

What, Why, and How?

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STYLE:

Sentence Crafting

WHAT IS SENTENCE CRAFTING?

Sentence craft is consciously creating clear and focused sentences. Good writers work hard to edit their compositions on the sentence level. As you review each sentence of the essay, you will need to consider your reader to make sure you craft sentences (and paragraphs) that effectively express your meaning.

As with any skill, crafting clear sentences that effectively communicate your meaning requires a lot of practice, but with that practice you will become more adept and efficient at editing your sentences for clarity, focus, and style. Even the greatest writers continually review their sentences to ensure they clearly express their ideas to the reader.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Good writers know they must put in the time to make sure their reader clearly understands their writing, from a text message to an email to a college essay. Think of the times when you have said something that someone misinterpreted. If this happened in a conversation, you had the chance to explain yourself to make sure your “audience” understood your meaning.

However, when you write, your reader does not have the chance to ask you questions to clarify your meaning. Therefore, you must work hard to edit your sentences to accurately deliver your message to the reader the first time.

HOW DO I DO IT?

In this section, you will learn some techniques to help you craft clear, focused sentences.

1. **“to be” verb + verb ending in –ing**—When you find a sentence using this construction, drop the “to be” verb and make the verb ending in –ing the main verb of the sentence.
 - **ORIGINAL:** This book *is showing* the reader how hip hop can affect listeners.
 - **REVISED:** This book *shows* the reader how hip hop can affect listeners.
2. **There + “to be” verb**—When you find sentences that begin with “There is/are/was/were,” delete “there” and the “to be” verb and find the *real* subject of the sentence and think of an active verb to accurately describe the subject’s specific action.
 - **ORIGINAL:** There are many hip hop artists rapping about drugs, sex, and violence.
 - **REVISED:** Many hip hop artists rap about drugs, sex, and violence.
 - **ORIGINAL:** There is a difference between mainstream and underground hip hop.
 - **REVISED:** Some key differences distinguish mainstream and underground hip hop.

3. **Passive voice (“to be” verb + past participle)**—Sentences in passive voice start with the object of the action rather than the subject (or actor); instead of beginning the sentences with the object of the action, you should begin the sentence with the subject (actor) directly followed by the action. To accomplish this, you will need to identify the “who” or “what” that performs the action in the sentence and make the actor the subject of the sentence; drop the “to be” verb and replace it with a more active verb.
- **ORIGINAL**: The audience is influenced negatively by the violence in hip hop lyrics.
 - **REVISED**: Violent hip hop lyrics negatively affect the audience.
4. **“to be” as the main verb**—Since good writing includes specific actions performed by specific actors, you will want to make sure you use active verbs instead of “to be.” If you use “to be” as the main verb of the sentence, you will need to revise the sentence by focusing on the specific action you describe. For example, look for other words in the sentence (i.e. nouns) based off verbs and use the verb form.
- **ORIGINAL**: Talib Kweli’s lyrics are both socially conscious and clever.
 - **REVISED**: Talib Kweli creates both socially conscious and clever lyrics.
5. **Noun forms of verbs + “to be”**—Often writers end up with “to be” in their sentences when they rely on noun forms of verbs. Rather than using the noun form of the verb, you should use the verb form to show the action in the sentence.
- **ORIGINAL**: The specialization of magazines in hip-hop is something that started in the 1980s.
 - **REVISED**: Magazines first specialized in hip-hop in the 1980s.
 - **ORIGINAL**: Bakari Kitwana is the organizer of “Rap Sessions: Community Dialogues on Hip-Hop,” which supports political activism on college campuses throughout the United States.
 - **REVISED**: Bakari Kitwana organizes “Rap Sessions: Community Dialogues on Hip-Hop,” which supports political activism on college campuses throughout the United States.
6. **Unclear pronoun references**—When you use pronouns to refer to other nouns in your sentences and paragraphs, you must make sure the reader can easily identify to whom or what the pronoun refers. You can accomplish this by simply using the specific noun rather than the pronoun.
- **ORIGINAL**: Skyline College holds a hip hop and education conference every year and has a new hip-hop learning community. This gives middle school and high school students an introduction to the College.
 - **REVISED**: Skyline College holds a hip hop and education conference every year and has a new hip-hop learning community. The conference gives middle school and high school students an introduction to the College.

PRACTICE

Sentence Crafting

Revise the following sentences to replace the “to be” verb with an active verb.

1. I am studying nursing at University of San Francisco.
2. The psychology class is interesting to me because it focuses on how war affects soldiers.

Revise the following sentences to remove the “there + to be.”

3. There are many Skyline College students who want to transfer to a four-year university.
4. There is a major advantage to starting your college career at a community college.

Revise the following sentences to use active voice.

5. The application was sent yesterday by my sister.
6. The increase in college attendance was partially caused by a poor economy.

Revise the following sentences to use an active verb for the main verb of the sentence.

7. John is responsible for maintaining a 3.0 GPA so that he can transfer next Fall.
8. Counseling 100 is helpful for first-generation college students.

Revise the following sentences to use make the noun-form of the verb the main verb of the sentence.

9. Professor Smith is the teacher for my calculus class.
10. The student government president was a presenter at the awards banquet.

Revise the following sentences for clear pronoun references.

11. The book and movie told the same story, but it gives readers more insight into the characters' thoughts.
12. Though John and Mark both had full-time schedules last semester, he took this semester off to work.

ANSWERS

POSSIBLE ANSWERS FOR SENTENCE CRAFTING SECTION

Revise the following sentences to replace the “to be” verb with an active verb.

1. I **study** nursing at University of San Francisco.
2. The psychology class **interests me** because it focuses on how war affects soldiers.

Revise the following sentences to remove the “there + to be.”

3. Many Skyline College students want to transfer to a four-year university.
4. There is a major advantage to starting your college career at a community college.

Revise the following sentences to use active voice.

5. My sister sent the application yesterday.
6. The poor economy partially caused the increase in college attendance.

Revise the following sentences to use an active verb for the main verb of the sentence.

7. John **must maintain** a 3.0 GPA so that he can transfer next Fall.
8. Counseling 100 **helps** first-generation college students begin their college career.

Revise the following sentences to use make the noun-form of the verb the main verb of the sentence.

9. Professor Smith **teaches** my calculus class.
10. The student government president **presented** at the awards banquet.

Revise the following sentences for clear pronoun references.

11. The book and movie told the same story, but **the book** gives readers more insight into the characters' thoughts.
12. Though John and Mark both had full-time schedules last semester, **John** took this semester off to work.