

# Writing simply and effectively

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October 30, 2017*



GLOBAL



REGIONAL



NATIONAL



COUNTY



VILLAGE

# Outline

- Why write short
- Best writing practices
  1. Organize your text
  2. Prune ideas and shorten sentences
  3. Pay attention to verbs
  4. Revise, polish, and proofread
  5. Visualize your final product

# Why do we write the way we do?

- You need to “warm up”
- You say the same thing several different ways since you’re not sure which is best.
- It takes you a while to figure out what you’re saying.
- Things happen chronologically, so you tend to think and write that way.

# Why write simply and effectively?

- Poor writing
  - Wastes time
  - Fails to get a message across
  - Makes us a poor source of information

*The tighter you write, the more persuasive you will be.*

## 1. Organize your text

“People who think well,  
write well.”

- David Ogilvy

# Common pitfalls

- The beginning is too broad
- The writer takes a detour
- The writer lacks a sense of audience
- Clutter hides a clear focus



# Techniques for Organizing Your Text

- Make an outline, with bullet headlines for each message you want to get across
- Organize points by most important to least important
- Begin boldly
- Make sure ideas flow logically

# As you write, ask yourself

- What's my point?
- In a sentence, what am I trying to say?
- Have I taken a detour?
- Have I squeezed in extra stuff?





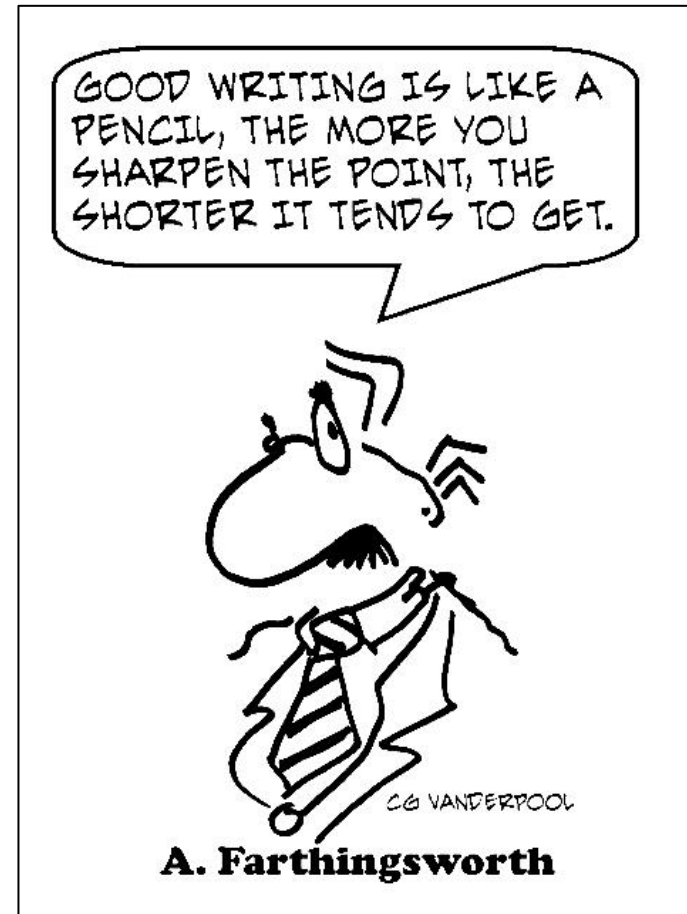
2. Prune ideas. Shorten sentences.

“Brevity comes from selection  
and not compression.”

- Donald Murray

# Prune ideas

- Select the most important piece of information to share
- Ask yourself, what information can I afford to leave out?



# Quick Exercise

- Find the headline...

# Example – Quick Win News

That commitment was materialized by the inclusion of one of our recommendations: the integration of SRH modules in the training curricula of students **by the Government Prime Minister in his policy statement to the parliamentarians on Friday, February 5, 2016.**

*Why is this significant?*

## **BEFORE**

### **INTRODUCTION OF REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH MODULES IN STUDENTS' CURRICULA: SOON A REALITY**

Telmar, like other countries in Narnia, is facing issues related to unwanted teenage pregnancies in schools, resulting in dropouts and academic failures, abortions and suicide of thousands of girls.

Targeting the authorities in charge of Education, Partner X has made the problem a priority in 2015 as part of its advocacy project Advance Family Planning (AFP), funded by AFP Baltimore, with the technical support of Partner Y. However, those authorities did not respect their commitment due to the socio-political unrest of the country. The multiple advocacy meetings conducted were not very successful.

## **AFTER**

### **TELMAR PARLIAMENT PRIORITIZES INTEGRATING SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH EDUCATION INTO STUDENT CURRICULA**

In an agenda-setting policy statement to Parliament on February 5, 2016, Telmar's Prime Minister recommended integrating sexual and reproductive health modules into curricula for students aged 10-24. A majority of the country's parliamentarians then voted to prioritize it on the Prime Minister's agenda. More than four months in the making, this advocacy win represents a remarkable step forward in expanding access to family planning information for young people in Telmar.

# Shorten sentences

- Use short, familiar words
- One sentence per idea
- Use transitional words or phrases to show how ideas are linked
- Avoid jargon
- Say what you mean
- Vary sentence length

# Watch out for jargon

## Avoid or Define

- Contraceptive prevalence rate
- Fertility rate
- Unmet need for family planning

## Use

- Percentage of people using contraceptives
- Average family size or number of children per woman
- Estimate of women who would like to prevent or delay pregnancy but are not using contraception

### 3. Pay attention to verbs

“No verb means no action. No action means nothing for the reader to see. Nothing to see means no fire in the brain and no reason to dive deeper...”

- Roy Peter Clark, *How to Write Short*



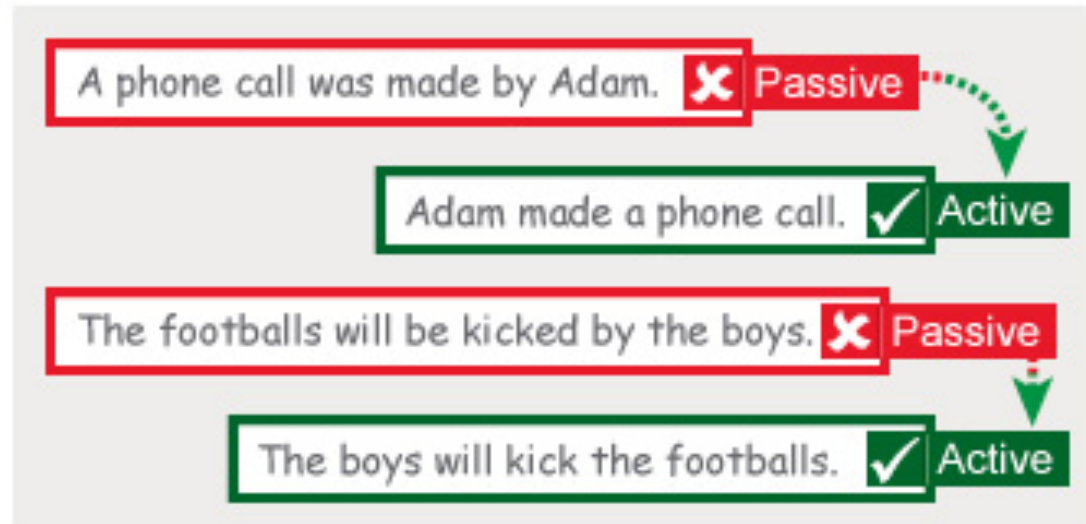
# Passive vs. Active Voice

## Passive Voice

- Vague
- Slows down understanding
- Evasive

## Active voice

- Clear and direct sense of who did what



# Example – Quick Win News

Beginning in October 2015, Advance Family Planning local partner X prioritized addressing the issue with the technical support of Partner Y.

Partner X began advocacy activities during a time of socio-political unrest in the country. Initial advocacy meetings were ~~not very~~ unsuccessful. But by mid-December, with a return to normalcy, Partner X moved quickly, organizing a multi-sector advocacy committee to think through ~~the issue of~~ addressing unwanted teenage pregnancies in schools.

# Headlines

- Locally-driven Family Planning Progress in Tanzania: 2012-2014 (version 1)
- Following through on Tanzania's Locally Driven Family Planning Progress (2012-2014) (v2)
- Tanzania Leads the Way on Family Planning, Health and Development: Following through on Progress (v3)
- Investing in Family Planning for Tanzania's Health and Development (final)

#### 4. Revise, polish, and proofread

“To be a good self-editor, you have to read your writing like you’ve never seen it before.”

- SW

**PEANUTS**

those years in Paris were to  
be among the finest of her life.



3-2

Looking back, she once remarked,  
"Those years in Paris were among  
the finest of my life." That was  
what she said when she looked  
back upon those years in Paris



where she spent some of the  
finest years of her life.



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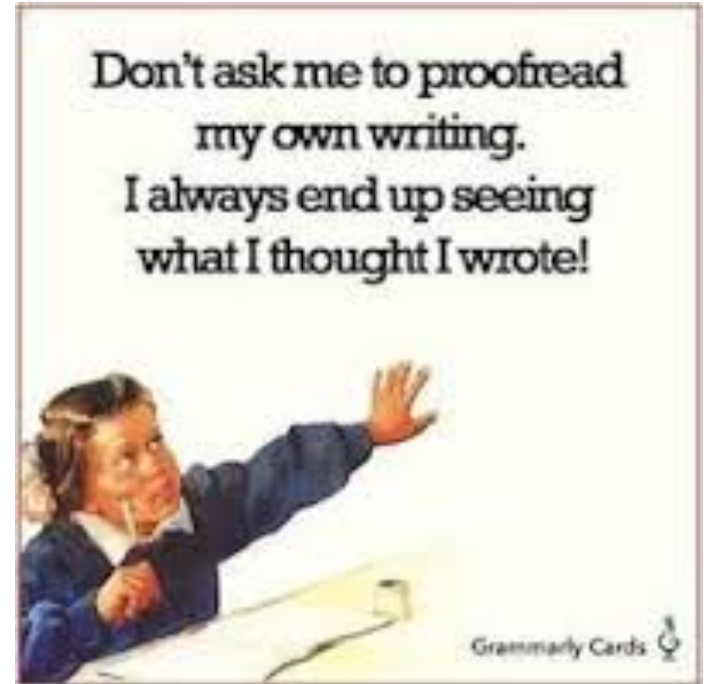
I THINK THIS IS GOING  
TO NEED A LITTLE EDITING...



SCHULZ

# Self-editing

- Put yourself in the place of someone who knows nothing about your work
- Try to anticipate the kinds of wrong assumptions such a person might make
- Simplify, but not at the risk of clarity



# Best practices

- Scrutinize each word through drafting and revision
- Identify and preserve stronger elements
- Find and trim weaker elements
- Try not to edit something on the same day you write it
- Get someone else to read it

# Editing tips

- Delete words that mean little or nothing [*very, quite, kind of*]
- Delete words that repeat the meaning of other words [*various and sundry*]
- Delete words implied by other words [*terrible tragedy*]
- Replace a phrase with a word [*in the event that = if, due to the fact that = because*]



# Trim the Fat

~~There are some bloggers who seem to have a natural gift when it comes to writing.~~ Some bloggers seem to be naturally gifted writers.

~~They manage to get their ideas across clearly and economically, which means that readers can easily follow what they write.~~ Readers devour their clear, economical prose.

~~Not only is there a lot of respect for what they have to say, but also the way that they say it.~~ People respect what they say – and *love* how they say it.

~~Whenever they publish a new post on their blog, it always gets dozens of comments and hundreds of shares.~~ Every new blog post attracts dozens of comments and hundreds of shares.

~~It would be great to be as successful as they are, but you don't know what you need to do to make your writing better.~~ You'd love to emulate their success, but you don't know how.

~~The good news is that there's a secret you can easily learn which will improve everything you write from now on.~~ Fortunately for you, a simple secret can transform your writing forever.

# Harshi's most recurring track changes

1. Family planning working groups were established by three municipalities.
  - Avoid passive voice.
2. Three municipalities established family planning working groups.
  - Put the T in SMART.
3. AFP is an initiative of GI at JHBSPH in MD focused on FP advocacy to meet the FP2020 goal.
  - Spell it out.
4. Traps for translation.
  - Be brief.
5. The Ministry of Health worked with OSV Jordan.
  - Provide context.
6. They aim to reduce deaths and will increase supplies.
  - Match tense and structure.
7. Burkina Faso, Zambia, Colombia.
  - Put in order.

## 5. Visualize your final product

“Writing tight involves more than leaving out words...it also involves laying out words – laying them out on the page, the physical presentation of your writing.”

- William Brohaugh

# Best practices

- Make a relaxed visual environment where information can be easily scanned and understood
- Use white space
- Use sidebars, subheads, footnotes, paragraphing, checklists, graphs, images, quotes
- Use **bolding** to call out key words or phrases

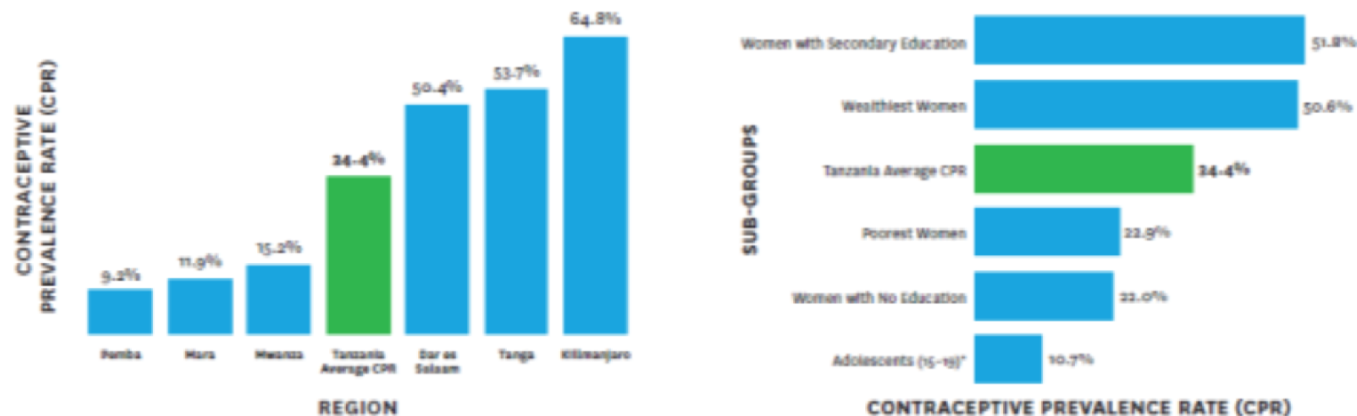
# WHY FAMILY PLANNING?

## 1 Simple Answer to 5 Major Global Challenges

degradation, such as deforestation, drought and flooding, which compound hunger and nutritional issues.

### 5. Family planning promotes women's empowerment

Figure 1: **Contraceptive Prevalence Rates Vary Widely in Tanzania**



\*CPR calculated for all women. Other sub-groups and regions calculated with married women only.  
Source: Tanzania Demographic and Health Survey 2010

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3. women to increase the time between pregnancies. Evidence has long shown that babies born less than two years apart are more likely to die than those born at an interval of at least two years.<sup>2</sup>
4. Family planning protects and preserves the environment by minimizing problems of environmental

method. Eighty-five percent of married adolescents and 60% of unmarried adolescents do not practice family planning. As a result, 44% of 19-year-olds surveyed in 2010 were either mothers or pregnant with their first child<sup>6</sup> and many others resort to unsafe abortion.<sup>7</sup> Increasing access to contraceptive information, services and supplies for everyone would avert tens of thousands of unintended pregnancies, abortions, and maternal and child deaths.

# Final Thoughts

- You need more time, not less, to write something good and short
- Focus, focus, focus
- Revise, polish and proofread everything
- Read, study and collect great examples

# Citations

- [“How to Write Short: Word Craft for Fast Times”](#) by Roy Peter Clark
- [“10 Tips on How to Write Shorter”](#) by Josh Burnoff
- “How to Write Clearly and Effectively” by SkillSoft, Johns Hopkins University
- [“7 Simple Edits That Make Your Writing 100% More Powerful”](#) by Shane Arthur
- [25 Editing Tips for Tightening Your Copy](#)