



EDITING FOR A GLOBAL AUDIENCE

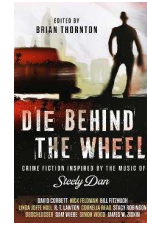
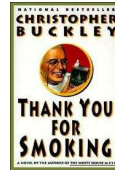
NORTHWEST EDITORS GUILD – 8 JULY 2019



© David B. Schlosser

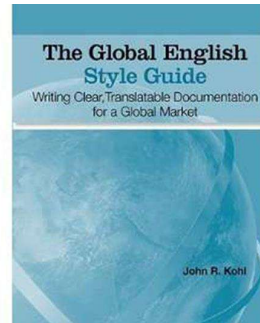
WELCOME

- David B. Schlosser
- dbschlosser.com



HOW TO EDIT FOR A GLOBAL AUDIENCE

- In your efforts to make language clear for non-native English speakers, don't edit the language in a way that would make it sound unnatural to native speakers of English.
- If making the language clear makes it sound unnatural, restructure until the language is both clear and natural-sounding.



AGENDA

1. Walk in the shoes of your global audience
2. Simplify
3. Clarify
4. Reduce
5. Contextualize
6. Ensure consistency

There's no way to be exhaustive on a topic like this. Instead, my goal is to explain why these strategies are best practices, because if we can share a solid understanding of the **why** of a thing, the guidelines make more sense and you can adapt them to your unique situation, whether that's math and engineering or literature and poetry. You'll note that there is some overlap in these strategies, which is a good reminder of how important they are.

The first strategy is to imagine yourself as a person who's a non-native speaker of a language you absolutely must understand.

The second strategy allows us to focus on the muscle in writing – the verbs – and to abandon the bad habits you learned from your high school English teacher and return to the good habits you learned from your grade school teacher.

Clarification sounds sort of generic and nebulous without context. In this case, it really focuses on making sure modifiers get put in the right places and any ambiguity of pronouns is eliminated.

Reducing the volume of content goes along with simplifying and clarifying, but it also adds an element of making life easy – or, at least, less expensive – for people who need your English document translated into other languages.

Context deals with using structural and visual clues to help readers understand the content of what they're reading – for example, passive voice is sometimes the best solution despite it being drilled out of us by Microsoft Word grammar checker.

And consistency is something we, as style guide worshippers, are familiar with, but in the particular case of editing for global audiences, it really focuses on when breaking the rules makes sense and how to keep breaking the rules in the same way to minimize confusion.

WALK IN THE SHOES OF YOUR GLOBAL AUDIENCE

- Readers and listeners
- Translators
- Machines

READERS AND LISTENERS

四年前和七年前，我们的父亲在这个大陆上建立了一个新的国家，在自由中孕育，并致力于人人人生而平等的主张。

现在，我们正在进行一场伟大的内战，检验这个国家，或任何一个如此构想和奉献的国家是否能够长久存在。我们遇到了这场战争的伟大战场。我们来到这个领域的一部分，作为那些在这里献出生命的人们的最后安息之地。我们应该这样做是完全合适的。

但是，从更广泛的意义上说，我们不能奉献 - 我们不能奉献 - 我们不能成为现实 - 这一点。在这里挣扎的勇敢的人，无论是活着的还是死去的人，都已经将它们奉献给了它，远远超过了我们增加或减少的能力。世界将很少注意到，也不记得我们在这里所说的，但它永远不会忘记他们在这里做了什么。对我们来说，生活，而是在这里献身于未完成的工作，他们在这里奋斗到目前为止如此高尚。我们在这里专注于我们面前的伟大任务 - 从这些荣幸的死者中我们更加投入到他们给予最后一次全力投入的事业 - 我们在这里高度决心这些死者不会白白死了 - 这个国家，在上帝之下，将有一个新的自由诞生 - 人民，人民，为人民的政府不会从地球上灭亡。



The text is Google's translation of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.

The film clip comes from the 2001 Indian thriller *Nayak: The Real Hero*

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nayak_\(2001_Hindi_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nayak_(2001_Hindi_film)) or

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0291376/>).

- A maximum of 5.7% of the world's population speaks English as a first language.
- A maximum of 9% speaks some amount of English as a second language

When you put on your "editing for global audiences" hat, remember that 85% of your potential audience will approach your document with the same level of English comprehension that you probably approached the content on this slide.

TRANSLATORS

- I'm upset because people think I said something strange, when I said nothing at all.
 - **Japanese:** I-as-for what-also said-not although, strange-being thing said way-in though-being troubled.
- Thank you for your letter, and thanks for the regards.
 - **Chinese:** come letter receive, thank your regard.
- I didn't expect to be able to attend the conference.
 - **German:** I expected not, that I the conference would have attend be able to.

Examples from Kohl's Global English Style Guide: in red are the literal translations of the sentences in black.

MACHINES

- I'm upset because people think I said something strange, when I said nothing at all.
 - **Japanese – 2013:** Because I said something strange and is upset when I didn't tell people at all.
 - **Japanese – 2019:** I am angry because people think I said weird when I said nothing.
- Thank you for your letter, and thanks for the regards.
 - **Simplified Chinese – 2013:** Thank you for your letter and for greeting.
 - **Simplified Chinese – 2019:** Thank you for your letter and thank you for your greetings.
- I didn't expect to be able to attend the conference.
 - **German – 2013:** I did not expect to be able to take part in the conference.
 - **German – 2019:** I did not expect to attend the conference.

I think there are two important take-aways from this strategy of imagining yourself in the shoes of your non-native-English speaking audience.

First, when you see what the literal translations look like, you inevitably are reminded that editing for a global audience is less about style guides and right vs. wrong. It's more about understanding. It's more about using the tools in your editing kit bag to increase the understanding of your audience based on what you understand about the general and specific challenges that they will encounter when reading or hearing English.

Second, when you approach your editing tasks from this perspective of mutual understanding, it's easier to accept that some of the rest of the strategies we're going to discuss may seem counterintuitive to editors practiced in the art of protecting the author's voice.

SIMPLIFY



- Use the simplest and fewest verbs possible
- Use the simplest possible structure and tense
- Keep phrasal verbs together
- Unsplit infinitives
- Consider placement of words that indicate logical relationships
- Limit passive voice
- Don't verb nouns
- Don't verb TLAs
- Avoid rhetorical flourishes
- Short sentences (20-25 words max)

Simplest and fewest:

Reach a conclusion → conclude

Come to a decision → decide

Needs to → must

Structure and tense:

Tenses get confusing when translating into languages like Chinese that do not have them, or use them differently.

I ate → I eat yesterday

I will eat → I eat tomorrow

Complex tenses are confusing even to native English speakers:

I had been planning to go → I plan to go

Surgery should not be performed → Do not perform surgery

–ing verbs are confusing because of other –ing words that are not verbs: thing, setting.
–ing words

(1) play multiple roles in language and

(2) do not always have equivalents in other languages

Style manuals don't even agree on how to classify or explain these words.

Example: Relationships are expressed by tables **consisting** of rows and columns. →

Relationships are expressed by tables **that consist** of rows and columns.

Phrasal verbs:

Turn the machine off → Turn off the machine

Pick the tool up → Pick up the tool

Split infinitives:

Although most style and usage manuals accommodate split infinitives, editing for global audiences strives to keep them together so the verb is easier to recognize and the modifier can find its proper home nearby: To boldly go → To go boldly

Logical relationship signifiers:

However, therefore, thus, nevertheless, etc.

Do not interrupt the flow of a sentence – instead, indicate the logical relationship at the beginning – not the end – of the sentence, where it might completely invert the meaning of what the reader just read.

You can, **however**, jump rope. → **However**, you can jump rope.

Passive voice:

Passive voice is more common in English than in other languages – it makes translation more difficult than it needs to be.

Don't verb nouns:

Use parts of speech as intended by your grade-school teacher

Particularly important because in many languages, nouns are gendered.

TLAs: Three-letter acronyms

He DRMed the book → He applied DRM to the book.

He got RIFed → He was laid off as part of the reduction in force.

Rhetorical flourishes:

... as well as... → and

Within and Upon → In and On

Short sentences:

Short sentences leave less room for ambiguity, less space for pronouns to get mixed up, and less distance between subjects and their modifiers.

CLARIFY

- Be bloody literal-minded
- Don't date yourself
- Be positive
- Has / Have and past participles with noun phrases
- Homophobia
 - Replace or minimize homonyms (particularly noun / verb):
 - Homographs
 - Homophones
- Thesaurusophobia
- Pronouns
- Directional words
- Clichés and idioms
- Not only just one more thing



Be stupidly literal:

QUESTION: What's wrong with "This report compares department salaries"? Departments don't have salaries.

QUESTION: What's wrong with the rhetorical flourish "In order to..."? It suggests you're doing something in an order, such as alphabetizing.

This also includes metaphors, which tend to be culturally specific: Handful = a few; Vanilla = plain or standard

Dates and times:

It's not hard to figure out whether the text follows month – day – year or day – month – year convention with 12/25/19 – but what about 7/4/76?

Solution: European or "military" style – 25 December 2019, 4 July 1776

AM and PM isn't as big an issue, but remember that many countries use what we call "military time." From George Orwell's 1984: "It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen."

Audience suggestion: Dates are red flags – convert relative dates ("during the past six months" or "last year") to explicit and specific references ("between January 2019 and June 2019" or "in 2018")

Be positive:

Avoid negative construction: Not only A, but B → A and B.

When you have the opportunity to restructure a negative as a positive, just do it.

Example: Include a statement to specify that messages should not be displayed. → Include a statement to suppress messages.

Has / Have with past participles

Each column has assigned attributes → Attributes are assigned to each column.

The software has the printing function built in. → The printing function is included in the software.

Homophobia

Homonyms have the same spelling and pronunciation but different meanings:

[Homographs](#) are words of like spelling but with more than one meaning: close, finance, reject

Homophones are words of like pronunciation but with different meanings: cannon/canon, knead/need, right/write

Thesaurusophobia:

Words that mean the same thing ... but also mean other things: Since, because, as

Pronouns:

Be absolutely confident that readers can identify what each pronoun refers to. If there is any possibility that the referent is unclear, use the referent again.

Do not use this, that, these, and those as pronouns.

Example: Apply the rules before making manual adjustments. These are listed in the next section. → Apply the rules before making manual adjustments. The rules (or manual adjustments) are listed in the next section.

Directions:

Over → more than; Above → preceding; Under → less than; Below → following

Up and Down / In and Out ← usually redundant

Cliché and Idiom:

Clichés are shortcuts, but they are almost entirely cultural. Clichés that would make sense only to Americans? In the ballpark, your John Hancock, bang for your buck, riding shotgun.

Idioms are phrases whose meaning is not derived from the literal meaning of the words: 11th hour, whole 9 yards

Not, Only, and Just:

Place these words immediately before whatever they modify: He only had the animals for company → He had only the animals for company

And remember that proper placement of “not” may have implications for use of contractions.

REDUCE



- Prole drift
- Balance increased word count against decreased ambiguity
- Return on investment and comparative value

Prole Drift:

A phrase coined by Paul Fussell in his book *Class*: The tendency to use lots of words and lots of big words to sound authoritative:

A number of = many

Despite the fact that = although

Conduct an investigation = investigate

Balance:

Consider that being explicit may be so important to your audience that it's worth increasing the word count, or trading a few extra words here for a few fewer words elsewhere.

Three years in health-care industry taught me that making instructions simple and actionable can take a lot more words than you'd expect.

ROI:


Consider whether the cost of your time in reducing content is less than the cost of a translator's time on content that hasn't been reduced.

"Some" research indicates that structural changes to technical documents can reduce length as much as 50%.



Virtually any document can be edited down 10% with nothing more than attention to sentence-level issues.

CONTEXTUALIZE

- Humor and sarcasm
- Punctuation and capitalization
- Passive and active voice
- Noun phrases
- Prepositional phrases
- Articles
- Reconsider eschewing that
- Headlines and section headers
- Bullet / Number lists instead of long sentences
- Valuable resource: Edward Tufte's books and classes on displaying visual information



No context

 <p>Helpful context</p>	 <p>Misleading context</p>
--	--

Humor and sarcasm:

Almost entirely cultural – they *do not* translate.

Punctuation and capitalization:

These cues allow readers to correctly analyze and interpret sentences.

In general in editing for global audiences, violating a style manual's rules on something that may create ambiguity is more important than the style manual.

In general, editing for global audiences will cause you to use more commas than for native English speakers. For example,

Oxford / Trailing commas: Be explicit about the parts of a sentence joined by and or or.

Consider using commas before because and such as.

The same is true for hyphens as used in noun phrases.

In general, restructure sentences interrupted by dashes – consider replacing dashes with periods. Same with semi-colons, which have more functionality as list separators if the list includes complex phrases.

Passive vs. active:

Passive voice often leaves unanswered an implicit question, especially if you are being stupidly literal.

However, conversion to active voice may cause the real emphasis of the sentence to be

lost.

If the performer of the action is unimportant, irrelevant, or obvious AND passive voice keeps the audience's focus on the right thing, passive voice is probably OK, especially if it allows you to achieve another strategy.

Noun phrases:

Consider hyphenating, restructuring, or defining in a glossary for readers of translators. This may cause some sensation of over-hyphenation by US English standards.

Example: Concrete floor paint. Hard to hyphenate, so restructure: paint made to be applied to concrete floors.

Example: Read file descriptor bit mask. Hyphenation virtually impossible, so restructure: a bit mask for a read-file descriptor.

Prepositional phrases:

When modifying a verb phrase, move it to the beginning of the sentence or as close as possible to the verb it is modifying:

Example: The server enables a client to share data across platforms [with other users]. →

The server enables a client to share data [with other users] across platforms.

When modifying a noun phrase, consider restructuring:

Example: This code creates a table [with 4 cells]. → This code creates a table that has 4 cells.

Articles:

The, a, and an – use THE for definite nouns the audience will recognize easily. Otherwise, use A or AN.

Consider repeating them in lists: You can buy it from a store or kiosk → You can buy it from a store or a kiosk.

That:

A word useful for making explicit what we understand implicitly.

Example: Suppose the data is all numeric and stored in a file. → Suppose that the data is all numeric and that it is stored in a file.

Example: The page you requested cannot be found. → The page that you requested cannot be found.

Headlines and section headers:

Use the relative sizes of the font to communicate the relative location of the reader in the outline of the document.

Use plenty of white space

Bullet/Number lists:

Use bullets and numbers to make explicit the idea that long string of words is a list.

Introduce them with complete sentences: Not “The process can: bullet bullet bullet,” but “The process can be used in the following ways: bullet bullet bullet.”

Edward Tufte:

Visual Display of Quantitative Information and others -

https://www.edwardtufte.com/tufte/books_vdqi

ENSURE CONSISTENCY



- Verb tenses
- Hyphenation and compound / twoword words
- TLAs
- That / Which
- Contractions and other clipping services

Verb tenses:

Using the accurate verb tense is a matter of routine editing and simple style, but you frequently encounter challenges when editing documents written by non-native English speakers, especially from China.

Hyphenation and compound words:

Adverbs, particularly –ly adverbs, traditionally do not take hyphens even though they are compound modifiers.

This is a US English convention, and different than British English. Consider hyphenating, but then it becomes a matter of consistency, and you've got to consider something like well known vs. well-known.

Many two-word phrases commonly are used as a single word: healthcare, for example, It's more important to be consistent and clear than to be "right."

Compound words becoming single words particularly troublesome in tech docs:

Shutdown, Lookup, Speedup, Breakdown → Shut-down, Look-up, Speed-up, Break-down.

If one part of the word can change tense logically in the sentence, hyphenate or restructure it. Looked up, Broke down.

TLAs – Latin and other abbreviations:

i.e., e.g., a.k.a. – eliminate or make consistent.

That / Which:

This is primarily a US / British English issue, and worth of an entire book. I mention it not to declare any sort of solution, but to make you aware that the subject will require an inordinate amount of your attention. Apply your favorite style manual rigorously.

Contractions:

In general, avoid them.

Also replace words we abbreviate in speech with their full glory in text: app → application, dupe → duplicate

REVIEW

- “Seek first to understand, then to be understood.” - Stephen R. Covey
- “Our life is frittered away by detail ... simplify, simplify.” - Henry David Thoreau
- “For me the greatest beauty always lies in the greatest clarity.” - Gotthold Ephraim Lessing
- “Civilization is the process of reducing the infinite to the finite.” - Oliver Wendell Holmes
- “Always design a thing by considering it in its next larger context.” - Eliel Saarinen
- “A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds.” - Ralph Waldo Emerson

ALMOST THE END

- Most wired country
- Access to the internet is growing fastest in Africa,
- Virtually everything written will be accessible to anyone who can type a string after www
- We now edit for the 95% of the potential audience who didn't grow up exposed natively to



Most wired country – Iceland

Fastest-growing internet use – Algeria

Most popular TV show in the world: *CSI: Miami* (2013) and *NCIS* (2019)

THE END



Photo from Michael Ashton's Chinese dinner – 6 July 2019

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

- Further thoughts, ideas, suggestions, questions?
 - dbschlosser.com
- References
 - John R. Kohl, *The Global English Style Guide: Writing Clear, Translatable Documentation for a Global Market* (SAS Publishing, 2008).
 - Edmond H. Weiss, *The Elements of International English Style: A Guide to Writing Correspondence, Reports, Technical Documents, and Internet Pages for a Global Audience* (M.E. Sharpe, 2005).
 - https://www.edwardtufte.com/tufte/books_vdqi