

WRITING BEST PRACTICES

1. Write for your reader

- Look at the content from the reader's point of view.
- Emphasize what the reader needs or wants to know
- Will the report create problems for them?
- What do you want your reader to know or do after reading?

2. *Write actively*

- Whenever appropriate, use the active voice

Subject (actor) – Verb (action) – Object (victim)

Passive:

Three different pumps are used by the large boiler to circulate hot water for space heating.

Active:

The large boiler uses three different pumps to circulate hot water for space heating.

3. Use simple, concrete language

- Cut out unnecessary words
- Break run-on sentences into simple, declarative sentences
- Break complex paragraphs into separate paragraphs for clarity
- Avoid \$10 words
- Limit adverbs & adjectives

4. Be courteous

- Remember your manners
- Maintain an appropriate level of formality
 - Avoid contractions (*don't, we've, you're, that's*)
 - Avoid buzz words and jargon
 - Avoid metaphors

5. *Be consistent*

- Parallel construction
 - *subject-verb agreement*
 - *start lists with same type of word (verb, gerund, noun)*
- Visually
 - *font*
 - *format*
 - *spacing*
 - *bullet styles*
 - *Headers/footers*
 - *pagination*

5. Be consistent, continued

- Spelling & hyphenation
 - *runtime or run-time? Pick one and use it throughout*
- Names
 - *If you called it a framitz on page 1, call it a framitz for the rest of the document*
- Acronyms
 - *Spell it out the first time, with the acronym in parentheses after. Thereafter, use the acronym only.
Air handling unit (AHU)*

6. *Use correct punctuation*

- Commas
 - *Separate items in a list*
 - *The Oxford comma can add clarity: We collected efficiency specifications for the chillers, boilers, fans, and motors.*
- Semicolons
 - *Separate independent clauses that are closely related, and not connected in the sentence by a conjunction*
 - *Separate items in a list when the items contain commas*

6. *Use correct punctuation, continued*

- Apostrophes for possessives:
 - *Before the ‘s’ for a singular noun. “The fan’s motor was left running.”*
 - *Before the ‘s’ for plural nouns not ending in ‘s’. “There are occupancy sensors for the lights in the men’s and women’s locker rooms.”*
 - *After the ‘s’ for a plural noun ending in s. “The fans’ motors were left running.”*
- Apostrophes to pluralize numeric names: *T-5’s, T-8’s*

7. Correctly use “that” & “which”

- *That* usually introduces essential information in a restrictive clause
“We determined that the existing package units had economizers that were not operating correctly.”
- *Which* introduces extra information that is not essential to the first clause.
“Economizers were installed on the existing package units, which do not meet current efficiency standards.”

8. Don't confuse "affect" & "effect"

- Affect is a verb (**A**ffect = **A**ction)
- Effect is a noun (**E**ffect = **E**nd result of the action)

*"The extreme temperature fluctuations of the desert climate **affect** the amount of energy used for air conditioning."*

*"The **effect** of the extreme desert climate on energy consumed by HVAC systems is dramatic."*

9. Proofread

- Get your thoughts down first
- Walk away, then come back to it to proofread

Writing is like jello. You have to let it set before you cut into it.

Examples: What's wrong with this?

The facility is located at 100 Street Drive in Coastalton, California, and is an 80,000 square foot 6 story building with retail space including a restaurant and 4 small shops on the first floor, and offices on the remaining 5 floors; it was remodeled in 2005.

Original sentence: The facility is located at 100 Street Drive in Coastalton, California, and is an 80,000 square foot 6 story building with retail space including a restaurant and 4 small shops on the first floor, and offices on the remaining 5 floors; it was remodeled in 2005.

What's wrong?

- Run-on sentence
- Building is misspelled
- Too many ideas in one sentence
- Poor use of punctuation

Let's fix it

original

The facility is located at 100 Street Drive in Coastalton, California, and is an 80,000 square foot 6 story building with retail space including a restaurant and 4 small shops on the first floor, and offices on the remaining 5 floors; it was remodeled in 2005.

repaired

The facility is located at 100 Street Drive in Coastalton, California. The 80,000 square foot, 6-story building was remodeled in 2005. The first floor contains a restaurant and 4 small shops. The remaining 5 floors contain offices.

Examples: What's wrong with this?

Data loggers were deployed by the auditing team on various mechanical equipment, including AHUs, motors to determine on/off settings, fans to determine on/off settings and runtimes, and to determine when lighting was turned on versus occupation of the space in question, so trend data could be collected and analyzed and compared to the facility operational schedule.

Original sentence: Data loggers were deployed by the auditing team on various mechanical equipment, including AHUs, motors to determine on/off settings, fans to determine on/off settings and runtimes, and to determine when lighting was turned on versus occupation of the space in question, so trend data could be collected and analyzed and compared to the facility operational schedule.

What's wrong? Wow! What's not wrong?

Let's fix it

original

Data loggers were deployed by the auditing team on various mechanical equipment, including AHUs, motors to determine on/off settings, fans to determine on/off settings and runtimes, and to determine when lighting was turned on versus occupation of the space in question, so trend data could be collected and analyzed and compared to the facility operational schedule.

repaired

The team deployed data loggers to collect trend data about the runtimes and on/off status of various mechanical equipment. This included AHUs, motors, fans and lights. We analyzed the trend data and compared it to the facility operation schedule.

BEST Center Curricula, Resources & Recordings

Academic Programs

Georgia Piedmont Technical College - Building Automation Systems

Milwaukee Area Technical College - Sustainable Facilities Operations

Laney College - Commercial HVAC Systems

City College San Francisco - Commercial Building Energy Analysis & Audits

Professional Development Materials, Presentations & Videos

National Institutes

Building Automation Systems Instructor Workshops

Webinars (e.g., BEST Talks)

Faculty Profile Videos

Reports & Case Studies

Marketing Resources

© 2013-2025 by BEST Center: NSF National Center for Building Technician Education is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial (CC BY-NC) 4.0 International.

To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

 CC BY-NC 4.0

Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0

