

# DEAR KITZZY

WRITING STYLE ADVISING COLUMN

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**I am very shy (It took me months to get the nerve to write you this note). The problem is that I got a new job, and I have to write a proposal, but I don't think I am confident enough. What can I do?**

**- Shy in Kissimmee**



Dear Shy,

I often lack assertiveness in my writing, an essential skill when writing proposals. One of the most valuable things I learned was to convert passive voice to active voice. Sentences in the passive voice usually contain a "to be" verb followed by a preposition, turning the subject of the sentence into the object of the preposition. The grammar and style options in Word can be set to alert you when you are using passive voice. I used passive voice a lot, but now I at least recognize it and attempt to get rid of when possible. I also use weak verbs such as *has*. You should avoid using weak verbs and replace them with ones that are more precise.

**My friends tell me that I talk too much. I know I do this in my writing sometimes (or maybe a lot). Do you have some tips to help me *get to the point* faster?**

**-Wordy in Orlando**

Dear Wordy,

The art of concision was new to me until I took a graduate professional writing course. Using the active voice will help reduce unnecessary words. To *get to the point* faster, follow these five principles of concision:

1. Delete meaningless words such as *kind of*, *actually*, and *really*.
2. Delete words that repeat the meaning of other words.
3. Delete words implied by other words.
4. Replace a phrase with a word.
5. Change negatives to affirmatives.

**Every grant proposal I submit is rejected. My girlfriend tells me they aren't pretty enough. I think a proposal should contain just the facts in a standard 12-point font and double-spaced. Can you settle this argument?**

**- Unsure in Tampa**

Dear Unsure,

The short answer: you are both right. Proposals should contain mainly the facts, but technology changed all the rules. We live in a competitive world where logic and facts alone do not suffice. Only include in the proposal the relevant facts and don't pad it with *fluff*. Grant agencies receive tons of proposals so you need to make yours stand out. Use a readable serif font at least 12-points in size for your main text. Break up long paragraphs of texts with appropriate use of headings, lists, images or charts and leave plenty of white space. Use the title page, table of contents and executive summary to grab their attention and make them want to read more. Create a style guide in Word to ensure consistency throughout your proposal. This also allows you to quickly change the entire document at once if you make a style change.

**I want to be a writer but I'm not sure what kind. What types of writing do you enjoy most?**

**- Hopeful in Ocala**

I grew up speaking and writing Spanish until I the age of 12. I always loved writing but never thought I wrote good enough because my first language is not English. The graduate professional writing course gave me more confidence and helped me realize that although my writing can still improve, it is better than I thought. My main interest in professional writing is for e-learning curriculum development. I believe that clarity and concision play an even more important role when writing web instruction because you will not have the advantage of explaining in person any misconceptions students infer from your writing. I can follow directions well and write in a given format, but I believe my writing lacks grace. I also consider myself a creative person and try to think outside the box on assignments when possible. I would love to apply this creativity in the future to writing short stories.

**That is all for this week's column. Send your questions to [ask@kitzzy.com](mailto:ask@kitzzy.com).**