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# **How to Make Your Audit Count**

**Sara I. James**  
**Getting Words to Work**  
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The English language is an arsenal of weapons. If you are going to brandish them without checking to see whether or not they are loaded, you must expect to have them explode in your face from time to time.

— Stephen Fry

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# The ABCs of Report-Writing

**ACTIVE**

**BRIEF**

**CONCRETE**

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# Be active

We have not passed that subtle line between childhood and adulthood until we move from the passive voice to the active voice – that is, until we have stopped saying "It got lost," and say, "I lost it."

– Sydney J. Harris

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# Be active

Retention and completion of all relevant sections of sign up checklists needs to be improved to evidence that arrears prevention is discussed with tenants from the outset.

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# Be brief

The most valuable of all talents is that of never using two words when one will do.

— Thomas Jefferson

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# Be brief

The responsibilities of an Accounting Officer, including responsibility for the propriety and regularity of the public finances for which the Accounting Officer is answerable, for keeping proper records and for safeguarding the Security and Intelligence Agencies' assets, are set out in the Accounting Officer's Memorandum issued by the Treasury and published in Managing Public Money.

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# Be brief

It took Lieutenant Treadwell thirteen weeks to compose the regulations. He was toasted and congratulated at a staff meeting. He beamed proudly. The regulations were perfect. No one could understand them.

—Joseph Wambaugh, *The Choirboys*

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# Be concrete

[President Warren G. Harding's] speeches leave the impression of an army of pompous phrases moving over the landscape in search of an idea; sometimes, these meandering words actually capture a straggling thought, and bear it triumphantly, a prisoner in their midst, until it dies of servitude and overwork.

– William G. McAdoo

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# Be concrete

In one case involving external validation, the report identified a lack of processes for moderation by the awarding institution of the standards of student achievements at the partner institution, the monitoring of students at programme level being dependent on sampling by external examiners.

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Wherever appropriate, the report indicates the source or nature of the information on which analysis has been based or conclusions have been reached. Where such references would be overly repetitive or might otherwise confuse the presentation, evidentiary references have been omitted.

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Across the government, there were failures of imagination, policy, capabilities, and management.

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At more senior levels, communication was poor. Senior military and FAA leaders had no effective communication with each other. The chain of command did not function well. The President could not reach some senior officials. The Secretary of Defense did not enter the chain of command until the morning's key events were over. Air National Guard units with different rules of engagement were scrambled without the knowledge of the President, NORAD, or the National Military Command Center.

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## Orwell's Rules

(‘Politics and the English Language’, 1946)

- 1) Never use a metaphor, simile or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.
- 2) Never use a long word where a short one will do.
- 3) If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
- 4) Never use the passive where you can use the active.
- 5) Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
- 6) Break any of these rules sooner than say anything barbarous.