

Warren Buffett's guide to writing in plain English

 By [James Hurford](#)

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One of the world's most famous and successful investors - Warren Buffett, prefers to write in plain English.

He wrote the preface in the *Plain English Handbook*, published by the US Securities and Exchange Commission - which gives some useful advice:

"Write with a specific person in mind."

"When writing Berkshire Hathaway's annual report, I pretend that I'm talking to my sisters."

I have no trouble picturing them: though highly intelligent, they are not experts in accounting or finance. They will understand plain English, but jargon may puzzle them."

"My goal is simply to give them the information I would wish them to supply me if our positions were reversed. To succeed, I don't need to be Shakespeare; I must, though, have a sincere desire to inform." - Warren Buffett

Here, he captures the essence of writing in plain language, making four key points:

- Keep your reader in mind
- Use clear, simple language
- Avoid technical jargon and gobbledegook
- Write to inform not to impress

If writing plainly is good enough for Mr Buffett, it's good enough for anyone. Here's how he does it:

How to write like Warren Buffett

1. **Keep it personal** - use 'you, we, us and I'. People respond more positively when addressed personally.
2. **Use short sentences and short paragraphs** - aim for an average of 15-20 words per sentence. Make only one point per sentence. Break long sentences into 2-3 short ones.

3. **Aim to be understood** - what you write must be clear on first reading.
4. **Use the active voice** - it's more vigorous and direct. It's also easier to read and understand:
 - use 'consider' not 'consideration'
 - 'appoint' instead of 'appointment'
 - 'notify' rather than 'notification'
5. **Be economical with words** - use only as many words as you need:
 - use 'A new bank account is being set up' instead of 'A new bank account is in the process of being set up'
 - 'now' rather than 'at this present time'
 - 'for' not 'on behalf of'
6. **Use everyday words and expressions** - inflated words add little value; buzzwords even less. Stick to words you use in everyday conversation.
7. **Get to the point** - remember your readers don't have much time. Be straightforward. Free yourself of corporate mumbo-jumbo.

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