Get noticed. Some of the most important syllables you will write.

These suggestions apply to headlines, labels, titles, email slugs and a lot of regular content, too.

* Engage readers by speaking directly to them using second person.

**NO: Class of ’93 alumni reunion report**

**![C:\Users\Sandra\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary Internet Files\Content.IE5\JQDQ3QDF\MP900426547[1].jpg]()YES: ’93 alums, are you ready for reunion?**

* Keep it tidy. Five to six words is often ideal.
* Use active voice and simple, direct sentences.

**NO: Statistics released on test**

**YES: Here’s that test. Can you pass it?**

* Use hard-working verbs and vivid images.

**NO: Medical test results surprising**

**YES: Surgeon spots nail in skull X-ray**

* Resist the urge to pun. Word play seldom translates on the screen.
* Banish superlatives and vague adjectives. **The best, the largest, richest, first, strongest**are never as effective as a specific, vivid description.

**NO: Fullback strongest in school’s history.**

**YES: Fullback lifts Chevy’s weight daily.**

* While you are at it, please ban **unique, most unique and very unique**.
* Keep the promise of your headline.  Do you know how angry it makes me when you call your How-To article “**Sure-fire secret solutions to looking young”** and then send me on a wild goose chase through link after link? You got my clicks this time, but not the next.
* Finally: Read your headline with a dirty mind. Don’t conjure an image you didn’t intend.

**Coors drops union suit**

Trim the flab

## Use positive statements. Describe what happens, not what won’t. Not only will your message be clear, it often will be more concise.

You will not find that our research takes more than a month to deliver and we do not provide lengthy reports, but only highlights.

**![C:\Users\Sandra\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary Internet Files\Content.IE5\CVNZ51I6\MP900402316[1].jpg]()Our report highlights are delivered within a month.**

The contractor was not very often on time.

**The contractor was usually late.**

She did not think that studying grammar was a sensible use of her time.

**She thought studying grammar was a waste of time.**

Our last client did not pay any attention to the warning.

**Our last client ignored the warning.**

## Use active voice: Think of active voice like Spanx. No jiggly prose.

There were a great number of paper cups dropped by the runners after the water stop.

**Paper cups covered the ground at the water stop.**

Seats may be reserved with a simple phone call.

**Call for reservations.**

## Strong imagery and concrete words are better than vague words

Hundreds of cupcakes, especially chocolate, were handed out at the big party.

**Food Fest guests ate 300 chocolate cupcakes in the first hour.**

![C:\Users\Sandra\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary Internet Files\Content.IE5\0KZ3KPDC\MC900089940[1].wmf]()Take a bullet: scannable content

## BEFORE: Portion of doomed press release

**From: Hawaiian Pineapple Plant LTD**

**Re: Proteolytic (protein-digesting) enzyme with important uses**

The pineapple plant, producer of the fruit long a favorite on American menus, may soon become a major source of a proteolytic (protein-digesting) enzyme with important industrial and medical uses, the Hawaiian Pineapple Co. announced Thursday.

Henry A White, Hapco president, announced at the annual meeting of the Dole stockholders that the company has started pilot plant production in Honolulu of bromelain, an enzyme recovered from the stumps of pineapple plants.

Proteolytic enzymes are presently used primarily in the brewing, food and leather industries. Limited quantities of Dole bromelain are being sold to breweries, where the enzyme “digests” protein particles which would otherwise cause beer to become cloudy when chilled. Other possible uses include meat tenderization and in dairy production.

Plans are being made to expand production for other uses as quickly as possible.

Independent medical research on the properties of bromelain indicates that it may be useful medically.

“It is necessary to to emphasize, however, that a great deal of independent research must yet be carried out to explore more fully the medical potentialities of bromelain,” Mr. White declared.

“Initially the bulk of our enzyme production will be for industrial uses, and our projects are based on its use as an industrial product.” In many respects, he said, bromelain shows promise of being a by-product ideally suited to Hapco’s operations.

## AFTER: An introduction that may get some traction

**From: Hawaiian Pineapple Plant LTD**

**Re: Thank a pineapple for clear beer**

The Hawaiian Pineapple Co. is testing a product that can:

* Keep your beer from turning cloudy when chilled.
* Tenderize a steak.
* Speed the production of cheese.

The substance, bromelain, is recovered from the stumps of pineapple plants.

Why use 3-4 words when one is enough?

Pickup truck (truck)

At this point in time (now)

Due to the fact that (because)

In the majority of cases (usually)

If this should prove to be the case (if)

Large in size (large)

Armed gunman (gunman)

Foreign imports (imports)

General consensus (consensus)

Close proximity (near)

Due to the fact that (because)

First began (started)

Informed those attending the meeting (said)

For the purpose of (to)

He is a man who (he is)

Draw to a close (finish)

A bolt of lightning (lightning)

First priority (priority)

Along the lines of (like)

In order to (to)

In the near future (soon)

We’ll revert back to the original (revert)

The reason why (why)

Hot water heater (water heater)

Future plans (plans)

Suddenly exploded (exploded)

Invited guests (guests)

General consensus, general public (consensus, public)

Past experience (experience)

New record (record)

Repeat again (repeat)

True facts (facts)

When and if (if)

Completely filled (filled)

Entirely destroyed (destroyed)

Estimated at about (estimated at)

Is a resident of Austin (lives in Austin)

Repeat again (repeat)

Revise downward (lower)

Merged together (merged)

![C:\Users\Sandra\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary Internet Files\Content.IE5\JQDQ3QDF\MP900422451[1].jpg]()On behalf of (for)

Invited guests (guests)

Free gift (gift)

(Gratuitous cute pup)

Put it to work. Actual examples from my inbox:

These are everyday messages that I crunched for you. ***![C:\Users\Sandra\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary Internet Files\Content.IE5\0KZ3KPDC\MP900422188[1].jpg]()***

**REAL TWEET**: APD is searching for a man who attacked a woman and tried to sexually assault her near a school over the weekend (91 characters)

**MY VERSION: APD searching for man who attacked, tried to sexually assault woman near Hart Elementary Saturday (83 characters and considerably more information)**

**REAL NEWSLETTER**: Most of us find it very convenient to keep many documents saved on a computer hard drive, but Super Computer Company advises that while this method may be great for ease and convenience, it is not the safest method.  The best solution is to have a copy of electronic files stored in a different location.

**MY VERSION: While it is convenient to keep documents on a computer hard drive, it is risky. Super Computer Company advises storing a copy of electronic files in a different location.**

## **GOOGLE ANALYTICS CASE STUDY, showing my changes for clarity, conciseness:**

## By tailoring the features of Google Analytics, LunaMetrics helps PBS increase conversions and visits by 30%

Top Notch Programming, The Public Broadcasting System’s interactive arm, helps PBS producers and local PBS stations promote programs such as NOVA, American Masters, and Sid the Science Kid on PBS.org. Existing web analytics tools were difficult to maintain and use. PBS wanted a coordinated approach to analysis and reporting to inform their strategic decisions.

Led by Web Analytics Director Amy Sample, the team at PBS turned to Google Analytics. In addition to top-level analysis of PBS.org and PBSKids.org, they hoped to provide producers of individual programs data related to those shows. Amy needed an over-arching view. To meet these requirements, LunaMetrics devised a custom solution.

Google Analytics has been a key facilitator in the transformation of PBS online. The tool enables reporting that is robust, tailored and meaningful, which means that stakeholders can use analytics to inform  critical and timely business decisions on a day-to-day basis. Analysis of search engine trends led to an increase in PBS traffic by 30 percent during the first year. Conversions in PBSKids increased by 33 percent. Since Google Analytics allowed PBS to evaluate the way users consumed video, the broadcaster created two new portals: PBS Video and PBSKIDS Go!

**My version is one-third shorter and easier to read and understand. (192 word vs 300)**

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**Credits, resources and inspiration for this handout**

“The Elements of Style, Fourth Edition,” William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White

“The Art of Editing,” Floyd K. Baskette and Jack Z. Sissors

“Grammar and Language Workbook, Grade 9,” Glencoe Language Arts

Rosalie Stemmer, writing coach