

Memorandum

To: Brian Malone
From: Collin Heist
Date: January 13th, 2019
Subject: Grammatical Analysis of *Choosing the Perfect Dog*

I have finished analyzing my piece, *Choosing the Perfect Dog*, as you requested. I outline my findings below, but I have broken up the analysis into the following four parts: concision, precision, directness, and noticeable errors.

Concision

Concise writing is brief in length, but comprehensive in substance. I looked at my writing for the common problems of unnecessary repetition, dead phrases, and auxiliary modifiers.

Unnecessary Repetition. As a whole, I believe my writing is generally concise. For the most part, I was unable to find many cases of dead phrases or auxiliary modifiers. I cannot say the same about unnecessary repetition, as I found *many* examples of overused phrases / words.

One of the worst cases of unnecessary repetition in my writing was the following passage:

“The general premise is to rank the attributes themselves (usually through pairwise comparisons) in order to understand which attribute is the most important. From there, the alternative with the best most-important attribute is deemed to be the winner... In order to rank the attributes, I’ve included a table that shows how each attribute fares when compared to the other attributes.”

Although the word “attribute” is a necessary technical word, I should have either reworded my sentences to avoid using it in such quick succession, or used synonyms throughout this paragraph in particular. By not addressing this repetition, the natural flow of this paragraph is damaged. There are, of course, other repeated phrases and words throughout this piece, but a similar solution would resolve each of these cases as well.

Dead Phrases. As mentioned, I largely avoided the pitfalls of dead phrases in my writing, but I was able to identify at least one case, and it's shown below:

"Dominance is, by far (in my opinion), the most straightforward method to make a decision based on multiple attributes."

Reading this piece back it is quite clear that in my attempt to make the writing more 'natural' sounding and less direct, I inadvertently added this dead phrase. Given both the context of the piece, and that it is written in first person, it is assumed that all of the presented information is *my opinion*, making that statement entirely unnecessary. If I wanted to avoid the direct tone of outright stating that *"Dominance is the most straightforward method,"* I could simply reword the sentence.

Precision

Use only technical terminology that works for the audience, check for consistent term usage, check if the level of specifics and detail were appropriate for audience needs

To be precise means to be exact and accurate. The necessary amounts of exactness and accuracy change with your audience, so in my case my initial audience was my Economics professor. I looked for consistent term usage, and the correct level of specifics and details for my audience.

Consistent Term Usage. Overall, I was very consistent throughout this paper. The only instance of inconsistency I was able to find was the following:

"...due to not meeting the criteria is the pomeranian husky breed, for costing too much."

Through the rest of the paper I treated each of the dog breed's as proper nouns, capitalizing each word. Yet, here I was inconsistent and forgot to do the same. Luckily, this is both quite a simple fix (capitalize the letters) and the only spot I identified throughout my paper.

Specifics and Details. For the most part, I used the correct level of specificity throughout the paper. Due to the high technical expertise of my audience, my language is primarily appropriate, except for the following instance where I should have used *more detail*:

“For quantitative attributes such as cost, cuteness, size and trainability, this is simple (the values are already ranged, they just need to be scaled between zero and one).”

For a paper as technical as this one, I should have explained *how* I scaled each attribute between zero and one, rather than just saying that it was done. Explaining this methodology would remove the ambiguity of my work, and provide the appropriate level of precision.

Directness

Directness is defined as being straightforward. For the purpose of this analysis, I looked at my use of active verbs and voice, and the clarity / directness of my topic sentences and stress positions throughout this piece.

Active Verbs and Voice. Even though active writing is not *inherently* better than passive writing, I did notice a few instances where I used passive verbs or voice when their active alternatives would have added more energy to my writing. For example:

“Here, a problem with these non-compensatory comparison methods is highlighted.”

As said before, there is nothing outright wrong with the way this passage is written, but it does fail to truly emphasize the subject of the sentence. If rewritten using active verbs, the true intention of the sentence (and in turn the rest of the paragraph) would become a lot more clear.

Topic Sentences and Stress Positions. Although the implementation of these two are entirely opposite (one at the beginning of the sentence / paragraph, the other the end), they both produce very direct writing when used correctly.

I was able to identify at least one instance of each of these in my writing, the following is a very poor topic sentence:

“Lexicography is one of the more involved analysis methods. The general premise is to rank the attributes themselves...”

Although this *technically* introduces the topic I wrote about (lexicography) it does nothing to introduce my audience to the actual substance of lexicography, only its

complexity. I could easily combine the two sentences into one and provide a more thorough introduction to the topic being discussed.

Similarly, the following poorly emphasized stress position should also be changed to be more direct:

“For the sake of future analyses I will ignore the fact that the American Eskimo is an outright ‘inferior’ choice, and continue with all alternatives.”

This is a particularly poor use of the stress position because it not only ends the sentence on a ‘weak’ note, but the paragraph / topic as a whole. Rather than stating how this particular analysis method will be used independently of the rest, I should have ended this section with a summarization of the analysis method itself.

An effective rework of this would be to place this sentence at another point in the paragraph entirely, and instead place a more direct sentence in its place.

Noticeable Errors

Aside from the previously addressed issues regarding conciseness, precision, and directness, I identified a few additional errors in my writing. The first was a small typo, where I simply forgot an end parenthesis:

“I’ve included a table that shows how each attribute fairs when compared to the other attributes (in my opinion”

The fix is quite clear, I just need to add the necessary “)”. Although, as addressed in my section on conciseness, the entire “in my opinion” phrase is superfluous and should be removed.

Another, more grammatically centered error is as follows:

“The final analysis technique I’ll be looking at is additive weighting. I view this method as a combination of lexicography and non-dimensional scaling and summation.”

Rather than repeating ‘and’ multiple times in this sentence, ruining the flow of the list, I should have simply used commas to separate each part of the list and removed one of the offending ands.

Conclusion

To me, it is quite clear that the greatest weakness of my writing is concision. I found many instances of repeated words, and quite a few dead phrases scattered throughout the piece (more than just those highlighted here). As a goal, I'll just need to be more vigilant about identifying these errors in my writing, and using the appropriate means to correct them.