#### One Dozen Secrets\*

#### to Writing Clearly and Concisely

**(\*Closely Guarded and Mostly Patented)**

**Wednesday, November 2, 2016**

**Presented by Gary Kinder**

**Sponsored by WordRake Editing Software**



**Description:**

This webcast will teach you tricks and techniques to help you write clearer, more concise emails, summaries, reports, proposals, legislation, and briefs.

**Speaker:**

Gary Kinder is the creator of WordRake, the only software that edits for clarity and brevity. He has taught over 1,000 writing programs for the American Bar Association; government agencies like NOAA and the Social Security Administration; law firms like Jones Day, WilmerHale, and Sidley; and companies like VISA, KPMG, and Microsoft. He is also author of the *New York Times* bestseller *Ship of Gold in the Deep Blue Sea*.

**Agenda**

**Power Editing**

Making Every Word Count

(Times – Eastern Daylight)

2:00 – Clear & Concise – seven signs for spotting needless words

2:20 – Bright & Lively – three signs for spotting dull words

2:35 – Fast & Forward – repetition and the important point

2:45 – Exercises

3:00 – Adjourn

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**Table of Contents**

**POWER EDITING**™

**Part I**

Clear & Concise ---------------------------------------------------------- 2

Needless Words ------------------------------ 2

Seven Signs for Spotting Needless Words ---- 3

examples --------------------------------------- 4

**Part II**

Bright & Lively -------------------------------------------------------------------- 5

Passive Voice ---------------------------------------- 5

Nominalizations ------------------------------ 5

Three Signs for Spotting Dull Sentences ------- 6

examples ---------------------------------------- 7

**Part III**

Fast & Forward ---------------------------------------------------------- 8

Repetition --------------------------------------- 8

The Main Point ----------------------------- 8

Two Ways to Move a Reader Forward -------- 9

examples --------------------------------------- 10

**Final Exercises** -------------------------------------------------------------------- 11

**Epilogue** – Conquering Writer’s Block -------------------------------------- 12

**Power Editing**

**Power Editing**™

**PART I**

**CLEAR & CONCISE**

Our writing abounds in needless words that the tired eyes and weary minds of colleagues, boards, administrators, and the public must sort out before they understand us. If we want these readers to look favorably upon our writing and us, we must lighten their load. It starts with this concept:

**Needless Words:**

A word’s job is to convey meaning; if a word is not conveying meaning, it is not doing its job; if it is not doing its job, it is getting in the way of the words trying to do their jobs. There is no middle ground. We are never going to catch them all, and we will sometimes debate about the necessity or preference for others; but the essence of good writing is this: Every word not working must come out. A note about style: A hundred writers could each write a paragraph describing the same horse in the same pasture. We would have a hundred paragraphs, some longer than others; although each would be different, each could be perfect. Our writing styles dictate the difference. But we all can follow the same approach to refine that individual style.

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**Seven Signs for Spotting Needless Words**

**it**

**that**

**in**

**of**

**.**

**as**

**or**

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**THE SEVEN SIGNS**

examples

The report discusses the ways in which various types of oil interact with the coastal environments.

It was the RRT that recommended that a consequence management program be developed.

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide you with an overview of the legal

aspects of trading in Germany. The first part of the memorandum provides . . . .

The sub-surface oil was present in distinct areas that appeared to be root channels or animal burrows where the oil had penetrated from the surface.

At or about the same time, Paulson terminated his agreement.

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**PART II**

**BRIGHT & LIVELY**

After we toss the deadbeat words, we sometimes have to poke at the ones left to keep them stepping lively. If we’re not vigilant, they start slouching and shuffling. This happens two ways:

**Passive Voice:**

We are all sick of hearing we shouldn’t write in the passive voice. We are sick of it because we are told constantly not to do it, and we are told constantly not to do it because passive voice *unnecessarily* slows and dulls our writing. It is a tool for us to use when we need it, and to avoid when we don’t. Using passive voice should be a conscious decision—I need to do this, and writing in the passive helps me do it—rather than something we do because we don’t know better. The Plain Writing Act encourages us to write in the active voice.

**Nominalizations:**

Few of us have even heard this word, yet nominalizations slow and dull our sentences as much as passive voice. A nominalization is a noun that should be a verb. Well-educated managers and administrators often write with nominalizations, because subconsciously we think it makes us sound smarter; to the reader, we sound dull. So instead of having an ALJ “issue a ruling” or a body “make a decision,” let the ALJ “rule” and the body “decide.” The Plain Writing Act encourages us to write with verbs.

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**Three Signs for Spotting Dull Sentences**

**PASSIVE VOICE**

**to be verbs**

am

is

was

were

are

been

be

being

**NOMINALIZATIONS**

**to be verbs**

**of**

**ion**

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**THE THREE SIGNS**

examples

Google has a similar feature that allows chat histories to be saved by a user.

Numerous oiled pups were observed, as well as several dead ones.

I wanted to confirm this treatment with you, so we are in agreement on the proper tax allocations.

French law regarding patents does not provide a definition of the term “inventor.”

On March 7, 2007, the ALJ issued a decision denying Plaintiff’s application (Tr. 12-20).

This is an application of the models to additional independent data sets.

They arrived and made arrangements to inspect the vessel.

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**PART III**

**FAST & FORWARD**

Governing over 300 million people is complex; but we must never confuse complexity with confusion. Complexity can be clearly expressed. That is our job as we communicate with the American public. But in trying to explain the complexity, we often inject confusion into our writing as though we seek to make our points as inaccessible as possible. Confusion only accomplishes what we hope to avoid: the glazing of a reader’s eyes. We want nothing to slow that reader, nothing to force that reader to stop, go back, and take another running leap at the confusion. With everything now clear, concise, and lively, we have to move the reader forward by dismantling the roadblocks and straightening the curves.

**Repetition**

One of the great ironies of writing: The more we say it, the less it sticks. Of all the problems we have in trying to write clearly, repetition might be the most serious. Often we can distill the essence of two sentences in one.

**The Main Point**

Few of us realize that the fastest way to communicate with a reader is to put the important point at the end of the sentence: Rule 18 or Rule 22 (depending on the age of your version) of *The Elements of Style*. Professor Strunk posited the idea at Cornell about 1895. E.B. White passed it along in “the little book” in 1955. The rule remains one of the most important in writing. And one of the least known.

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**Two Ways to Move a Reader Forward**

**AVOID REPETITION**

Readers expect to advance with each sentence; don’t take them backwards or sideways; that confuses them; say it once—clearly, concisely, vividly—then go on.

**END WITH THE MAIN POINT**

Sentences often contain two points, one the supporting point, the other the main point; open with the supporting point, then give the main point; otherwise, the main point gets lost in the middle.

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**THE TWO WAYS**

examples

Pursuant to Rule 26(B)(1), California has adopted a liberal philosophy concerning the scope of discovery. This general philosophy allows for a broad scope of discovery that encompasses any request that “appears reasonably calculated to lead to the discovery of admissible evidence.”

The deployed mussels appeared to be 9 years old based on an average shell length of approximately 60 mm.

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**Final Exercises**

It is reported that thirty or more workers were observed in the marsh during portions of the cleanup.

This agreement shall be subject to termination at the election of either party.

A temporary road was also built into and along one side of the wetland to provide access.

In fact, the law in these cases indicates otherwise.

At the time of the initial response there were gale force winds and a hurricane watch in effect in the area.

It was not initially realized how the magnitude of this response was going to grow.

The unified command commends the vessel owners and shipping agents for their cooperation, patience and assistance with the resolution of this incident.

If this Court were to agree with this proposition, it would, in effect, be reviewing the Appeals Council’s determination not to grant review of this case.

It is also interesting to note that tomorrow on *20/20*, there will be a segment on mercury.

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**Epilogue**

**Conquering Writer’s Block**

We are under such time constraints, we have to find ways to do our good work faster, especially when we face multiple deadlines. The “21-Minute Method” helps us create a passable rough draft quickly. To make this work, we have to hold the left brain, the hyper-critical side of our heads, at bay, while the right brain does what it does so well, and that is get something down on paper we can work with. To help, I have created Three Steps and Three Rules:

**Three Steps: Three Rules:**

**1) Converse 1) No research**

**2) Organize 2) Do not stop writing**

**3) Write 3) Go all the way to the end**

Rule #1 – **no research**: Do the research so you know what you’re talking about, but then get rid of it. Write the first several drafts from memory.

Step #1 – **converse**: When you have completed your research, imagine a conversation between you and another person—friend, colleague, spouse—The last thing this person has said to you is, “Tell me about this.” You can’t walk away; you can’t just stand there; you have to say something. This is the right brain in flow, and it will come out randomly. Let it. As you listen to the conversation, write down everything you say. This usually takes no more than four minutes.

Rule #2 – **do not stop writing**: No matter what comes into your right brain, it goes down on paper. This helps to keep the left brain out of the process.

Step #2 – **organize**: After four minutes (but don’t time it), the right brain has usually exhausted its memory; now invite the left brain to look at what you have written and have it do two things: first, note and group the related items; second, arrange the groups of related items in logical order. This takes far less time, maybe two minutes. You now have a rough outline.

Step #3 – **write**: Referring to your rough outline, expound upon each point, still working from memory and still not stopping. Don’t worry about spelling, punctuation, grammar, or making sense. Just get black on white. Do this for about fifteen minutes.

Rule #3 – **go all the way to the** end: It’s tempting to go sideways trying to perfect the first paragraph. Some paragraphs will develop faster than others, but expound upon each thought on your outline without stopping to think or pausing to refine.

DRAFT #2 will take a little longer, maybe thirty minutes, DRAFT #3 forty-five minutes to an hour. Each draft takes a little longer, and the left brain takes over a little more, until you reach the final, which is the editing, and that is all left brained. Good luck.

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