

# Put Technology into Plain English

## Lucy's Seven Tips

1. Know your audience. The reader is *the* most important person when you write. Your task is to educate, inspire or entertain them. Help the information slip easily into their minds. Nobody has ever complained that something is too easy to understand.
2. Assume the reader is intelligent but do not overestimate what they know. Define a technical word the first time you use it. This confirms that the word means the same thing for both you and the reader. You can then use the technical term throughout. The same applies to jargon, abbreviations and acronyms. For example, “the muscles atrophy - waste away” or “MECO – main engine cut-off”.
3. Aim for the shortest sentence possible. Long sentences are hard to read and understand. A sentence of seven words is easy. Sentences longer than 29 words are hard going.
4. Choose a ‘voice’ and stick with it - “I did it”, “They did it” or “It was done”. This helps to reduce confusion. If the person doing the action is important, use the active voice and make them do the action - “We will rock you”. If the person is unimportant, use the passive voice - “200ml of liquid was added to the powder”.
5. Use short and simple words. Shorter words are quicker to read. Simple words need less thought. Use “drool” rather than “salivate”, “bubbles” rather than “effervescence” and “kill” rather than “exterminate”.
6. Relate data to things the audience already knows. This helps them get a feel for the information. One in four is easier to imagine than 25%. Numbers are hard to grasp - compare them to something. £453,000 is about twice the price of an average house. 2.4 billion is about one out of every four people on the Earth. Accuracy is not always important. People want to know roughly if it is as big as a grain of sand, a football, or a double decker bus. Try not to use the cliché “the size of a jumbo jet”. These are usually seen from a distance or from the inside. It is difficult to imagine their actual size.
7. Clichés should be avoided like the ...