



## Keep it short!

The more there is to read, the less your audience will want to read it.

- Keep sentences to **20 words or fewer**
- Keep paragraphs to **5 sentences or fewer**



## Chunk it!

Most readers skim documents instead of reading every word. Help your readers get your main points.

- Include a **short, clear main message** at the top of your document
- Use short paragraphs and bulleted lists. Keep lists to **fewer than 7 items**, and don't use sub-bullets
- Use a **relevant** and **specific heading** for every **1-3 paragraphs**



## Use Active Voice!

Passive voice is wordy, but active voice is concise and direct. Passive voice is formal, but active voice sounds more like speech (*making it easier to understand*).

- Use passive voice only when the **subject is unknown** or of **less importance**
- Strengthen your sentences further by **keeping the subject and verb close together**



National Center  
for Environmental Health  
Agency for Toxic Substances  
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