

100 VIEWS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

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FOR CLEARER, MORE INVITING WRITING

Paint signposts for your readers.

Clearly highlight your main points throughout the piece you're writing and indicate how they relate to each other. Lead your readers through your topic with conceptual transitions (therefore, similarly, next, on the other hand, for instance).

Let yourself sound like a person talking with other people.

Try writing your draft as if it were a note to a friend. (You'll use shorter, more familiar words: a good thing.) Then tidy it up so it's (just) as formal as it has to be. Check for a "prose pulse": read your sentences out loud or ask a friend to read them to you.

Let actors act.

Figure out what the action in a sentence is, and make that your verb. Then figure out who or what is doing that action, and make that your grammatical subject. Thus: "The cat wears the hat" instead of "The hat is worn by the cat."

Choose lively actions.

The two duller verbs in English are *to be* and *to have*. When you can, use something more interesting. "There were a great number of dead leaves lying on the ground" → "Dead leaves covered the ground."

Consider stories.

Everybody likes a story, and science offers plenty of them. If you've got one, use it: characters (you or your team? the rocks or air patterns you study?), action (searching? doing something surprising? having or causing trouble?), tension (will you solve the mystery? did the volcano erupt as predicted? will hurricanes strengthen?), resolution (yes, too soon to know, partly, and so). A good sentence or paragraph tells a miniature story; a longer piece of writing can tell a longer one.

Cut unnecessary words.

There are always lots of these, and you can learn to spot them. When you clean out the underbrush, your readers will see your main points more easily. "There is no doubt that this community has been unaware of the fact that . . ." → "We have not realized . . ." Or: "Designing sustainable fisheries is possible if all elements impacted are considered. Scientific, biological, economic and social aspects must be thought through before management is implemented." → "Designers of sustainable fisheries must consider scientific, biological, economic, and social factors."

See *The Elements of Style* (William Strunk & E.B. White) and *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace* (Joseph M. Williams) for more advice along these lines.

Changing Climates @ Colorado State University

SueEllen.Campbell@colostate.edu & John.Calderazzo@colostate.edu, English Department and CMMAP (an NSF Science & Technology Center)