

CIRCLE YOUR GROUP:

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Overall Goals: To foster a growth-oriented writing mindset

Goals of Each Part:

Part I: To present our ideas in a dynamic manner

Part II: To reduce the strain that our writing puts on the reader

Part III: To write with the reader in constantly in mind

-----ACTIVITY STARTS BELOW-----

PART I: Dynamic sentences & dynamic paragraphs (15-20 minutes)

Consider the paragraph below:

Vikram started hiking in the morning. The trail was in a forest. It was humid. Vikram did not know that he forgot his lunch. He hiked the trail. There was a scenic overlook halfway through the trail. Vikram saw a frog. Vikram picked up the frog. The frog bounced out of Vikram's hands. Vikram kept hiking. Vikram reached the top of the mountain around noon. Vikram opened his backpack. Vikram felt around for his lunch but found nothing. Vikram became angry. Some other hikers saw Vikram. They offered Vikram some food. Vikram thanked them. Vikram ate the other hiker's extra sandwich. Vikram hiked back down the trail.

Pretty boring, right? While all of you are *much* more compelling writers than whoever wrote this bland paragraph (*cough*), we will still try to flex those writing muscles.

Revise the paragraph above to be more *dynamic*. Some questions to consider as you revise:

- Do the sentences vary in syntactic structure? How can we integrate more variety (short/long)?
- Do the words repeat unnecessarily? How can we introduce new ways of saying things?¹
- Do all of these sentences need to be full sentences? Or can some become dependent clauses?
- Do these sentences develop a dynamic narrative? If not, what choices can we make to guide the reader through the narrative?

¹ ... without being obnoxious! No need to flex on your reader.

Briefly discuss how you approached your revisions below:

PART II: Weight your words appropriately (15-20 minutes)

While writing, we sometimes fall into the trap of overburdening our words: we put too much importance on words that cannot handle such importance. For example, consider the following sentences:

Writing in the classroom is a key factor to improving student life.

That can have long term effects on the student's education, both inside and outside the classroom!

So... what the heck does "That" refer to? "Writing in the classroom"? "Improving student life"? Or even "Writing in the classroom is a key factor to improving student life"? We are putting a lot of burden on the "That" to convey our message to the reader. Unfortunately, it's very likely that "That" will break under the pressure. Note that we can overburden other words that are not pronouns; follow "gestures" below:

"While traditional theories of phonology hypothesize that the primitive units combine by forming linear sequences, Articulatory Phonology hypothesizes that **gestures**¹ are coordinated into more elaborated "molecular" structures in which **gestures**² can overlap in time. Such coproduction of **gestures**³ can account for much of the superficial context-dependence that is observed in speech. The reason for this can be found in the nature of the distinct constricting organs, which share articulators and muscles. When two **gestures**⁴ overlap, the activities of the individual mechanical degrees of freedom will depend on both (competing) **gestures**⁵. For example, consider the coproduction of a tongue tip constriction **gesture**⁶ with the tongue body **gesture**⁷ for different vowels (as in /di/ and /du/)." (Goldstein & Fowler, 2003: 163).

The word **gestures** is working hard: it acts like a *unit* (as in 1), an *articulatory movement* (as in 4), or a *goal* (as in 6).² When we flip between senses of a word so rapidly, the reader might become disoriented. However, note that some ideas that we write about are difficult. We do not want to simplify our writing at the expense of our ideas – we only want to minimize the logical jumps that reading our writing requires.

In the following passage, identify the words that are overburdened by circling and numbering them. Then, in the blank lines provided below the passage, propose some revisions that relieve some of the pressure on each circled word. Explain the reasoning behind each of your revisions.

The circus is a raucous place: animals roaring, people soaring, nothing's boring. The whole family can have fun – and bring a friend! They really know how to have a good time. While walking around, you can visit the animal stations, pick up some tasty treats, and meet the whole circus. You will find so much to do there. And, once the circus is over and you've had your fun, you might never stop thinking about it!

² Note that the three word senses for **gesture** that I've mentioned above (unit, articulatory movement, goal) are not the only way that **gesture** is being used in this passage. If you've got some extra time, try to identify some other senses of the word **gesture** in the Goldstein & Fowler passage.

[illegible]

PART III: Think about your reader while you write (15-20 minutes)

In Part I, we explored how to engage the reader with our writing at both the lexical and syntactic levels. In Part II, we focused on reducing the mental gymnastics that the reader has to go through in order to interpret our writing.

In this part, we will focus on the broader idea of thinking with the reader in mind by explicitly combining what we've developed in Parts I and II.³ Specifically, we will try to make our writing clear, logical, and efficient by considering the following three questions (and their sub-questions) while writing⁴:

1. Is the sentence that I'm writing clear at both the lexical (word-level) or syntactic (clause-level or phrasal-level)?
 - a. If not, how can I reorganize my writing to clarify any mistakes?
2. Do my sentences logically build into one another?
 - a. If not, how should we transition between them?
3. Have I defined provided my intended reader with enough context that my argument of this {sentence, paragraph, essay} follows naturally?
 - a. If not, what additional information (context, definitions, etc.) do they need, and where should that information go?

If you answer "No" to any of the numbered questions above, then your brain should immediately move to the corresponding lettered question.

Now, imagine that you wrote the introductory paragraph presented below while you were very sleepy last night. You need to revise the paragraph to make it more readable. Keeping the three questions above in mind, identify and number places in the passages where you answer "No". As a reader, where do you get tripped up? As a writer, how would you fix that problem? Explain your decisions and revisions.

Eating healthy doesn't mean only consuming fresh fruit and vegetables. Having a balanced diet has been shown to be crucial to overall health, which is crucial when thinking about longevity. A well-rounded approach includes a variety of foods. A balanced diet supports weight management, lowers the risk of chronic diseases, and boosts the immune system. It's imperative to consider the influence of antioxidants on improving a person's quality of life. The old saying the younger generation needs more fruit is only partially true.

³ Note that we will discuss how to *structure* argumentation – within the sentence, across the sentence, and across paragraphs – at a later point in the semester.

⁴ These four questions aren't the only ones that you should consider when evaluating your writing, but they are a good place to start!

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