1. Concise writing

Concise writing

Clear

Concise

Accurate

When writing your manuscript, be as brief as possible without omitting essential details. **Keep it simple!** Simple language is usually clearer; it is more precise and concise than complex language. Though you will often be describing something that is sophisticated, using unnecessarily complicated language will confuse the reader and weaken your message.

Ways to keep your manuscript clear, concise, and precise:

Only **one idea** per sentence

Use the **active voice**, not the passive voice, when possible

Delete **unnecessary or vague words** and replace them with more specific words

Avoid **circular sentences and redundancies**

The goal of concise writing is to use the most effective words. Concise writing does not always have the fewest words, but it always uses the strongest ones. Writers often fill sentences with weak or unnecessary words that can be deleted or replaced. Words and phrases should be deliberately chosen for the work they are doing. Like bad employees, words that don't accomplish enough should be fired. When only the most effective words remain, writing will be far more concise and readable. Below resources contains general conciseness tips followed by very specific strategies for pruning sentences.

1.1. Paramedic Method: A Lesson in Writing Concisely

Summary:

Below are the steps and exercises to eliminate wordiness at the sentence level.

Use the Paramedic Method (originally developed by Richard Lanham in *Revising Prose*) to edit any kind of professional writing. Editing your professional writing using the Paramedic Method will make your prose easier to read. Sentences that are easy to read are more persuasive and more user-centered. When you use the Paramedic Method, you will reduce your word count by eliminating unnecessary words. The Paramedic Method also helps you activate your sentences by eliminating passive voice and redundancies. The Paramedic Method is an easy to learn, systematic way to make your sentences more persuasive and more user-centered.

Follow the seven steps below to improve the readability of your sentences.

The Paramedic Method:

Circle the prepositions (of, in, about, for, onto, into)

Draw a box around the "is" verb forms

Ask, "Where's the action?"

Change the "action" into a simple verb

Move the doer into the subject (Who's kicking whom)

Eliminate any unnecessary slow wind-ups

Eliminate any redundancies.

Exercise:

Use the Paramedic Method in the sentences below to practice making your sentences more concise.

1. The point I wish to make is that the employees working at this company are in

need of a much better manager of their money.

2. It is widely known that the engineers at Sandia Labs have become active participants in the Search and Rescue operations in most years.

3. After reviewing the results of your previous research, and in light of the relevant information found within the context of the study, there is ample evidence for making important, significant changes to our operating procedures.

Example Concise Solutions:

A1. Employees at this company need a better money manager.
(Original word count: 26. New word count: 10).

A2. In recent years, engineers at Sandia Labs have participated in the Search and Rescue operations. (Original word count: 24. New word count: 16).

A3. After reviewing the results of your research, and within the context of the study, we find evidence supporting significant changes in our operating procedures. (Original word count: 36. New word count: 25).

1.2. Reverse Paramedic Method

This will help you write clear, concise sentences while remaining in the passive voice. Passive voice is used quite often in scientific writing. The original exercise helps people recognize wordy sentences written in the passive voice. This adaptation reverses one purpose of the activity and assists in recognizing and implementing

passive voice, which is often used in scientific writing. This reverse method should still help writers make sentence less wordy and more concise.

Lets first learn the following grammar concepts:

1. Preposition: A preposition is any word or group of words that relates a noun or pronoun to another word in a sentence. Some common prepositions: about, after, among, behind, down up, from, of, off, past, before, underneath, with, above, during, beyond, in, since, until, within, according to, along, at beside, by except, into, on, through, up, without, across, amid, before, besides, concerning, for, like, over toward, upon.

2. "To be" or "is" verbs: These words describe the "states of being" of people or things in a sentence. Examples: is, was, has been, will be, are, become.

3. The "action" of the sentence: The action of the sentence describes what who is doing what to whom. For example, in the following sentence, the action would be "placed:" The team placed the gyroscope laterally.

4. The subject: The subject of the sentence is the person or thing doing the action. In the following sentence, the subject is "the team." "The team placed the gyroscope laterally."

5. The object: The object of the sentence is the person or thing being affected by the action. In our sentence, the object is "the gyroscope". "The team placed the gyroscope laterally."

6. Windups: Windups are phrases, usually prepositional phrases, that set up an idea to be expressed in a sentence. Some windups are necessary or important to the meaning of the sentences they introduce, but others just make sentences wordy or unnecessarily complex. Deciding whether a windup is necessary or not depends on the context.

Examples of windups:

"According to the results…"

"In the next part of the lab…"

"In order to understand X concept…"

7. Redundancies: redundancies are patterns or words that are repeated in a sentence. Using redundancies leads to awkward and lengthy sentences, which can make your sentences and your ideas hard to understand. The following sentence contains redundancies (was conducted, with):

"The experiment was conducted at 1330 GMT and was conducted with an increased basal rate with a double bolus."

Eliminating redundancies reduces word count and makes sentences easier to understand:

"The experiment was conducted at 1330 GMT using an increased basal rate and a double bolus."

8. Active and passive voice: Active voice is a structure of writing that emphasizes the doer and uses active verbs rather than forms of the verb "to be" (see above).

Here is an example of a sentence written in active voice:

"Morgan Latour attended the baseball game."

The sentence above is constructed in the subject-verb-object pattern. Note that the doer (Morgan) precedes the verb (went).

Passive voice emphasizes the object rather than the subject and may even use past tense. Passive voice is usually used in scientific writing because the emphasis is placed on what was done rather than on who did it. Here is an example of the same sentence written in passive voice:

"The baseball game was attended by Morgan Latour."

In some cases, the doer is not even mentioned in scientific writing:

"The experiment was conducted at 1330 GMT."

Once you understand these basic concepts, continue on to the exercises. The purpose of this exercise is to learn how to emphasize the experiment rather than the researchers.

Procedure for the Reverse Paramedic Method:

Circle the prepositions. Eliminate any unnecessary prepositions.

Identify any references to the researchers (the doer).

Replace references to the researchers with a passive construction that emphasizes the experiment (what was done).

Eliminate any unnecessary slow wind-ups.

Eliminate any redundancies.

Example:

Original: In the following experiment, we used the feline cell line, W9, to evaluate cell growth in the presence of the growth factor.

Revised: The feline cell line W9 was used to evaluate cell growth in the presence of growth factor.

Exercises: Please write the below sentences in passive voice.

Original: During the procedure, we cultured the cells for 48 hours in media that we

modified with 78, 80, 90, and 110 ng/mL BMP.

Revised:

Original: At 48 hours, we harvested cells from the cell culture dish and counted. We used a hemocytometer.

Revised:

1.3. Replace several vague words with more powerful and specific words.

Often, writers use several small and ambiguous words to express a concept, wasting energy expressing ideas better relayed through fewer specific words. As a general rule, more specific words lead to more concise writing. Because of the variety of nouns, verbs, and adjectives, most things have a closely corresponding description. Brainstorming or searching a thesaurus can lead to the word best suited for a specific instance.

Example: Notice that the examples below actually convey more as they drop in word count.

Wordy: The politician talked **about several of the merits of** after-school programs in his speech

(14 words)

Concise: The politician **touted** after-school programs in his speech.

(8 words)

Exercises: Rewrite the below wordy sentences in a more concise form.

Wordy: Suzie **believed but could not confirm** that Billy **had feelings of affection for** her.

(14 words)

Concise:

(6 words)

Wordy: Our Web site **has made available many of the things you can use for making a decision on** the best dentist.

(20 words)

Concise:

(9 words)

Wordy: Working as a **pupil under someone who develops photos** was an experience **that really helped me learn a lot**.

(20 words)

Concise:

(10 words)

1.4. Interrogate every word in a sentence

Check every word to make sure that it is providing something important and unique to a sentence. If words are dead weight, they can be deleted or replaced. Other sections in this handout cover this concept more specifically, but there are some general examples below containing sentences with words that could be cut.

Example:

Wordy: The teacher demonstrated some of the various ways and methods for cutting words from my essay that I had written for class.

(22 words)

Concise: The teacher demonstrated methods for cutting words from my essay.

(10 words)

Exercises: Rewrite the below sentences more concisely.

Wordy: Eric Clapton and Steve Winwood formed a new band of musicians together in 1969, giving it the ironic name of Blind Faith because early speculation that was spreading everywhere about the band suggested that the new musical group would be good enough to rival the earlier bands that both men had been in, Cream and Traffic, which people had really liked and had been very popular.

(66 words)

Concise:

(32 words)

Wordy: Many have made the wise observation that when a stone is in motion rolling down a hill or incline that that moving stone is not as likely to be covered all over with the kind of thick green moss that grows on stationary unmoving things and becomes a nuisance and suggests that those things haven't moved in a long time and probably won't move any time soon.

(67 words)

Concise:

(6 words)

1.5. Combine Sentences.

Some information does not require a full sentence, and can easily be inserted into

another sentence without losing any of its value. To get more strategies for sentence combining, see the handout on Sentence Variety.

Example:

Wordy: Ludwig's castles are an astounding marriage of beauty and madness. By his death, he had commissioned **three castles**.

(18 words)

Concise: Ludwig's **three castles** are an astounding marriage of beauty and madness.

(11 words)

Exercise: Write the below wordy sentences in a more concise form.

Wordy: The supposed crash of a UFO in Roswell, New Mexico aroused interest in extraterrestrial life. This crash is rumored to have occurred in **1947**.

(24 words)

Concise:

(16 words)

1.6. Eliminating Words

Summary:

This resource will help you write clearly by eliminating unnecessary words and rearranging your phrases.

1.6.1. Eliminate words that explain the obvious or provide excessive detail

Always consider readers while drafting and revising writing. If passages explain or describe details that would already be obvious to readers, delete or reword them. Readers are also very adept at filling in the non-essential aspects of a narrative.

Example:

Wordy: I received your inquiry that you wrote about tennis rackets yesterday, and read it thoroughly. Yes, we do have. . .

(19 words)

Concise:

(12 words)

Exercises with concise solutions:

Wordy: It goes without saying that we are acquainted with your policy on filing tax returns, and we have every intention of complying with the regulations that you have mentioned.

(29 words)

Concise:

(12 words)

Wordy: Imagine a mental picture of someone engaged in the intellectual activity of trying to learn what the rules are for how to play the game of chess.

(27 words)

Concise:

(9 words)

Wordy: After booking a ticket to Dallas from a travel agent, I packed my bags and arranged for a taxi to the airport. Once there, I checked in, went through security, and was ready to board. But problems beyond my control led to a three-hour delay before takeoff.

(47 words)

Concise:

(9 words)

Wordy: Baseball, one of our oldest and most popular outdoor summer sports in terms of total attendance at ball parks and viewing on television, has the kind of rhythm of play on the field that alternates between times when players passively wait with no action taking place between the pitches to the batter and then times when they explode into action as the batter hits a pitched ball to one of the players and the player fields it.

(77 words)

Concise:

(11 words)

1.6.2. Eliminate unnecessary determiners and modifiers

Writers sometimes clog up their prose with one or more extra words or phrases that seem to determine narrowly or to modify the meaning of a noun but don't actually add to the meaning of the sentence. Although such words and phrases can be meaningful in the appropriate context, they are often used as "filler" and can easily

be eliminated.

Example:

Wordy: Any particular type of dessert is fine with me.

(9 words)

Concise:

(6 words)

Exercises:

Wordy: Balancing the budget by Friday is an impossibility without some kind of extra help.

(14 words)

Concise:

(10 words)

Wordy: For all intents and purposes, American industrial productivity generally depends on certain factors that are really more psychological in kind than of any given technological aspect.

(26 words)

Concise:

(11 words)

Here's a list of some words and phrases that can often be pruned away to make sentences clearer:

   kind of

   sort of

type of

really

basically

for all intents and purposes

definitely

actually

generally

individual

specific

particular

1.6.3. Omit repetitive wording

Watch for phrases or longer passages that repeat words with similar meanings. Words that don't build on the content of sentences or paragraphs are rarely necessary.

Example:

Wordy: I would appreciate it if you would bring to the attention of your drafting officers the administrator's dislike of long sentences and paragraphs in messages to the field and in other items drafted for her signature or approval, as well as in all correspondence, reports, and studies. Please encourage your section to keep their sentences short.

(56 words)

Concise: Please encourage your drafting officers to keep sentences and paragraphs in letters, reports, and studies short. Dr. Lomas, the administrator, has mentioned that reports and memos drafted for her approval recently have been wordy and thus

time-consuming.

(37 words)

Wordy: The supply manager considered the correcting typewriter an unneeded luxury.

(10 words)

Concise:

(9 words)

Wordy: Our branch office currently employs five tellers. These tellers do an excellent job Monday through Thursday but cannot keep up with the rush on Friday and Saturday.

(27 words)

Concise:

(25 words)

1.6.4. Omit redundant pairs

Many pairs of words imply each other. Finish implies complete, so the phrase completely finish is redundant in most cases.

So are many other pairs of words:

   past memories

   various differences

   each individual

basic fundamentals

true facts

important essentials

future plans

terrible tragedy

end result

final outcome

free gift

past history

unexpected surprise

sudden crisis

A related expression that's not redundant as much as it is illogical is "very unique." Since unique means "one of a kind," adding modifiers of degree such as "very," "so," "especially," "somewhat," "extremely," and so on is illogical. One-of-a-kind-ness has no gradations; something is either unique or it is not.

Exercise:

Wordy: Before the travel agent was completely able to finish explaining the various differences among all of the many very unique vacation packages his travel agency was offering, the customer changed her future plans.

(33 words)

Concise

(23 words)

1.6.5. Omit redundant categories

Specific words imply their general categories, so we usually don't have to state both. We know that a period is a segment of time, that pink is a color, that shiny is an appearance.

In each of the following phrases, the general category term can be dropped, leaving just the specific descriptive word:

  large in size

  often times

  of a bright color

  heavy in weight

  period in time

  round in shape

  at an early time

  economics field

  of cheap quality

  honest in character

  of an uncertain condition

  in a confused state

  unusual in nature

  extreme in degree

  of a strange type

Exercises:

Wordy: During that time period, many car buyers preferred cars that were pink in color and shiny in appearance.

(18 words)

Concise:

(10 words)

Wordy: The microscope revealed a group of organisms that were round in shape and peculiar in nature.

(16 words)

Concise: (9 words)

1.7. Changing Phrases

Summary:

This resource will help you write clearly by eliminating unnecessary words and rearranging your phrases.

1.7.1. Change phrases into single-words and adjectives

Using phrases to convey meaning that could be presented in a single word contributes to wordiness. Convert phrases into single words when possible.

Example:

Wordy: The employee with ambition... (4 words)

Concise: The ambitious employee... (3 words)

Exercises:

Wordy: The department showing the best performance... (6 words)

Concise: (4 words)

Wordy: Jeff Converse, our chief of consulting, suggested at our last board meeting the installation of microfilm equipment in the department of data processing. (23 words)

Concise:

(20 words)

Wordy: We read the letter we received yesterday and reviewed it thoroughly.

Concise:

(8 words)

Wordy: As you carefully read what you have written to improve your wording and catch small errors of spelling, punctuation, and so on, the thing to do before you do anything else is to try to see where a series of words expressing action could replace the ideas found in nouns rather than verbs. (53 words)

Concise:

(13 words)

1.7.2. Change unnecessary that, who, and which clauses into phrases

Using a clause to convey meaning that could be presented in a phrase or even a word contributes to wordiness. Convert modifying clauses into phrases or single words when possible.

Example:

Wordy: The report, which was released recently... (6 words)

Concise: The recently released report... (4 words)

Exercises:

Wordy: All applicants who are interested in the job must... (9 words)

Concise: (4 words)

Wordy: The system that is most efficient and accurate... (8 words)

Concise: (6 words)

1.7.3. Change Passive Verbs into Active Verbs

See our document on active and passive voice for a more thorough explanation of this topic.

Example:

Wordy: An account was opened by Mrs. Simms. (7 words)

Concise: Mrs. Simms opened an account. (5 words)

Exercise:

Wordy: Your figures were checked by the research department. (8 words)

Concise: (6 words)

2. Avoid Common Pitfalls

2.1. Avoid overusing expletives at the beginning of sentences

Expletives are phrases of the form *it* + *be*-verb or *there* + *be*-verb. Such expressions can be rhetorically effective for emphasis in some situations, but overuse or unnecessary use of expletive constructions creates wordy prose. Take the following

example: "It is imperative that we find a solution." The same meaning could be expressed with this more succinct wording: "We must find a solution." But using the expletive construction allows the writer to emphasize the urgency of the situation by placing the word imperative near the beginning of the sentence, so the version with the expletive may be preferable.

Still, you should generally avoid excessive or unnecessary use of expletives. The most common kind of unnecessary expletive construction involves an expletive followed by a noun and a relative clause beginning with *that*, *which*, or *who*. In most cases, concise sentences can be created by eliminating the expletive opening, making the noun the subject of the sentence, and eliminating the relative pronoun.

Example:

Wordy: It is the governor who signs or vetoes bills. (9 words)

Concise: The governor signs or vetoes bills. (6 words)

Exercises:

Wordy: There are four rules that should be observed: ... (8 words)

Concise: (5 words)

Wordy: There was a big explosion, which shook the windows, and people ran into the street. (15 words)

Concise: (12 words)

2.2. Avoid overusing noun forms of verbs

Use verbs when possible rather than noun forms known as **nominalizations**. Sentences with many nominalizations usually have forms of *be* as the main verbs. Using the action verbs disguised in nominalizations as the main verbs—instead of forms of *be*—can help to create engaging rather than dull prose.

Example:

Wordy: The function of this department is the collection of accounts. (10 words)

Concise: This department collects accounts. (4 words)

Exercise:

Wordy: The current focus of the medical profession is disease prevention. (10 words)

Concise: _____ (8 words)

2.3. Avoid unnecessary infinitive phrases

Some infinitive phrases can be converted into finite verbs or brief noun phrases. Making such changes also often results in the replacement of a *be*-verb with an action verb.

Example:

Wordy: The duty of a clerk is to check all incoming mail and to record it. (15 words)

Concise: A clerk checks and records all incoming mail. (8 words)

Exercise:

Wordy: A shortage of tellers at our branch office on Friday and Saturday during rush

hours has caused customers to become dissatisfied with service. (23 words)

Concise:

<center>(18 words)</center>

2.4. Avoid circumlocutions in favor of direct expressions

Circumlocutions are commonly used roundabout expressions that take several words to say what could be said more succinctly. We often overlook them because many such expressions are habitual figures of speech. In writing, though, they should be avoided since they add extra words without extra meaning. Of course, occasionally you may for rhetorical effect decide to use, say, an expletive construction instead of a more succinct expression. These guidelines should be taken as general recommendations, not absolute rules.

Example:

Wordy: At this/that point in time... (2/4 words)

Concise: Now/then... (1 word)

Exercise:

Wordy: In accordance with your request... (5 words)

Concise: (3 words)

Below are some other words which may simplify lengthier circumlocutions.

  "because," "since," "why" =

       the reason for

       for the reason that

       owing/due to the fact that

in light of the fact that

considering the fact that

on the grounds that

this is why

"when" =

on the occasion of

in a situation in which

under circumstances in which

"about" =

as regards

in reference to

with regard to

concerning the matter of

where _____ is concerned

"must," "should" =

it is crucial that

it is necessary that

there is a need/necessity for

it is important that

cannot be avoided

"can" =

is able to

has the opportunity to

has the capacity for

has the ability to

"may," "might," "could" =

it is possible that

there is a chance that

it could happen that

the possibility exists for

Example:

Wordy: It is possible that nothing will come of these preparations. (10 words)

Concise: (6 words)

Exercises:

Wordy: She has the ability to influence the outcome. (8 words)

Concise: (5 words)

Wordy: It is necessary that we take a stand on this pressing issue. (12 words)

Concise: (9 words)

3. Sentence Types

Summary:

This resource presents methods for adding sentence variety and complexity to writing that may sound repetitive or boring. Sections are divided into general tips for varying structure, a discussion of sentence types, and specific parts of speech which can aid in sentence variety.

Structurally, English sentences can be classified four different ways, though there are endless constructions of each. The classifications are based on the number of independent and dependent clauses a sentence contains. An independent clause forms a complete sentence on its own, while a dependent clause needs another clause to make a complete sentence. By learning these types, writers can add

complexity and variation to their sentences.

3.1.Simple sentence: A sentence with one independent clause and no dependent clauses.

Examples:

My aunt enjoyed taking the hayride with you.

China's Han Dynasty marked an official recognition of Confucianism.

Exercise: Write a simple sentence below.

3.2. Compound Sentence: A sentence with multiple independent clauses but no dependent clauses.

Examples:

The clown frightened the little girl, and she ran off screaming.

The Freedom Riders departed on May 4, 1961, and they were determined to travel

through many southern states.

Exercise: Write a compound sentence below.

3.3. Complex Sentence: A sentence with one independent clause and at least one dependent clause.

Examples:

After Mary added up all the sales, she discovered that the lemonade stand was 32

cents short

While all of his paintings are fascinating, Hieronymus Bosch's triptychs, full of

mayhem and madness, are the real highlight of his art.

Exercise: Write a complex sentence below.

3.4. Complex-Compound Sentence: A sentence with multiple independent clauses and at least one dependent clause.

Example:

Catch-22 is widely regarded as Joseph Heller's best novel, and because Heller served in World War II, which the novel satirizes, the zany but savage wit of the novel packs an extra punch.

Exercise: Write a complex-compound sentence below.

4. Linking Short, Choppy Sentences

Summary:

This resource presents methods for adding sentence variety and complexity to writing that may sound repetitive or boring. Sections are divided into general tips for varying structure, a discussion of sentence types, and specific parts of speech, which can aid in sentence variety.

If your writing contains lots of short sentences that give it a choppy rhythm, consider these tips.

4.1.1. Combine Sentences With Conjunctions:

Join complete sentences, clauses, and phrases with conjunctions:

and, but, or, nor, yet, for, so

Example: Doonesbury cartoons satirize contemporary politics. Readers don't always find this funny. They demand that newspapers not carry the strip.

Revision: Doonesbury cartoons laugh at contemporary politicians, but readers don't always find this funny and demand that newspapers not carry the strip.

4.1.2. Link Sentences Through Subordination:

Link two related sentences to each other so that one carries the main idea and the other is no longer a complete sentence (subordination). Use connectors such as the ones listed below to show the relationship.

after, although, as, as if, because, before, even if, even though, if, if only, rather than, since, that, though, unless, until, when, where, whereas, wherever, whether, which, while

Example:

Original: The campus parking problem is getting worse. The university is not building any new garages.

Revision: The campus parking problem is getting worse because the university is not building any new garages.

Exercise:

Original: The US has been highly dependent on foreign oil for many years. Alternate sources of energy are only now being sought.

Revision:

Notice in these examples that the location of the clause beginning with the dependent marker (the connector word) is flexible. This flexibility can be useful in creating varied rhythmic patterns over the course of a paragraph.

4.2. For Repeated Subjects or Topics

Summary:

This resource presents methods for adding sentence variety and complexity to writing that may sound repetitive or boring. Sections are divided into general tips for varying structure, a discussion of sentence types, and specific parts of speech which can aid in sentence variety. Handling the same topic for several sentences can lead to repetitive sentences. When that happens, consider using these parts of speech to fix the problem.

4.2.1. Relative pronouns

Embed one sentence inside the other using a clause starting with one of the relative pronouns listed below.

which, who, whoever, whom, that, whose

Example:

Original: Indiana used to be mainly an agricultural state. It has recently attracted more industry.

Revision: Indiana, which used to be mainly an agricultural state, has recently attracted more industry.

Exercises:

Example: One of the cameras was not packed very well. It was damaged during the move.

Revision:

Example: The experiment failed because of Murphy's Law. This law states that if something can go wrong, it will.

Revision:

Example: Doctor Ramirez specializes in sports medicine. She helped my cousin recover from a basketball injury.

Revision 1:

Revision 2:

4.2.2. Participles

Eliminate a be verb (am, is, was, were, are) and substitute a participle:

Present participles end in -ing, for example: speaking, carrying, wearing, dreaming.

Past participles usually end in -ed, -en, -d, -n, or -t but can be irregular, for example: worried, eaten, saved, seen, dealt, taught.

Example: Wei Xie was surprised to get a phone call from his sister. He was happy to hear her voice again.

Revision 1: Wei Xie, surprised to get a phone call from his sister, was happy to hear her voice again.

Revision 2: Surprised to get a phone call from his sister, Wei Xie was happy to hear her voice again.

4.2.3. Prepositions

Turn a sentence into a prepositional phrase using one of the words below:

about, above, across, after, against, along, among, around, as, behind, below, beneath, beside, between, by, despite, down, during, except, for, from, in, inside, near, next to, of, off, on, out, over, past, to, under, until, up, with

Example: The university has been facing pressure to cut its budget. It has eliminated funding for important programs. (two independent clauses)

Revision: Under pressure to cut its budget, the university has eliminated funding for important programs. (prepositional phrase, independent clause)

Exercise: Billy snuck a cookie from the dessert table. This was against his mother's wishes.

Revision:

4.3. For Similar Sentence Patterns or Rhythms

Summary:

This resource presents methods for adding sentence variety and complexity to writing that may sound repetitive or boring. Sections are divided into general tips for varying structure, a discussion of sentence types, and specific parts of speech which can aid in sentence variety. When several sentences have similar patterns or rhythms, try using the following kinds of words to shake up the writing.

4.3.1. Dependent markers

Put clauses and phrases with the listed dependent markers at the beginning of some sentences instead of starting each sentence with the subject:

after, although, as, as if, because, before, even if, even though, if, in order to, since, though, unless, until, whatever, when, whenever, whether, and while

Example: The room fell silent when the TV newscaster reported the story of the earthquake.

Revision: When the TV newscaster reported the story of the earthquake, the room fell silent.

Exercise: Thieves made off with Edvard Munch's *The Scream* before police could stop them.

Revision:

4.3.2. Transitional words and phrases

Vary the rhythm by adding transitional words at the beginning of some sentences:

accordingly, after all, afterward, also, although, and, but, consequently, despite, earlier, even though, for example, for instance, however, in conclusion, in contrast, in fact, in the meantime, in the same way, indeed, just as... so, meanwhile,

moreover, nevertheless, not only... but also, now, on the contrary, on the other hand, on the whole, otherwise, regardless, shortly, similarly, specifically, still, that is, then, therefore, though, thus, yet

Example: Fast food corporations are producing and advertising bigger items and high-fat combination meals. The American population faces a growing epidemic of obesity.

Revision: Fast food corporations are producing and advertising bigger items and high-fat combination meals. Meanwhile, the American population faces a growing epidemic of obesity.

4.3.3. Comparisons (between, among, like, with, than)

Comparisons are frequently made in the Results sections of papers. When making a comparison, remember to:

Compare "like" with "like"

Avoid being vague – be as specific as possible

Words such as "reduced," "increased," and "decreased" can only be used to compare something to the way it was before, not to compare two different things. To compare two different things (e.g., groups of patients), use words such as "higher," "shorter," or "more"

Use "between" when comparing two things, but "among" for comparisons of more than two things

Examples:

BAD: The material from the riverbank was compared *with* the landfill.

GOOD: The material from the riverbank was compared *with that from* the landfill.

It doesn't make sense to compare material to a landfill. Instead, we need to compare like with like – that is, material from the riverbank with material from the landfill.

GOOD: Expression levels of p53 in smokers were compared *with* p53 levels in non-smokers.

BETTER: Expression levels of p53 in smokers were compared *with those in* non-smokers.

Here "those" means "expression levels of p53." It's best not to repeat the same words in a sentence, since it can bore readers.

BAD: Reactions with the new machine were faster.

GOOD: Reactions with the new machine were faster *than those with* the old machine.

The first sentence makes the reader wonder "Faster than what?"

BAD: In our study, time until eating and inpatient time after surgery were *reduced* in the L Group compared with the T Group.

GOOD: In our study, time until eating and inpatient time after surgery were *shorter* in the L Group than in the T Group.

"Reduced" cannot be used to compare two different things.

4.3.4. Nouns

A noun is a word that refers to a person, thing, or idea. A proper noun is the specific

name of a person, organization, or location. Proper nouns always have their first letter capitalized.

Examples:

The first and last names of a person:

Gillian Welch, Steve Jobs, Derk Haank, Hillary Clinton

Names of companies and organizations:

World Wildlife Fund, United Nations, Volkswagen, Springer

Countries and cities:

Australia, India, Germany, New York, London, Beijing

Months of the year, days of the week

January, Monday

Examples of when not to capitalize:

Nouns that refer to more than one thing:

The experiment was performed at two **centers**

(see **tables** 3 and 4)

Names of chemicals or generic drugs:

acetaminophen, benzene

4.3.5. Articles

There are three articles in English: a, an, and the. These are classified as indefinite

(**a** and **an**) or definite (**the**).

Indefinite articles refer to something not specifically known to the person you are communicating with. In other words, **a** and **an** are used before nouns that introduce something or someone you have not mentioned before.

Examples:

"I witnessed **an** eclipse this morning."

"I wrote **a** laboratory report before lunch."

A and **an** are also used when talking about your profession.

Examples:

"I am **an** ethicist."

"I am **a** scientist."

Use **a** when the noun you are referring to starts with a consonant sound when pronounced.

Examples:

"**a** city", "**a** factory", "**a** hotel", "**a** university"

If the word begins with a vowel sound when pronounced, then use **an**.

Examples:

"**an** hour", "**an** umbrella", "**an** owl", "**an** igloo".

Use **the** when you know that the reader or listener knows or can identify what particular person or thing you are discussing.

Examples:

"**The** results were confirmed."

"Did you unlock **the** door?"

You should also use the when the thing you are discussing has been mentioned previously; **e.g.,**

"Each vector encoded **a** protein with a different reporter molecule. The size of **the** protein was..."

We also use **the** when talking about geographical features.

Examples:

"**the** Tropic of Capricorn", "**the** English channel", "**the** Himalayas".

We also use **the** preceding certain nouns when it is known that there is only one of something.

Examples:

"**the** sun", "**the** world", "**the** Imperial Palace"

4.3.6. Use of respectively

'Respectively' is an adverb that is often misused by non-native English speakers. Use 'respectively' only if your sentence would be unclear without it.

For example:

If we wanted to describe this data in the text of a manuscript, it would be written as: Oxygen, nitrogen and hydrogen detector flows were set at 85, 7, and 4 mL/min, respectively. This makes it clear that the first gas mentioned goes with the first number, the second gas goes with the second number, etc.

More examples:

BAD: The two values were 143.2 and 21.6, respectively.

GOOD: The two values were 143.2 and 21.6.

BAD: The two tubes were labeled B and S, respectively.

GOOD: The tubes containing blood and saline were labeled B and S, respectively.

4.3.7. Numerals and units

Spell out numbers one through nine, except in the case of units of measure or time. For these, and for values of 10 and higher, use Arabic numerals. Always spell out numbers at the beginning of a sentence if the sentence cannot be rearranged to avoid starting with a number.

Example:

Fifteen days previously… **NOT** 15 days previously…

For a mixture of numbers in one sentence, use a consistent number style.

Example:

The sample included 34 men with type A blood, 15 with type B, and 3 with type AB.

Use different number styles when putting two numbers next to each other.

Example:

Five 50-kg women, **NOT** 5 50-kg women

TIP!

The AMA Manual of Style is a good guide to the use of numerals and units.

4.4. Spacing

Generally, in the life sciences there should be no space between a numeral and a percent sign: 48%. In the physical sciences, a space is sometimes included: 48 %. Check the instructions to authors or sample reports in your target journal.

Use a space between a numeral and a unit of measurement: 178 mm.

4.5. Decimals

Use a zero before a decimal point, e.g., 0.28 mL, except when reporting *P* values: *P* = .04.

4.6. Rates, proportions and fractions

Use a virgule (/) for proportions, and a colon (:) for ratios: About 1/3 of samples… The ratio was 3:4.5… The rate averaged 40/100,000 people…

Spell out fractions that modify nouns: Half the cases showed… A two-thirds majority…

When writing a range or series, give the unit after the final item: **BAD:** 25 mg–30 mg **GOOD:** 25–30 mg

Do not insert a space on either side of an en-dash (–): **BAD:**The three sites — Taipei, Shanghai, and Bangkok — all experienced severe weather events in the time period studied. **GOOD:** The three sites—Taipei, Shanghai, and Bangkok—all experienced severe weather events in the time period studied.

4.7. Spelling

Should you use UK or US spelling?

American journals usually require US spelling and British journals usually require UK spelling, but many journals accept either form. If the journal's Instructions for Authors do not specify which to use, just remember to **be consistent** with the spellings throughout your manuscript.

Examples:

US	UK
fiber	fibre
center	centre
labeling	labelling
color	colour

Tip!

Microsoft Word can help you with correct spellings. Simply select all of the text, then go to Tools>Language and choose the kind of English you want to use. Misspelled words should now be underlined in red — if not, be sure to turn on "Check spelling as you type" under Preferences > Spelling and Grammar.

4.8. Punctuation

The colon ":" and semicolon ";" are two punctuation marks that are often misused.

A **colon** is used to introduce a list or a clause that explains the clause before the colon.

Example:

There are a number of Springer journals that accept manuscripts dealing with organic chemistry**:** Organic and Medicinal Chemistry Letters, Chemistry of Natural Compounds, the Journal of Molecular Modeling, and The Protein Journal.

Semicolons are used in two ways:

To separate two independent clauses (clauses that could be complete sentences by themselves) if you do not use a connecting word like "and" or "while" between them.

To separate items in a list if some items in the list have commas within them. In other words, semicolons are used instead of commas if commas would be confusing.

Examples:

The volcano erupted unexpectedly**;** magma flowed toward three major cities at an alarming rate.

These two clauses could be separate sentences: "The volcano erupted unexpectedly. Magma was flowing towards three major cities at an alarming rate." However, the semicolon suggests that there is a relationship between these two sentences. You can usually tell from the context what the actual relationship is.

Examples continued:

She works all day as a nurse in a retirement home**;** in addition, she is studying in the

evenings to become a doctor.

Dr. Benaud is a French researcher**;** however, he lives in Antarctica.

Thousands of mites crossed the barrier from region A to region B every hour**;** therefore, it was not possible to count all of them.

Our main findings were that uninsured patients are most likely to visit the emergency room for their health care needs**;** that children, the elderly, and the unemployed are the groups most affected by lack of insurance**;** and that the uninsured are a heavy burden on hospitals.

4.9. Large/small/high/low

"Large" and "small" are generally used to express variations or changes in size, dimensions, or mass. "High" and "low" are usually used to express levels or numerical values. "Large" and "small" are often mistakenly used where "high" and "low" would be better.

Example:
BAD: Large particulate and ozone emissions were measured in Beijing's air on 278 days in 2009.
GOOD: High particulate and ozone emissions were measured in Beijing's air on 278 days in 2009.

Exercise:

BAD: A low amount of the processor's memory is taken by the browser application and graphics rendering.

GOOD:

BAD: A high fluctuation in average storm drain outflow was detected between June 4 and 18.

GOOD:

Final Exercise: Below is some text from a published paper with out the punctuation. Please read it out loud and insert punctuation as you see fit:

According to Gauses hypothesis a corollary of the process of evolution by natural selection is that in a community at equilibrium every species must occupy a different niche this idea is generally accepted by zoologists Krebs 1972 but most botanists find difficulty in understanding how all the species in a species rich plant community can possibly occupy different niches although many different factors are involved in the full definition of an animals niche one can fairly readily imagine sufficient niches for all the animal species known using food-requirements alone the million or so animal species can easily be explained in terms of the 300000 species of plants so many of which have markedly different parts such as leaves bark wood roots etc and the existence of three to four tiers of carnivores Hutchinson 1959 there is no comparable explanation for autotrophic plants they all need light carbon dioxide water and the same mineral nutrients

SOLUTION 1: (First paragraph of Grubb 1977 Biological Reviews 52:107-145)

SOLUTION 2 (punctuation is to some degree a matter of personal taste!):

ALL OF THE ABOVE RESOURCES AND EXERCISES ARE FROM THE BELOW WEB SITE

RESOURCES SECTION:

http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/624/01/