic	See Page
The Need for Complete, Concise, and Clear Writing	2
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Note: To get the most from this manual, review Appendix A.

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# The Need for Complete, Concise, and Clear Writing

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**Introduction** Since writing lacks the advantage of immediate feedback to clarify meaning, it must be complete, concise, and clear from the beginning. Here's what happens if it's not:

The reader will waste time	The writer will also waste time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Rereading.</li><li>• Guessing.</li><li>• Grabbing a dictionary.</li><li>• Picking up a phone.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Taking calls from confused readers.</li><li>• Writing a clarification.</li><li>• Explaining to an irate boss why the paper must be re-written.</li></ul>

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**Speaking versus writing** If feasible, communicate in person instead of writing so you both:

- Can see or sense emotions attached to spoken words.
- Can read body language, which gives larger meaning to the words.
- Can ask questions if you're unable to understand what's said.

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**When to write** Write when--

- Conversation isn't feasible.
- The subject requires analysis.
- You need a permanent record.

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**Quality** Using some bureaucratic language can be good but using a lot of it is poor. Typically, it's pompous, wordy, awkward, and confusing.



In spite of efforts to eradicate it, poor writing still survives:

- It's embedded in the bureaucracy.
- People think government writing should look *official*.
- The undereducated or insecure think they can impress by writing this way.
- Writers either don't know how or else are afraid to change.
- Leaders who should know better tolerate poor writing.

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**Writing is the heart of being a good action officer** It's essential for FEMA action officers to write well, because they write--

- Papers to be signed by senior officials.
- Documents many people read--perhaps nationwide.
- Policies and regulations with great impact.

Remember: An otherwise talented person who doesn't write well works at a disadvantage. This gifted writer says it best:

**Bad writing makes bright people look dumb.**  
**--William Zinsser**

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# Standards and Rules

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**Introduction** This section summarizes FEMA writing standards.

Note: These standards are just that--they're not suggestions.

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**Standards** To be quickly understood, writing must meet these standards:

Standard	Description
Complete.	Answers the mail.
Concise.	Uses fewest words to get point across.
Clear.	Understood in a single, rapid reading.
Organized.	Logical and coherent.
To the point.	Bottom-line up front.
Grammatically correct.	Proper spelling, punctuation, grammar.

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**Clarification** Writing must be error free in spelling and punctuation but not necessarily perfect in finer points of grammar. Remember, *perfect* is the enemy of *good*. A reader who quickly grasps the meaning will likely overlook finer points, such as using *which* instead of *that* or splitting an infinitive.

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**Composition rules** To meet FEMA writing standards, follow these composition rules:

Item	Rule
<b>Main point up front</b>	State purpose and main point up front.
<b>Active voice</b>	Use active voice in most sentences (try for 90 percent).
<b>Short sentences</b>	Write short sentences (average 15 or fewer words).
<b>Short words</b>	Choose one or two-syllable words. Don't exceed 15 percent over two syllables.
<b>Lean paragraphs</b>	Write most paragraphs about one inch deep.
<b>Jargon free</b>	Avoid jargon, especially when writing to outsiders.
<b>Error free</b>	Use correct spelling, punctuation, and grammar.
<b>Informal</b>	Set a businesslike but informal tone. Use <i>you</i> , <i>we</i> or <i>I</i> , instead of <i>this office</i> or <i>this headquarters</i> . <u>Exception</u> : Because it's patronizing, <u>don't</u> say <i>my</i> staff; say <i>our</i> staff.
<b>One page</b>	Limit length to one page for most correspondence.

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## Standards and Rules, Continued

**Example** Adhering to standards improves writing:

Original	Revised
<p><i>This responds to your request for a determination of eligibility to receive a stipend for training attended during the period 28 Aug 99 to 15 Jan 00.</i></p> <p><i>FEMA Instruction 996 specifically states that "students undergoing training above the entry level while undergoing such training are entitled to payment of stipends as appropriate."</i></p> <p><i>Since the course in question is above entry level, you are entitled to receive a stipend for the period you were undergoing training.</i></p> <p><i>A copy of this letter and receipts for your travel expenses associated with this training should be submitted to the Admissions Office for processing.</i></p>	<p>The training you participated in from Aug 28, 1999 to January 15, 2000 entitles you to receive a stipend.</p> <p>To get this stipend, please:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Go to the Admissions Office, and</li> <li>• Be sure to take copies of this letter and your travel receipts with you.</li> </ul>

**Before and after** Here's what was done to improve the original document:

Before	After
Main point buried in middle of text.	Main point stated in beginning.
Wordy and pompous.	Minimum words to get point across.
Written in passive voice.	Written in active voice.

**Application** Apply FEMA writing standards to all formats:

Standard formats: FEMA Instruction xx prescribes standard formats for official correspondence such as--

- Informal memorandums (no official letterhead).
- Formal memorandums (official FEMA letterhead).
- Letters.

Nonstandard formats include fact sheets, information papers, decision papers, and other documents used to shape and convey information. FEMA Instruction xx doesn't prescribe formats for them, so they vary across organizations.

# Active Voice

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**Introduction** If you did nothing else with sentences except change them from passive to active voice, you would see an immense improvement in your writing. Active voice makes sentences short, vigorous, and to the point.

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**Definition: active voice** A sentence written in the active voice shows the subject acting in standard English sentence order: subject-verb-object. A sentence written in the active voice shows the *subject* as the *doer* of the action.

Example: George threw the ball.

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**Definition: passive voice** Passive voice shows the subject receiving the action, which changes standard sentence order. What was the subject of the sentence now becomes its object.

Thus, a sentence written in the passive voice shows the *object* as the *doer* of the action. The subject no longer acts but is acted upon.

Example: The ball was thrown by George.

A passive sentence may also omit the object (*doer* of the action) yet still contain a complete thought. However, this makes a sentence vague, because it may omit key information such as *who*, *what*, or *why* (perhaps intentionally).

Examples:

- . The ball was thrown.
  - . The report was lost.
  - . No decision has been made.
- 

## Passive form

We also define passive voice by a sentence's verb forms. Most verbs change their form to distinguish between past and present. Passive voice contains verbs in these forms:

- . A form of the helping verb *to be*: The report was lost.
- . Plus a main verb forming a past participle: The report was lost.

Examples of passive verb forms:

Forms of helping verb <i>to be</i>		Main verb as a past participle	
<i>am</i>	<i>be</i>	<i>said</i>	<i>caught</i>
<i>is</i>	<i>being</i>	<i>led</i>	<i>arisen</i>
<i>was</i>	<i>been</i>	<i>become</i>	<i>begun</i>

Note: Most past participles end in *e*, *en*, *un*, or *t*.

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## Active Voice, Continued

### Write in the active voice

This table illustrates why the active voice is more powerful:

Passive voice	Active voice
Uses 20 percent more words.	Uses fewer words.
Takes more time to read.	Takes less time to read.
May omit doer of the action.	Identifies doer of the action.
Lessens impact of stated action.	Makes writing direct and forceful.

Example:

Written in passive voice	Written in active voice
<i>It was recommended that an ethics committee <u>be created</u> by the mayor, so citizens would <u>be afforded</u> a means of reporting fraud, waste, or abuse. (25 words)</i>	<i>The City Council recommended the mayor create an ethics committee, so citizens could report fraud, waste, or abuse. (18 words)</i>

### Conversion

To convert a passive expression into an active one, take these steps:

Step	Action
1	Find the real subject of the sentence, the <i>doer</i> of the action.
2	Put the doer up front in the subject position.
3	Eliminate the helping verb <i>to be</i> .
4	Convert the past participle into an action verb.

Examples:

Passive	Active
The report has been completed.	Jane completed the report.
The team was beaten.	The team lost.
The door was closed by John.	John closed the door.
The request could not be approved.	We could not approve the request.

### When to use passive

Passive voice has useful purposes:

Use passive voice when	Example
Receiver is focus of action.	City Hall was demolished by the quake.
Actor is unknown.	The store was robbed.
Actor is irrelevant.	The paragraphs will be numbered.
The situation calls for discretion.	No decision has been made. (Your boss is sitting on the action.)

# Eliminating Wordiness

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**Introduction** Using the active voice improves writing quality. However, if writing contains unnecessary, pompous, or long words, it will still be hard to read. Remember, the longer it takes to say it, the weaker it comes across.

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**Wordy expressions** This section identifies types of wordy expressions and ways to eliminate them:



- **Deadwood.**
- **Dummy subjects.**
- **Doubled expressions.**
- **Needless repetition.**
- **Overuse of *the, that, or which*.**
- **Nouns as modifiers.**

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A well-chosen word is worth a thousand pictures. However, some people choose words to impress, rather than to express. Big words and pompous phrases add deadwood that hinders meaning.

Most wordy expressions have much shorter common synonyms far easier to read, write, say, and hear. See Appendix A, *Simpler Words and Phrases*.

Examples:

<b>Instead of saying</b>	<b>Try saying</b>
At this point in time	Now
For the purpose of	To
In the near future	Soon
Due to the fact that	Because
Separate out	Separate
A prioritized list	A priority list
In order to	To
Instruct	Teach
Provide	Give
Outsource	Contract

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## Eliminating Wordiness, Continued

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### Cut out deadwood



To cut out deadwood--

- Use the active voice.
  - Delete extraneous words, phrases, clauses, and sentences.
  - Change long clauses to phrases or single words.
  - Substitute pompous expressions with simpler words.
  - Replace long words with short ones.
  - Use contractions to shorten words.
- 

### Dummy subjects

Dummy subjects are empty expressions that--

- Obscure the real subject.
- Make the sentence longer.
- Delay the point.
- Encourage passive voice.
- Hide responsibility.

Examples: Beginning a sentence with--

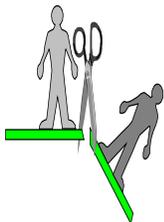
- *It is.*
- *There is.*
- *It appears.*
- *It will be.*

Don't use these expressions unless they refer to something definite mentioned earlier (as in this sentence from page 2: *It's embedded in the bureaucracy*). Otherwise, delete these expressions and move the subject to the front.

Instead of saying	Try saying
It is my intention to . . .	I intend to . . .
There is one thing bothering me.	One thing bothers me.
There are three reasons for this.	Three reasons for this are . . .
It appears that . . .	I think . . .
It is essential that . . .	You must . . .

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### Doubled expressions



Don't use pairs of similar words when one will do. Doubled expressions create meaningless or unnecessary distinctions. These redundant expressions add bulk but not information. If two ideas are slightly different, is it that important? If not, eliminate one and retain the one that expresses meaning more precisely.

Examples:

- The manager's function and role are . . .
  - The diplomats engaged in a frank and open dialogue.
  - The team provides guidance and assistance to . . .
-

## Eliminating Wordiness, Continued

### Needless repetition and redundancy

Avoid needless repetition of words or phrases. While intentional repetition can unify a paragraph and reinforce understanding, too much makes writing appear juvenile and cluttered.

Example:

Before	After
In the absence of the Federal Coordinating Officer, these documents may be signed by a substitute officially designated and acting for the Federal Coordinating Officer.	If the Federal Coordinating Officer is not available, an authorized substitute may sign these documents.

### Redundant expressions

Redundancy is a form of needless repetition. In the examples below we've deleted the redundant words:

- Separate ~~out~~.
- ~~Basic~~ fundamentals.
- Start over ~~again~~.
- Symmetrical ~~in form~~.
- Seldom ~~or ever~~.
- ~~Actual~~ facts.
- ~~Really~~ glad.
- ~~Honest~~ truth.

### Overuse of *the*, *that*, or *which*

Use these words to clarify meaning; otherwise, leave them out. Examples:

- ~~The~~ regulations won't allow it.
- I feel ~~that~~ it's a good decision.
- The report ~~that~~ I'm writing is nearly finished.

In some cases this may require modifying the sentence somewhat. Examples:

Before	After
In this section, give the one or two sentences that summarize your position.	In this section summarize your position in one or two sentences.
We think that the change that they want will result in an engine that is unreliable.	The change they want will make the engine unreliable.

### Nouns as modifiers

Don't use long strings of nouns as modifiers. Revising the sentence may add a word or two, but it's easier to read:

Instead of saying	Try saying
Material replacement alternatives	Alternatives for material replacement.
Increased high cost area allowances	Increased allowances for high cost areas.

# Smothered Verbs

**Introduction** Another way to eliminate unnecessary words is to avoid using smothered verbs.

**Definition: action verb** An action verb is one that expresses meaning without helping verbs or other modifiers. Example: We agree with the decision.

**Definition: smothered verb** A smothered verb is a verb converted to a noun, so it needs a helping verb and prepositions or articles to express action. This lengthens a sentence and saps its vitality.

Example: We are in agreement with the decision.

The writer has--

- Converted the main verb, *agree*, into a noun: *agreement*.
- This now requires a helping verb: *are*.
- A preposition: *in*.

**Distinct endings** Most smothered verbs have distinct endings:

- |       |       |       |
|-------|-------|-------|
| -ance | -ity  | -ness |
| -ant  | -mant | -sion |
| -ence | -ment | -tion |

**Weak helping verbs** Smothered verbs rely on weak helping verbs to show action. If one of them appears, you know a smothered verb is nearby. Examples:

- |            |           |         |            |
|------------|-----------|---------|------------|
| • Be.      | • Do.     | • Give. | • Make.    |
| • Can.     | • Effect. | • Have. | • Provide. |
| • Conduct. | • Get.    | • Hold. | • Put.     |

**Converting smothered verbs** To give your sentences more punch--

- Find the smothered verb.
- Convert it into an action verb (or substitute it with a harder hitting verb). This eliminates the need for a helping verb and other modifiers.

Instead of saying	Try saying
We held a meeting	We met.
I made a choice	I chose . . .
They conducted an investigation	They investigated . . .
We gave consideration to	We considered . . .
We are in support of the plan	We support the plan.
He made an attempt to escape	He tried to escape.

# Short Sentences

**Introduction** Long sentences make writing dense and hard to read. Don't try to cram too many thoughts into one. Break long sentences into shorter ones.

- Read the sentence carefully and sort ideas expressed in it.
- Write a separate sentence for each idea.

**Use bullets** If a sentence contains a series of related ideas or laundry-list items, put them in a bullet format. To make a bullet format, follow these steps:

Step	Action						
1	Break the sentence into a lead-in statement and list ideas under it. Use this technique only for a long series. <u>Don't</u> use it for a series of only two or three ideas unless you want to emphasize them.						
2	Punctuate the lead-in statement in one of two ways: <table border="1" data-bbox="560 804 1390 966"> <thead> <tr> <th>If the lead-in statement is</th> <th>Then punctuate it with</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>A complete sentence</td> <td>A colon (:).</td> </tr> <tr> <td>An incomplete sentence</td> <td>An em dash (--).</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	If the lead-in statement is	Then punctuate it with	A complete sentence	A colon (:).	An incomplete sentence	An em dash (--).
If the lead-in statement is	Then punctuate it with						
A complete sentence	A colon (:).						
An incomplete sentence	An em dash (--).						
3	Place a bullet before each listed item and a period at the end, whether it's a complete sentence or not. <u>Note:</u> Be sure each <i>bulleted</i> item begins with the same grammatical form such as an infinitive phrase, noun, or verb.						

**Example** Example of how bullets make a sentence with laundry-list items more readable:

Before	After
Cards for individuals departing the unit will show a complete forwarding address, the reporting date to the new unit, the order and paragraph number, the issuing headquarters, and the date of departure.	Cards for individuals departing the unit will show-- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete forwarding address.</li> <li>• Reporting date to new unit.</li> <li>• Order and paragraph number.</li> <li>• Issuing headquarters.</li> <li>• Date of departure.</li> </ul>

## Short Sentences, continued

### Sentence variety

Sentences should average about fifteen words, but they don't all have to be the same length. Write sentences that are neither too dense nor too sparse. To give sentences variety, follow these guidelines:

Don't make sentences	Because it makes writing
All the same length.	Monotonous.
Too long.	Dense and hard to read.
All short.	Choppy, telegraphic, or juvenile.

## Packaging

**Introduction** The way something is presented can be as important as its intrinsic worth.

An ordinary meal is made more inviting when served with appealing garnishes and fine tableware. Similarly, readers are more likely to read something when it's presented in an attractive package.

This section describes two packaging techniques:

- Putting the main point up front.
- Using visual devices to draw a reader's eye to the text.

### Definition

Packaging is the arrangement of text to enhance its readability and visual appeal.

Packaging opens up writing and gives it *white space*. Whatever format used--letter, memo, or fact sheet--packaging makes it easier to read.

### Main point up front

Unlike an O. Henry short story, staff writing shouldn't feature suspenseful, unfolding narratives and surprise endings. In staff writing, put the main point up front. This helps the reader understand the issue quickly and go on to something else.

Examples of main points

- Purpose.
- Request.
- Reason for writing.
- Recommendation.
- Conclusion.
- Bottom line.

### Putting the main point up front

To find the main point, pick the sentence you would keep if you had to cut out all the rest. In other words, request something before justifying it or provide the answer before explaining it.

To put the main point up front--

- Open with a short and clear statement of purpose.
- Then state the main point.

Note: Sometimes the two statements can be combined.

## Packaging, Continued

### Visual devices

Though it lacks the substance of *The Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today* is easier to read because of its clever use of visual devices:

- Color.
- Labels.
- Bullet lists.
- Bold headings.
- Boxes.
- Underscoring.
- Italics.
- Tables and graphs.
- Diagrams.

Caution: Don't overdo packaging; too much is as bad as too little.

### Before and after

This is a before-and-after excerpt from an old military regulation. The original is passive, dense, and ponderous. The revision is much easier to read; it's written in the active voice and is packaged to give it white space and visual appeal.

Before	After
<p><b>12. Introduction</b> When Government property is lost, damaged, or destroyed and no other credit method is appropriate, relief from responsibility for the loss may be obtained by explaining the circumstances surrounding the loss, damage, or destruction to the satisfaction of the Director of FEMA or his designated representative. This explanation ordinarily takes the form of a report of survey, which constitutes the most important credit instrument in the FEMA supply system. The report of survey system insures that appropriate investigation is made and that each report of survey is reviewed objectively at a suitable level.</p> <p><b>13 Purpose</b> The report of survey is an instrument to explain and record the circumstances surrounding the loss, damage, or destruction of property so that responsibility can be determined and to serve as a credit document to justify dropping property from the accountable property officer's account. Theoretically, the explanation on the report is made to the Director of FEMA. However, authority for final approval has been delegated to lower levels, usually associate directors, office directors or regional director. The report is particularly useful because it provides for detailed investigation, collection of all information regarding the case in a single report, and review of findings and recommendations. Reviewing authorities, and the Chief Financial Officer represent the levels authorized to take final action on reports of survey. The level at which final action is taken varies with different reports, depending on the nature of the loss, damage or destruction, persons involved, and dollar amount involved.</p>	<p><b>Introduction</b> The report of survey (DD Form 200) is the most important credit method in the Army supply system. Use it to record what happened to lost, damaged, or destroyed Government property. The property-book officer can then take the item off the property account.</p> <p><b>Purpose</b> Use report of survey to--</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Record details of investigation of loss.</li> <li>• Collect all information about the case in a single report.</li> <li>• Review findings and recommendations.</li> <li>• Take lost item off property book.</li> </ul> <p><b>What level takes final action:</b> These levels may take final action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Installation commander.</li> <li>• Reviewing authorities.</li> <li>• Chief of Finance and Accounting (Office of the Comptroller of the Army).</li> </ul> <p><b>Level depends on--</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nature of the loss.</li> <li>• Person involved.</li> <li>• Amount of money involved.</li> </ul>

# Readability Scores

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**Introduction** Readability scores measure ease of reading and reading grade level (RGL).

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**Readability formulas** Readability formulas measure readability, based on word and sentence length. They come in several versions, such as the Flesch Reading Ease score and the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level score. FEMA standard software, Microsoft® Word can automatically calculate and display these scores for your documents. You can calculate any formula manually, but the word processor does it quicker.

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**Caution** These formulas merely indicate if writing is readable. However, short words and short sentences may make writing readable, but they may not make it good. Writing may be readable but lack substance and logic.

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**FEMA clarity index** This is a manual version of a readability formula. We use it here simply to show how a typical formula is calculated. Otherwise, use a word processor.

To compute the clarity index, select a random sample of 200 words or less:

- Select solid text--don't choose bullet lists.
- Sample every ten pages.
- Follow this formula:

Step	Action	Sum
1	Number of sentences.	
2	Number of words.	
3	Number of long words (three or more syllables).	
4	Average words per sentence = (Step 2 / Step 1).	
5	Percentage of long words = (Step 3 / Step 2 x 100).	
6	FEMA Clarity Index = (Step 4 + Step 5).	
7	RGL = (Step 6 x 0.4).	

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**Clarity index scores** Scores: Clarity index scores indicate the following:

- Below 20--too abrupt.
  - About 30--*readable*.
  - Above 40--too hard to understand.
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## Readability Scores, Continued

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### Reading grade level (RGL)

Reading grade level (RGL) links readability to level of education. It takes a tenth-grade education to understand text written at RGL 10. Most people read comfortably at one or two grades below their education level. You should aim for an RGL between 10 and 12.

To lower RGL, use short words and write short sentences. If using technical words with no synonyms, writing short sentences is the easier approach.

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## Editing

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**Introduction** Good writing is a skill acquired only with practice. You can't expect to prepare readable writing by quickly dashing it off. Even experienced writers find writing a difficult, time-consuming process. It's also difficult to edit one's own work.

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**"If I had more time, I'd have written you a shorter paper."**

### Intentions versus results

The best writers have trouble editing their work. The tendency is confuse what was intended with what was written. We don't always express intentions clearly.

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### Pride of authorship

Your writing is fair game to those reviewing it as it passes through the system. This is part of the process so be prepared to have it criticized and modified. To cope with pride of authorship--

- Prepare excellent work.
- Practice writing every day.
- Ask critics to help with errors you didn't see or can't fix.
- Accept changes gracefully.
- Be tactful when proving critics wrong.

## Editing, continued

### Editing Procedure

To edit copy, take these steps:

Step	Action
1	Lay copy aside for an hour or two.
2	Read it but from the <i>reader's</i> viewpoint.
3	For objectivity, ask a colleague to read it.
4	Read copy aloud while a colleague follows text (this will give you an idea how the text flows).

Tip: In a first draft you'll write too much. In the second, cut out half the words.

### Editing others' work

Your writing skill may earn you the thankless task of editing other people's work. People have thin skins when critics judge their writing. You may have the same shortcomings, but it's easier to see them in others. No one writes poorly on purpose, and only a few write poorly from laziness. Be tactful when editing someone's work. Ask yourself, does it need to be perfect or just acceptable? If you want it perfect, then be prepared to invest time to coach and drill the writer.

### The mark of a good Executive

Someday, people may write letters for your signature. Before nitpicking them to death and sending them back, keep in mind the old saying that, "perfect is the enemy of good."

**The mark of a good executive . . . you're handed letters which you know you could have written better yourself and you sign them anyway.**

**--Dwight D. Eisenhower**

### Rules

When editing another writer's work, follow these rules:

Don't	Do
Judge one on his writing ability.	Be objective.
<i>Nit-pick</i> about minor grammatical points or arbitrarily change words.	Weigh value of proposed edits against cost in time and effort.
Change writing for literary effect.	Focus on meeting standards.
Hold one to your standards of perfection.	Accept the writing if it meets minimum FEMA standards (AR 25-50).
Ruthlessly mark up every minor thing.	Give feedback, one step at a time.
Use editing as an evaluation exercise.	Use editing to help the writer learn.
Rewrite one's work--relieves him of responsibility and causes resentment.	Show the writer how to improve.

## Editing, continued

**Checklist** Edit copy three times: 1. for completeness, 2. for conciseness, 3. for clarity.

Complete	✓	Checklist	Notes
		Just enough information.	
		Examples where needed.	
		Relevant facts.	
		Valid interpretation of facts.	
		Logical argument of position.	
		Objective.	
<b>Concise</b>		Main point up front.	
		Active voice.	
		Short words and sentences.	
		Paragraphs one inch deep.	
		No jargon or pompous words.	
<b>Clear</b>		Subject matter laid out clearly.	
		Subject advanced in stages.	
		Smooth transitions.	
		Clear linkages between stages.	
		Correct spelling/punctuation.	
		Informal.	
		Packaged attractively.	



## Manual Summary, continued

### Key points (continued)

Topic	Summary	Page						
<b>Eliminating wordiness</b>	Types of wordy expressions and examples of eliminating them:							
	<b>Deadwood</b>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Instead of saying</th> <th>Try saying</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>At this point in time . . . Due to the fact that . . .</td> <td>Now . . . Because . . .</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Instead of saying	Try saying	At this point in time . . . Due to the fact that . . .	Now . . . Because . . .	8	
	Instead of saying	Try saying						
	At this point in time . . . Due to the fact that . . .	Now . . . Because . . .						
	<b>Dummy subjects</b>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Instead of saying</th> <th>Try saying</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>It is requested that . . . There is (are) . . .</td> <td>Please . . . (Leave out.)</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Instead of saying	Try saying	It is requested that . . . There is (are) . . .	Please . . . (Leave out.)	9	
	Instead of saying	Try saying						
	It is requested that . . . There is (are) . . .	Please . . . (Leave out.)						
<b>Doubled expressions</b>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Instead of saying</th> <th>Try saying</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>The manager's <u>function</u> and <u>role</u> . . .</td> <td>(Take one out.)</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Instead of saying	Try saying	The manager's <u>function</u> and <u>role</u> . . .	(Take one out.)	9		
Instead of saying	Try saying							
The manager's <u>function</u> and <u>role</u> . . .	(Take one out.)							
<b>Needless repetition</b>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Instead of saying</th> <th>Try saying</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Dick gave the book to Jane. Jane took the book and read it.</td> <td>Dick gave the book to Jane, who read it.</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Instead of saying	Try saying	Dick gave the book to Jane. Jane took the book and read it.	Dick gave the book to Jane, who read it.	10		
Instead of saying	Try saying							
Dick gave the book to Jane. Jane took the book and read it.	Dick gave the book to Jane, who read it.							
<b>Over use of <i>the, that, or which</i></b>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Instead of saying</th> <th>Try saying</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td><u>The</u> regulations won't . . .</td> <td>(Leave out.)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>I think <u>that</u> it's good.</td> <td>(Leave out.)</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Instead of saying	Try saying	<u>The</u> regulations won't . . .	(Leave out.)	I think <u>that</u> it's good.	(Leave out.)	10
Instead of saying	Try saying							
<u>The</u> regulations won't . . .	(Leave out.)							
I think <u>that</u> it's good.	(Leave out.)							
<b>Nouns as modifiers</b>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Instead of saying</th> <th>Try saying</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Modernization initiatives.</td> <td>Initiatives to modernize.</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Instead of saying	Try saying	Modernization initiatives.	Initiatives to modernize.	10		
Instead of saying	Try saying							
Modernization initiatives.	Initiatives to modernize.							
<b>Smothered Verbs</b>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Instead of saying</th> <th>Try saying</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>We are in compliance. We conducted a meeting.</td> <td>We are complying. We met.</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Instead of saying	Try saying	We are in compliance. We conducted a meeting.	We are complying. We met.	11		
Instead of saying	Try saying							
We are in compliance. We conducted a meeting.	We are complying. We met.							
<b>Sentences</b>	Break long sentences into shorter ones. Use bullets for laundry-list items.	12						
<b>Packaging</b>	Put main point up front and use visual devices.	13						
<b>Readability formulas</b>	<u>FEMA Clarity Index</u> : Use if a readability formula isn't available on a word processor. Aim for RGL between 10 and 12.	15						
<b>Editing</b>	<p><u>Procedure</u>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lay copy aside, then read again.</li> <li>• Adopt reader's viewpoint.</li> <li>• Have a critic read copy.</li> <li>• Read copy aloud as critic follows.</li> </ul> <p>Be tactful when editing others' work. Follow <i>do's</i> and <i>don'ts</i>.</p>	16 and 17						

## References

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**References consulted** To write this manual, we consulted these references:

**Blumenthal, Joseph C. *English 3200: A Programmed Manual in Grammar and Usage*. 4th College Edition. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1990.**

**Fowler, H. R. *The Little, Brown Handbook*. 3rd ed. Boston: Little, 1986.**

**Sabin, W. A. *The Gregg Reference Manual*. 6th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1985.**

**Strunk, William S. Jr. and E. B. White. *The Elements of Style*. 3rd ed. New York: Macmillan, 1979.**

**Williams, Joseph M. *Style: Ten Courses is Clarity and Grace*. 2nd ed.: Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1985.**

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*Continued on next page*

## Exercises

**Instructions** Read the paragraph below, then answer questions 1 through 3. Each sentence in the paragraph is numbered for easy reference.

(1) This responds to your request for a determination of eligibility to receive parachute duty pay during the period 28 Aug 93 to 15 Jan 94.  
 (2) AR XXX-XX specifically states that "students undergoing training above the entry level while undergoing such training are entitled to pay as appropriate."  
 (3) Since the course in question is above entry level, you are entitled to parachute duty pay during the period you were undergoing training.  
 (4) A copy of this letter and orders assigning you to the training courses should be submitted to your Personnel Administration Center (PAC) for preparation of forms.

1. Does the paragraph follow composition rules from FEMA writing?

Rule	Yes	No
Purpose and main point stated up front.		
Active voice in most sentences.		
Short sentences.		
Short words.		
Lean paragraphs--one-inch deep.		
Jargon free.		
Informal.		

2. Of the four sentences in the paragraph--

	1	2	3	4
Which sentence contains the main point?				
Which sentences are unnecessary?				
Which sentences are written in the passive voice?				
Which sentences are too long?				

3. What would you do to make the paragraph easier to read?

Action	Yes	No
Move main point to the bottom of the paragraph.		
Leave the main point where it is.		
Move the main point to the top of the paragraph.		
Convert all sentences to the passive voice.		
Convert all sentences to the active voice.		
Convert most sentences to the active voice.		

*Continued on next page*

## Exercises, Continued

4. Instructions:

- Identify sentence voice.
- If voice is OK, enter **OK**.
- If not, enter **Not OK**.

Sentence	Voice	OK/Not OK
<b>Example: <i>The report was poorly prepared.</i></b>	<i>Passive</i>	<i>Not OK</i>
a. John spilled milk on his coat.		
b. The defendant was found guilty.		
c. He selected his replacement with care.		
d. The teacher was exasperated with the class.		
e. The report has been lost.		
f. The bank was robbed.		
g. The water was warm.		

5. Instructions:

- Refer to sentences below.
- Strike through the wordy expressions.
- Identify types of wordy expressions.
- Delete expressions or replace them with simpler words (see Appendix A).

Selection Key--Types of Wordiness
Deadwood
Dummy subjects
Doubled expression
Needless repetition
Overuse of <i>the, that, or which</i>
Strings of nouns as modifiers

Sentence	Type of Wordy Expression
<b>Example: <i>We have no vacancies <sup>now</sup> at the present time.</i></b>	<b>Deadwood</b>
a. In order to succeed, focus on priorities.	
b. In the event that this occurs, we're prepared to act.	
c. There are several reasons for rejecting this scheme.	
d. This project is important and significant.	
e. The process should be repeated again and again.	
f. The task group devised an action plan.	
g. We believe that the proposed changes won't raise costs.	
h. Henry designed a concept analysis planning strategy.	

## Exercises, Continued

6. Strike through redundant word(s).
- a. Separate out.
  - b. Basic fundamentals.
  - c. Start over again.
  - d. Symmetrical in form.
  - e. Seldom or ever.
  - f. Actual facts.
  - g. Really glad.
  - h. Honest truth.
- 

7. A smothered verb is--
- a. A verb converted into an adjective.
  - b. A main verb converted into a noun.
  - c. A helping verb.
  - d. An action verb.
- 

8. Select sentences containing smothered verbs.
- a. The suspect made an attempt to flee.
  - b. The lawyer provided advice to the client.
  - c. The regional director approved the request.
  - d. Sally put in an appearance.
  - e. Place emphasis on the first syllable.
  - f. The security officer denied the request.
- 

9. Strike through smothered expressions and replace with action verbs.

<b>Before</b>	<b>After</b>
The suspect made an attempt to flee.	
The lawyer provided advice to the client.	
The team made a valiant effort to score.	
Fred provided food to the dog.	
Sally put in an appearance at the party.	
Place emphasis on the first syllable.	
Make an attempt to improve.	
Artillery is placed in support of the infantry.	
Paragraph 3 makes provision for storing extra supplies and is applicable to all units.	

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# Answer Key and Feedback

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**Instructions** Correct choices are highlighted.

---

1. Does the paragraph follow composition rules for FEMA writing?

Rule	Yes	No
Purpose and main point stated up front.		✓
Active voice in most sentences.		✓
Short sentences.		✓
Short words.		✓
Lean paragraphs--one inch deep.		✓
Jargon free.	✓	
Informal.	✓	

(Page 3)

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2. Of the four sentences in the paragraph--

	1	2	3	4
Which sentence contains the main point?			✓	
Which sentences are unnecessary?		✓		
Which sentences are written in the passive voice?		✓	✓	✓
Which sentences are too long?	✓	✓	✓	✓

(Pages 3 through 7)

---

3. What would you do to make the paragraph easier to read?

Action	Yes	No
Move main point to the bottom of the paragraph.		✓
Leave the main point where it is.		✓
Move the main point to the top of the paragraph.	✓	
Convert all sentences to the passive voice.		✓
Convert all sentences to the active voice.		✓
Convert most sentences to the active voice.	✓	

(Pages 3 through 7)

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*Continued on next page*

## Answer Key and Feedback, Continued

### 4. Feedback.

Explanation	Voice	OK/Not OK
a. John spilled milk on his coat. <i>Active OK: Standard English sentence order.</i>	Active	OK
b. The defendant was found guilty. <i>Passive OK: Receiver is focus of the action.</i>	Passive	OK
c. He selected his replacement with great care. <i>Active OK: Standard English sentence order.</i>	Active	OK
d. The teacher was exasperated with the class. <i>Active OK: Expresses a state of being, not action.</i>	Active	OK
e. The report has been lost. <i>Passive not OK: Evades responsibility for action.</i>	Passive	Not OK
f. The bank was robbed. <i>Passive OK: Bank robbers unknown.</i>	Passive	OK
g. The water was warm. <i>Active OK: Expresses a state of being, not action.</i>	Active	OK

(Pages 5 through 7) *Correct choices highlighted above. If you checked sentences d and g as passive, go back and review information on predicate adjectives. These two sentences don't show the subject being acted on but simply describe its state of being.*

### 5. Feedback

Sentence	Type of Wordy Expression
<b>To</b> a. <del>In order to</del> succeed, focus on priorities.	Deadwood (Page 8, B-5, App A)
<b>If</b> b. <del>In the event that</del> this occurs, we're prepared to act.	Deadwood (Pages 8, B-5, App A)
<b>We have</b> c. <del>There are</del> several reasons for rejecting this scheme.	Dummy subject (Page 9)
d. This project is important <del>and significant</del> .	Doubled expression (Page 9)
e. The process should be repeated <del>again and again</del> .	Needless repetition (Page 10)
<b>a</b> f. The task group devised <del>an action</del> plan. <u>Note:</u> A plan, by definition, implies an intent to act.	Redundancy (Page 10)
g. We believe <del>that</del> the proposed changes won't raise costs.	Overuse of <i>that</i> (Page 10)
<b>planning strategy for analyzing concepts.</b> h. Henry designed a <del>concept analysis planning strategy</del> .	Strings of noun modifiers (Page 10)

## Answer Key and Feedback, Continued

6. Strike through redundant word(s).
- a. Separate ~~out~~.
  - b. **Basic** fundamentals.
  - c. Start over ~~again~~.
  - d. Symmetrical ~~in form~~.
  - e. Seldom ~~or ever~~.
  - f. **Actual** facts.
  - g. **Really** glad.
  - h. **Honest** truth.

(Page 10)

7. A smothered verb is--
- a. A verb converted into an adjective
  - b. **A main verb converted into a noun.**
  - c. A helping verb.
  - d. An action verb.

(Page 11)

8. Select sentences containing smothered verbs.
- a. **The suspect made an attempt to flee.**
  - b. **The lawyer provided advice to the client.**
  - c. The regional director approved the request.
  - d. **Sally put in an appearance.**
  - e. **Place emphasis on the first syllable.**
  - f. The security officer denied the request.

(Page 11) *Statements a ,b, d, and e contain smothered verbs. Statements c and f do not.*

*They're written with action verbs that don't require helpers.*

9. Strike through smothered expressions and replace with action verbs.

Before	After
The suspect <del>made an attempt</del> to flee.	The suspect <b>tried</b> to flee.
The lawyer <del>provided advice</del> to his client.	The lawyer <b>advised</b> his client.
The team <del>made a valiant effort</del> to score.	The team <b>valiantly tried</b> to score.
Fred <del>provided food</del> to the dog.	Fred <b>fed</b> the dog.
Sally <del>put in an appearance</del> at the party.	Sally <b>appeared</b> at the party.
<del>Place emphasis on</del> the first syllable.	<b>Emphasize</b> the first syllable.
<del>Make an attempt</del> to improve.	<b>Try</b> to improve.
The staging area <del>is placed in support of</del> response operations.	The staging area <b>supports</b> response operations.
Paragraph 3 <del>makes provision</del> for storing extra supplies and <del>is applicable</del> to all units.	Paragraph 3 <b>provides</b> for storing extra supplies and <b>applies</b> to all units.

## Appendix A—Simpler Words and Phrases

<b>Introduction</b>	In spite of campaigns to improve, poor writing still pervades bureaucratic institutions. It persists because people— don't know any better— think it's expected, or— feel it's a way to impress others
---------------------	--

<b>Less is more</b>	Official writing doesn't demand big words or pompous phrases. Small, one-syllable words— form the backbone of the English language— save writing and reading time, and— increase your power of expression.
---------------------	--

<b>Payoff</b>	Simple words and phrases enable readers to read what you write, understand it, and remember who wrote it
---------------	--

<b>Instead of Try . . .</b>	Review the list of big words and pompous phrases in the first column; then consider the simpler alternatives in the second.
-----------------------------	---

Instead of	Try
a number of	some
accompany	go with
accomplish	carry out, do
accomplish (a form)	fill out
accordingly	so
accrue	add, gain
accurate	correct, exact
achieve	do, make
actual	real
additional	added, more
adjacent to	next to
advantageous	helpful
advise	recommend
affix	put, stick
afford an opportunity	allow, let
aircraft	plane
anticipate	expect
apparent	clear, plain
appear	seem
appreciable	many
appropriate	proper, right
approximately	about
as a means of	to
as prescribed by	under
ascertain	find out, learn
assist, assistance	aid, help
attached herewith is	here's
attempt	try
at the present time	now
benefit	help
by means of	by, with
cannot	can't
capability	ability
category	class, group
comply	follow
component	part
comprise	form, make up
concerning	about
conclude	close, end
concur	agree
confront	face, meet
consequently	so
consolidate	combine
constitutes	is, forms
construct	build
contains	has, holds
continue	keep on
contribute	give
cooperate	help
currently	(leave it out)
deem	think
delete	cut, drop
demonstrate	prove, how
depart	leave
designate	appoint, pick
desire	wish

Instead of	Try
determine	decide, find
develop	grow, make
disclose	show
discontinue	drop, stop
disseminate	send, issue
do not	don't

*Continued on next page*

## Appendix A—Simpler Words and Phrases, continued

downsize	reduce
due to the fact that	because, due to
echelons	levels
effect	make
elect	choose, pick
eliminate	cut, drop, end
employ	use
encounter	meet
encourage	urge
endeavor	try
enumerate	count
equitable	fair
equivalent	equal
establish	set up, prove
evaluate	check, test, rate
evidenced	showed
evident	clear
examine	check, look at
exhibit	show
expedite	hurry, speed up
expeditious	fast, quick
expend	pay, spend
facilitate	ease, help
factor	reason, cause
failed to	didn't
feasible	can be done
females	women
final	last
finalize	complete, finish
for example	such as
forfeit	give up, lose
for the purpose of	for, to
forward	send
forwarded under	
separate cover	sent separately
function	act, role, work
fundamental	basic
furnish	give, send
has the capability	can
herein	here
however	but
identical	same
identify	find, name, show
immediately	at once, now
impact (v)	affect, change
impact (n)	effect
impacted	changed
implement	carry out, do
in accordance with	by, under
in addition	also, besides, too
in an effort to	to
in conjunction with	with

Instead of	Try
in lieu of	instead of
in order that	for, so
in order to	to
in regard to	about, on
in the amount of	for
in the course of	during, in
in the event that	if
in the near future	soon
in view of	since
in view of the above	so
inasmuch as	since
inception	start
incorporate	blend, join

incumbent upon	must
indicate	show, write down
indication	sign
initial	first
initiate	start
instruct	teach
it is	(leave out)
it is essential	must
it is recommended	I/we recommend
it is requested	I/we ask
justify	prove
legislation	law
limited number	few
limitations	limits
locate	find, place
location	place, scene, site
magnitude	size
maintain	keep, support
majority	most
maximum	greatest, most
minimize	decrease, lessen
modify	change
monitor	check, watch
nebulous	vague
necessitate	cause, need
notify	let know, tell
numerous	many, most
objective	aim, goal
obligate	bind, compel
observe	see
obtain	get
operate	run, work
operational	working
optimum	best, greatest
partnering	partnership
option	choice, way
participate	take part
perform	do
permit	let, allow
personnel	people, soldiers
pertaining to	about, of, on
place	put
portion	part
position	place
possess	have, own

Instead of	Try
preclude	prevent
previous	earlier, past
previously	before
prior to	before
prioritize	priority, rank
probability	chance
procedures	rules, way
proceed	do, go on, try
proficiency	skill
programmed	planned
promulgate	announce, issue
provide	give, say, supply
provided that	if
provides guidance to	guides
(the) provisions of	(leave out)
purchase	buy
pursuant to	per
reason for	why
recapitulate	sum up
reduce	cut

## Appendix A—Simpler Words and Phrases, continued

reflect	say, show
regarding	about, of, on
relating to	about, on
relocation	move
remain	stay
remainder	rest
remuneration	pay
render	give, make
request	ask
require	must
requirement	need
retain	keep
review	check, go over
selection	choice
similar	like
solicit	ask for
state	say
subject	the, this, you
subject to	may be
submit	give, send
subsequent	later, next
subsequently	after, later, then
substantial	large, real, strong
sufficient	enough
take appropriate measures	act
terminate	end, stop
that	(leave out)
there is (are)	(leave out)
therefore	so
thereof	its, their
this office	us, we
time period	time, period
transmit	send
transpire	happen, occur
type	(leave out)
until such time as	until
(the) use of	(leave out)

Instead of	Try
utilize, utilization	use
validate	confirm
verbatim	exact
via	in, on, through
viable	workable
warrant	call for, permit
whenever	when
whereas	since
with reference to	about
with exception of	except for
witnessed	saw
you are requested to	please