

Improving your writing style

Developing a clear style

1. **Make your sentences specific** and avoid vague words. Clear, specific details will attract and hold your reader's interest. Therefore, make each sentence contribute something new and interesting to the overall discussion.

The examples below first show sentences far too vague to sustain anyone's attention. Rewritten, these sentences contain specific details that add clarity and interest:

Vague	She went home in a bad mood. (What kind of bad mood? How did she act or look?)
Specific	She stomped home, hands jammed in her pockets, angrily kicking rocks, dogs, small children and anything else that crossed her path.
Vague	My neighbour bought a really nice old desk. (Why nice? How old? What kind of desk?)
Specific	My neighbour bought a solid oak roll-top desk made in 1885 that contained a secret drawer triggered by a hidden spring

2. **Use specific, precise adverbs and adjectives that help the reader see, hear or feel what you are describing.** Try to avoid adjectives like *good, bad, many, more, great, important, interesting* and the adverbs *very, really, and quite* as they are overused and vague. For example:

Imprecise	Mary is a very interesting person.
Better	Mary is witty, intelligent and talented.
Imprecise	The vegetables tasted funny.
Better	The vegetables tasted like rotting weeds mixed with glue.

If you can't think of a better word than *interesting* or *important*, for example, always make sure you **explain in enough detail how or why** what you are describing is interesting or important.

3. **Vary your sentence style.** A paragraph filled with sentences which are constructed in the same way is boring. Vary the length, arrangement and complexity of your sentences, but be careful to not write sentences which are too long or too complicated.

Exercise

Re-write and/or expand these sentences with specific details that add clarity and interest.

- *Facebook* is a useful/annoying invention.
- Banning smoking in bars has been good for non-smokers.
- Establishing fair trade would be really important for Third World countries