

Good writing style: Plain and simple

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Princeton University researchers say they've found the secret of impressive writing: Keep it plain and simple.

The scientists say writers using long words needlessly and choosing complicated font styles are seen as less intelligent than those who stick with basic vocabulary and plain text -- suggesting efforts to impress readers by using florid font styles and searching through a thesaurus may have the opposite effect.

Study author Daniel Oppenheimer based his findings on students' responses to writing samples for which the complexity of the font or vocabulary was systematically manipulated.

In a series of five experiments, he found people tended to rate the intelligence of authors who wrote essays in simpler language, using an easy to read font, as higher than those who authored more complex works.

"It's important to point out that this research is not about problems with using long words, but about using long words needlessly," said Oppenheimer. "Anything that makes a text hard to read and understand, such as unnecessarily long words or complicated fonts, will lower readers' evaluations of the text and its author."

The research is to be published in the next edition of Applied Cognitive Psychology.

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