

Could You Be a Little Clearer?

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Photo by Bruce Mars from Pexels

The above look (furrowed brow, squinty eyes) is probably not the one you're going for when someone is reading your copy, whether it be marketing content, technical documentation, or directions to your place of business.

Let's say you have a document that is overly wordy or otherwise unwieldy, but you prefer not to rewrite from scratch. What follows is a little editorial exercise to show how I might whip that copy into shape.

Consider the following paragraph from an old home repair manual.

The chart outlines methods for tackling a few of the more common stains that may occur on fabrics around the home. Generally speaking, greasy stains are removed with a grease solvent of the type usually referred to as dry cleaning fluids. These are available at grocery stores and hardware stores and they should be carefully used according to directions on the label. Some are flammable, and practically all have vapors which are dangerous if inhaled in a confined area. The flammable kind should not be used where any open flame or danger of electrical spark is present.

To get to the following revision, I basically cut down on wordiness and use of passive voice and added some emphasis.

The chart outlines methods for tackling some common household fabric stains. For greasy stains you will usually need dry cleaning fluid, a special type of grease solvent sold at grocery and hardware stores. Be sure to follow all directions on the label. Some of these cleaners are flammable; do not use these near an open flame or anything that might cause an electrical spark. Also, most dry cleaning fluids have dangerous vapors; use these only in well ventilated areas and avoid inhaling the vapors.

Using more concise statements with bullets and symbols can make the copy even easier to follow on the first reading, and more useful as a quick reference afterward.

The chart details how to tackle common household fabric stains. For greasy stains you will usually need dry cleaning fluid.

- Look for dry cleaning fluid at grocery or hardware stores
- Be sure to follow all directions on the label
 - ⚠ Some of these fluids are flammable—do not use near an open flame or anything that might cause an electrical spark
 - ⚠ Most have dangerous vapors—use only in well ventilated areas and avoid inhaling the vapors

Of course, the ideal is to have a strong writer communicate your message from the start; but when circumstances call for a good edit, I can work to your specifications to maximize the effectiveness and impact of any copy you want to make more reader-friendly.