Technical Writing

Technical writing is a starkly different writing genre than what we may commonly think of as traditional academic writing, such as works found in English or history. In the technical writing genre, writers focus on stating complex information in the most efficient and clearest way possible.

Understand How to Use Passive Voice

One major goal in technical writing is avoiding passive voice: any of the "to be" verbs—am, is, are, was, were, be, being, been—plus a past tense verb (passive participle).

Ex: The balloon was popped by Bob.

The reason technical writers avoid passive voice is because passive voice adds length to a document. While the example above may seem like a short sentence, we can make the sentence shorter while expressing the same message:
Bob popped the balloon.

While the second example is only two words shorter, these small differences in word count can impact the paper's length over its entirety.

Technical writers *can* use passive voice if the focus of a sentence is on the action rather than the actor. This is why passive voice is a major part of science writing. The methods, research, and events described are often more important than the actors who perform these actions.

Note that even though we often use passive voice in science writing, we should still keep the length of a verb phrase as short as possible.

Long	The fish have been found with high levels of mercury.
Short	The fish were found with high levels of mercury.

Below is a table with a small list of long phrases to watch for and their shorter replacements:

Long Phrase	Shorter Phrase
Have (has) been	Was
Must be	Must
Have to be	Must be
Had + past-tense verb (had researched)	Past-tense verb (researched)
Going on for	Occurred for
Were able to + verb (were able to go)	Past-tense verb (went)

Avoid Unnecessary Words

Like long passive verb phrases, unnecessary words add fluff to a document that gets in the way of communication.

Long	Short
For the purposes of measuring…	to measure
It is well-known that the sky is blue.	The sky is blue.

Use Simple Language

Fancy words add complexity to scientific jargon, which is already complicated enough. Instead of using fancy words, opt for more simple and common words to reach a wider audience.

Fancy	Simple
Utilized	Used
Cease	Stop
Insouciant	Carefree

Be Precise and Specific

In science writing, details matter. Science writers should be specific in naming the materials used and any necessary quantities.

Vague	Specific
We studied a large sample of fish.	We studied 300 Atlantic Bluefin Tuna.
Many acres burned.	3,000 acres burned.

Helpful Tips

Revising your writing can become tedious and be daunting. Try these tips to make your writing process easier to manage:

- **Start your writing assignment early**—Writing takes time, and the earlier you start, the more time you have to review and revise your work.
- Proofread in steps—On the first round of proofreading, look for the correct tense for your particular assignment (active or passive). On the second round of proofreading, look for any unnecessary words, and so on.
- Ask a friend or Writing Center tutor to review your writing with you. Having a second pair of eyes can help make sure you wrote clearly and coherently.

If you would like to set an appointment with a Writing Center tutor, contact us:
- Main Office: Sage 150

- Phone: 940.565.2563
- Main Email: WritingCenter@unt.edu
- Grad Email: GradWriting@unt.edu
- Website: WritingCenter.unt.edu