Editing for readability and conciseness

UNL Libraries Writing Retreat - 2017

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How do you turn out prose that is clear, crisp, lively, concise, smooth, unambiguous, pleasant to read, and easy to understand?
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**By editing!**
When should you begin editing?
As an author, what is your purpose for writing?
As a reader, what is your purpose for reading?
Considering your readers:

Who will read this?
Why will they read this?
What do they already know?
What else do they need to know?
What do I know that they need to know?
How can I best* present my work to them?

* in terms of logic, readability, and style
I used to hate writing assignments, but now I enjoy them.

I realized that the purpose of writing is to inflate weak ideas, obscure poor reasoning, and inhibit clarity.

With a little practice, writing can be an intimidating and impenetrable fog! Want to see my book report?

"The dynamics of interbeing and monological imperatives in Dick and Jane: A study in psychic transrelational gender modes."

Academia, here I come!
Readability:

1. The quality of being legible or decipherable.
   1.1 The quality of being easy or enjoyable to read.

Oxford Dictionaries.com
Why does it matter? Why bother trying to make your writing readable?
8 C’s of Academic Writing

- Correct
- Complete
- Clear
- Concise
- Cohesive
- Consistent
- Considerate
- Convincing
Readability Formulas:

- Flesch reading ease
- Flesch–Kincaid grade level
- Gunning fog index
- SMOG (Simple Measure of Gobbledygook) grade

Each index above takes into account features like number of words per sentence and number of polysyllable words to give a readability score.
Some example resources for automated readability analysis:

http://writersdiet.com
https://www.webpagefx.com/tools/read-able/check.php
https://www.online-utility.org/english/readability_test_and_improve.jsp
Along with sentence length and polysyllable words, style and organization of writing can greatly affect readability.
Problems that make writing hard to understand:

Excessive abstraction
Passive verbs/voice
Unnecessary complexity
Jargon
Careless diction, colloquial expressions, clichés, vogue words
Pomposity/overly academic language
Problems with style that add unnecessary length:

- More than one idea per sentence
- Wordiness/circumlocution
- Redundant words, repetitive text
- Statements of the obvious/unnecessary explanation
- Metadiscourse and overview sentences
- Unnecessary qualification
- Passive verbs/voice
- Use of third person instead of first person
- Inclusion of irrelevant material
Problems that confuse readers:

Starting a sentence in the middle of the idea
Run on sentences
Missing connections or transitions
Incomplete comparisons
Inconsistent terminology
Excessive compression
Noun clusters
Lack of specificity
Equivocation
Too many abbreviations
Imprecise expressions
Sentences or paragraphs out of logical order
“There is no good writing, only good rewriting.”

-Joseph Garland
Questions or comments?

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