



Keep it short!

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

Make sure your
writing is short.

20

Keep sentences to **20 words or fewer**

5

Keep paragraphs to **5 sentences or fewer**



National Center
for Environmental Health
Agency for Toxic Substances
and Disease Registry



Visit
for
**more
info**

Become a better writer:

www.cdc.gov/nceh/ClearWriting



Chunk it!

**No one wants to read
a wall of words.**

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

1

Include a **short, clear main message** at the top of your document

7

Use short paragraphs and bulleted lists. Keep lists to **fewer than 7 items**, and don't use sub-bullets.

1-3

Use a **relevant** and **specific heading** for every **1-3 paragraphs**

For example: "ATSDR Study Looks at Lead Contamination"

Instead of: "Overview"



National Center
for Environmental Health
Agency for Toxic Substances
and Disease Registry



Visit
for
**more
info**

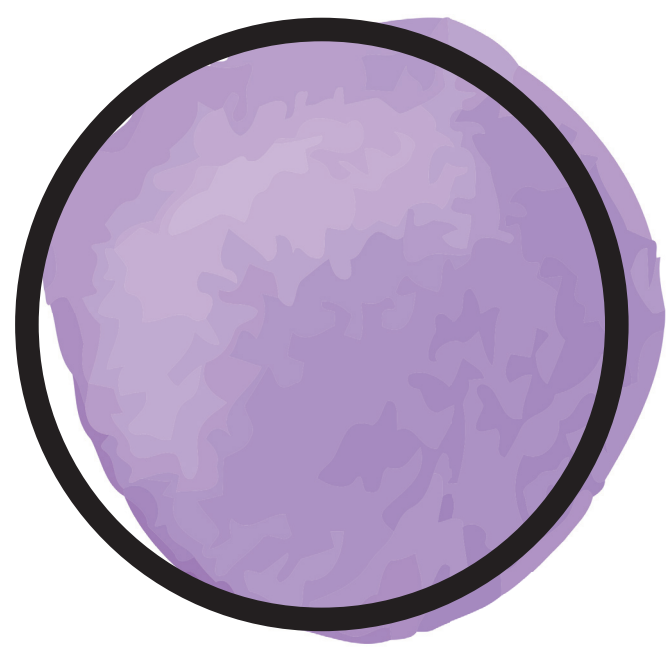
Become a better writer:

www.cdc.gov/nceh/ClearWriting



Use Active Voice!

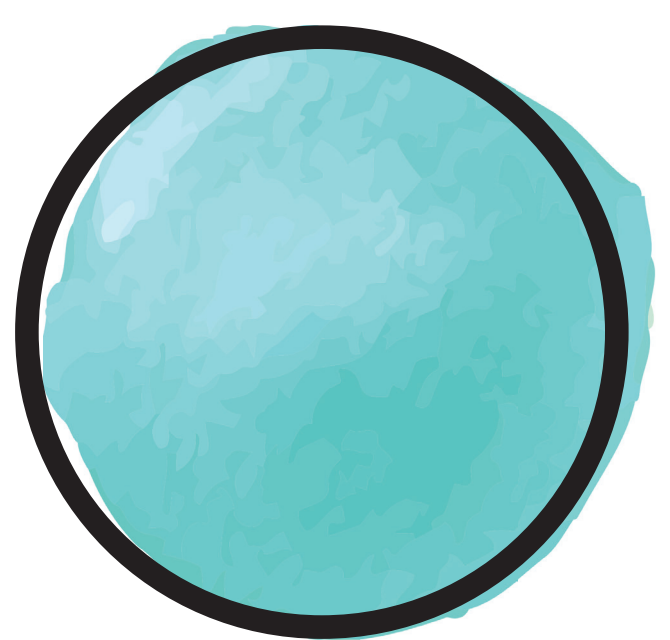
Passive voice is wordy, but active voice is concise and direct. Passive voice is formal, but active voice sounds more like speech (*making it easier to understand*).



Use passive voice only when the **subject is unknown** or of **less importance**.

Passive Voice: “About 500 homes were left without water as a result of the chemical spill.”

Active Voice: “The chemical spill left 500 homes without water.”



Strengthen your sentences further by **keeping the subject and verb close together**.



National Center
for Environmental Health
Agency for Toxic Substances
and Disease Registry



Visit
for
**more
info**

Become a better writer:

www.cdc.gov/nceh/ClearWriting