

# Rules that Breathe Fire into Your Writing

Follow these simple rules. Then, people will like your articles AND stay awake while reading them. They might even take the action you recommend.

Use a bold, short, punchy title; put the balance of your otherwise long title in a subtitle or the first heading.

Write an executive summary of a short sentence or two at the beginning.

Use ONLY one graphic per page IFF it relates directly to the story. Keep it small and near the related text.

Use catchy headings inside the document by breaking up text into groups of 1 to 3 paragraphs to prevent monotony.

Proceed from general to specific, and put most important information first.

Eliminate passive voice and to-be verb forms to avoid ambiguity and prevent confusion. Use be, am, is, are, was, or were only to express identity.

Put subject and verb at the front of the sentence.

Limit sentences to 17 words; Limit paragraphs to 3 sentences.

Use numbered or bulleted lists for series of more than 3 items.

Always include a call to action in political or sales articles, and make it easy to take the action. Mention it in the executive summary and at the end.

Go to [http://www.fox.com](#) and see how The Claw sets up his articles. He manages to make his dry subject (terrorism) of political interest.

## How to Kill Your Opponent's Case

By the way, these same rules apply to legal and other forms of technical writing. As for the legal side, do what you can to keep your pleadings short, punchy, and interesting. If you do this, the judge will read YOUR pleadings and toss you opponents' pleadings aside.

I have noticed a HUGE offense in most legal writing: passive voice, coupled with to-be verbs. Those cause immediate confusion because they deprive the sentence of an actor, someone or thing that DOES something to

something else.

## How to Brings Writing to Life

You would not write

“The knife was taken from the pillow and placed half way into the victim’s chest.”

That would bore the judge to death. Instead, you would write something like

“The murderer took the knife from the pillow and stabbed it hilt-depth into the victim’s heart.”

Active voice and elimination of to-be verbs bring your writing to life.