



LANGUAGE CONSTRUCTION

WRIT1999



WHAT IS GOOD WRITING?

The move from a structuralist account in which capital is understood to structure social relations in relatively homologous ways to a view of hegemony in which power relations are subject to repetition, convergence, and rearticulation brought the question of temporality into the thinking of structure, and marked a shift from a form of Althusserian theory that takes structural totalities as theoretical objects to one in which the insights into the contingent possibility of structure inaugurate a renewed conception of hegemony as bound up with the contingent sites and strategies of the rearticulation of power.

- Judith Butler (1997) "Further Reflections on the Conversations of Our Time", Diacritics

“We are going to die, and that makes us the lucky ones. Most people are never going to die because they are never going to be born. The potential people who could have been here in my place but who will in fact never see the light of day outnumber the sand grains of Arabia. Certainly those unborn ghosts include greater poets than Keats, scientists greater than Newton. We know this because the set of possible people allowed by our DNA so massively exceeds the set of actual people. In the teeth of these stupefying odds it is you and I, in our ordinariness, that are here. We privileged few, who won the lottery of birth against all odds, how dare we whine at our inevitable return to that prior state from which the vast majority have never stirred?”

Richard Dawkins (2006) “Unweaving the Rainbow: Science, Delusion and the Appetite for Wonder”, Penguin, p1.

THE FIVE COMMANDMENTS

- First person
- Active voice (most of the time)
- Conceptually import ideas first
- Keep it simple
- Parallel wording for repetition

**LOWER YOUR READER'S
COGNITIVE LOAD!**

PLAY TIME



ACTIVE VOICE

- Subject - verb - object
- Subject is the important part of the sentence.
- Simple, direct, clear

“

The quick brown fox jumped over the
lazy dog.

- *Active Voice*



PASSIVE VOICE

.....

- Inversion of subject and object
- Makes the object the important part of the sentence
- Avoid where as possible
- Still useful in dependent clauses however.

“

The lazy dog **is jumped over by** the
quick brown fox.

- *Passive Voice*



TENSE

- Present tense is stronger
- Past tense lessens the impact of a verb

“

The lazy dog **was** jumped over by the quick brown fox.

- *Past Tense*



ARTICLES

- Definite articles - 'the'
- Indefinite articles - 'a'
- Definitive is more specific than indefinite

“

A lazy dog was jumped over by *a*
quick brown fox.

- *Indefinite articles*



VERB CHOICE

- Verbs are the main action of the sentence
- Changing them alters the story
- Direct verbs are better

“

A lazy dog was involved in a jumping
incident with a quick brown fox.

- *Indirect verb*



ADJECTIVE STRENGTH

- Choice of adjective can weaken or strengthen a claim
- Use one as strong as appropriate.

“

A lazy dog was involved in a **jumping-related** incident with a quick brown fox.

- *Adjective strength*



SUBJECT POSITION

- The subject is the focus of the sentence.
- Who or what do you want the reader to focus on the most?

“

A lazy dog and a quick brown fox
were involved in a jumping-related
incident.

- *Subject position*



NOUNIFICATION

- Verbs can be subjects too!
- Don't do this. Just don't.

“

Speed was involved in a jumping-related incident with a lazy dog and a brown fox.

- *Nounification*



NOUNIFICATION

- So can adjectives!
- Again, just don't do this.

“

Speed was involved in a jumping-related incident with a lazy dog whilst a fox was brown.

- *Nounification*

“

Thanks to McSweeney's Internet
Tendencies

- [https://www.mcsweeneys.net/articles/an-
interactive-guide-to-ambiguous-grammar](https://www.mcsweeneys.net/articles/an-interactive-guide-to-ambiguous-grammar)