

EXTRACTS FROM AGENCY WRITINGS

LET'S PRUNE OUR CORRESPONDENCE!

It may be hard to believe but the following extracts are from our pattern letters used repeatedly:

"In view of the fact that I am yet unable to report any decision in connection with your application for employment with the Central Intelligence Agency, I do want you to know once more that the interest we retain in your qualifications is an active one."

Isn't this better?

Your application for employment in this Agency is still being considered. When decision is made we will notify you promptly.

Here's what we eliminated:

25 words
38 syllables
3 two syllable words
1 three syllable word
2 four syllable words
4 prepositional phrases

Consider this one!

"Should there be any radical change in your personal plans regarding your interest in this Agency, or should you have any questions regarding the particulars in your case, I want to invite you to communicate with us by letter at your convenience."

Isn't this clearer?

If you have any questions or if any personal change should affect your interest in your application, please write us.

Our pruning eliminated:

21 words
36 syllables
5 three syllable words
3 four syllable words
5 prepositional phrases

APPENDIX B

A final example:

"In view of the circumstances in your letter, we can realize that you are in no position to consider employment at this time. However, we do wish to suggest that you get in touch with us again in the event you become interested in a position here at any time in the future."

Isn't this sharper?

We realize you cannot accept a position with us now. If conditions change so that you will wish to reconsider, we will be pleased to hear from you.

Modern times call for new styles in writing. Don't you admit that these examples prove that money and time can be saved--that our readers will grasp what we are saying more easily and they will need less time to read our writings?

CAN OUR REGULATIONS BE IMPROVED?

Let's modernize some of our latest regulatory writing. This calls for streamlining--that is, we will shorten our words, sentences, and paragraphs. We will get rid of governmental jargon. We will keep our words of three or more syllables to a minimum, our sentences to an average length of seventeen to twenty-one words, and cut down on the use of prepositions. Here are some examples:

"For this reason, every employee of the Organization whose duties involve the obligation and expenditure of confidential funds should not only understand the Regulations governing their obligation and expenditure, but the underlying philosophies as well."

Let's see how we can improve it!

Every Agency employee whose duties authorize him to handle confidential funds should understand applicable regulations and all basic principles.

Here's what happened: We cut the original sentence from 35 to 19 words and from 75 to 43 syllables. Because of the nature of the subject we cannot eliminate all long words. But we have cut eight of the four syllable words to four, and eliminated one five syllable word. Do you think the revision is more readable, that you spent less time reading it, and possibly you will remember it longer?

Let's look at another one:

"Delegation of authority for particular actions to levels considered to provide the degree of discretionary judgment commensurate with the magnitude or significance of the acts involved."

This appeared as an entire paragraph. Isn't it difficult to understand? Aren't they trying to say that certain tasks will be assigned to personnel who are qualified to handle them? Doesn't the use of "levels" here sound as though they are speaking down to others?

Can't we sift this one?

"The Organization regulatory system provides the vehicle for the expression of policies and procedures essential to the performance of the Organization mission. It encompasses and delineates the functions of all components of the Organization individually and collectively with the objective of establishing singleness of purpose and efficiency and continuity of operational and administrative activities."

Here is one possible revision:

The Organization regulatory system expresses policies and procedures essential to our mission. It describes the functions of all Organization components to establish a single aim and promote continuity and efficiency in operational and administrative activities.

Or:

The Organization's policies and procedures are issued in its regulations. These regulations cover and describe all Organizational divisions. Their aim is for efficiency and unity in operational and administrative activities.

LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT OUR REPORTS

Sometimes long words are necessary in reports. Sentences can be kept within bounds, however, and the meaning can be clear. Here is a good example from one of our reports:

"Consultations with appropriate personnel toward the solving of procurement and external clearance bottlenecks is continued."

But--

Doesn't this one stall you a bit?

"There was tentative agreement to adapt the Agency filing system but the recommendations provided for waiting until the material of all divisions could be reviewed in order that the manual could be adapted for the entire Office rather than this one division."

Can't we convey the same thought in a more understandable and readable way? For example:

It was agreed that our filing system could be adapted office wide. However, material from all divisions must be reviewed before this can be done.

Here is something more interesting than a crossword puzzle. Can you reduce these expressions to simple language? They were taken from our reports.

"...fall under heavy obligation..."

"The sense of the group seemed to be that in part this was possible."

"...such wasted effort would not obtain owing to..."

"...is dependent upon economic research in greater depth..."

"...and the Agency will have an exchange of views in order to obtain..."