Before you start

Before you write, ask yourself:

▶ Who am I writing to and what do I want them to know or do after reading this article?

▶ What is my message or argument and how can I prove it?

▶ How can I structure my article to make it easy to read?

Actuaries Institute

Getting started

Writing is a series of decisions. If you are not clear on what you are doing, you'll do it badly. So, give yourself clarity.

▶ Try not to start until you have a plan – at least a series of bullet points outlining your ideas, in order, and noting the facts, figures, examples and ideas you will use to drive your argument. It's a roadmap that will get you started and stop you going off on crazy detours.

▶ Can't get the plan going?   Then just start writing but don't lose momentum by cutting and rewriting your first sentences over and over. Keep going with rough sentences or bullet points that are on topic but loose. Do this until you have populated the document with ideas and facts, then review.

Actuaries Institute

Headings and sentences

Use headings to guide the reader (and you).

▶ Use short, relevant headings to guide the reader through your article. The headings will also help you structure your purpose.

▶ Shorter sentences are better. Aim for a maximum of 25 words. Keep an eye on the number of clauses, brackets and hyphens you have got in each sentence. If you are racking them up it may be a sign you are squeezing too much into one sentence. Break up the sentences and the ideas.

Actuaries Institute

Paragraphs

Try for one idea per paragraph.

▶ Try to find more interesting ways to link paragraphs to each other.

▶ Constantly referring to the previous paragraph is a repetitious waste of words – see next slide.

Actuaries Institute

Paragraphs

A repetitive approach

▶ First Para: ' …and risk assessment remains the crucial role for actuaries.'

▶ Second Para: 'In addition to risk assessment, new fields are opening up. Policy issues like pension planning…

A more interesting effort

▶ First Para: ' … and risk assessment remains the crucial role for actuaries.'

▶ Second Para: 'Now actuaries are working in new areas, on policy issues like pension planning…'

Active and passive voice

Write using the active voice so the reader can see what is happening in the sentence. Think 'who is doing what to whom?' Examples below.

▶ **Passive**
This stadium was built to enhance spectator comfort.

▶ **Active**
We created this stadium to welcome the true sports fan.

▶ **Passive**
The presentation is focused on major legislative change.

▶ **Active**
This presentation guides you through the latest legal changes.

Actuaries Institute

Your tone

Aim for **Engaging • Precise • Relevant** to make sure your article connects with readers, is informative and isn't misunderstood.

Actuaries Institute

Your tone - engaging

- You keep your target audience interested with engaging language and use an active voice.

- Your articles are easy to read, friendly, confident and informative.

- You proudly showcase achievements (without bragging).

Your tone - precise

- Your writing is concise, accurate and easily understood by the target audience.

- You don't use technical jargon or ambiguity.

- Your goal is clarity!

Actuaries Institute

Your tone - relevant

▶ You have a compelling message to share with your audience and express your ideas effectively.

▶ You use a friendly tone to create a personal connection with your audience.

▶ You use language that assumes your audience is intelligent, but does not ask them to waste time working their way through needless formality or jargon.

Actuaries Institute

Cutting the jargon

▶ Jargon disfigures communication, always eliminate industry talk if there are ordinary words that work just as well. We write to connect – not to remind others of how smart or different we are.

▶ Avoid the clichéd and confusing management-speak that sometime creeps in. Don't say 'we want to build collaborative transformative partnerships to…' when what you really want to say is 'we want to work with others to change…'

Reaching your word limit

▶ Check for duplication and waste. Re-read your piece carefully to make sure you have not repeated arguments or examples.

▶ There are simple clues: if you say 'As mentioned earlier' you probably should not be mentioning it again. If you are using quotes and examples, do not introduce them at such length that the example is redundant.

▶ Get someone else to read the piece for you. When you are too close to the document, you will not see the repetition or irrelevancies.

Reaching your word limit

▶ **Don't just shorten sentences, shorten words**. Shorter message across more succinctly. words will not necessarily cut your word count, but they will leave more white space around the text and get your message across more succinctly. Context is important but there will be plenty of times when you can write aim instead of commitment, run rather than manage and ability not capability.

▶ **Cut and cut again.** Be vigilant about relevance. Cut everything that is off topic. Check for unnecessary words – 'that' is often overused. Use the active voice – it is generally shorter.

▶ **Finally,** go through your article, sentence by sentence asking yourself if you can say it in fewer words?

Publication standards

- **Commas**
  Generally commas are used to separate parts of a sentence, to join items in a list and to avoid ambiguity. Common sense should prevail when proof reading for the use of commas.

- **Quotation marks**
  Generally single quotation marks indicate an 'unusual phrase' and double quotation marks indicate a "quote." Punctuation goes inside quotation marks in a quote.

Actuaries Institute

▶ **Web links and email addresses**
No punctuation after web links and email addresses unless at the end of a sentence.

▶ **Use of i.e. and e.g.**
Should always appear as 'i.e.' and 'e.g.' NOT 'ie' or 'eg'.

▶ **Spacing**
No double spaces between sentences and please use single letter-space only.

▶ **Spelling**
Australian English / UK English (not American). Use an 's' wherever possible, not 'z': e.g. organisation, analysing. Some letters are doubled when adding a suffix: e.g. travelled.

▶ **Capitalisation**
Always use a capital letter to start a sentence and for proper nouns. The name of any committee or taskforce in full, the name of any publication in full and job titles in full. If you use a generic term in place of a proper noun, do not capitalise it, even if you are still referring to a specific person or organisation.

- **Ampersands (&)**
  Should be replaced with 'and' unless article has been reproduced from another source.

- **Dates**
  Written as 'Day Month Year', not 'Day^th Month Year'.

- **Numbers**
  Below10 should be written, e.g. nine. 10 and above should be in figures.

▶ **Titles and publications**
Use italics for the name of any publication in full or abbreviated, also for any song, CD, film or television show. Quotation marks should be used for the name of an article from any publication.

▶ **Bullet Points**
Preferably each bullet point should start in lower case and use ';' 'and' at the end of the second last bullet point.

▶ **Headings**
'and' / 'to' etc. would normally be in lower case, but not where they start a sentence or phrase.

Was this helpful?

actuariesmag@actuaries.asn.au

Actuaries Institute