Seminar 8
Clarity vs Ambiguity & Vagueness
Why papers get rejected. Not grammar, but these six problems:

1. Long convoluted complex sentences
2. Redundancy
3. Words in the wrong order
4. Massively long paragraphs
5. **Ambiguity and lack of clarity**
Which is more immediately understandable?

Concrete

Abstract
Why do some authors use so many abstract terms?
When you use so many abstract terms it is because you don’t really understand the importance and relevance of what you are writing.

Ask yourself: What is important about my work? What is new about it? What real contribution am I making?

You can only write in a concrete way if you know the answers to those questions. And then you can use specific examples to explain the importance.
Moral of the story: Be clear

Don’t fill your paper or your oral presentation with abstract words and ideas.

Don’t think you are super-smart by using complex terms.

Write and speak using the simplest most direct terminology.
If you can’t explain it simply, you don’t understand it well enough.

– Albert Einstein
Message on golf course: Any persons (except players) caught collecting golf balls on this course will be prosecuted and have their balls removed.
Moral of the Story for Ex 48.1 and 48.2

Put the elements in a sentence in the most logical order. Make sure subjects are next to their verbs.
Moral of the Story for Ex 48.3

Avoid gerunds (-ing) unless the subject is clear.

If you take your dog in the car don't let him hang out of a window while driving.
Gerunds don’t have subjects so they can be ambiguous

I found a **bug using** the software.

[bug = defect + insect]

While I was using the software I found a bug.
Ambiguity with gerund

Inflation should go down reducing taxes.

Does this mean inflation will go down:

a) before taxes are reduced

b) after taxes have been reduced

c) WTF?
Ambiguity with gerund

Inflation will go down *reducing* taxes.

First taxes will be reduced and then inflation will go down.

*Inflation will go down by reducing* taxes.

Inflation will go down first and then taxes will go down.

*Inflation will go down, thus reducing* taxes.
Ambiguity with gerund

Inflation will go down, **thus reducing** taxes.

**THUS** + gerund = and the consequence is / and then (temporal) [hence, therefore, so]

Inflation will go down **by reducing** taxes.

**BY** + gerund = this is how it will happen
A woman was carrying a 2 meter long steel tube for her house. She had had it for six months.

She wanted to go home by bus. But when she got on the bus with her mother, the driver told her that she couldn’t bring anything onto the bus that is longer than 1.5 m.

So they got off the bus and caught a taxi, she then bought something, and then she caught another one.

The driver said nothing when she got on. And she thought to herself: Finally I managed to get on the bus with it.

How did she get the latter on the bus?
A woman was carrying a 2 meter long steel tube for her house. She had had it for six months. She wanted to go home by bus. But when she got on the bus with her mother, the driver told her that she can’t bring anything onto the bus that is longer than 1.5 m.

So they got off the bus and caught a taxi, she then bought something, and then she caught another one.

The driver said nothing when she got on. And she thought to herself: Finally I managed to get on the bus with it.

How did she get the latter on the bus?
Moral of the Story: Avoid using: *it, they, this, that, one and the former/latter*

Instead, repeat the word that these pronouns refer to
When *the former/latter* is OK

The are two countries involved in the project: France and Italy. The *latter* initiated the collaboration in 2017.

There is no possible ambiguity in the above sentence.
When *the former/latter* is not OK

The are two countries involved in the project: France and Italy. Blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah. The *latter* initiated the collaboration in 2017.
Exercise 49
keep it simple.
Understand what is important about your research. You will then be able to keep your paper and your presentation simple and clear.

If YOU don’t understand the importance, how will your READER understand?
Keep It Simple Quiz

At the beginning of a presentation:
a) Hi  b) Good Morning c) Other (what?)

When addressing Saxon Baines, a fellow researcher, in an email:
a) Dear Saxon Baines b) Dear Mr Baines c) Dear Baines Saxon

When concluding an email:
a) I look forward to hear from you. b) Best regards
email quiz – get 4 right and win huge prize!

1 Year first email sent?
   a) 1971  b) 1976  c) 1981  d) 1986

2 Is it possible to tell whether the writer of an email is male or female just from the way they write?
   a) yes  b) no

3 When did the movie “You’ve got mail” with Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan come out?
   a) 1988  b) 1998  c) 2008

4 What makes Japanese smileys different from Western smileys?
   Smiley = :)  

5 What is drailing?  a) emailing while drunk  b) emailing / messaging while driving  c) drafting possibly ‘dangerous’ emails and waiting prudently before hitting ‘send’
1 First email 1971
2 Male / Female YES
3 You’ve got mail 1998
4 (^^) smiley
   (>_<) pain or failure
   (-_-) zzz good night
   (---) restrained anger
5 Emailing while drunk
What should you do when you have finished writing your paper?
What you probably want to do
What you **should** do.
Cut drastically – words, sentences, paragraphs, tables, figures, even subsections.

Only leave what readers need to know.

You can probably delete 25% without removing useful content.
You will discover the joy of destruction.
And your referees and your readers will be very happy!
What other important things should you do when you have finished writing your paper?
For every paragraph you write, ask yourself:

Will the reader understand why I have done x,y,z?

Will the reader understand why it is important?
Check:
- paragraphs are not too long
- concordance
- spelling
- letter to editor

going colleagues to check too
The End

Thank you!
The End
People can recognize themselves in stories about particulars. The abstract is another world. It requires effort of imagination to transport ourselves there.
Why couldn’t the reviewer understand?

The multi-correspondence analysis (MCA) shows no association between relevance and use of participative approach and attitudes and practices of knowledge co-production.

**What exactly are you saying?**

Transdisciplinary knowledge needs public arenas to be produced.

**What does this mean?**

Practices of urban environmental policy.

**Do you mean practices of policy development, implementation, or both (or even something else entirely?)**