

# TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE WRITING

## PRACTICAL TIPS

UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE.

### PRACTICAL TIPS

These tips for effective writing are intended to be used as a tool for making text more readable, more accessible and more effective. We provide practical tips that result in readable texts for all purposes.

### WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHY, WHERE AND HOW ...?

Ask yourself who, what, where .... and you will have all the answers needed for your text. For **whom** is it intended, **what** does your subject involve, **when** does it take place, **why** is it taking place, and, of course, **where**? You can then make use of the **how** if you feel that you need to (how do I get there?). This way, you can be assured that you have provided your readers with answers to the most important elements of your text. It goes without saying, of course, that you will also make the text comprehensible, so that everyone can understand it. An example of no more than six lines, with the requisite text below, in green

Albert van den Berg, who was awarded the Spinoza Prize in 2009, specializes in building complete laboratories the size of a credit card – or even smaller. Yesterday, he was interviewed by Diederik Jekel.

On Friday 18 January, in the TV show “The World Goes On Learning”, Diederik Jekel interviewed Prof. Albert van den Berg, of the University of Twente’s MESA+ Institute for Nanotechnology. They discussed lab-on-a-chip systems and the latest development in this field: the organ-on-a-chip.

### STYLE

Is the style formal, informal, amicable, or familiar? Is the text intended to inform or persuade, or to encourage someone to take action? You have to take all these factors into consideration when writing a text. While this is not easy, we do have a few tips to help you on your way.

#### 1. ADDRESS PEOPLE DIRECTLY, BE SPECIFIC

Very common: Anyone who is interested can register for the information days here.

Very common: You can register for the information days here.

A better option is: Register for the information days here.

#### 2. FOCUS YOUR WRITING ON YOUR READERS, NOT ON THE ORGANIZATION

That is not only more personal, in many cases it is also easier to understand.

Within the University of Twente community it sometimes happens that ...

Within your own department, you often find that ...

#### 3. WRITE CONSISTENTLY

Avoid switches of terminology, for example.

Always use people’s titles, not just the first time they occur in the text.

Expressions/notations: always write these in the same way.

#### 4. AVOID UNNECESSARY WORDS

This often involves verbs such as would/want. In other words, you should adopt an active writing style.

Very common: We would very much like to invite you ...

A better option is: We'd like to invite you ...

#### 5. USE OF ABBREVIATIONS

Some abbreviations may be unknown to the reader, even if you – as the writer – assume that 'everyone' knows that. M&C's product and services catalogue contains the List of Terms and [https://www.utwente.nl/mc/alfabet/abc/afkortingen\\_ut/](https://www.utwente.nl/mc/alfabet/abc/afkortingen_ut/)

Very common: The meeting will take place in WA 236.

A better option is: The meeting will take place in lecture theatre number 236, in the Waaijer building.

Minimize the use of abbreviations as these make for unpleasant reading.

Veel voorkomend: m.b.t., t.z.t., a.s.a.p., i.d.g.

Goed: met betrekking tot, te zijner tijd, zo snel mogelijk, in dit geval.

#### 6. KEEP TECHNICAL TERMS TO A MINIMUM AND AVOID THEM WHEREVER POSSIBLE

If these need to be used in a text, then they must at least be explained.

#### 7. VARY YOUR CHOICE OF WORDS

The repetitive use of a given word makes a text boring. It is better to use a synonym for the word in question.

#### 8. WRITE ACTIVELY AND INSTRUCTIVELY RATHER THAN PASSIVELY

Very common: Students are placed by the University of Twente.

A better option is: The University of Twente places the students.

Remove the packaging;

Turn the volume knob to the left until you hear a click.

#### 9. WHERE POSSIBLE, USE SHORT SENTENCES RATHER THAN SENTENCES WITH LOTS OF COMMAS.

Very common: The University of Twente carries out the placement of students because [...] so that [...], and [...], with the result that ... [...].

A better option is: The University of Twente places the students because [...]. (new sentence)  
Accordingly ...

#### 10. USE OF NUMBERS

Up to twenty are written out in full. The same goes for tens and hundreds.

With regard to combinations such as 'thirty educational programmes and 341 students' we correct that to numbers ('30 educational programmes and 341 students').

#### 11. USE OF LINKS

The use of links helps readers to better understand the text. There is no need to go into intricate detail about something. Provide links, so if readers want to find out more, they can follow these to the information in question. Be sure to place the links on meaningful search terms.

Finally, inserting a lot of links into a text helps smartphone users navigate through it quickly. This is because the menu buttons will often move off the screen as you scroll down.

Very common: You will now arrive at a page where you can read more about ...

Very common: You can find information about our institutes here.

A better option is: Be sure to visit our overview page of research institutes.

A better option is: You can find further details at the Department of Instructional Technology's website.

## STRUCTURE IN THE TEXT

### TITLE

Titles and headers have three important characteristics:

1. They provide structure
2. They help the reader to find information
3. They motivate people.

To start with, the title of an article alone conveys a great deal of information. That can be motivational or informative, or it might have a structuring effect, or sometimes all three. For instance, what are we to make of this: [five ways to become a millionaire in one week](#).

- The following three titles of texts taken from the staff portal are primarily **motivational**. [Good news for University of Twente staff](#), [Early Bird Coffee](#), [Take note: attack using phishing emails](#). You do not immediately know what the text is about.
- The following **title, which has a structuring effect** (and which was also obtained from the staff portal), tells you a lot more. [Kees Eijkel appointed Director of Strategic Business Development](#).

### SUBTITLE

After the title, a subtitle can be added to the text. Here, too, you can use the same principle of motivational or creating a structuring effect. In many cases, you will choose a main title that has a structuring effect, and a motivational subtitle. It goes without saying that this is just as effective the other way round.

### INTRODUCTORY TEXT

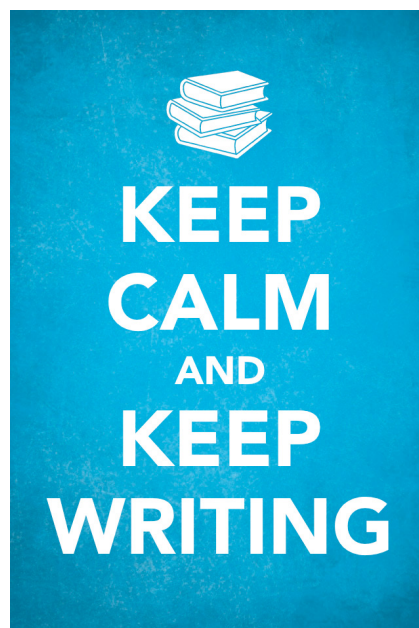
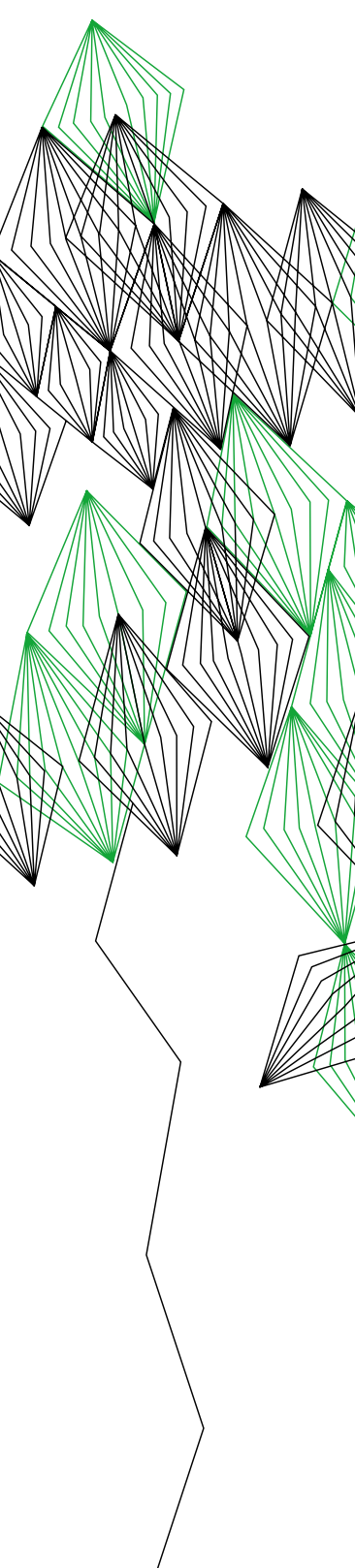
Especially in the case of the staff portal, it can be very useful to include a brief introduction. That way, you can see at a glance what the text is all about. And if this is accompanied by an appealing photograph, the reader will, of course, be totally 'triggered'. Which is the whole point.

### PARAGRAPHS

Long texts should be subdivided into short paragraphs of 6-8 lines, with one topic per paragraph.

- It should be possible for readers to get the gist of the text just by reading the first sentence of each paragraph.
- News items in descending order of importance.
- When enumerating, always use bullet points, and with step-by-step plans, always use numbers.
- Avoid long texts: reading from a screen takes a lot of time, people just give up.

The same is true of newspapers, of course. Scanning headlines and looking at pictures. If you want to know more then you read on, but the initial contact has been made.



### EFFECTIVE WRITING (TITLE)

#### GOLDEN TIPS LEADING TO A PERFECT TEXT (SUBTITLE)

**Kill your darlings is a common saying. But writing also often means that you must abide by various rules and regulations or agreements. How are you going to deal with that? M & C and TCP have put the most important tips for you here. (introduction)**

#### **Style Tips (subheading)**

Is the style formal, informal, amicable, familiar? Should the text inform, persuade or encourage action? About these things you consider when writing a text. The most important tips for effective writing can be found on our website.

#### **Form of a message**

A (news) message has a fixed structure with a title, introduction and paragraphs. If you want to know where you still need to pay more attention to? Read more about the structure of a message or use the format of a (news) message.



## INTERESTED IN MORE TIPS?

- Tips for email traffic
- Use of photographic and video material
- Search-engine-friendly writing
- House style, templates and downloads.

[www.utwente.nl/tips-for-effective-writing](http://www.utwente.nl/tips-for-effective-writing)