

Am I making myself clear?

A proposed set of rules and conventions for improving writing style for academic and professional reports.

Stylistic Rules

RULE	Rule NOT applied	Rule applied
1 Use definite, specific, concrete language.	Billy could not talk properly.	Billy's speech sound system appears disordered, as evidenced by the persistence of syllable-initial velar fronting and syllable-final consonant deletion.
2 Do not take short cuts at the expense of clarity.	The DEAP and ERB were done.	Two tests were administered: (1) the Diagnostic Evaluation of Articulation and Phonology (DEAP), and (2) the Early Repetition Battery (ERB).
3 A participle phrase at the beginning of a sentence should refer to the grammatical subject.	Analysing the statistics, the assessment suggests developmental delay.	Analysing the statistics, I consider that the assessment suggests developmental delay.
4 Avoid florid, lavish words.	The child exhibited partial restriction of movements of the lingual muscles. A condition of insufficient frenulum development was noted.	A short frenulum appeared to restrict elevation of the tongue tip.
5 Omit needless words and stock phrases - make each word count.	The questions as to whether... Due to the fact that...	Whether... Because...
6 Express co-ordinated ideas in a similar form.	The patient sat at 24 weeks. At 8/12, crawling began.	The child sat unsupported at six months and crawled at eight months.
7 Do not be too casual.	The session got off with a bang, with the child yelling her head off.	Samantha cried when her mother left the room.
8 Avoid the use of contractions.	I haven't arranged to see Sarah again. They should've reported it.	I have not arranged to see Sarah again. They should have reported it.
9 Do not overstate - report accurately.	There is absolutely no vocal abuse.	Father reported no vocally abusive behaviours.
10 Do not impute unverifiable psychological states.	Billy was happy today.	Billy was observed to smile when entering the room.
11 Avoid the use of intensifiers whenever possible.	The child was very attentive.	The child was attentive.
12 Wherever possible put statements positively.	She did not know her colours.	On testing, she could not name red or blue but she did match blocks of the same colour.
13 Always label reported information.	He was a late walker.	Mother reported that he walked at six months of age.
14 Avoid the use of 'shudder quotes' - be specific.	Lisa is a little 'slow'.	Lisa presents with delayed general development.
15 Use gender-neutral language.	Mankind has progressed... The working man...	Humanity has progressed... Working people...
16 Avoid sexual stereotyping of roles by not calling attention to irrelevancies.	The male nurse provided the medical report.	The nurse provided the medical report.
17 Do not use <i>he</i> or <i>she</i> to refer to all people in a category.	As a child develops he learns to control his environment.	As a child develops it learns to control its environment. As a child develops they learn to control their environment.
18 Avoid patronising language.	Women of a certain age...	Women between the ages 50-65 years...

Structural Conventions

	CONVENTION	Convention NOT followed	Convention followed
1	Spell out any numbers between nought and nine within the text.	The child built a tower of 6 blocks.	The child built a tower of six blocks.
2	Use digits for numbers from 10 and above within the text.	Daniel first babbled at thirty-three weeks.	Daniel first babbled at 33 weeks.
3	Do not begin a sentence with a digit, always spell out the number.	10 aims and objectives were set.	Ten aims and objectives were set.
4	Use a semi-colon (;) to separate years and months when indicating ages.	David was 5.5 years old. <i>[This would mean five-and-a-half years old]</i>	David was 5;05 years old. <i>[This means that he is five years and five months old]</i>
5	Few reports will require more than four levels of heading. The first is the report title. This is followed by up to three sub-headings.		TITLE Sub-heading 1 <i>Sub-heading 2</i> Sub-heading 3

Billy's speech sound system appears disordered, as evidenced by the persistence of syllable-initial velar fronting and syllable-final consonant deletion. Two tests were administered: (1) the Diagnostic Evaluation of Articulation and Phonology (DEAP), and (2) the Early Repetition Battery (ERB). Analysing the statistics, I consider that the assessment suggests developmental delay. A short frenulum appeared to restrict elevation of the tongue tip. The child sat unsupported at six months and crawled at eight months. Samantha cried when her mother left the room. The child

