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How did I pass?

In the fall of 2022, I took a class called Culture and Health. During that class, the discussions were centered around the different cultures throughout the United States, from the black community, the Hispanic community, the white community, the elderly community. Each week of the class was focused on a different community. The study of those groups was focused on how living conditions and prejudices and belief systems affect the health of the members within each community. In that course, an ethnography paper that was also a book report of sorts was slowly built up as well. The goal of the paper was to apply the concepts and vocabulary learned in the class, then apply them to the populace in the book and relate them back to current affairs. For my paper, I studied the book *Playing the Enemy*, which was about Nelson Mandela and how he used rugby, something his enemy loved with all their hearts, to unite all the people of South Africa into one united country. This paper was designed to be a research style paper with the application of class concepts, lessons from our book/studies, and additional research in the relation of the class and the book that was chosen. Being a paper that was worked on for the entire semester, I thought I would find less errors than I did. Considering that I did not have the knowledge I have now, it is good to reflect on improvements to apply in the future.

It is very seldom that I seem to use any noun phrases or clauses. There is an occasion or two that I have found where I set a noun phrase or clause to be the subject of the sentence. As discussed later, I also occasionally hide the subject as part of a prepositional phrase, like in, “**For white South Africa,** there was ….” The times I do it right though I set a noun phrase or clause at the beginning of the sentences I noticed it in and continue regarding it as the noun of the sentence. One sentence begins with, “**Were the United States lacks,** is in …” (if you could, forgive the spelling and punctuation errors). This clause introduces the idea presented to be the subject, though in the sentence were this was found I separated it with a comma even though it is an essential grammatical element. Throughout the paper being analyzed, this seems to be the only way that I use noun clauses and phrases.

Another point that will be made later is that many of my sentences I cannot leave as simple, and thus find myself adding adverb and adjective structures as parts of most sentences. As a research paper, I feel that such structures make sense in that they help add clarification and context to many of the points brought up throughout. In support of that claim that these clauses and phrases are for clarification and context, it appears that many of them are adjectival. For the adjectival examples, it appears that most of them were for the clarification. As discussed in class, they often found themselves following the nouns of the sentences as in, “American Football, **which is a close relative of rugby**.”

The clause beginning “…, which is…,” brings another topic to mind -- the dreaded “which.” As it turns out, I used the word which a total of seven times throughout my paper. I have a feeling it would have been more, but during that semester I had a different teacher for an ethics class who told me not to use the word which in any kind of academic writing, so at the time I was trying to be conscious not to use it. I see why now, after this grammar class and learning the rules and differences between the words *which* and *that*, with that being restrictive and thus needing to be connected to the sentence and which being non-restrictive and thus needing to be separated from the rest. Of the seven uses I had within my paper, only three of them properly separated by commas as in “…, which was their sport,” and kept the clause connected as non-restrictive (as in the example above). The other four time I did not have as much luck I guess, having treated the clauses as restrictive, though it does not appear that any are broad reference.

Adverbs are up next on the list in order of appearances. Often to begin my sentences, I add either an adverb phrase or an adverb clause for what seems like a variety of reasons. The first and most noticed was to begin with contrast or connections. In many places in the analyzed paper, like the beginning of this sentence: “**For the whole country**, civil war was looming around every corner,” it began by establishing the connections that all South Africa, whether you were black or white, were facing the same issues and often had similar outlets just with minor substitutes.

The bolded sentence fragment above also gives a great example of a free modifier as well. I think they are so prevalent and sprinkled into almost every sentence because almost all papers I write have page requirements. Adding elements, like this, that add to the length of such papers make them longer than they would regularly be. There are occasions where they are indeed necessary like later in the paper when I said, “Seeing rugby as a point that the whites could connect on, …,” helping to add clarity to the situation. These parts, even though unnecessary, emphasize the point trying to be made through the extra context in which they are found. More commonly, you would see examples like the one from the previous paragraph that add little to no sustenance to the paper and are just there to fulfill the role of sentence lengthening.

Sentence structures seem to be varied and spread out to an interesting surprise. Though no simple sentences were found in the two paragraphs analyzed, or looking through the rest, very seldom used. One of the few I did find was near the beginning of the paper where I said, “…, the story is still of an Apartheid South Africa….” This sentence was still found surrounded by prepositional phrases on either side of it. Often instead, I found the independent clauses of my sentences following a dependent clause, or a prepositional phrase, or even other independent clauses. Then in other paragraphs I found that the independent clause leads the sentence followed by the supporting information. I thought it was interesting that whichever way I would begin a paragraph, I would typically continue with the same or similar sentence structures for every sentence within. This being a form of repetition I feel leads to the reader flowing more easily through the paragraph, the reader getting the layout first and then more of the same to follow.

Sadly, this repetition means that some of the mistakes I made would be followed by more of the same mistake throughout an entire paragraph. In one of the paragraphs analyzed for this paper, of the three sentences within, two of them began with a prepositional phrase that held the subject of the following clauses. Thinking back, I was trying to decrease the number of sentences I needed to write to decrease the repetition of the subject or not lose the subject with different pronouns like “it” or “they” and leave my readers wondering who I was talking about. Looking at it now, who was I talking about? For these two sentences, they would begin something like, “For white South Africa, …,” and then continue with two “independent clauses” (quotes since not true ICs) that the reader needed to refer back to the beginning prepositional phrases to remind themselves of the subject. Skimming through the rest of the paper, there were several other spots in which I see myself having done this again and again.

Other than those occasions, I found it interesting that I began or ended my sentences with prepositional phrases, dependent clauses, or other independent clauses. It could be the fact that I had written this paper as a research discussion, and it is a more effective way of getting more information across in a quicker way. It could also be that because this was a research paper that it was easier to structure my sentences this way to help clarify for the reader how certain conclusion were drawn. In either case, and even now as I am writing this paper, I find that I need to convince myself to simplify sentences and just make a statement.

With this analysis paper, I have realized that my writing style is very much tailored towards academic purposes. As discussed, I write often to extend the length of my papers by adding optional, yet sometimes unnecessary information throughout the sentences. I think for similar reasons, I do not use noun structures as a way of being more direct with instructors and letting them know exactly what I am trying to talk about. This idea of being direct with noun clauses seems to have been the cause of one of the uglier problems I found in my past writing, being how I add the subject into an introductory prepositional phrase and then try to string along different independent clauses and dependent clauses that begin with their verbs and intending it to refer to the subject at the beginning.

It was very funny to me that I was so hit or mis when using *which*, and that I got it correct so often even though I had no idea about the restrictive/non-restrictive rules. Though in the back of my mind, I think I felt that rule and so that is why the commas are there on some, I think the others just needed me to use the word *that* instead. I also found it very interesting that I often, from paragraph to paragraph, stuck to a particular sentence structure and did not change until the next. I guess I liked that I made the paragraphs a bit more flowing, but I do not think I ever had the thought of why that was exactly.

I am glad to have learned the why for some of the rules that past teachers have put in place to prevent students from making some of these mistakes, though I wish they just would have explained at the time instead to let me work on trying to fix it there. To be able to look back and see how I could fix and change things, as well as improve for the future, give high hopes to continue to get better over time.