



## Why succinct writing tastes sweet

### Get to the point

Let's get to the point.

Succinct writing succeeds. It makes no claim to literary merit, but it communicates a clear message in plain English.

In the world of corporate and marketing communications, time is often money, so you need to capture attention. Keeping your writing short and simple doesn't mean making it boring. It means cutting out the jargon and cutting to the chase.

### Cut redundant words

If you Google "unnecessary words" you'll find lots of good advice, such as the Economist style guide, which advises cutting out redundant words. For example:

- 'weather conditions' means 'weather'
- 'policy making process' is 'policy making'
- 'sold off' means 'sold' while a 'top priority' is usually just a 'priority'

There are others, too. For example 'in the vicinity of' is 'near' while a 'substantially finished project' is still 'unfinished' and 'to record the fact that' means 'to record'.

### Make every word count

But writing succinctly is more than just cutting out words. It's about making every word count.

Next time you write something, check that all of the words are needed.

It's good practice to keep your sentences short and keep longer sentences under control. What does that mean? For longer sentences, keep your subject and verb close together – preferably near the start of the sentence.

Here's an example that doesn't follow this advice:

*The software, which is the product of two years of research involving a team of ten and £3m worth of investment, brings together all subsidiary data into one easy to use contact management interface.*

At 34 words, it's not a short sentence and it's not easy to follow. Why? The subject of the sentence ('the software') is separated from the verb phrase describing what it does ('brings together') by 19 words.

You could keep it one sentence and make it easier to understand by bringing the subject and verb close together at the start of the sentence, like this:

*The software brings together all subsidiary data into one easy to use contact management interface and is the product of two years of research involving a team of ten and £3m worth of investment.*

This is better, but can be improved by splitting it into two sentences and cutting out the jargon.



*The software brings together all data into a user-friendly, contact management screen. It is the product of a two year, £3m investment involving a team of ten.*

At 28 words, it's six words shorter than the original, gets to the point and cuts out unnecessary words ('subsidiary') and jargon ('interface').

### **Use short sentences and short words**

Using shorter sentences is good for you, the writer, and your reader. It helps you to write faster and stay in control of what you want to say. For the reader, it's easier to understand.

Shorter sentences are often helped by using shorter words. Concrete, easy to understand words are nearly always better than abstract words. But remember to always ask yourself the question: who am I writing this for?

### **In summary**

- Be your own editor and cut redundant words
- Keep sentences short and simple
- Avoid jargon
- Keep longer sentences under control
- Use short, concrete words whenever possible
- Remember your audience

There's a lot more I could write about this, but I'll follow my own advice and keep it short and simple.