Improving Reader-friendliness and Rhetoric

Here you can learn about

- **improving the reader-friendliness of a text.**

Making your texts more reader-friendly will also improve the rhetoric of your paper. This improved rhetoric will not only make it easier for your readers to remember what they have read but also strengthen your paper's message. An associated worksheet is also available.

Devices Suited to Academic Papers

The following four devices can be used to improve the reader-friendliness of a text

1. **Use descriptive verbs**: Readers find your text more interesting if you use verbs that describe or state more emphatically what is going on in a sentence, e.g.,

   o *Obtaining reliable data about migrants from Africa <u>is</u> nearly impossible as its accessibility is withheld from the public*

   is rhetorically not as strong as

   Obtaining reliable data about migrants from Africa <u>proves</u> nearly impossible as its accessibility is withheld from the public.

   In the latter sentence, the verb *proves* has a stronger meaning than the verb *is* in the former sentence.

2. **Be aware of end focus** – see also *Information Sheet 9a – Structuring Sentences – Improving Clarity*: Because readers remember what comes at the end of a text unit (paper, section, paragraph, sentence), you should place important information there, e.g.,

   o *Obtaining reliable data about migrants from Africa proves nearly impossible as its accessibility is withheld from the public* is rhetorically less effective than *As data accessibility is withheld from the public, obtaining reliable figures about migrants from Africa proves nearly impossible* which ends with a rhetorically strong negative word *impossible.*

3. **Reduce nouns**: In comparison to other types of writing, academic writing contains a lot of nouns. Removing some of them by, e.g., changing them to verbs, reduces the density of a text and makes it easier to read, e.g.,

   o *As data accessibility is withheld from the public, obtaining reliable figures about migrants from Africa proves nearly impossible*

   could be changed to

   Since the public cannot access the data, obtaining reliable figures about migrants from Africa proves nearly impossible where *accessibility* has been changed to the verb *access.*

4. **Reduce prepositions**: Academic texts also tend to have a lot of prepositions. Some of them could be removed, e.g.,

   o *Since the public cannot access the data, obtaining reliable figures about migrants from Africa proves nearly impossible*

   can be changed to

   Since the public cannot access the data, obtaining reliable figures about African migrants proves nearly impossible.

   In the latter sentence, the phrase *migrants from Africa* has been changed to *African migrants*. Phrasal verbs, e.g., *to look at,* can also often be changed to one-word alternatives, e.g., *to investigate.*

Useful Resources

Forsyth, M. 2013. *The Elements of Eloquence: How to Turn the Perfect English Phrase*. London. Icon Books.

Montgomery, S.L. 2017. *The Chicago Guide to Communication Science.* 2nd ed. Chapter 6, Chicago, University of Chicago.

Sword, H. 2012. *Stylish Academic Writing.* Cambridge, Mass. Harvard University Press.

Zinsser, W. 2012. *On Writing Well: The classic guide to writing nonfiction.* 30th ed. New York. Collins.

Final Comments/Tips

- You can make your writing more eloquent by using devices such as similes and metaphors, which are helpful when explaining complex abstract concepts. However, they are simply an add-on. Your readers will also appreciate it if you write simply with reasonable precision, in a clearly organized fashion without too many significant grammatical or syntactic errors.

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DFG Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft German Research Foundation