



Making the Complex Trouble Free

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Give your non-specialist readers opportunities to take cognitive breaths while they negotiate your specialist writing.

Non-specialist readers will need your help if they are to make sense of your specialist writing. Make your text reader-friendly by giving your readers plenty of time to pause cognitively. Provide your readers with the cognitive breathing space they need by using plenty of little joining words – prepositions and determiners. These words tell your readers what the link is between one element of your sentence and another.

Which of the following sentence pairs do you prefer?

Example 1

- A. The engineer developed an earthquake prone buildings risk framework.
or
B. The engineer developed a framework to identify buildings prone to risk in an earthquake.

Example 2

- A. The Ministry of Transport has developed new traffic control device codes.
or
B. The Ministry of Transport has developed a new code to control traffic devices.

Example 3

- A. She read the dairy national chemical contaminants programme report.
or
B. She read the report on the national programme that monitors chemical contaminants in dairying

Why are the A sentences so hard to understand?

All of the A sentences have lost their little words, their prepositions and their determiners.

Many business writers, under pressure to limit their word counts, omit vital little words and link all of their big words, usually nouns and adjectives, in a chain.

When writers take out prepositions and determiners, they take out crucial information their readers need in order to make sense of the text.

What's so important about prepositions?

Prepositions show the relationship or link between the words in your sentence. They provide extra information about:

Time: at, before, since, past, until,

Space: above, onto, into, near, up,

Reason: for, but, as, by, to, of,

Example 1

The engineer developed a framework **to** identify buildings prone **to** risk **in** an earthquake.

Example 2

The Ministry **of** Transport has developed a new code **to** control traffic devices.

Example 3

She read the report **on** the programme that monitors nationwide chemical contaminants **in** dairying.

What's so important about determiners?

Determiners tell your reader which particular one, or whose, or how many.

Determiners tell your reader whether something is specific and unique or part of a collective.

Example 1

The engineer developed **a** framework to identify buildings prone to risk **in** **an** earthquake.

Example 2

The Ministry of Transport has developed **a** new code to control traffic devices.

Example 3

She read **the** report on **the** programme **that** monitors nationwide chemical contaminants in dairying.



Now it's
your turn...

Proofreading Tasks

1. Whenever you write a long string of nouns, try disassembling them.
2. Start from your last noun and reverse their order.
3. Link your words with prepositions and determiners.
4. Ask yourself, have I given my reader enough cognitive breathing space to pause and make sense of my text?

“When beetles fight these battles in a bottle with their paddles and the bottle's on a poodle and the poodle's eating noodles, they call this a muddle puddle tweetle poodle beetle noodle bottle paddle battle.”

— Dr Seuss

The logo for 'Get it Write' is centered in the lower half of the page. It consists of the words 'Get it' in a smaller, sans-serif font above the word 'Write' in a larger, bold, sans-serif font. The entire logo is contained within a light teal circular background that has a subtle drop shadow.

Get it
Write

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