

Writing for a Multilingual Audience

The Local Voters' Pamphlet is delivered to all households in King County and read by many of our 1.4 million registered voters. The pamphlet is also translated in its entirety into Chinese, Korean, Russian, Somali, Spanish, and Vietnamese. To help ensure that your candidate statement is understood by a broad audience, we recommend keeping your writing simple, clear, and to the point.

Below are some tips to help as you draft your statement.

Simplify long sentences

Consider rearranging, rewording, or dividing sentences that are long and complex. Try reading a sentence out loud, listening to it using a screen reader, or asking a colleague to read it for clarity. If you keep long sentences, write them as clearly as possible with correct punctuation, to aid in comprehension.

Simplify phrases

Aim for writing that is concise. Condense phrases such as "in order to," "for the purpose of," and "in regard to" to "to," "for," and "concerning."

Simplify verb formats

Simplify language when possible. For example, avoid unnecessary nominalizations by using "use" instead of "utilize" or "enact" instead of "operationalize."

Simplify grammatical structures

Some grammatical forms that are common in English are not used in other languages and do not translate easily. Double negatives, for example, can convey the opposite meaning to speakers of a language such as Spanish where a second negative can serve to intensify the meaning of the first negative. For instance, the phrase "not uncommon" could translate to "very rare" instead of "common," so replacing it with "common" avoids confusion. Similarly, false subjects or expletives such as "it is" or "there are" require the reader to connect "it" and "there" to the actual subject of the sentence, which can be challenging for those who are

not native-English speakers. Phrasal verbs, formed out of multiple words, are similarly problematic. "Reduce," for example, is syntactically simpler than "cut back."

Use active voice

This is good advice for all authors. Passive voice is often wordy and ambiguous. For example, the passive sentence, "It has been demonstrated that learning can be promoted by student engagement" can be replaced with "Researchers have demonstrated that student engagement promoted learning" or even "Student engagement promotes learning (*cite relevant research*)." Even better, the previous sentence can read, for example, "Researchers have demonstrated that student engagement promoted learning" or even "Student engagement promotes learning (*cite relevant research*)" can replace the passive sentence, "It has been demonstrated that learning can be promoted by student engagement."

Idioms

These can be so ubiquitous that we sometimes don't even realize we are using them. For example, references to "skating on thin ice" may appear obvious in terms of meaning but for other readers may seem out of place and confusing. Additionally, some idioms have origins that might be offensive. For example, "rule of thumb" purportedly originated from 18th-century English law that allowed a man to beat his wife with a stick as long as it was no thicker than his thumb.

Source: Teaching & Learning Inquiry, [Writing for Diverse Audience](#).