



This series was written by Writing Tip Wednesday reader **Rick Hull**. Rick has been a health communications specialist with the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion's (NCCDPHP's) Office of the Director for 36 years, many of them as a writer-editor. He is NCCDPHP's clearance coordinator and branding ambassador, CDC's logo-licensing and co-branding coordinator, and a reviewer in CDC's system logos clearance.

His favorite quotation is "Great ideas are hogwash. Style and structure are the essence of great writing." —Vladimir Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*

Deadly Sin #4: Noun Strings

Another regrettable feature of scientific writing, a noun string is exactly what the name implies. It's three or more nouns in a row—a compound noun gone mad. In a noun string, the first nouns end up turning into adjectives, making things difficult to read. But if you train yourself to recognize them, they're not hard to fix. [Avoid Noun Strings](#) (from Plainlanguage.gov) provides some helpful tips.

Example:

These outcomes are clearly influenced by certain behaviors (i.e., taking pregnancy prevention actions).

Revision:

These outcomes are clearly influenced by certain behaviors (i.e., taking actions to prevent pregnancy).

Even better revision:

Certain behaviors (i.e., avoiding pregnancy) clearly influence these outcomes.

Example:

The report analyzes a diabetes in pregnancy adverse outcome prevention program.

Revision:

The report analyzes a program for preventing adverse outcomes from diabetes during pregnancy.