

How to write documents

Philippe Pittoli

ABSTRACT

Writing documents is hard, so let's summarize a few advice.

Check out for newer versions: <https://t.karchnu.fr/doc/how-to-write-documents.pdf>
And if you have questions: karchnu@karchnu.fr

Lastly compiled the **31/12/2021** (day/month/year, you know, like in any sane civilization).

1. Random advice

- Verify spelling, grammar and conjugation. You can do it easily with <https://linguee.fr>
- Don't write bullshit sentences: you should (almost) always be concrete. Is that sentence necessary? If not, remove it. Everybody wins: you write less, your reader reads less, and your text is clearer.
- Repetitions can make sense, but you probably don't need it in a small document, so drop it.
- Read it again, and again, and again. Mandatory to get good results.
- Conciseness is key. If there is a way to say the same thing in less lines, rewriting may be necessary¹.
- Typography and page layout advice: text has to be justified, no line return in a paragraph, no slash (/). The document has to be homogeneous to be pleasant for the reader, so use carefully layout and style elements, such as titles and subtitles, boldness and italics, dashed lists (instead you can use paragraphs, or inlined lists such as *(a) some-element, (b) other-element...*), etc.
- One idea per paragraph, and paragraphs should logically follow each other: tell a story.
- What isn't necessary to the comprehension of your idea can be put in footnotes. Having only a single idea to follow in the main text is relaxing. Comments and details can be in footnotes. Also, footnotes should be referred in the main text with numbers, like this².
- (Warning: may not be true in every situation) Avoid talking about you, avoid **I**. "I" should only be employed when you

have to talk about you. Your document is about a subject, talk about it, not about you. Take example with this current list of advice.

- Pay attention to the public. Avoid both familiarities and erudite phrasing your interlocutor doesn't use, it is most likely inappropriate. Avoid specially knowledgable words if you are not sure they are used by your peers: it's the best way to appear anything but smart.

1. You already spent a long time on your document? Too bad. If you really care about your document, you have to take your time writing it.

2. Hello, I'm a footnote.