8. Prefer active verbs to passive...

Another easy step to clear writing is to use verbs in the active voice ('the car hit a tree') rather than the passive ('a tree was hit by the car'). Compare these:

New guidelines have been laid down by the President in the hope that the length of documents submitted by DGs will be restricted to 15 pages.

The President has laid down new guidelines in the hope that DGs will restrict the length of documents to 15 pages.

Look how we can make a sentence clearer by cutting out passives...:

unclear:
A recommendation was made by the European Parliament that consideration be given by the Member States to a simplification of the procedure.

a bit better:
The European Parliament made a recommendation that the Member States give consideration to a simplification of the procedure.

and finally by using verbs instead of abstract nouns:

much better:
The European Parliament recommended that the Member States consider simplifying the procedure.

… and name the agent

If you change passive verb forms into active ones, your writing will become clearer because you will be forced to name the agent — the person, organisation or thing that is carrying out the action.

It's easy to identify the agent here ...

This project was rejected at Commission level.

The Commission rejected this project.

... but impossible here:

It is considered that tobacco advertising should be banned in the EU.

Who considers? The writer, the Commission, the public, the medical profession?

Remember that EU documents have to be translated into several languages. If your original document is unclear, you may end up with non-matching translations, as each translator tries to guess what you might have meant and comes up with a different solution.

But you don't have to avoid passives at all costs. They can be useful, for example when there's no need to say who is responsible for the action because it's obvious ('All staff are encouraged to write clearly').

Avoid false friends

False friends (or *faux amis*) are pairs of words in two languages that look similar, but differ in meaning.

In a multilingual environment like the European Commission, we often mix up our languages. Borrowing between French and English is common. For instance, 'to control' in English normally means 'to command/ direct' or 'to restrict/limit'. It does not mean simply 'to check/supervise' like *'contrôler'* in French. Using the wrong word can alienate readers, making the EU institutions look like a closed club that is out of touch with the real world. In the worst case, it can lead to misunderstandings and diplomatic incidents (for example, if you just want to say that Luxembourg is small, but you write that 'Luxembourg is not an important country').

French	False friend	Why is it wrong?	What's the correct word?
actuel	actual	'actual' means 'real'	current, topical
adéquat	adequate	'adequate' means 'sufficient'	suitable
assister à	assist at	'assist' means 'help'.	attend, participate in
attribuer	attribute to	'attribute to' means 'consider to be due to/characteristic of'	allocate to, assign to
compléter	complete	'complete' means 'finish'	supplement
délai	delay	'a delay ' means 'a postponement or hold-up'(= *retard* in French)	deadline, time limit
élaborer	elaborate (verb)	'to elaborate' means 'to go into detail'	draft, develop, produce
éventuel	eventual	'eventual' means 'ultimate'	any
prévu	foreseen	'foreseen' means 'predicted'	provided for, planned
important	important	'important' is right if you mean 'significant'; but not if you mean>	> large
matériel	material	'material' means 'matter', 'information'	supplies, equipment
opportunité	opportunity	'opportunity' means 'chance'	advisability
perspectives	perspectives	'perspective' means 'standpoint'	prospects, outlook
respecter	respect	'to respect' means 'to value' or 'honour' someone or something	comply with (rules), meet (a deadline)
sensible	sensible	'sensible' means 'reasonable'	sensitive

Avoid or explain jargon

Jargon is vocabulary used by any group of insiders or specialists to communicate with each other, and is acceptable in documents which are only read by that group.

However, outsiders (especially the general public) will have to work harder than they need to or want to when reading jargon. Some readers may even stop reading — so make sure that any document you want outsiders to read is as jargon-free as possible.

And if you DO have to use jargon terms in documents for the general public, explain them when you first use them, or add a glossary, a hyperlink or a reference to one of the websites indicated at the bottom of this page.

This non-exhaustive table contains a number of terms commonly used in the EU institutions:

Jargon term	Suggested definition
acceding country	*country about to join the EU*
acquis (communautaire)	*body of EU law*
candidate country	*country still negotiating to join the EU*
cohesion	*approach aimed at reducing social and economic disparities within the EU*
comitology	*procedure under which the Commission consults committees of experts*
Community method	*method developed for taking decisions in the EU, where the Commission, Parliament and Council work together*
enlargement	*expansion of the EU to include new members*
mainstreaming	*taking into account in all EU policies*
proportionality	*principle that a level of government must not take any action that exceeds that necessary to carry out its assigned tasks*
subsidiarity	*principle that, wherever possible, decisions must be taken at the level of government closest to citizens*

Clear explanations of much jargon can be found in:

the 'Plain Language Guide to Eurojargon' section on the Europa website
(http://europa.eu/abc/eurojargon/index_en.htm).

For definitions of more technical and legal terms arising in an EU context, see the online Europa Glossary
(http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/index_en.htm).