



Claire's Clear Writing Tips



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Claire is the face of the European Commission's **Clear Writing campaign**. As her name (meaning 'clear' in French) suggests, she is an expert on clear writing. Here she presents some detailed practical tips to help EU staff avoid common pitfalls and draft more clearly. These tips **on writing in English** expand upon the guide **How to write clearly**, which is available in all official EU languages.

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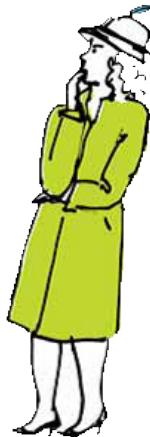
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Seven key questions

First things first. Before you start writing, imagine what questions your reader might ask.

A clear, well-structured text should answer these 'seven questions':

1. **What** is being done?
2. **Who** is doing it (to **whom**)?
3. **When** is it being done?
4. **Where** is it being done?
5. **How** is it being done?
6. **Why** is it being done?
7. **How** much is involved (resources, time, etc.)?



So:



Don't write this:

At the appropriate stage, the necessary steps will be taken and sufficient funds committed to tackle the problems arising in several Member States.

Why? Because it is vague and uninformative, and therefore uninteresting. It provides no clear answers to any of the seven questions.



Instead, write this:

Over the next six months, the European Central Bank will provide the governments of Ireland, Spain and Portugal with a loan of €10 billion from the emergency fund to help them tackle their debt crisis.

Why? Because it is specific, clear and informative.

Focus on the reader

Who are you writing for? Involve them by addressing them directly ('**you**' is underused).

What do they need to know? Use the 'seven key questions' approach described previously.

What will really interest them? Give them only the information they actually need. Leave out as many details of EU procedures and structures as you can, unless these are essential for your reader.



Don't write this:

The institute will engage with its key stakeholders: the European institutions (European Parliament, the Commission and other European Agencies, such as the Fundamental Rights Agency, EUROFOUND, EU-OSHA), relevant agencies in the Justice and Home Affairs cluster and the Member States, to take advantage of synergies.



Instead, write this:

The institute will engage with its key stakeholders — EU institutions and agencies, justice and home affairs organisations, and Member States — to take advantage of shared expertise.



Don't write this:

It is unadvisable to be in control of a moving vehicle when suffering from fatigue.

Demonstrate the relevance of the proposal to the needs and constraints of the target groups and final beneficiaries.

This part of the Grant Application Form is intended to allow the Applicant to describe certain aspects of the project which could not be specifically addressed in Part B. The Applicant should set out the work plan by subdividing it into steps.



Try this instead:

You should not drive if you are tired.

Show how your proposed project will meet the needs and constraints of the people it is intended to benefit.

This part of the grant application form allows you to describe aspects of the project which could not be dealt with in Part B. You should set out your work plan and subdivide it into steps.

Readability test

Ask yourself:

Would your friends understand it?

Are all instructions clear?

Can it be easily and accurately translated?

Is there enough white space (e.g. short paragraphs, bullet points where possible)?

Keep it short and simple (KISS)

To achieve greater clarity:

- **split long sentences** (and paragraphs) into two or three shorter ones;
- **cut out unnecessary words** – using active verbs where possible can help you do this;
- **replace overly complex phrasing** with simple, everyday language;
- **use bullet points** for lists of facts or information;
- **avoid ambiguous expressions.**



Don't write this:

It furthermore seems appropriate to enable a preliminary regime with a control on the volume of products that are placed on the market using this procedure with their conformity assessment based on the results of initial compatibility studies.

Problem: long sentence (38 words) containing a lot of ideas; jargon (regime), incorrect usage (control)



Instead, write this:

There should be preliminary arrangements for limiting the volume of products placed on the market. Their conformity should be assessed on the basis of initial compatibility studies.

Solution: two shorter sentences (27 words) with one idea per sentence, fewer nouns



Don't write this:

The final amount of the grant will depend on the implementation of the action in accordance with the terms and conditions of this Agreement. It will be determined at the time of the payment of the balance and will correspond to the lowest of the amounts calculated under Article 10.

Problem: verbose (50 words) and over-complicated



Instead, write this:

The final amount of the grant depends on the action meeting the terms and conditions of this Agreement. The amount is calculated when the balance is paid. It corresponds to the lowest of the amounts calculated under Article 10.

Solution: three shorter sentences (39 words) with one idea per sentence, plain language



Don't write this:

Strengthening of cooperation between national authorities further needs improving, as well as its intensity.

Problem: too many (abstract) nouns; impersonal, awkward grammar



Instead, write this:

National authorities need to work together more closely and more regularly.

Solution: more verbs, simpler grammar



Don't write this:

The breach, by the beneficiaries, of their obligations pursuant to Article 1, may, if appropriate, lead to any of the measures provided under Article 6.

Problem: ambiguous and wordy; passive construction



Instead, write this:

If a beneficiary breaches its obligations under Article 1, the Commission may apply any of the measures in Article 6.

Solution: sentence shortened and restructured; ambiguity resolved by changing 'beneficiaries' to the singular; active voice used and both agents named



Don't write this:

It goes without saying that our volunteers love their work.

Problem: wordy, redundant jargon at the beginning of the sentence ('it goes without saying'). This kind of thing is called 'throat-clearing'.



Instead, write this:

Our volunteers (clearly) love their work.

Solution: cut out words that are doing no work or adding little meaning to the sentence



6.



SIMPLIFY! Resist the temptation to use long **words** and **expressions** — short, simple ones are often the clearest.



This will **contribute to improving** the situation.



This will **help improve the situation.**

Indeed, this will **facilitate the** monitoring of the trend by the Commission.

This will **help the Commission to** monitor the trend.

The wider political dialogue **gave** national parliaments **the possibility** to play a role in shaping policy at EU level.

Wider political dialogue **enabled** national parliaments to play a role in shaping EU policy.

The reason I am working for DG DEVCO is because I am interested in the EU's relations with developing countries.

I am working for DG DEVCO because I am interested in the EU's relations with developing countries.

The number of women in management positions is lower in comparison to the number of men.

There are fewer women than men in management positions.

Here are some **simple alternatives** to help you make phrases more concise:



with reference to
with regard to
on the subject of
in relation to



about

accounted for by the fact that
due to the fact that
for the reason that
in view of the fact that
owing to the fact that

because

in case (that)
in the event that
provided that
on condition that
where/when

if



To make texts clearer and more concise, use '**if**' wherever you can to express a **condition**.

If the temperature in your office this summer exceeds 30°C, you may work from home. (not 'On condition that ...')

If you work from home, remember to transfer your calls from the office to your private line. (not 'In the event that ...')

If you decide to work from home, please inform your line manager. (not 'In case ...')

Readability test

Ask yourself:

Have you used the shortest phrase?

Is all the information relevant?

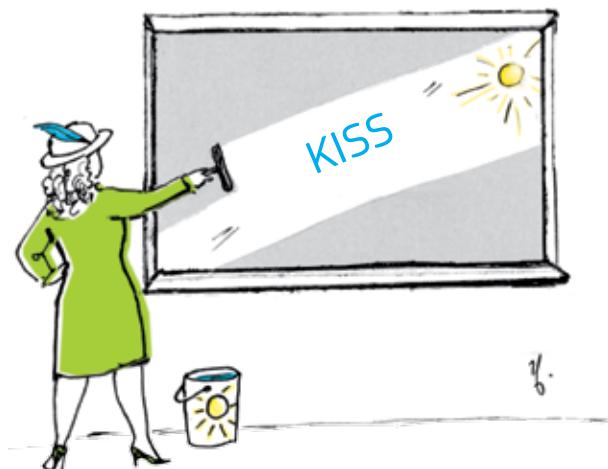
Are any words or expressions redundant?

Is there any unnecessary repetition?

Are there any ambiguities?

And finally ...

Does the language sound natural?



Keep it **short and **s**imple!**

Cut out excess nouns

A sentence full of nouns is hard to read. If you can, use verbs instead. The result will often be a shorter, simpler and more dynamic text.



Do you need all these nouns?

The intention of the Commission is the reinforcement of the monitoring of the development of these policies and thus the assurance of the continuation of the implementation of the agreed strategies by the Member States. (35 words — 11 nouns)



Try verbs instead:

The Commission intends to monitor these policies closely, to ensure that Member States continue implementing the agreed strategies. (18 words — 4 nouns)



Do you need all these nouns?

There is a need for an intensification of Community efforts aimed at the prevention of the pollution of the coastlines of Europe through the accidental spillage of oil. (28 words — 10 nouns)



Try verbs instead:

The EU must do more to protect Europe's coasts from oil spills. (12 words — 5 nouns)



Don't write this:

Tourism expenditure by Europeans aged 65 or over grew by 33% in the past five years.

The establishment of shelters and strengthening of health services in areas where there is a congregation of displaced persons are our priority.

Your employment contract confers on you an entitlement to full remuneration for one calendar month in the event of your medical incapacitation.



Try this instead

Europeans aged 65+ spent 33% more on tourism over the past five years.

We need to urgently set up shelters and boost health services in areas where displaced people are staying.

Your employment contract entitles you to full pay for a month if you fall ill.

Be concrete, not abstract

Replace vague and abstract expressions with concrete language. The text will be clearer, more meaningful, and often shorter too.



Do you need all this abstraction?

It is a matter of necessity that citizens be aware of the division of competences among European institutions and Member States.

The principle of the liability of Member States for breach of EU law plays an important part in consolidating the protection of the rights conferred on individuals by EU provisions.

The confidentiality of the information exchanged pursuant to the Agreement must be preserved by the beneficiary.

The vast majority of our assets will be out in the public space.

(Police press briefing on security in London)



Try being more concrete:

People need to know who does what in the EU.

Member States can be taken to court if they break EU law, and this helps ensure that citizens' rights are protected.

The beneficiary must not disclose information exchanged under this Agreement to third parties.

Most of our officers will be on patrol on the streets.



Abstract language

negative evolution (of the economy)

remunerated employment

hierarchical superior

employment destruction

human capital development

specificities

commonalities

orientations towards actions

ensure the universal availability of



Concrete language

(economic) downturn, decline, slump

paid work

boss, line manager

job losses

training for staff

specific features/characteristics (of x)

shared or common aspects/themes/goals

guidelines for action

ensure that everyone has access to

Prefer active verbs to passive

Sentences are usually clearer and simpler (and shorter) if the verbs are in the active form rather than the passive.



Don't write this:

It has been decided by the Commission that smoking in its offices should be banned.

The setting up of the advisory service by the Member States and the use of the service by farmers will be supported by these measures.



Try this instead:

The Commission has decided to ban smoking in its offices.

These measures will help Member States set up the advisory service and will help farmers use it.

Name the **agents** of each action if possible, and put the actions ***in the order in which they occur***.



Don't write this:

Its decision on the allocation of EU assistance will be taken subsequent to receipt of all project applications and the Award Committee's meeting.



Instead write this:

1. When all the **applicants** **have submitted** their project applications,
2. the **Award Committee** **will meet**
3. **to decide**
4. **how much EU aid it will grant to each.**



Beware of jargon

Jargon is vocabulary used by groups of insiders or specialists to communicate with each other. Make sure that any document you want outsiders to read is as jargon-free as possible. If you do have to use jargon terms, explain them when you first use them.



Don't write this:

EU customs legislation must be applied in a convergent and harmonised way.

The IAS is reviewing our SNE employment modalities.



Try this instead:

EU customs legislation must be applied consistently.

The Internal Audit Service (IAS) is reviewing our arrangements for employing seconded national experts.



Don't write this:

In order to achieve our overarching goal to eradicate never events, we will need to engage and collaborate with organisations and bodies across the healthcare spectrum, to not only ensure the initiatives we develop are accessible and achievable, but also that they can be used as standard practice across the healthcare system.

(National Health Service, England – report summary)



Instead, write this:

'Never events' are serious patient safety incidents that should not be allowed to happen. To prevent these arising, we need to work with a wide range of healthcare groups and organisations to develop realistic and achievable initiatives that can become standard practice across the healthcare system.



The sentence in italics can be omitted if the reader is familiar with the term 'never events' or if it has been explained earlier in the text.



Jargon



English

blue-sky thinking

clear/visionary thinking

deliverables

results, benefits or outcomes

keep in the loop

keep informed

human capital

people and their skills

active labour market policies

job creation schemes or measures

modalities

arrangements, procedures

Clear explanations of jargon can be found in:

'EU jargon in English and some possible alternatives'

http://ec.europa.eu/ipg/content/tips/words-style/jargon-alternatives_en.htm

**Definitions of technical and legal terms relating to EU activities can be found in:
the online 'Europa Glossary'**

http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/glossary/index_en.htm



Take care when using abbreviations, acronyms and foreign expressions

Too many unfamiliar abbreviations or foreign words can make a document incomprehensible. Latin is used much less frequently in English than in some other languages. Not only does it make a document appear very formal, but it can alienate and annoy readers if they do not understand Latin.



Don't write this:

The information transmitted by the NAO and AA cf. the above deadlines is analysed by DG AGRI J.5 auditors au fil de l'eau, as further described below. (guidelines)



Instead, write this:

The national authorising officer and the Audit Authority (AA) submit information in accordance with the above schedule. This is analysed by DG Agriculture's auditors as set out below.



Don't write this:

The Contractor has been convicted of an offence concerning its professional conduct by a judgment which has the force of *res judicata*.



You could write this:

The Contractor has been convicted of an offence concerning its professional conduct by a final judgment, not subject to an appeal.



This is better still:

The Contractor has been convicted of an offence concerning its professional conduct by a court whose decision is final and not subject to appeal.

Example used with thanks to Gayl Russell and Louise Mills (Clear Legal Writing presentation)



Latin	English
<i>inter alia</i>	including, partly, for example, among other things, in particular
<i>prima facie</i>	at first sight, on the face of it
<i>de facto</i>	in reality, in effect, actual
<i>circa</i>	about
<i>ex ante</i>	upstream, prior, advance
<i>ex post</i>	downstream, subsequent
<i>ex post facto</i>	after the event, retrospectively
<i>in toto</i>	completely, as a whole, entirely
<i>ipso facto</i>	therefore
<i>post hoc</i>	after this
<i>mutatis mutandis</i>	with the necessary modifications



Many of the acronyms and abbreviations used in European Commission documents are defined in the:
'Interinstitutional Style Guide' (Main Acronyms and Abbreviations)
<http://publications.europa.eu/code/en/en-5000400.htm>

Beware of false friends (*faux amis*)

False friends are pairs of words in two languages that look similar, but differ in meaning.

False friend: **actual**

The English word ‘actual’ looks as if it means the same as the French ‘*actuel*’, Dutch ‘*actueel*’, German ‘*aktuell*’, Italian ‘*attuale*’ and Portuguese ‘*atual*’. But it doesn’t. The English translation of all these words is **current** or **topical**. The English word ‘actual’ means ‘real’ or ‘true’.



Don't write this:

The ban on the import of live, captive birds was very **actual in May.**



Instead, write this:

The ban on the import of live, captive birds was very **topical in May.**



Be careful if you write this:

Car drivers should state their **actual registration number.**

Why?

Because you are implying that unscrupulous drivers might give a false number.



Instead, write this:

Car drivers should state their **current registration number.**

False friend: **assist at**

To ‘assist at’ is a literal translation of the French ‘*assister à*’ and similar expressions in other Romance languages, but it doesn’t mean the same thing. ‘To assist’ means ‘to help’ while ‘*assister à*’ means to **attend**.



Be careful if you write this:

The Director-General will be unable to **assist at the September meeting.**

Why?

Because you may insult your Director-General by suggesting that he won’t be able to help at the meeting.



Instead, write this:

The Director-General will be unable to **attend the September meeting.**

False friend: control

'To control' is a literal translation of the French '*contrôler*', German '*kontrollieren*' and similar words in other languages, but the meaning is not the same in many cases.



When used as a verb, the English word 'control' has at least two meanings:

1. **to exercise power over** or **to be in charge or command of** something
2. **to limit** or **to restrict** something



You can write this:

It is the responsibility of drivers to ensure that they are in control of their vehicle at all times. (i.e. in command of the vehicle)

Militants now control large parts of northern Syria. (i.e. exercise power over)

The purpose of this directive is to control pollution emissions. (if the directive aims to restrict emissions, not just monitor them)

The central bank raised interest rates in order to control inflation. (i.e. in order to limit inflation)

Room temperature is controlled automatically by a thermostat.

However:



Don't write this:

When you cross the border, customs officers will control your car. (No they won't: you will still be at the wheel, controlling your car.)



Instead, write this:

When you cross the border, customs officers will inspect your car.



'Control' can be used as a noun in: **border control, customs control, passport control**.



Don't write this:

Employee expense claims are randomly controlled by the tax authorities.



Instead, write this:

The tax authorities check a random sample of employee expense claims.



Avoid using 'control' in the following examples.



Use the **highlighted words** instead:

The environment agency has launched a weather forecast model that can monitor smog levels in the air.

Appointment will be approved once the applicant's qualifications have been verified.

The purpose of this report is to evaluate the agency's performance in 2014.

The pricing regulations limit the volume of product that may be imported and sold.

Nurses supervise the healthcare of the children on the ward under the direction of paediatricians.

The main objective of the research is to assess the nutrient content of meals.

Is there any way to check that the data on my hard drive has not been corrupted?

False friend: **delay**

'Delay' looks as if it means the same as the French '*délai*', but it doesn't mean the same thing at all. The French word '*délai*' refers to a **period of time** or a **time limit** or **deadline**. In English, if something is delayed, it means it is late, postponed or held up, i.e. the time limit has passed.



Be careful if you write this:

The payment delay is three months.

Why? Because you are saying that the payment is three months late!



Instead, write this:

Payment must be made within three months.

Why? Because this makes clear how much time you are allowed before you have to pay the bill.



Don't write this:

What is the delay for implementing the reforms in Greece?

The translation delay is 15 June 2014.

The driver did not respect the delay for delivering the IT equipment.



Instead, write this:

How long does Greece have to implement the reforms?

The deadline for the translation is 15 June 2014.

The driver did not meet the deadline for delivering the IT equipment.

False friend: **dispose of**

To 'dispose of' is a literal translation of the French '*disposer de*' and similar expressions in other Romance languages, but the meaning is completely different. '*Disposer de*' means **to have something** or **to be equipped with**, but 'to dispose of' means 'to get rid of something'.



Be careful if you write this:

DG MARE will **dispose of Danish interpreters at the conference in Copenhagen.**

Why? Because this means that DG MARE will be removing Danish interpreters from the conference.



Instead, write this:

DG MARE will **have Danish interpreters at the conference in Copenhagen.**



Don't write this:

All airports must **dispose of facilities for people with impaired mobility.**

All planes **dispose of oxygen masks.**



Instead, write this:

All airports must **have facilities for people with impaired mobility.**

All planes are equipped with oxygen masks.

False friend: **element**

The English word 'element' resembles the French '*élément*', but the meaning is not the same in many cases. '*Elément*' means **part**, **constituent** or **component** (of a structure/problem). In English, it is an essential or characteristic part of something abstract, or more specifically a chemical element or one of the 'four elements': earth, water, air, and fire.



Don't write this:

Article 290 of the TFEU states that the legislator may delegate to the Commission the task of supplementing or amending certain non-essential **elements of this Regulation.**

New **elements have been added to the action plan, which has been updated.**

The various **elements of the budget are analysed below.**



Instead, write this:

Article 290 of the TFEU states that the legislator may delegate to the Commission the task of supplementing or amending certain non-essential **parts of this Regulation.**

New **items have been added to the action plan, which has been updated.**

The various **components of the budget are analysed below.**

False friend: elaborate

'To elaborate' is a literal translation of the French '*élaborer*', but it does not mean the same thing. French '*élaborer*' means to **draft, draw up, prepare, produce, formulate, write up** or **develop**.

'En cours d'*élaboration*' means **being drafted, prepared** or **drawn up**.



Don't write this:

The website design was
elaborated by a group of
consultants.

We will conduct the survey when
we have **elaborated** the
questionnaire.

The parties agreed to cooperate in
elaborating new planning rules.

Guidance is **in the course of**
elaboration to help food
businesses understand the new
requirements.



Try this instead:

A group of consultants **designed**
the website.

We will conduct the survey when
we have **drafted** the questionnaire.

The parties agreed to cooperate in
drawing up new planning rules.

We **are preparing** guidance to help
food businesses understand the
new requirements.



The English verb 'elaborate' means to **go into more detail** or **expand** upon something.



You can write this:

Your mission report does not explain why you took three days to travel from Amsterdam to Brussels. Please **elaborate**.

She **elaborated** on the main ideas in her dissertation.



The adjective 'elaborate' is used to describe something that is detailed or complicated.



You can write this:

That sounds like a very **elaborate** plan for such a simple task.

False friend: **eventual/eventually**

The English word 'eventually' looks like the French '*éventuellement*' and the German '*eventuell*', but it does not mean the same thing. French '*éventuellement*' and German '*eventuell*' mean **possibly**. In English, 'eventually' means 'certainly' or 'later on'.



Be careful if you write this:

European airspace will eventually be closed by volcanic ash next month.

Why? Because this means that it will definitely be closed next month.

The Green Party will eventually come into power.

Why? Because this means that they will definitely come into power one day, which might not be what is meant.



Instead, write this:

European airspace will possibly be closed by volcanic ash next month.

The Green Party will possibly come into power.

For the same reasons, 'eventual' is often misused.



Don't write this:

Please send eventual enquiries on the products by email to the address below.



Instead, write this:

Please send any enquiries on the products by email to the address below.

False friend: **expose**

To 'expose' is a literal translation of the French '*exposer*', but it does not always have the same meaning. A particular problem arises with the reflexive form of the verb. In English, 'to expose oneself' has a specific meaning: to expose one's naked body in public. The French '*s'exposer*' may be used to refer to an artist **exhibiting** work, or to a person **explaining** or **expounding** arguments.



Don't write this:

A Belgian artist will expose himself in the Berlaymont.

The President exposed herself to the European Parliament.



Instead, write this:

A Belgian artist will exhibit his work in the Berlaymont.

The President set out her views to the European Parliament.

False friend: foresee

'To foresee' is a literal translation of the French '*prévoir*' and similar expressions in other Romance languages, but it doesn't always mean the same. 'To foresee' means to predict or forecast the future, usually involving a crystal ball.

The French terms '*prévoir/ prévu*' are often used to refer to the provisions laid down in legislation. In this sort of context, the best straight equivalent is **provide for**.

In other contexts, *prévu* can mean **planned**, **considered**, **scheduled**, **envisioned** or **anticipated**.



Don't write this:

Article 15 foresees some exceptions to the general rules.

The necessary funds have not been foreseen in the budget.

Finland has implemented the foreseen fiscal measures.

The office move is foreseen for the end of the year.

To avoid possible bankruptcy, we could foresee restructuring the business.



Instead, write this:

Article 15 provides for some exceptions to the general rules.

The necessary funds have not been provided in the budget.

Finland has implemented the planned fiscal measures.

The office move is scheduled for the end of the year.

To avoid possible bankruptcy, we could consider restructuring the business.



This is the correct way of using 'foresee', meaning predict or forecast:

The fall of Troy was foreseen by Cassandra.

False friend: project

The French '*projet*' does not always translate as 'project' in English. For example, '*projet de budget*' means **draft budget** and '*projet de loi*' means **bill** or **draft law**.



Don't write this:

The budget project provides for considerable investment in research.

The Ministry of Health issued its opinion today on a project regulation establishing a 'Code of Ethics'.



Instead, write this:

The draft budget provides for considerable investment in research.

The Ministry of Health issued its opinion today on a draft regulation establishing a 'Code of Ethics'.

False friend: **punctual/punctually**

The English word 'punctual' looks like the French '*ponctuel*' and the German '*punktuell*'. However, 'punctual' means 'on time'; it never means **sporadic**, **occasional** or **localised**, as in the other languages.



Don't write this:

I have only made a few **punctual** changes.



Instead, write this:

I have only made a few changes **here and there**.



This is the correct way of using 'punctual' and 'punctually':

Please arrive **punctually** at the meeting.

The train leaves at 06:58. Please be **punctual**.

Why? Because this means 'Please arrive **on time**'.

False friend: **report**

The English verb 'to report' looks as if it means the same as the French '*rapporter*', but the meaning is completely different. '*Rapporter*' means to **postpone** to a later date, or to **carry over** money in accounts.



Don't write this:

DG HR has **reported** the application deadline to 15 December.



Instead, write this:

DG HR has **postponed** the application deadline to 15 December.

A sum of €5 million was **reported** from 2013 to 2014 for new projects.

A sum of €5 million was **carried over** from 2013 to 2014 for new projects.



False friend: respect

'To respect' is a literal translation of the French '*respecter*', but it is not always used in the same way. The English word means 'to value' or 'honour' someone or something. The French '*respecter*' means to **meet** (a deadline), **observe** (principles and rules), **comply** (with rules) or **uphold**.



Don't write this:



Try this instead:

You did not **respect** the deadline for completing the report.

You did not **meet** the deadline for completing the report.

Please **respect** the rules.

Please **observe** the rules.



This is the correct way of using 'respect', meaning value or honour:

The company has an obligation to **respect** human rights under its **Code of Ethics**.

I **respect** his courage in standing up to the bullies.

False friend: sensible

'Sensible' is a literal translation of the French '*sensible*' and the German '*sensibel*', but it doesn't mean the same. The French and German words mean **sensitive**, but the English word means 'reasonable'.



Be careful when you write this:

This is not a politically sensible decision.

Why? Because you are saying the decision is not reasonable, which is probably not what you mean!



Instead, write this:

This is not a politically sensitive decision.



This is the correct way of using 'sensible' meaning reasonable:

Let's be **sensible**, your 50-page mission report is far too long. I'm sure you could trim it.

For our walk along the Moselle, please wear **sensible** shoes.

Additional examples of false friends, with detailed explanations, can be found in:

'Misused words and expressions in EU publications'

http://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/EN_TERMINIOLOGY_PUBLICATION/EN_TERMINIOLOGY_PUBLICATION_EN.pdf

Tips on usage (grammar, vocabulary, punctuation)

Take care when using adjectival/adverbial phrases



This is unclear!

Rules were adopted on packaging toys as recommended by the Consumer Council.

(What had the Consumer Council recommended? Packaging toys? Packaging them in a certain way? Or rules on packaging?)



Make it clear!

Put the adverbial phrase 'as recommended by ...' next to the action to which it applies.

As recommended by the Consumer Council, rules were adopted on packaging toys.



This is unclear!

Parliament made a number of changes to the law on access to information requested by the OSCE (Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe).

(What had the OSCE requested? Information? Or access to information? Or the law on access to information? Or changes to that law?)



Make it clear!

Put the adjectival phrase 'requested by ...' next to the noun to which it applies.

Parliament made a number of changes, requested by the OSCE, to the law on access to information.

Or make it an adverbial phrase instead, and put it in the right place:

As requested by the OSCE, Parliament made changes to the law on access to information.

At the OSCE's request, Parliament changed the law on access to information.

Take care with the word 'which'



This is unclear!

The President announced a far-reaching reform of the electoral process, which was followed by a decision to reduce the number of MPs.

(Did the decision follow the electoral process? Or did it follow the reform? Or did it follow the President's announcement?)



Make it clear!

The President announced a far-reaching reform of the electoral process. Following this reform [or the elections or the announcement], the President [or Parliament or the Government] decided to reduce the number of MPs.



This is unclear!

Parliament adopted a new version of the law on local elections which had been widely criticised by election experts.

(What had been widely criticised? The local elections? Or the law on local elections? Or the new version of that law?)



Make it clear!

Parliament adopted a new version of the law on local elections, as the old law had been widely criticised by election experts.

To use or not to use a comma?

With a comma

The government adopted new rules on the inspection of farms, applying stricter hygiene standards.

This means that the new rules apply stricter standards to the inspection of all farms.

Without a comma

The government adopted new rules on the inspection of farms applying stricter hygiene standards.

This means that the new inspection rules apply only to farms that apply stricter standards.

With a comma

Air quality in schools is important because children, who are particularly vulnerable to pollutants, spend most of their time in school environments.

This means that all children are vulnerable and all children spend a lot of time at school.

Without a comma

Air quality in schools is important because children who are particularly vulnerable to pollutants spend most of their time in school environments.

This means that certain (vulnerable) children spend a lot of time at school.

What is the right word or expression?

'exclude' and 'exempt'

'Excluded from' means 'not permitted to'; 'exempt from' means 'not required to'.



Don't write this:

The areas listed shall be **excluded from the energy efficiency requirements.**



Instead, write this:

The areas listed shall be **exempt from the energy efficiency requirements.**



Don't write this:

Requests for **exclusion from the rules shall be submitted within one year of the entry into force of this regulation.**



Instead, write this:

Requests for **exemption from the rules shall be submitted within one year of the entry into force of this regulation.**



This is the correct way of using 'exclude':

Expatriate Scots were **excluded from voting in the independence referendum.**

'in case of' and 'in the event of'

'In case of' is most often used in a set phrase: 'in case of emergency, [do X]' – it's used when giving instructions to people. 'In the event of' is more often used when referring to a situation that might occur.



Don't write this:

The labour market has been applying the 'flexicurity' model that combines flexible hiring and firing rules with a generous social safety net in the form of income compensation **in case of unemployment.**



instead, write this:

The labour market has been applying the 'flexicurity' model that combines flexible hiring and firing rules with a generous social safety net in the form of income compensation **in the event of unemployment.**



This is the correct way of using 'in case of':

In case of fire, do not use the lift.

'with a view to' and 'in view of'

'With a view to' means 'with the intention of', while 'in view of' is similar to 'as a result of'.



Don't write this:

In 2013, Poland set its legislative procedure in motion **in view of adopting new national rules to address the weaknesses identified in the Action Plan.**



Instead, write this:

In 2013, Poland set its legislative procedure in motion **with a view to adopting new national rules to address the weaknesses identified in the Action Plan.**



This is the correct way of using 'in view of' meaning as a result of:

The committee decided to consider the security issue at a later meeting, **in view of the packed agenda.**

'ensure', 'insure' and 'assure'

These three words are sometimes confused.

- 'Ensure' means to make (something) certain.
- 'Insure' refers to making arrangements to obtain financial compensation in the event of an accident or loss.
- The most common meaning of 'to assure' is to inform (somebody) positively.



Don't write this:

Fishing opportunities should be distributed among Member States in such a way as to **assure each Member State relative stability of fishing activities.**



Instead, write this:

Fishing opportunities should be distributed among Member States in such a way as to **ensure that each Member State enjoys relative stability of fishing activities.**



This is the correct way of using 'insure':

All household items should be **insured for their full replacement cost.**



This is the correct way of using 'assure':

Airline staff **assured passengers that there would be no significant disruption despite the strike by air traffic controllers.**



'Assure' can also mean to make certain or safe — but in this sense it is mainly used in the passive or adjectival form.

- **Be self-reliant and your success is assured!**
- **Rest assured that we will do all we can to find your missing luggage.**

Test yourself!

1) The police will find the thief eventually.

This means:

- A) The police will never find the thief.
- B) The police will certainly find the thief, but it may take some time.
- C) It is possible that the police will find the thief, but not certain.
- D) We hope the police will find the thief.

2) 'The introduction of supplementation of remuneration for staff representation'

What's wrong with this title?

- A) 'Supplementation' should have a capital 's'.
- B) 'Introduction' should have a capital 'I'.
- C) 'Remuneration' is Eurojargon.
- D) Too many words (nouns) ending in '-ion'.

3) 'It was decided by the Commission that it had not been proved that the directive had been disregarded by the Member State in question'

What's wrong with this sentence?

- A) Nothing.
- B) 'Member State' should not have capital letters.
- C) Too many passive constructions.
- D) 'Proved' should be 'proven'.

4) 'There was a payment delay of three months.'

This means:

- A) It was permitted to wait three months before paying.
- B) The payment was made three months late.
- C) It was compulsory to wait three months before paying.
- D) EU law allowed three months before paying.

5) Which of these texts would you use in a public awareness campaign against drinking and driving? Why?

First text:

The consumption of alcohol before driving is a major cause of fatalities on Europe's roads and it is vital that the EU take action to raise awareness of the danger it poses.

Second text:

Drink driving kills thousands of people in Europe every year. You could be next. Want to stay alive? Don't drink and drive!

- A) First text, because it stresses the role of the EU.
- B) Second text, because it directly addresses the reader.
- C) First text, because the tone is more serious.
- D) Second text, because it specifies the number of people killed.

Answers: 1) B; 2) D; 3) C; 4) B; 5) B

Acknowledgements and further guidance

This brochure was produced by the Editing Unit in the European Commission's Directorate-General for Translation. It is the second publication in the Clear Writing series. A French version is also available.

Illustrations by Zeta Field, Directorate-General for Translation, European Commission.

Useful guidance

The English Style Guide, a handbook for authors and translators working in English for the European Commission

http://ec.europa.eu/translation/english/guidelines/documents/styleguide_english_dgt_en.pdf

The essential guide to drafting Commission documents on EU competition law

<http://goo.gl/XJi06>

Misused words and expressions in EU publications

http://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/EN_TERMINIOLOGY_PUBLICATION/EN_TERMINIOLOGY_PUBLICATION_EN.pdf

CLEAR ENGLISH - Tips for Translators

http://ec.europa.eu/translation/english/guidelines/documents/clear_english_en.pdf

EU jargon in English and some possible alternatives

http://ec.europa.eu/ipg/content/tips/words-style/jargon-alternatives_en.htm

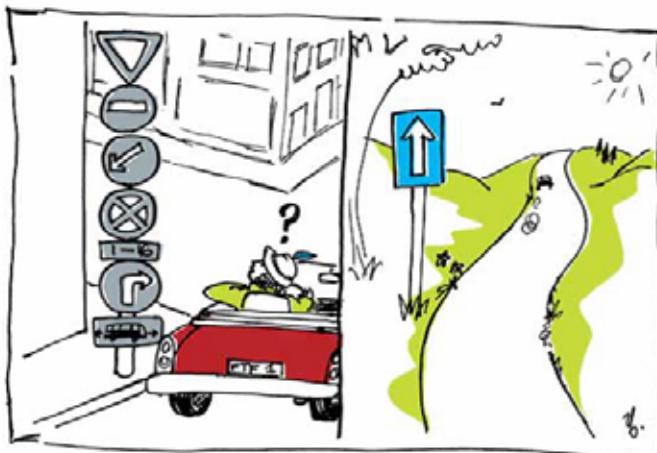
Europa Glossary

http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/glossary/index_en.htm

Writing for the web

www.ec.europa.eu/ipg/content/tips/index_en.htm

More guidance on writing specific types of documents is available to European Commission staff at: https://myintracomm.ec.europa.eu/hr_admin/en/drafting/Pages/index.aspx





The **How to write clearly** guide is available in all official EU languages at:
<http://bookshop.europa.eu/en/how-to-write-clearly-pbHC3212148/>



Those who write clearly have readers, those who write obscurely have commentators.

(Ceux qui écrivent clairement ont des lecteurs ; ceux qui écrivent obscurément ont des commentateurs.)

Albert Camus