
It can be easy to forget that writing is a type of communication. If you're looking to write better, try to put yourself in the mindset of someone reading or listening to you. How might they respond to what you're saying and how you're saying it? Some examples:

- Reader reaction: "Why did I just read eight words when one would do?" Lesson: **Be concise.**
 - Example: 'The idea in this paper will be that the belief of Plato that...' vs. 'This paper argues that Plato...'
 - Check uses of phrases like 'the concept/belief/idea/notion that'. Are they necessary? Almost never.
- Reader reaction: "Where'd this sentence start?" Lesson: **Use short sentences.**
 - Example: 'I had ice cream, the kind with the three flavours, for breakfast, which is the best meal of the day, I'd say' vs. 'I had ice cream for breakfast. It was Neapolitan. Breakfast is the best meal of the day.'
 - Is the sentence 3+ lines long? Would you need 5+ punctuation marks to make it grammatical? Consider splitting it into several sentences.
- Reader reaction: "That's not how we use that symbol." Lesson: **Be grammatical.**
 - Never use semicolons. Assume you don't know how.
 - Fix incomplete sentences: 'Believing that eating ice cream.' vs. 'I believed that Fluffy was eating ice cream.'
 - Would it make sense to ask whether 'X.' is true or false? If not, assume 'X.' isn't a complete sentence.
 - Fix run-on sentences: 'Puppies are cute, that's why I like them.' vs. 'Puppies are cute. That's why I like them.'
 - If 'X' and 'Y' each complete sentences, then 'X Y' and 'X, Y' are run-ons.
- Reader reaction: "What are we talking about?" Lesson: **Be explicit.**
 - Example: 'I will make an argument about whether this objection is correct' vs. 'I will argue that this objection fails. Ice cream is, in fact, delicious.'
 - Check phrases like 'this/that objection/idea/argument/claim/etc.'. Is what objection/idea/etc. you're talking about palpably obvious? If not, restate it.
- Reader reaction: "Why are we talking about this?" Lesson: **Use signposts.**

- Example: 'The previous section argued that... In response one might object that... However, ...'
- Reader reaction: "I could think of six things one might mean by this." Lesson: **Be precise.**
 - Example: 'Utilitarianism is unrealistic' vs. 'Utilitarianism incorrectly implies...'
 - Check uses of 'unrealistic', 'impractical', 'meaningless', 'nonsense', 'valid', 'contradictory', 'illogical', 'objective', 'subjective', 'universal', etc. What exactly do you mean? (Hazard: These terms are almost never used clearly or correctly.)
- Reader reaction: "Why are you trying to sound fancy?" Lesson: **Avoid unnecessary jargon.**
 - Example: Is the paper on analyticity or the a priori? If not, then you probably don't need to call something 'analytic' or 'a priori'.
- Reader reaction: "Why'd I just process five things when only one would be important?" Lesson: **Stay focused.**
 - Example: 'The German philosopher Immanuel Kant wrote in his 1785 book *The Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (reprinted in 2000 by Oxford University Press) that...' vs. 'Kant (1785/2000) argued that...'
 - Are you considering whether to mention something from something extra you read? Is it directly relevant and can you explain it clearly and concisely? If not, then it's probably best not to mention it.
- Reader reaction: "Why are you assuming I know what that means?" Lesson: **Explain everything** (that someone not in the class wouldn't already understand).
 - Give examples to help explain technical terms, key distinctions, claims, issues.
 - Tip: Try to make the paper a self-standing whole. If you introduce an issue, explain it enough that someone could understand. If you can't, then don't.
 - Quality over quantity / Depth over breadth
- Reader reaction: "Really?" Lesson: **Minimize distracting objections.**
 - Suppose someone interrupts you and says, "Really?" Try to avoid situations where you'd be inclined to respond, "Yes, maybe. It doesn't matter. Let's move on." Consider: Can I make my points without taking a stand on whether P?
- Reader reaction: "Why should I think that?" Lesson: **Give reasons.**
 - Is X controversial? Then don't assert 'Clearly, X'.
 - Don't say 'I argue that X' and then not give an argument. In fact, don't say 'I argue that' at all. Give the argument, and conclude that X.

- Suppose you're inclined to think X. Imagine what it would be like to think not-X. Reflect: "What might motivate someone to think not-X? What might I say to them to bring them from where they're at, and how they're thinking about things, to thinking about things the way that I am?"
 - Re number of arguments: Quality over quantity / Depth over breadth
- Tip: For each paper, focus on **ONE new skill**.
- Examples: writing grammatically, using short sentences, being concise, explaining key terms, giving examples, signposting transitions, explaining precisely what the main question is, articulating precisely what claim is at issue in a debate, stating your main conclusion in a single sentence, outlining an argument, developing an objection and reply, ...
 - Not every paper may go well overall :/ But each paper will improve in a certain way, and you'll make noticeable progress over time.
- **Final thoughts:**
- Try the Hemingway App (hemingwayapp.com) or Grammarly (grammarly.com).
 - First drafts are never good. It's okay! Leave time to get feedback and revise.
 - Feeling unsure how to make an argument? Read good philosophers. Consider how they motivate their ideas. Add tool to toolbox.
 - The task is *not* to show how much extra work you did. It's to explain and critically examine ONE PARTICULAR THING REALLY WELL.
 - Most of the work you've done should *not* be reflected in the final product (e.g., papers you read but didn't totally understand, related issues you're interested in that aren't directly relevant, arguments that didn't quite pan out).
 - Some questions to ask yourself when writing and revising:
 - Is this grammatical? Is this the right word to use? Could I make this sentence easier to read? Do I really understand this? Would someone who didn't already know what I was talking about understand this? Is this necessary? How are these issues related to each other? How is this paragraph related to the ones before and after? What claim is at issue between X and Y? Why does what X is saying seem wrong to me? Am I understanding X correctly? What claim/assumption/inference am I objecting to? Would someone who didn't already agree with me be at all moved by this?
 - Want more feedback? Ask :) Come to office hours.