The top 10

- Be prepared
- Be systematic
- Be simple
- Be clear
- Be concise
- Be fluent
- Be accurate
- Be visually aware
- Be correct
- Be consistent
Be prepared

“Success depends upon previous preparation, and without such preparation there is sure to be failure”

Confucius
“Well, this certainly buggers our plans to conquer the Universe.”
Be prepared – the ‘big picture’

- Purpose
- People
- Product
- Process
Be systematic

“If a man can group his ideas, then he is a writer”

Robert Louis Stevenson
Reading strategies

- Preselecting papers
- Skimming headings
- Skimming hotspots
- Whole thing (rarely)
- Grouping refs by category
- Extracting/recording
Useful tools

**Thinking**
- Six key questions
- Brainstorming
- Talking it through
- Incubation

**Organizing**
- Mind-mapping
- Post-it notes
- Outlining
- Heaps of paper
Six key questions

- Meaning?
- Why?
- Why not?
- Like what?
- Based on what evidence?
- So what?
Be simple

“If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough”

Albert Einstein
Writing Skills for Medical Communications

Top 10 tips
Be simple

- Have a good structure
- Make structure clear to reader
- Manage structure and length of:
  - sentences
  - paragraphs
  - lists
- Choose appropriate words
Since behavioral factors, such as poor compliance with treatment, frequently contribute to exacerbations of heart failure, a prospective, randomized trial of the effect of a nurse-directed, multidisciplinary intervention on rates of readmission within 90 days of hospital discharge, quality of life, and costs of care for high-risk patients 70 years of age or older who were hospitalized with congestive heart failure was conducted by Deng et al.
“Good prose is like a window pane”

George Orwell
Sentence order

Every step of the procedure, including the criteria for selecting patients, the surgical approach, the intraoperative technique, and the postoperative nursing care, was evaluated.
Don’t be unclear

“Women dream about food ten times more often than men.”

“Weight loss is an independent prognostic marker for poor survival in complicated heart failure, and therapies directed at improving weight loss may improve outcomes.”
"...plain, simple language, short words and brief sentences. That is the way to write English - it is the modern way and the best way"

Mark Twain
Five principles for conciseness

- Delete words that mean little or nothing
- Delete words that repeat meaning of other words
- Delete words implied by other words
- Replace a phrase by a word
- Change negatives to positives
Words that can often be deleted

- Actually
- Really
- Rather
- Basically
- Generally
- Somewhat
Redundancies

- Basic fundamentals
- Various different
- Consensus of opinion
- Future events
- Period of time
- Red in colour
- At a rapid speed
Words implied by other words

- The last point to make is...
- Have been determined to have...
- This section introduces...
Phrases into words

- Despite the fact that...
- In a situation in which...
- Concerning the matter of...
- A greater number of...
- Performed an investigation into...
Negatives into positives

- Not allow...
- Not include...
- Not stop...
“I’m of the opinion that this manuscript of yours may well benefit from a modicum of judicious editing.”
Be fluent

“Writing stopped being fun when I discovered the difference between good writing and bad”

Truman Capote
Traditional clinical review articles differ from systematic reviews and meta-analyses. Traditional reviews are often highly selective in the literature they discuss and may reflect the author’s personal opinion. Non-quantitative systematic reviews comprehensively examine the medical literature, seeking to identify and synthesize all relevant information to formulate the best approach to diagnosis or treatment. Meta-analyses (quantitative systematic reviews) seek to answer a focused clinical question, using rigorous statistical analysis of pooled research studies.
In a **coherent paragraph**, each **sentence** relates clearly to the topic **sentence** or controlling idea. However, there is more to **coherence** than **sentence** meaning. If a paragraph is coherent, each **sentence** flows **clearly** to the next without obvious shifts or jumps. A **coherent paragraph** also creates ties between old and new information to make the structure of ideas or arguments **clear** to the reader.
Type 2 diabetes is an increasingly common condition. There exist over a million diagnosed cases in the UK. A further million cases are believed to be undiagnosed. This illness has devastating complications. Examples include coronary heart disease, nephropathy, stroke, retinopathy and heart failure. Three-quarters of patients with this condition die of cardiovascular causes.
Be accurate

“Fast is fine, but accuracy is everything”

Xenophon
Missing out a couple of words could alter meaning

Incorrect
- …and $\geq 2$ unscheduled medical visits during the past year were required for enrollment

Correct
- …and $\geq 2$ unscheduled medical visits for asthma during the past year were required for enrollment

Example: Steve Cook
Is this an accurate statement?

In the first 10 years after erythropoiesis-stimulating agents were introduced, only four cases of pure red cell aplasia occurred.
"It's time we face reality, my friends. ... We're not exactly rocket scientists."
Be visually aware

“The soul cannot think without a picture”

Aristotle
Favourite hot drinks among postdoctoral researchers at three UK universities (based on a questionnaire study)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Favourite drink</th>
<th>Oxford (n=92)</th>
<th>Cambridge (n=150)</th>
<th>Manchester (n=88)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coffee</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tea</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chocolate*</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other†</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* including cocoa
† including Horlicks, Ovaltine, milk (from any animal) and hot water
Fig. 3. Summary of changes in domains of the Short Form-36 Quality of Life Questionnaire. Scores represent mean change from baseline to final calculable score adjusted for specified covariates (baseline score and cluster/study centre). A positive change indicates improvement.
Be correct

“Life is tons of discipline. Your first discipline is your vocabulary, then your grammar and your punctuation.”

Robert Frost
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commonly misused words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Varying/Various</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accuracy/precision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effect/affect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infer/imply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adopt/adapt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assure/ensure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definite/definitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dose/dosage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Steve & Tricia Gough
Complimentary Therapists

The Massage Centre
Pamper days & Treatments

66a Lord Street
Liverpool
opp B.H.S
Phone: 0151 709 9701

E-mail: massagecentre@hotmail.com
Website: www.themassagecentre.co.uk
A painful procedure?

...when documented weight loss is used as a criterion to dichotomise patients with chronic heart failure...
Lost Consonants

There are loads of mistakes in this, but I wouldn't want to say anything.

Jean worked at a publishers as a coy editor.
Be consistent

“Consistency is the last refuge of the unimaginative”

Oscar Wilde
A few consistency issues...

- Technical terms
- Spelling
- Abbreviations
- Lists
- Capitalization
- Heading style
- Symbols in graphs
- Special characters
- Dashes, hyphens, etc
- Digits vs words for numbers
- Units
- Brackets and parentheses
The top 10

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The last word

“What is written without effort is in general read without pleasure”

Samuel Johnson