How many interpretations should readers get from your writing?

1

NIH: "Sentence length should average 15-20 words. Sentences that are simple, active, affirmative, and declarative hold the reader's interest."

http://www.nih.gov/clearcommunication/plainlanguage.htm
Our hypothesis not only tests the context dependent roles of Notch pathway within a cellular framework but also defines molecular axes through which these roles are executed, thus having the potential to identify molecular nodes that can be targeted for selective and sequential activation of stem cell and neurogenic properties of Müller cells, setting a stage for pharmaceutical recruitment of these cells for therapeutic regeneration.

Our hypothesis not only tests the context-dependent roles of Notch signaling within a cellular framework, but also defines molecular axes through which these roles are executed. Thus, our work has the potential to identify molecular nodes that can be targeted for selective and sequential activation of stem cell and neurogenic properties of Müller cells. These findings will set the stage for pharmaceutical recruitment of these cells for therapeutic regeneration.


―It is theoretically impossible to forward only a single interpretation. By using natural positions of emphasis, the best an author can do is make available to the reader the interpretation the author wants to convey.‖

George Gopen, JD, PhD

Exercise:
1) Although the treatment is highly effective, it has significant side effects.
2) Although the treatment has significant side effects, it is highly effective.
3) The treatment has significant side effects, but it is highly effective.
4) The treatment is highly effective, and it has significant side effects.

Structuring Your Writing: Positions of emphasis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1ST HALF</th>
<th>2ND HALF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>POSITION OF EMPHASIS IS THE SECOND HALF OF THE SENTENCE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Structuring Your Writing: Positions of emphasis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBJECT</th>
<th>VERB</th>
<th>STRESS POSITION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Old information</td>
<td>the action</td>
<td>• New information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Backwards-looking information</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Important information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Information that the reader is familiar with</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Information that deserves to be stressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Specific information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1ST HALF: Development of an X model for Y injury is the goal of this project.
2ND HALF: The goal of this project is to develop an X model for Y injury.

Structuring Your Writing: Let the subjects do the work

Examine what the subject is doing in each sentence.
Use the conceptual or physical agent of the sentence as the subject.

http://www.gly.uga.edu/railsback/writing2.html
Structuring Your Writing: Structure of a paragraph

1st sentence is the most important:
- Main idea or the context of the information
- "Topic sentence"

Middle sentences: the information

Last sentence: a way to carry around the information
- Summary or evaluation of information
- "Taken together, these data point to..."
A retrospective study of 301 patients who underwent radical prostatectomy for clinically localized prostate cancer between January 1991 and December 1992 at St. Mark's and affiliated hospitals was performed.
A palliative, noncurative relief of symptoms was reported in women with rheumatoid arthritis taking the oral contraceptive Envoid by several investigators.

Activating Verbs:
Convert passive to active

1. Find the true subject
2. Find the verb
3. Organize into subject–verb structure

A palliative, noncurative relief of symptoms was reported in women with rheumatoid arthritis taking the oral contraceptive Envoid by several investigators.

Activating Verbs:
Check for clarity and stress

Several investigators reported a palliative, noncurative relief of symptoms in women with rheumatoid arthritis taking the oral contraceptive Envoid.
Activating Verbs: Reduce wordy verbs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instead of . . .</th>
<th>Use . . .</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>is aware of</td>
<td>knows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>has knowledge of</td>
<td>knows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is taking</td>
<td>takes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are indications of</td>
<td>indicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are suggestive of</td>
<td>suggest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/ClearCon ciseSentences.html

Activating Verbs: Avoid nominalization

Don't bury the action in a noun or blur it across the entire sentence.

The stability and quality of our financial performance will be improved through the profitable execution of our existing business, as well as the acquisition or development of new businesses.

We will improve our financial performance not only by executing our existing business more profitably but by acquiring or developing new businesses.

http://www.gly.uga.edu/railsback/writing2.html

Eliminating Wordiness:

Write in clear, simple sentences
- Break things into smaller chunks
- Avoid difficult, compound sentences
- Poor structure diverts readers' energy
- Don't put your reader to sleep
Avoid saying the same thing twice
Don’t be redundant
Examples
• “Past history”
• “Completely eliminate”
• “Necessary prerequisite”
• “Refer back”

Don’t overuse qualifiers
1. Avoid intensifiers that don’t intensify
2. Words such as really, very, quite, extremely, severely
3. Best effect when used sparingly

Avoid weak qualifiers
1. If, try, hope, may, might, should, could, believe, possible
2. They dilute your writing
3. Try “expect” instead

A possible cause is likely the apparent tendency of a certain number of patients with diabetes to develop indications of retinopathy.

A possible cause is the tendency of patients with diabetes to develop retinopathy
Eliminating Wordiness: Avoid clichés and empty generalities

Look out for important-sounding phrases that do not add meaning

Ex. State of the art research is expected to advance the field significantly

Be specific and original

Top 5 clichés in science
1. Holy grail
2. Silver bullet
3. Shedding light
4. Missing link
5. Paradigm shift


Eliminating Wordiness: Phrases you can omit

- Have a tendency to
- In the event that
- Manner
- In the process of
- All things considered
- Has the ability to
- As far as __ is concerned
- In light of the fact that
- By means of
- For all intents and purposes
- Type of
- It seems that
- In the nature of
- At the same time as

This policy has a tendency to isolate some communities.
The policy tends to isolate some communities.

In the event that enough people protest, it will probably be revoked.
If enough people protest, it will probably be revoked.

They have monitored the activities of conservationists in a cautious manner.
They have cautiously monitored the activities of conservationists.

Legislators are already in the process of reviewing the statutes.
Legislators are already reviewing the statutes.

http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/style.htm

Improving Clarity

Word choice

Use that and which correctly

“Which” follows commas and introduces modifying but nonessential clauses

“That” does not follow commas and introduces essential clauses

a. “He took the box that was on the top shelf”

b. “He took the box, which was on the top shelf”
Improving Clarity: Word choice

- Compliment
- Complement
- Criteria
- Criterion
- Affect
- Effect

Make sure you use the correct word when two are closely related.

http://www.gly.uga.edu/railsback/writing2.html

Improving Clarity: Comma placement

An independent clause has a subject and verb. Commas separate 2 independent clauses.

a. “The grains are well-rounded, and they commonly have oolitic coatings.”

b. “The grains are well-rounded, and they commonly have oolitic coatings.”

c. “The grains are well-rounded and commonly have oolitic coatings.”

d. “The grains are well-rounded and commonly have oolitic coatings.”

http://www.gly.uga.edu/railsback/writing2.html

Improving Clarity: Noun stacking

Avoid nouns as adjectives. Ex. TIMP-1 mediated evolutionarily conserved CNS matrix regulation. Regulation of the CNS matrix by TIMP-1 is evolutionarily conserved.

http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/concise.htm
The ancient Egyptians were masters of preserving dead people's bodies by making mummies of them. Mummies several thousand years old have been discovered nearly intact. The skin, hair, teeth, fingernails and toenails, and facial features of the mummies were evident. It is possible to diagnose the disease they suffered in life, such as smallpox, arthritis, and nutritional deficiencies. The process was remarkably effective. Sometimes apparent were the fatal afflictions of the dead people: a middle-aged king died of a blow on the head, and polo killed a child king. Mummification consisted of removing the internal organs, applying natural preservatives inside and out, and then wrapping the body in layers of bandages.

The ancient Egyptians were masters of preserving dead people's bodies by making mummies of them. In short, mummification consisted of removing the internal organs, applying natural preservatives inside and out, and then wrapping the body in layers of bandages. And the process was remarkably effective. Indeed, mummies several thousand years old have been discovered nearly intact. Their skin, hair, teeth, fingernails and toenails, and facial features are still evident. Their diseases in life, such as smallpox, arthritis, and nutritional deficiencies, are still diagnosable.

http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/transitions.htm
Espinoza's style was remarkable for its dexterity, grace, and versatility.

In English class, Tashonda learned to read poems critically and to appreciate good prose.

The ceremony was both long and tedious. It was both a long ceremony and very tedious.

http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/parallelism.htm

There are likely to be many researchers raising questions about this methodological approach.

Many researchers are likely to raise questions about this methodological approach.

It was her last argument that finally persuaded me. Her last argument finally persuaded me.

http://www.angelfire.com/wi/writingprocess/revising.html

 ARRRR Method
 Adding: What else does the reader need to know?
 Rearranging: Is the information in the most logical and effective order?
 Removing: What unnecessary details are in this piece of writing?
 Replacing: What words could be replaced by clearer or stronger expressions?
How to Revise

Checklist
1. Can you read it out loud without stumbling?
2. Replace long verb phrases with forceful verbs.
3. Is your train of thought clear?
4. Check your sentence variety.
5. Are you using the same words and phrases over and over again?
6. Aim for precision in word choice.

http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/revision.html

How to Revise
Practice

Before:
• At this point in time we can't ascertain the reason as to why the screen door was left open.

Revised:
• We don't know why the screen door was left open.

Before:
• Basically, in light of the fact that Congressman Fuenches was totally exhausted by his last campaign, there was an expectation on the part of the voters that he would not reduplicate his effort to achieve office in government again.

Revised:
• Because Congressman Fuenches was exhausted by his last campaign, voters expected he would not seek re-election.

Let's review...

• Structuring your writing
  • Positions of emphasis
  • Let the subjects do the work
  • Paragraph organization

• Activating verbs
  • Use active voice
  • Strong verbs
  • Avoid nominalization

• Eliminating wordiness
  • Prune the redundant
  • Reduce weak qualifiers
  • Avoid clichés and empty generalities
Let's review...

**Improving clarity**
- Correct comma placement
- Choose the right word
- That vs. which
- Avoid noun stacks

**Engaging the reader**
- Use transitions
- Parallel structure
- Avoid expletive constructions

**How to revise**
- ARRRR method
- Checklist

Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences... This requires not that the writer make all his sentences short, or that he avoid all detail and treat his subjects only in outline, but that every word tell.

- William Strunk Jr. in *Elements of Style*