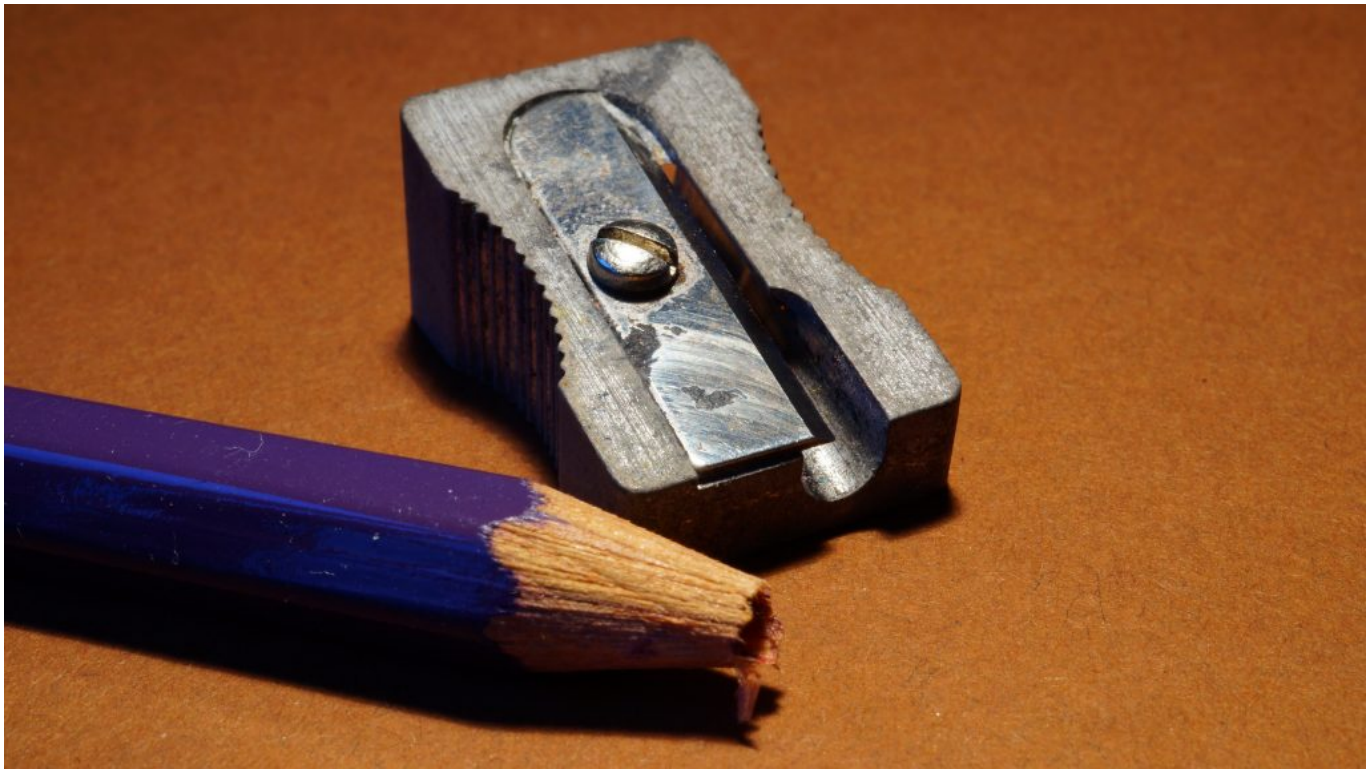
3 ways to tighten up your writing

My job as a copy editor is to tighten up other people's writing so that it is more easily readable, clear, consistent and accurate. Often, I come across the same three issues that make writing harder to read and more unclear. These issues include having sentences that are too long and stuffed with extraneous words and phrases; writing in the passive voice; and using unnecessarily big words.



If you want to make your writing sharper, and your meaning clearer, here are three ways to achieve that goal:

1. Use active voice

By eliminating passive sentences, you are immediately tightening up your writing and getting rid of useless words. Your sentences will be more direct and punchy.

Passive:

> The actress Jane Doe was awarded an Oscar by the Academy for her performance in *The Movie.*

Active:

> The Academy awarded an Oscar to actress Jane Doe for *The Movie*.
>
> Jane Doe won an Oscar for *The Movie*.

2. Get rid of the extras

Using extra words and phrases may have made your college essays reach the magic page number needed, but in marketing and business writing, these just make your work wordy and/or redundant.

Instead of this	Use this
As well as	and
In the afternoon hours	In the afternoon
The reason why is	Because
Came at a time when	Came when

For more examples, check out this list of 50 redundant phrases.

3. Cut out the big words

Using big words when small ones would do makes you look like you are trying too hard, and does nothing to enhance the writing’s readability. And p.s., using big words can sound pretentious.

Bigger word	*Smaller word*
Utilize	Use
Physician	Doctor

Reside	Live
Purchase	Buy

Have you come across these in your writing or in work you are editing? Which one is the most common?