



Clear English

Tips for Translators



Here are some tips to help translators avoid copying structure and wording from other languages that would be awkward in English. They should be useful to non-native speakers, but may serve as handy reminders for native speakers too.

A. English prefers to be simple, concise and concrete.

1. Use simple words where appropriate.



initiate a programme

start a programme

apply for *employment*

apply for *a job*

activities of a criminal nature

crime

contribute to constructing Europe

help build Europe

require assistance

need help

request remuneration

ask for a fee

specialised methodologies

special methods

an *agricultural holding with caprine animals*

a *goat farm*

with a possibility of dissemination to producers

and may be sent to producers

in view / light of the fact that fees are high

because / as fees are high

pursuant to / in accordance with / within the framework of this Law¹

under / according to this Law

for the purpose of protecting consumers

to protect consumers

for the purpose of its use as a guide

to be used / for use as a guide

important *from the point of view of* producers

important *for* producers

the Directive *concerning / regarding / relating to* financial services

the Directive *on* financial services / the Financial Services Directive

despite the fact that resources are limited

although resources are limited

prior to / subsequent to the Council Decision

before / after the Council Decision

¹ See the section on 'legal language' in the [English Style Guide](#).

at the time when the application is submitted

until such time as a decision is taken

on the occasion of its accession to the EU

Action is needed *at the present time*.

Help is needed *in the near future*.

updated *on a daily basis*

the study *demonstrates / indicates* that

the Commission *is aware of the fact* that

in the event of an emergency

in the same context, it is necessary

equal or superior to EUR 10 000

She *suffered an armed attack*.

It is inadvisable to be in control of a moving vehicle when suffering from fatigue.

This means avoiding archaic legalese.

The matter was put to the Style Guide Committee (*hereinafter 'the Committee'*). The Committee ...

Contract between the County of Needham (*hereinafter referred to as 'the County'*) and Acme Imports (*hereinafter referred to as 'Acme'*)

the aforementioned professions

when the application is submitted

until a decision is taken

when it joined the EU / *on joining* the EU / *upon accession to* the EU

Action is needed *now*.

Help is needed *soon*.

updated *daily*

the study *shows* that

the Commission *knows* that

in an emergency

it is *also* necessary

EUR 10 000 *or more*

She *was shot*.

Do not drive if you are tired.

The matter was put to the Style Guide Committee. The Committee ...

Contract between the County of Needham ('the County') and Acme Imports ('Acme')

these / the above professions

2. Leave out unnecessary words.



Article 1 *of the present Regulation / hereof*

Article 1 (of *this* Regulation)

the matter / question / subject of state aid

state aid

under *the provisions / terms of* the Directive

under the Directive

the Commission *'s services*

the Commission

the Hungarian *authorities*

Hungary

the decision by *the management of* Acme

the decision by Acme / Acme's decision

the training *process*

training

a period of five years

five years

the / an amount of EUR 10 000

EUR 10 000

increase funding *levels*

increase funding

under the conditions encountered in practice

in practice

actually implemented the reform package

implemented the reform package

including, *but not limited to, the following:*

including:

a *person* designated *as responsible* team leader

a designated team leader

The Board *decided to* suspend her mandate.

The Board suspended her mandate.

High prices harm consumers' *interests*.

High prices harm consumers.

For the operation of any lifting equipment it is *absolutely* required for the *operator* to be *equipped* with the *corresponding* licence.

A licence is required for the operation of any lifting equipment.

This includes unnecessary initial phrases.

It must be noted that high prices harm consumers.

High prices harm consumers.

The Commission notes that the deal was unlawful.

The deal was unlawful.

In this respect, I should like to recall the consistent rulings of the Court, according to which ...

The Court has consistently ruled that ...

3. Prefer a verb to an abstract noun.



carry out an evaluation of performance

conduct an investigation into fraud

perform an audit of operations

give consideration to consumers' concerns

secure the involvement / participation of students

upon the expiration of the time period

within 30 days following notification to farmers

make a/the recommendation that

contains a discussion of results

effect payment of EUR 10 000

bring about an improvement in quality

come to an agreement to the effect that

Law 485/2010 *on the amendment of* Law 22/2006

after *the setting up of* the Institute

introduce a ban on smoking

cause harm to consumers

bring about an increase in funding

proceed to the counting of the votes

provide a response to the complaint

The funding of projects *takes place* centrally.

Changes to the Law did not *come about*.

The project will be *subject to an evaluation*.

The practice of crop *rotation* is regular.



evaluate performance

investigate fraud

audit operations

consider consumers' concerns

involve students

when the time period *expires*

within 30 days after farmers *are notified*

recommend that

discusses results

pay EUR 10 000

improve quality

agree that

Law 485/2010 *amending* Law 22/2006

after the Institute *was set up*

ban smoking

harm consumers

increase funding

count the votes

respond to the complaint

Projects *are funded* centrally.

The Law was not *changed*.

The project will be *evaluated*.

Crops are regularly *rotated*.

This includes lists.

The project will achieve the following results:

- *creation of* contacts ...
- *preparation of* recommendations ...

Officers are responsible for tasks including:

- *supervision of* work ...
- *monitoring of* progress ...

The project will:

- *create* contacts ...
- *prepare* recommendations ...

Officers:

- *supervise* work ...
- *monitor* progress ...

Particularly avoid chains of abstract nouns.

This will *create the possibility of modifications of the methods of implementation of* the project.

The aim of the programme is the improvement of the effectiveness of the work of customs authorities *for the purpose of the protection of* EU interests.

This will *make it possible to change how* the project *is implemented*.

The programme *aims to help* customs authorities *protect* EU interests.

4. Prefer a gerund to an abstract noun.



the preservation of public health

by *the introduction of* a speed limit

the cost of *the provision of* a service

through the acquisition of new skills



preserving public health

by *introducing* a speed limit

the cost of *providing* a service

by acquiring new skills

Note that the gerund makes a noun phrase from an entire clause, not just a verb.

the taking of a decision

taking a decision

the building of an area of justice

building an area of justice

Thus, a simple gerund can often replace a pair of abstract nouns.

the submission of an application for a job

applying for a job

the development of a design for a project

designing a project

5. Prefer participles to relative clauses.



a project *which is* funded by the EU

a plan *which has been* approved by the Committee

the team *which is* planning the project

a staff member *who is* working part-time



a project funded by the EU /
an EU-funded project

a plan approved by the Committee

the team planning the project

a staff member working part-time

And eliminate participles entirely if appropriate.

a report *prepared / drawn up / written / submitted / issued / published* by our firm

a decision *taken / issued* by the Board

a plan *made / proposed / formulated* by the EU

a study *conducted* by the UN

a letter *sent / addressed* to Member States

a factory *located* in Warsaw

staff *working at / employed by* the Commission

an article *published / appearing* in a journal

a company *producing / manufacturing* clothing

a table *containing / showing / listing* results

a report *discussing / presenting* progress *made*

a programme *aimed at / serving / helping* children

methods *used in* planning aid

reasons *underlying* crime

a report by our firm

a decision by the Board / a Board decision

a plan by the EU / an EU plan

a study by the UN / a UN study

a letter to Member States

a factory in Warsaw

staff at the Commission / Commission staff

an article in a journal

a clothing company

a table *of* results

a report *on* progress / a progress report

a programme *for* children

ways *of* planning aid / *how* aid is planned

reasons *for* crime / *why* crime is committed

6. Use the passive voice sparingly.



An extension may *be requested by* any party.

This project *was rejected at* Commission *level*.

A meeting was held in Paris *between* A and B.

Inanimate subjects with animate verbs are fine.

In Article 20 *it is stated* ...

Institutional reform *is advocated in* the report.

The passive is appropriate in these sentences:



Any party may *request* an extension.

The Commission *rejected* the project.

A and B *met* in Paris.

Article 20 *states* ...

The report *advocates* institutional reform.

The team's findings *are detailed on* page 8.

These provisions may *be amended by* a decision of the Minister for Finance.

7. Consider replacing negatives with positives.



It is *not uncommon* for requests to be rejected.

It is *not excluded / not impossible* that we will fail.

The penalty shall be *not less than* EUR 10 000.

Failure to observe the rules is subject to a penalty.

The realisation of road work by workers who are *not certified is prohibited*.

The Commission *never acts without consulting* stakeholders.



It is *common* for requests to be rejected.

It is *(entirely) possible* that we will fail. / We *may (well)* fail.

The penalty shall be *at least* EUR 10 000.

Breach of the rules is subject to a penalty.

Road work *may* be performed *only by certified* road workers.

The Commission *always consults* stakeholders *before acting*.

8. Consider short forms and pronouns to avoid repeating full names ...



The Startup Financing Scheme grants loans to new businesses. In this way, *the Startup Financing Scheme* stimulates competition.

The Special Investigations Department of the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Welfare has investigated the allegations.



The Scheme grants loans to new businesses. In this way, *it* stimulates competition.

We have investigated the allegations.

... and instead of foreign or ad hoc abbreviations.

the National Institute for Quality and Organisational Development of Health Care and Medicines (*GYEMSZI*) ... *GYEMSZI* ...

the Financial Control Methodology and Internal Audit Department (*FCMIAD*) of the Ministry of Finance (*MF*) of the Slovak Republic (*SR*) ... the *FCMIAD MF SR* ...

the National Institute for Quality and Organisational Development of Health Care and Medicines ... *the Institute / it* ...

the Financial Control Methodology and Internal Audit Department of the Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic ... the *Department / it* ...

9. Express conditions, including hidden ones, with 'if' ...



in the event / case of a successful application

when / where a beneficiary fails to comply

provided that the application is received in time

in the event of a sale or transfer of the holding

should you need more information

A manufacturer *who* does not have a place of business in a Member State shall designate an authorised representative.

A proposal *which* does not comply with applicable legislation may be excluded.



if your application is accepted

if a beneficiary fails to comply

if the application is received in time

if the holding is sold or transferred

if you need more information

A manufacturer shall designate an authorised representative *if* it does not have a place of business in a Member State.

A proposal may be excluded *if* it does not comply with applicable legislation.

... entitlement with ‘may’...

Each owner *shall be entitled to* grant a licence to a third party to exploit the jointly owned results.

A beneficiary *is allowed to* use a simplified method for calculating eligible costs.

The negotiating body *shall have the right to* meet without the central management.

Each owner *may* grant a licence to a third party to exploit the jointly owned results.

A beneficiary *may* use a simplified method for calculating eligible costs.

The negotiating body *may* meet without the central management.

... and exceptions with ‘unless’ or ‘however’ (or ‘subject to’).

except where expressly authorised in this Annex

without prejudice to Article 2¹

Without prejudice to the aforementioned provisions, a licence is not required for ...

unless expressly authorised in this Annex

subject to / unless otherwise provided for in / without prejudice to Article 2

(However,) A licence is not required for ...

10. In general, cut out extra verbiage.



dockworkers *who have obtained the relevant authorisation to practise the profession of dockworker*

ensure *the suitability of the equipment used for the performance of work and its safety for use*

The cartel *'s purpose was to maintain prices at their prevailing, elevated level.*

Further to the letter by which the Commission asked our authorities to provide clarification of this matter, we would like to provide the following opinion.



authorised dockworkers

ensure *that* equipment *is suitable* and *safe*

The cartel *aimed to keep* prices *high.*

Please find enclosed our response to your request for more information on this matter.

¹ ‘Without prejudice to ...’ does exist in legal English, including EU law, but is used less than in other languages. Consider alternatives if uncertain.

It is not necessary that the Commission provide evidence of implementation of the agreement between the participants to fix prices, but only that it prove the existence of such an agreement.

Part of the responsibility of the responsible team leader is also the confirmation that the totality of the workers who compose the team are wearing a work uniform which ensures their safety at work.

The notice *seeks to increase understanding of the Commission's investigation process and thereby enhance the efficiency of investigations and ensure a high degree of transparency and predictability in the process.*

The compositions of the teams for the performance of every type of construction work may not deviate from those provided for in the legislation on the branch of construction workers.

'Cargo work' means loading *any good or item for transport or movement from the point of storage onto any means of transport or unloading from the means of transport to the point of storage.*

The Commission *must show* that the participants *agreed* to fix prices, *not* that *they actually did so.*

The team leader *must ensure* that *each* worker *on* the team is wearing a safety uniform.

The notice *explains* the Commission's investigation process *to ensure that it is efficient, transparent and predictable.*

Construction teams *must be composed as* provided for in *relevant* legislation.

'Cargo work' means moving *cargo* from *a place where it is stored* onto *a* means of transport or *vice versa.*

B. English prefers straightforward syntax.

11. Keep the subject close to the beginning of the sentence.



Under the agreement and subject to the call for proposals, *the Commission* shall fund the project.

If a party does not respond in time or if no agreement is reached within the maximum time period, *the Contracting Party* will consider the procedure to have failed.

As the provision which gave rise to the Commission's objections ceased to apply before the deadline for response, *the Commission's objections* are obsolete.



The Commission shall fund the project under the agreement and subject to the call for proposals.

The Contracting Party will consider the procedure to have failed if a party does not respond in time or if no agreement is reached within the maximum time period.

The provision which gave rise to the Commission's objections ceased to apply before the deadline for response. *Those objections* are therefore obsolete.

12. Avoid splitting up subjects, modals, verbs and direct objects.



The team *reported* to the Board *its findings*.

An applicant *may*, within 14 days, *contest* in writing *the Committee's decision*.

The Commission *shall*, if the proposal is approved, *fund* the project.

The judicial council *may*, by means of an order setting out the grounds for its decision, *extend* the investigation period.

The guidelines, from which the Commission may not depart without giving reasons, *lay down* the criteria for setting the amount of a fine.



The team *reported its findings* to the Board.

An applicant *may contest the Committee's decision* in writing within 14 days.

If the proposal is approved, the Commission *shall fund* the project.

The judicial council *may extend* the investigation period by means of an order setting out the grounds for its decision.

The guidelines lay down the criteria for setting the amount of a fine. The Commission must give reasons if it departs from the guidelines.

13. If a sentence is too long, pull information out into separate sentences.



Under the current system, if a manufacturer does not comply with the Regulation, the Ministry may, *taking account of the principle of proportionality*, withdraw the manufacturer's licence *unless it takes measures to ensure its compliance within a reasonable time*.



Under the current system, the Ministry may withdraw the licence of a manufacturer if it does not comply with the Regulation. *The Ministry must act proportionally. It need not act if the manufacturer takes measures to ensure its compliance within a reasonable time.*

But don't change sentence boundaries in legislation.

As a work-around, split with references and semicolons.

All documents must be sent, once evidence has been taken, to the prosecutor, *who*, within a period of one month, shall submit them to the court, *which*, within a period of one month, shall either reject the case or issue a court order, *even for* related offences, regardless of how serious they are, *when it* considers that there is no indication of one of the crimes in Article 1.

Once evidence has been taken, all documents must be sent to the prosecutor; *the prosecutor* has one month to submit the documents to the court; *the court* then has one month either to reject the case or to issue a court order; *this also applies to* related offences, regardless of how serious they are; *this provision does not apply if the court* considers that the case involves one of the crimes in Article 1.

14. Use topic-introducing phrases sparingly.



Concerning / When it comes to state aid, the speaker outlined his proposals.

As far as these goals *are concerned*, the report states that progress is being made.

When it comes to fighting disease, lives may depend on *it*.



The speaker outlined his proposals *on* state aid.

The report states that progress is being made *towards achieving* these goals.

Lives may depend on fighting disease.

C. English may use different number, articles, gender or words from other languages.

15. Keep uncountable nouns in the singular.



informations on EU policy

trainings for staff

aids to farmers

*actions*¹ to help students

the *impacts*¹ on health

professional *competences*¹

EU agricultural *policies*²

best agricultural *practices*²

training *materials*²

*crimes*² against EU interests



information on EU policy

training for staff

aid to farmers

action to help students

the *impact* on health

professional *competence*

EU agricultural *policy*

best agricultural *practice*

training *material(s)*

crime(s) against EU interests

¹ Words like 'actions', 'impacts' and 'competences' do appear in EU English, under influence from other languages.

² Some nouns, like 'policy', 'practice', 'material' and 'crime', can be countable or uncountable. Though the line is not always clear, they are countable referring to an individual concept and uncountable referring to a collective one.

16. Use ‘a’ rather than ‘the’ for members of a class.



The worker on *the* site should wear *the* uniform.

The application for *the* child to attend *the* school activity must be signed by *the* parent.



A worker on *a* site should wear *a* uniform.

An application for *a* child to attend *a* school activity must be signed by *a* parent.

If appropriate, use the singular for members of a class to avoid confusion.

Workers will receive *computers*.

Each worker will receive *a computer*.

Plumbers with professional *licences* may:

A plumber with *a* professional *licence* may:

Use ‘the’ rather than ‘this’ to refer back to a document.

Regulation 23/2000 ... *this* Regulation ...

Regulation 23/2000 ... *the* Regulation ...

(Use ‘this’ for the present document.)

17. Do not use gender pronouns for entities.



The contractor has announced *his* decision.

Any inaccuracies found in a producer’s file will disqualify *him or her*.



The contractor has announced *its* decision.

Any inaccuracies in a producer’s file will disqualify *the / that producer*.

18. Consider alternatives to ‘of’.



the largest lake *of* Italy

support *of* young people

officers *of* the crime division

a decision *of* the Court

participants *of* projects

staff *of* the company



the largest lake *in* Italy / Italy *'s* largest lake

support *for* young people

officers *in* the crime division

a decision *by* the Court / a Court decision

participants *in* projects / project participants

staff *at* the company / company staff

19. Finally, avoid ‘false friends’ in translation.



adequate mechanisms

an *attestation* of registration

in the case of Greece

ordinary *citizens*

projects *coherent* with sectoral priorities

The Commission *communicated*
its decision *to* the national authorities.

respect for national *competences*

This Regulation *completes* Regulation ...

consequent policy

Consumption is stable.

to *control* imports

to carry out a *control*

Criminality is on the rise.

to *deepen* relations

The *dossier* is closed.

Many *economic operators* have been hurt.

to *elaborate / formulate / establish* a plan

to *have a positive effect on* production

to *have a negative effect on* consumers

all *elements* of the process

to *exercise* a profession

to *exercise the profession of* lawyer



suitable / appropriate mechanisms

a *letter certifying / certificate of* registration

for Greece

ordinary *people / consumers / users*

projects *consistent* with sectoral priorities

The Commission *notified* the national
authorities *of* its decision.

respect for national *powers / jurisdiction*

This Regulation *supplements* Regulation ...

consistent policy

Consumer spending is stable.

to *check / verify / inspect / monitor* imports

to carry out a(n) *audit / check / inspection*

Crime is on the rise.

to *expand / improve* relations

The *issue / matter* is closed.

Many *businesses / traders* have been hurt.

to *draft / draw up / develop / produce* a plan

to *help / boost* production

to *hurt / harm / be detrimental to* consumers

all *aspects / items / stages* of the process

to *practise* a profession

to *work as a* lawyer

to *exploit* a farm
to *foresee* a ban
to *foresee* action
in the framework of the plan
heterogeneous conditions
illegal state aid
an *important* amount
informatics experts
an *information note*
to *intervene* at a meeting
EU *intervention*
to *introduce a demand* for aid
to provide *justification*
agricultural *material*
modalities for payment
a *negative evolution* in trade
the economic *perspective*
to *realise* a project
to invite *reflection*
to *reinforce* transparency

to *represent an actor for* change
to *respect / adhere to* conditions
sickness insurance
to *transmit* a report

to *run / operate* a farm
to *provide for / impose* a ban
to *envisage / plan / contemplate* action
as part of / under the plan
uneven / disparate conditions
unlawful state aid
a *large / significant* amount
IT / ICT / computer experts
a *memo / letter*
to *speak / take the floor* at a meeting
EU *activity / projects / action / involvement*
to *apply* for aid
to provide *evidence / an explanation*
agricultural *supplies / equipment*
arrangements for payment
a *downturn / decrease / drop* in trade
the economic *prospects / outlook*
to *implement, carry out, complete* a project
to invite *discussion / debate / thought*
to *enhance / improve / increase / heighten*
transparency
to *help bring about* change
to *comply with / fulfil / meet* conditions
health insurance
to *send* a report

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