

# Concise, clear, coherent

These three words sum up the writing style that we're trying to develop:

## Concise

Concise means “giving a lot of information in a few words”. It is the opposite of the word *waffle*, which means using lots of words but not really saying anything meaningful.

## Clear

The secret to clear writing is to focus on the **job** that each sentence is doing, instead of worrying about grammatical structures or big words.

## Coherent

Coherent means that your writing makes sense. The best way to ensure that your paragraphs are coherent is to stick to the 5-sentence method that I teach, and to make a **plan** before you start writing.

## A good example

Last week we were looking at a simple task that asked us to do two things:

1. Give a second benefit of robots / machines
2. Explain this benefit or give an example

Here are the two sentences that I wrote:

1. Another advantage of artificial intelligence is that it can deal with complex calculations without making mistakes.
2. For example, robots can perform complex surgical procedures with a level of accuracy that is far beyond that of a human surgeon.

I hope you'll agree that these two sentences are **concise**, **clear** and **coherent**. I'm not waffling, each sentence does a clear job, and I stick to the plan.

## A bad example

Compare my sentences above to a student's response to the same task below:

1. Another possible advantage is the utilization of artificial intelligence and its usefulness in human life.

2. Computer machines can deal with complex, detailed, and intricate dilemmas which, when done with humans, there are potentials errors and their ramifications.
3. This could be exemplified with computers that program cars' engines and gear shifts, especially for high-tech and hybrid cars.
4. A small margin of error might end up with mechanical or, even in a worst-case scenario, a total system failure.

I don't consider these sentences to be concise, clear or coherent. Here's why:

#### **Sentence 1**

Saying that we can "utilise" artificial intelligent and that it is "useful" is not giving a benefit. The sentence is not concise; it is unnecessary waffle about the overall topic.

#### **Sentence 2**

This sentence would be fine as the first sentence.

#### **Sentence 3**

The example of computers that program car engines and gear shifts is ok, but I personally find it a little confusing and unclear: Is programming a gear shift really something that needs to be done by AI in order to avoid human errors? Why not use a simpler, clearer example?

#### **Sentence 4**

If sentences 3 and 4 are the student's example, this is not concise writing; we could give the same information in one efficient sentence. Also, I'm not sure that sentence 4 is clear or coherent: Are we still talking about the car engine or gear shifts? And what does the "total system failure" refer to? This isn't the kind of phrase that we normally use when talking about cars breaking down.

#### **Overall analysis:**

It seems to me that the student wrote the four sentences above without stopping to think or plan ideas first. As a result, there is too much waffle, and the sentences don't progress in a clear, logical way.

## **Summary**

We've been looking at the following key ideas in relation to writing:

- Sentence jobs
- Ideas, explaining, examples
- Sticking to a method
- Efficient writing
- 3 Cs: concise, clear, coherent