

I.3. The Principle of Economy

The third Principle of Plain Language for English is the Principle of Economy which essentially seeks to restrict wordiness at all levels of writing, from the phrase, to the sentence, to the paragraph and beyond. There are four sub-principles of Economy, including (1) Brief is best; (2) Common words are preferred over uncommon words; (3) Avoid subordinate clauses; and (4) Discuss one point per statement. A representative rule of the Principle of Economy is Rule 57, "Avoid wordiness." This is a useful rule, often ignored by native as well as non-native speakers of English, which assumes that in the professional arena, where we assume you are writing, time is a commodity not everyone has a great deal of, and so, messages should be brief, direct and to the point. In terms of wordiness, we can often find lengthy expressions that can be said more simply in just one or two words. Expressions such as "replied to the effect that", "came to our attention" and "with warmest regards" can be replaced by less wordy expressions such as "answered", "noticed" and "with regards", respectively (or omitted entirely in some cases.) In the following two sentences, the second is preferred over the first.

- 3.a. It has come to our attention that your payment is outstanding.
- 3.b. Your payment is overdue.

I.4. The Principle of Appropriateness

The fourth Principle of Plain Language for English is the Principle of Appropriateness. This principle covers several areas, including what is suitable from mono-cultural and cross-cultural perspectives, as well as from perspectives which recognize differences of language usage for casual communication as opposed to professional communication, as well as for other aspects of using English appropriately. There are four sub-principles here as well, and they include (1) Be truthful and show politeness and respect for others, (2) Avoid idioms and slang, especially the more obscure regional variations, (3) Avoid contractions and fast speech rules, and (4) Use grammatically correct sentences. One representative rule here is Rule 70, "Use neutral words." This rule suggests that some words may be offensive to readers, and should be avoided. For example, gender terms such as "he" or "she" may not be appropriate for certain audiences, where the resulting tone might be interpreted as sexist, or biased. In situations such as these, use neutral terms, or some method of equalizing terms. As before, the second sentence is preferred over the first.

- 4.a. The new employee should pick up his badge at the personnel counter.
- 4.b. New employees should pick up their badges at the personnel counter.