TIPS FOR WRITING EFFECTIVE SENTENCES

1. **Eliminate or reduce** the following from your writing:

    - wordy phrases [see handout Choosing the Best Word]
    - words ending in *-tion* where appropriate
    - prepositional statements
        General rule of thumb: remove preps fewer than 6 letters where possible (e.g., of, to, in, for).

    - Redundancies [see handout Redundancies to Avoid]
    - archaic words
        The federal government no-no list includes: pursuant to, promulgated, thereunder, commencing, in accordance with, herein, heretofore, evidenced by, practicable, and shall

    - clichés entirely
    - unnecessary jargon
    - words ending in *-ize* where appropriate and proceed with caution

2. **Use lists**. Lists help simply complex information or a lot of information; they break up the text and increase comprehension and memory retention. Keep list items grammatically identical.

3. **Choose the appropriate sentence length.** Deliver complex info in short sentences, while less complex info can take longer sentences, if needed. Each sentence should contain a single idea. Vary sentence length throughout to give your readers a break.

4. **Focus on the real subject** and build grammar around it. Keep your real subject out of the prepositional phrase and put it in the action. Also, reduce expletives, such as *there are/is*, *it is*, and other similar phrases.

    Weak: The use of this method will eliminate the need for more study.
    Strong: This method will eliminate the need for more study.

    Weak: It is hoped that we will have the results in a week.
    Strong: We hope to have the results in a week.

5. **Focus on the real verb**. Where is the action?

    Weak: To conduct an analysis of the problem…
    Strong: To analyze the problem…

    Weak: Consideration should be given to…
    Strong: We should consider…

6. **Use parallel structure.** Each item in a sentence or a list should be grammatically identical; i.e., they should all have the same verb tense and be written in the same voice. Also, items in a series should not overlap.

> Nonparallel: Our current methods are costing too much and reduces our productivity.
> Parallel: Our current methods cost too much and reduce our productivity.

7. **Use modifiers correctly.** Does the modifier (i.e., a word, phrase, or clause) add necessary information to your sentence or does it simply provide additional information that isn't essential for the meaning? If it's nonessential, delete it. Avoid dangling and misplaced modifiers.

8. **Be clear and specific.** Avoid ambiguity by using the most effective words to say exactly what you mean.

> Unclear: The municipal water supply was impacted by *E. coli*.
> Clear: High levels of *E. coli* rendered the municipal water supply unusable.

9. **Use active rather than passive voice** as much as possible.

> To test for active–passive, in the main clause, identify the verb, subject, and object (if one). What is the oder of these parts of speech?

> > O – V – S = passive voice
> > S – V – O = active voice

10. **Avoid long noun strings.**

> Confusing: Ambient air monitoring data collection activities (What does *ambient air* modify—activities? data collection?)

> Better: Collecting data for monitoring ambient air

11. **Use positive constructions.** Say what it is instead of what it isn't; ask your audience to do something instead of telling them what not to do.

> Negative: Don't forget to label the bottle with the stream name.
> Positive: Label the bottle with the stream name.

> Negative: Our methods are not efficient.
> Positive: Our methods are inefficient.