

What, Why, and How?

13

STYLE:

Simplicity
Point of View
Word Choice
Sentence Crafting
Sentence Combining
Parallelism
Commonly Misused and Misspelled Words

Style chapter overview:

Simplicity: Simplicity does not mean writing simple sentences. A series of short simple sentences can sound too simple and unsophisticated in academic writing. Simplicity in writing is trimming the fat which is eliminating the wordiness and saying what you want to say clearly and directly. A reader cannot be convinced of your point if they get lost in the sentences.

Point of View: Point of view refers to the position from which a writer “speaks” to their audience. Writers must be careful and maintain a consistent point of view. Academic writing should primarily rely on third person point of view to appear objective with minimal instances of first person point of view.

Word Choice: You want to choose the best, most effective words to form clear and convincing sentences. So what makes the best word choices? When writing academic essays, you want to use concrete and specific words that directly engage the senses and give precise meaning. Concrete words refer to objects that we can hear, see, feel, touch, and/or smell.

Sentence Crafting: You want to consciously create clear and focused sentences by using energetic verbs (replace the bland verb “to be” when you can), preferring the active voice (rather than passive voice), and choosing clear noun references (don’t use vague pronouns that don’t have a clear referent).

Sentence Combining: Trying to achieve simplicity in your writing does not mean writing only in short sentences. If your essays are filled with short sentences, they will read as choppy and the relationships between the sentences will not be as clear. Combining or joining sentences can convey your ideas more fluidly and logically. However, you also want rhythm in your writing which can be created through varied sentence length and structure. Include short sentences for impact.

Parallelism: Parallelism is giving two or more parts of a sentence a similar form so as to give the passage a definite pattern and to give the ideas the same level of importance and a balance.

Commonly Misused and Misspelled Words: As English teachers who read a lot of essays, we see some words that are regularly used incorrectly, and we see some words that are commonly misspelled. Consult the lists provided to avoid common errors.

WHAT IS SIMPLICITY IN WRITING?

“If you can't explain it to a six year old, you don't understand it yourself.” — Albert Einstein

“It is not a daily increase, but a daily decrease. Hack away at the inessentials.” — Bruce Lee

William Zinsser, an expert on writing and author of *On Writing Well*, said: “The sentence is too simple—there must be something wrong with it. But the secret of good writing is to strip every sentence to its cleanest components. Every word that serves no function, every long word that could be a short word, every adverb that carries the same meaning that’s already in the verb, every passive construction that leaves the reader unsure of who is doing what—these are a thousand and one adulterants that weaken the strength of a sentence.”

Simplicity does not mean writing simple sentences. A series of short simple sentences (He went to the store. The store was far. The day was hot. He was tired.) can sound too simple and unsophisticated in academic writing. You want complexity in your sentences, but that does not mean cramming in smart-sounding words and making long rambling sentences.

Simplicity in writing is trimming the fat which is eliminating the wordiness and saying what you want to say clearly and directly. A reader cannot be convinced of your point if they get lost in the sentences.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Simplicity in writing is beneficial because...

- (1) when you say things with a lot of extra words in them or make sentences long because you think that’s what teachers want, then the sentences are not always as easy to follow and can confuse your reader.
- (2) sentences that are clear and easy to follow are then easier for your reader to follow and eventually be convinced by the points that you are trying to make.
- (3) the more that writers can strip down their sentences to the most important parts, they can better control what they want to say and shape the meaning in the writing they are striving to convey.

Let’s try that again.

Simplicity in writing is beneficial because...

- (1) direct sentences are clearer.
- (2) direct sentences are more convincing.
- (3) writers can better control and shape meaning.

HOW DO I DO IT?

Take notice of common expressions that are needlessly wordy and trim them:

there is no doubt but that	no doubt (doubtless)
he is a man who	he
in a hasty manner	hastily
this is a subject which	this subject
owing to the fact that	since (because)
in spite of the fact that	though (although)
call your attention to the fact that	remind you (alert you)

A common violation of conciseness is the presentation of a single complex idea, step by step, in a series of sentences which might better be combined into one:

Macbeth was very ambitious. This led him to wish to become king of Scotland. The witches told him that this wish of his would come true. The king of Scotland at this time was Duncan. Encouraged by his wife, Macbeth murdered Duncan. He was thus enabled to succeed Duncan as king. (55 words)	Encouraged by his wife, Macbeth achieved his ambition and realized the prediction of the witches by murdering Duncan and becoming king of Scotland in his place. (26 words)
--	--

The active voice is more concise and vigorous than the passive.

Passive:

The large chunks of debris covering the roof and clogging the drainpipes were removed by city workers.

Active:

City workers removed the large chunks of debris covering the roof and clogging the drainpipes.

The active voice can also strengthen bland expressions and wordy phrasing:

There were a great number of dead leaves lying on the ground.	Dead leaves covered the ground.
The reason that he left college was that his health became impaired.	Failing health compelled him to leave college.
It was not long before he was very sorry that he had said what he had.	He soon repented his words.

PRACTICE

Simplicity

Revise the following passages, avoiding wordiness and undesirable repetition.

A large number of people enjoy reading murder mysteries regularly. As a rule, these people are not themselves murderers, nor would these people really ever enjoy seeing someone commit an actual murder, nor would most of them actually enjoy trying to solve an actual murder. They probably enjoy reading murder mysteries because of this reason: they have found a way to escape from the monotonous, boring routine of dull everyday existence.

To such people the murder mystery is realistic fantasy. It is realistic because the people in the murder mystery are as a general rule believable as people. They are not just made up pasteboard figures. It is also realistic because the character who is the hero, the character who solves the murder mystery, solves it not usually by trial and error and haphazard methods but by exercising a high degree of logic and reason. It is absolutely and totally essential that people who enjoy murder mysteries have an admiration for the human faculty of logic.

But murder mysteries are also fantasies. The people who read such books of fiction play a game. It is a game in which they suspend certain human emotions. One of these human emotions that they suspend is pity. If the reader stops to feel pity and sympathy for each and every victim that is killed or if the reader stops to feel terrible horror that such a thing could happen in our world of today, that person will never enjoy reading murder mysteries. The devoted reader of murder mysteries keeps uppermost in mind at all times the goal of arriving through logic and observation at the final solution to the mystery offered in the book. It is a game with life and death. Whodunits hopefully help the reader to hide from the hideous horrors of actual life and death in the real world.

WHAT IS POINT OF VIEW?

Point of view refers to the position from which writers “speak” to their audience. Writers have a point of view in all types of writing (and speaking), including emails, text messages, essays, articles, stories, etc.

Writers have three different options for point of view:

- **First person point of view** makes direct references to the writer using the following pronouns: I, me, my, myself, mine, we, us, our, and ourselves.
- **Second person point of view** makes direct references to the reader using the following pronouns: you, your, yourself, and yourselves.
- **Third person point of view** directly states who or what the writing discusses without using first person pronouns; third person point of view uses the following pronouns: he, she, it, they, him, her, his, hers, its, itself, them, their, themselves, one, etc.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Although creative writing gives writers more flexibility with the point of view, **academic essays typically use third person point of view** (with minimal uses of first person point of view) because third person enhances credibility by appearing objective and also emphasizes the topic instead of the writer.

Here’s a guide for when you use which point of view and why:

- **First person point of view** allows writers to write about themselves when including specific personal examples (“The author’s criticisms are accurate which I know from having also served in the army as a young woman”). In some projects, first person point of view can be used to show how a writer’s research or ideas build on or depart from the work of others.
- **Second person point of view** allows the writer to speak directly to the reader so is helpful in “how to” instruction (like in this Rhetoric); however, this is not commonly used in academic writing because it can include your readers in beliefs they may not share (“When you listen to the president, you wonder how he got elected.”). Using “you” can also be imprecise (“You can drive around for hours looking for parking.” This is not true for all. This is more precise: “San Franciscans can drive around for hours looking for parking.”). Using “you” is also more informal and conversational. For these reasons second person is not commonly used in academic writing.
- **Third person point of view** allows the writer to appear objective and should be the primary point of view for academic essays and other formal types of communication.

HOW DO I USE IT?

As you write your essays, you will need to carefully consider how you use point of view so that your writing has a consistent voice throughout the essay. Let's look at some basics on using point of view.

1. Consistent Point of View—Writers must be careful and maintain a consistent point of view; as noted above, academic writing should primarily rely on third person point of view with minimal instances of first person point of view. When writers switch the point of view within a sentence, the sentences may be confusing.

- **ORIGINAL:** Students should make sure they register early for the Rock the School Bells conference since he will not have a chance to get tickets the day of the conference.
- **REVISED:** Students should make sure they register early for the Rock the School Bells conference since *they* will not have a chance to get tickets the day of the conference.

Another consideration for a consistent point of view relates to using plural nouns and pronouns instead of the singular forms; this approach helps writers be more concise and avoid the unnecessary use of “he/she” and “him/her.” While “he/she” and “him/her” may be grammatically correct, you can achieve a stronger voice and better style by minimizing the use of these phrases.

- **ORIGINAL:** A student should make sure he/she signs up early for the workshops he/she wants to attend for his/her classes.
- **REVISED:** Students should make sure *they* sign up early for the workshops *they* want to attend for *their* classes.

2. Personal examples—When you include personal examples or experiences to illustrate a point in an academic essay, you should not refer to yourself in the third person. On the contrary, you should definitely use first person point of view to avoid accidental changes in point of view as well as to avoid awkward references to yourself.

- **ORIGINAL:** Last year, Rachel Everett attended the Rock the School Bells conference, and I learned the history of hip hop. (NOTE: the writer, Rachel Everett, first refers to herself in the third person and switches to first person in the second half of the sentence)
- **REVISED:** Last year, I attended the Rock the School Bells conference, and I learned the history of hip hop.

3. Unnecessary use of first person—When writing academic essays, you will often need to make an argument, which requires you to state your opinion on the topic and sources. You do not need to use phrases like “I think/feel/believe” or “in my opinion.” If you have written a grammatically correct sentence, you will be able to simply delete these phrases (and *still* state your opinion).

- **ORIGINAL:** I think Dyson misses the point when he argues that older generations do not appreciate hip hop because to me many parents and grandparents do appreciate hip hop.
- **REVISED:** Dyson misses the point when he argues that older generations do not appreciate hip hop because many parents and grandparents do appreciate hip hop.

PRACTICE

Point of View

Revise the following sentences to make the point of view consistent.

1. A student should seek help from counselors to make sure they have student educational plans.
2. Professor Garcia's classes teach students critical thinking while it also helps them improve their writing.
3. A new student must work hard to learn about the college resources he or she may need as they begin their college careers.
4. If you want more active participation in class, teachers will appeal to different learning styles.

Revise the following sentences to remove the unnecessary use of first person.

5. Skyline College has great programs to help students get a good education, so I think local high school students should seriously consider starting their education here.
6. In my opinion, California should provide more funding to community college students because I believe education should be a top priority for the government.

WHAT IS WORD CHOICE?

Of course, it is what it sounds like: choosing the best, most effective words to form clear and convincing sentences. So what makes the best word choices? When writing academic essays, you want to use concrete words that directly engage the senses and give precise meaning. Here are some definitions of different types of words to consider:

- **Abstract words** refer to ideas or concepts rather than physical objects. For example, words like *love* and *hate* represent concepts with no physical referent.
- **Concrete words** refer to objects that we can hear, see, feel, touch, and/or smell; for instance, *tattoo* relates to something we can see and touch while you cannot touch, smell, or taste *justice*, an abstract term.
- **General words** refer to large classes of objects; for example, “jobs” and “video games” relate to general types of objects.
- **Specific words** refer to specific objects; for example, “high school teacher” and “*Call of Duty*” relate to specific jobs and video games.
- **Clichés** refer to overused word phrases and statements like, “Don’t judge a book by its cover.”

WHY IS WORD CHOICE IMPORTANT?

As you work on your academic essays, you want to create sentences that express clear, precise ideas to your readers. You want to be mindful about overusing abstract terms because your writing will lose clarity. In conveying the importance of favoring concrete terms in writing, French poet Alain de Lille once said, “Your sentences should be full of stones, metals, chairs, tables, animals, men, and women.”

Although abstract ideas have an important place in many academic essays, you will need to use concrete and specific language to clearly and effectively communicate your meaning to your readers. This also means that you should avoid using clichés because they do not show original thoughts and lack specific meaning.

HOW DO I APPLY IT?

As you revise your academic essays (and other types of communications), you will need to revise your sentences for concrete and specific language. Let's look at a few examples:

1. **Abstract vs. concrete**—To give your reader a clear understanding of your meaning, you will often need to replace abstract terms with more concrete terms.

- **ORIGINAL**: To develop a strong academic essay, you will need to work hard.
- **REVISED**: To develop a strong academic essay, you will need to spend time prewriting, organizing your ideas, writing an outline, and completing multiple drafts.

2. **General vs. specific**—Good academic essays will use specific language for more precise and clearer sentences.

- **ORIGINAL**: The student found the class fascinating. (NOTE: the reader might need more information here; why does he find the class fascinating?)
- **REVISED**: Jimmy found Professor Lachmayr's class fascinating because it focused on race and gender.

3. **Clichés**—In everyday speech, we might use clichés, but academic writing requires more thoughtful ideas and originality. Thus, you should not use clichés in your writing; instead, think of more original and specific ways of stating your idea.

- **ORIGINAL**: Because Jimmy submitted his essay late, he had to "pay the piper." (NOTE: The cliché "pay the piper" needs to be replaced to indicate exactly what this means in reference to the late essay.)
- **REVISED**: Because Jimmy submitted his essay late, he lost ten points and had to meet with Professor Williams.

PRACTICE

Word Choice

Revise the following sentences to replace abstract language with more concrete language and details.

1. I wrote a great research paper.
2. College students have a lot of freedom.

Revise the following sentences to replace general language for more specific language and sentences.

3. The book was very interesting.
4. Skyline College has a lot of great resources.

Revise the following sentences to replace the underlined cliché with more original and precise language.

5. John let the cat out of the bag when he told my parents which college I chose to attend.
6. Travelling to different parts of the world has taught me to not judge a book by its cover.

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.

WHAT IS SENTENCE COMBINING?

Trying to achieve simplicity in your writing does not mean writing only in short sentences. If your essays are filled with short sentences, they will read as choppy and the relationships between the sentences will not be as clear. Combining or joining sentences can convey your ideas more fluidly and logically. However, you also want rhythm in your writing which can be created through varied sentence length and structure. Include short sentences for impact.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Sentence combining helps you to...

- avoid the monotony of sentences that are brief and of equal length.
- draw attention to the ideas in the paper not to the repetitive and simple sentence structure.
- create rhythm through varied sentence length and structure.
- show the reader the relationships that exist among ideas of different importance.
- experiment with different methods of putting words together. Because there are countless ways to build sentences, the goal is not to find the one "correct" combination but to consider different arrangements to find the most effective.

HOW DO I DO IT?

Connections
In the Grammar chapter, see also "Appositives," "Coordinators," and "Subordinators."

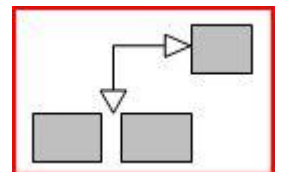
There are 3 main methods used to combine sentences:

I. **Coordinate** sentences when you want to equally emphasize the sentences.



II. **Subordinate** sentences when you want to emphasize one sentence over another.

III. **Embed** words, phrases and/or sentences to integrate ideas within sentences.



First, to understand how to combine sentences, we must have an understanding of the basic components of a sentence.

A **basic or simple sentence** contains a subject and a verb and can stand alone.

Examples: Fish swim. Dogs bark. People talk, laugh, and sing.

PRACTICE

In the following sentences, underline the subject (the doer of the action) once, and the verb (the action) twice.

- (a) Schools educate.
- (b) Better funding should be given to schools.
- (c) Students learn best in environments with quality materials and instructors.

To combine basic or simple sentences, there are 3 main methods used:

I. **Coordinate** sentences when you want to equally emphasize the sentences.



Coordination means to CONNECT two or more sentences. You join sentences through coordination when you want to give equal emphasis to each sentence.

Two ways to coordinate sentences:

- 1) Join sentences using a comma and conjunction (**For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, So**)
Example: I like reading poetry, **but** I don't always understand it.
- 2) Combine related sentences using a semi-colon → **;**
Example: I like reading poetry; I don't always understand it.

PRACTICE

Coordinate the following sentences by using one of the above methods.

- (d) Schools educate. Better funding should be given to schools.
- (e) Students learn best in environments with quality materials and instructors. Increased funding is difficult for schools to secure.
- (f) Better prepared students produce smarter citizens. More educated citizens raise the overall quality of a society.

II. **Subordinate** sentences when you want to emphasize one sentence over another.



First, to subordinate you have to know some subordinators:

Subordinators	
Contrast/Concession	although, while, even though, even if, whereas, though
Cause	because, since
Effect/ Result	so that, in that, in order that
Condition	if, unless, provided that
Time	after, before, as soon as, since, when, while, until, as

Subordination means to CONNECT one or more sentences with a subordinator. You join sentences through subordination when you want to give emphasis to one sentence over another. The sentence that begins with a subordinator receives LESS emphasis.

Two ways to subordinate sentences:

- 1) Join two sentences using a subordinator.
Example: Jenson spent a year traveling the world **because** he got fired from his job
- 2) Begin the sentence with a subordinator, which gives less emphasis to the beginning subordinated sentence.
Example: **Because** Jenson got fired from his job, he spent a year traveling the world.

Punctuation Note:

When a subordinator introduces a sentence, put a comma after the first clause.

Example: *After* she went to bed, she started to hear noises downstairs.

But if the subordinator comes in the middle of a clause, you don't need to set it off with a comma.

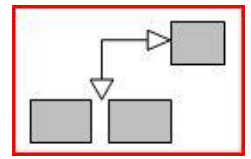
Example: She started to hear noises downstairs *after* she went to bed.

PRACTICE

Subordinate *the following sentences by using one of the above methods.*

- (g) Schools educate. Better funding should be given to schools.
- (h) Students learn best in environments with quality materials and instructors. Increased funding is difficult for schools to secure.
- (i) We are going to have a better educated populace. State funding priorities are adjusted to provide larger budgets for school.

III. **Embed** words, phrases and/or sentences to integrate ideas within sentences.



First, to embed sentences, you want to be familiar with some words that are commonly used to embed sentences. Words such as:

who, whom, whose, which, that, when, where

Example: She had a goat. She loved it very much.

Embedded: She had a goat that she loved very much.

Example: His favorite girlfriend had just received an anonymous phone call. He thought she was coming over later that evening.

Embedded: His favorite girlfriend, who he thought was coming over later that evening, had just received an anonymous phone call.

Ways to embed sentences:

- 1) When the subject of the sentence is repeated in more than one sentence, look to embed.
Example: Audrey loves traveling. Audrey was leaving for China in May. She works with me.
Embedded: Audrey, a woman I work with who loves traveling, was leaving for China.
- 2) For whole sentences used to give little pieces of information, look to embed.
Example: I wanted to give Craig money to buy me tickets. Craig is my sister's boyfriend.
Embedded: I wanted to give Craig, my sister's boyfriend, money to buy me tickets.

PRACTICE

Combine each grouping of sentences into one sentence using embedding.

- (j) Pancho came to the party. He is Jose's cousin. He graduated from Stanford. He was top in his class.
- (k) The clown was juggling for twelve hours in the circus tent. The clown was exhausted. The circus tent was crowded. He was juggling next to the live animals acts. The animals smelled badly.
- (l) After 10 years, Suzanne achieved her goal. Her goal was to get a PhD from Berkeley. Her PhD was in English Literature. Her degree had an emphasis in French literature. The 10 years were grueling. Suzanne is my neighbor.

PRACTICE

Sentence Combining: Apply the different sentence combining techniques you have learned to make this paragraph more fluid.

Paragraph 1:

The Boston Red Sox were three games down. The Red Sox had to win the next four games to advance. Fans were worried. Boston had not won a World Series since 1918. No team had ever come back in the playoffs from a three-game deficit. All of the fans knew this. Red Sox fans watched anxiously as the fourth game of the ALCS began. Yankees fans watched confidently. They also knew that anything could happen. People wanted to watch a good series. They did not expect it to be such a nail-biter! David Roberts stole second base. This move would be remembered as the turning point of the series. Nobody believed the Red Sox would win that year. The Red Sox won that year. The Yankees would not win the World Series for another five years. In 2009, the Yankees won the World Series.

Now let's try **de-combining** sentences so we can appreciate the conciseness of well combined sentences and how it is easier to see the relationship among ideas when they are joined. Break this sentence down into its root sentences:

Paragraph 2:

Here's a thesis from an essay written on Malcolm X's "Learning to Read":

The characteristics that he shows of not giving up even in the face of overwhelming odds and applying good old-fashioned, and often tedious and repetitive, hard work and persistence have become frighteningly rare in the U.S. today where people have bloated senses of entitlement.

WHAT IS PARALLELISM?

Parallelism is giving two or more parts of a sentence a similar form so as to give the passage a definite pattern and to give the ideas the same level of importance and a balance. Here is a visual of what parallelism looks like:

Parallel elements:

Words	Infinitives	prepositional phrases	Subordinate clauses
singing	to wonder	at the time	when I saw her
dancing	to investigate	under the table	after they called

Non-Parallel elements:

Words	Infinitives	prepositional phrases	Subordinate clauses
to sing	since I wondered	at the time	to see her
dancing	to investigate	being nearby	after they called

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Parallelism helps to...

- improve the fluidity of sentences.
- process meaning more easily.
- emphasize the likeness between two or more ideas.
- create symmetry (balance) in writing
- add force to writing.

HOW DO I DO IT?

Here are some basic parallelism guidelines to apply in your writing:

- (1) Parallelism is used to balance nouns with nouns, prepositional phrases with prepositional phrases, participles with participles, infinitives with infinitives, clauses with clauses (**in** the cup, **on** the desk).
- (2) Parallelism is used with elements joined by coordinating conjunctions (especially **and**, **but**, and **or**).
- (3) Parallelism is used with elements in lists or in a series (**talked** on the phone, **ran** 5 miles, **saw** friends)
- (4) Parallelism is used with elements being compared (**X** is *more than* / *better than* **Y**).
- (5) Parallelism is used with elements joined by a linking verb or a form of be (like **being**, **is**, **were**).
- (6) Parallelism is used with elements joined by linking words (**either/or**, **neither/nor**, **not only/but also**).

PRACTICE

Parallelism:

Using the different approaches to creating parallel structure, fix the faulty parallelism in the following sentences.

(1) Parallelism is used to balance nouns with nouns, prepositional phrases with prepositional phrases, participles with participles, infinitives with infinitives, clauses with clauses (*in* the cup, *on* the desk).

Example: We want a candidate who has a sense of commitment, a good record in public office, and experience in foreign affairs.

Fix: At the store my duties are to keep the shelves stocked, I work the registers, and assisting customers.

(2) Parallelism is used with elements joined by coordinating conjunctions (especially *and*, *but*, and *or*).

Example: She likes to look, **but** not to listen. He wondered who he was **and** what he was doing.

Fix: She is both happy about the raise and she is feeling nervous about the extra responsibility.

(3) Parallelism is used with elements in lists or in a series (*talked* on the phone, *ran* 5 miles, *saw* friends)

Example: He found cleaning supplies **in the closet**, **under the sink** but not **in the garage**.

Fix: Wizards tend to have the same personality traits: craftiness, being resourceful, they are rebellious, and they have a lot of determination.

(4) Parallelism is used with elements being compared (*X is more than / better than Y*).

Example: **Driving** to New York can actually take less time than **flying** there.

Fix: Hearing her sing in person was ten times better than if you heard her on the radio.

(5) Parallelism is used with elements joined by a linking verb or a form of be (like *being*, *is*, *were*).

Example: **Being** Jim's friend means **being** understanding. To know her **is** to love her.

Fix: The passengers were preparing for departure while the flight attendants are going to try to get all the drinks served.

(6) Parallelism is used with elements joined by linking words (*either/or*, *neither/nor*, *not only/but also*).

Example: As young recruits, we were told **not only** what to do **but also** what to think.

Fix: They not only ate all the food in the house but they also didn't clean up the mess.

PRACTICE

Parallelism:

Using the different approaches to creating parallel structure, fix the faulty parallelism in the following paragraph:

Many college courses require students to write essays as part of the class curriculum. An academic essay for a college course should contain a thesis, body, and to conclude. It is important for students to perform some type of pre-writing or to cluster before typing is attempted on the computer. Pre-writing will usually help students to find and expand new ideas for the paper. After pre-writing, students should type a rough draft using their previous cluster. Students are always nervous in writing the rough draft and started the paper. It is better for students to write to the end of the rough draft than stopping every few sentences to check the grammar. If students do not expand their rough draft, the essay will not only be short but will be also disorganized. Revising the essay for a strong thesis, organization, and proper supporting is the most important part of the writing process. This is what separates the strong writers from the writers who are weaker. The final step in writing a college paper is editing. This is where students will check the paper for grammatical errors, proper punctuating, and spelling errors. A strong writing process will allow students to write a proper college essay.

WHAT ARE SOME COMMONLY MISUSED AND MISSPELLED WORDS?

As English teachers who read a lot of essays, we see some words that are regularly used incorrectly, and we see some words that are commonly misspelled. Here are lists to help you avoid these errors.

COMMONLY MISUSED WORDS

accept and except - *Accept* means to receive while *except* means to exclude.

affect and effect - *Affect* is usually a verb meaning to influence. *Effect* is usually a noun meaning result. *Effect* can also be a verb meaning to bring about.

a lot and allot. *A lot* means many; *allot* means to distribute something.

cite, sight and site. A *sight* is something seen; a *site* is a place. To *cite* is to quote or list as a source.

it's and its. *It's* is a contraction that replaces *it is*. *Its* is the possessive determiner corresponding to *it*, meaning "belonging to it."

lose and loose. *Lose* can mean "fail to win," "misplace," or "cease to be in possession." *Loose* can mean the opposite of tight, or the opposite of tighten.

of and have. In some dialects of spoken English, *of* and the contracted form of *have*, 've, sound alike. However, in standard written English, they are not interchangeable. Could of, would of, should of is non-standard English. Instead use *could have*, *would have*, *should have*.

past and passed. *Past* refers to events that have previously occurred while *passed* is the past tense of "to pass."

than, then - *Than* is used for comparisons; *then* means it came next.

there, their, they're - *There* refers to the location of something. *Their* means "belonging to them." *They're* is a contraction of "they are."

to, two, too - *Two* is a number, *too* means also, *to* is used with verbs (going to) or as a preposition.

weather, whether - *Weather* is what the meteorologist always predicts wrong; *whether* is used when making a choice.

who's, whose - *Whose* is possessive; *who's* is short for *who is*.

who, which, that: Do not use *which* to refer to persons. Use *who* instead. *That*, though generally used to refer to things, may be used to refer to a group or class of people.

your, you're - *Your* is something that belongs to you; *you're* is a contraction for you are.

COMMONLY MISSPELLED WORDS

a lot - Two words! We know this is listed under misused words as well but it is misspelled a lot!

accommodate - This word is large enough to accommodate both a double "c" AND a double "m."

argument - Let's not argue about the loss of this verb's silent [e] before the suffix -ment.

committed - If you are committed to correct spelling, you will remember that this word doubles its final [t] from "commit" to "committed."

conscience - Don't let misspelling this word weigh on your conscience.

conscientious - Work on your spelling conscientiously.

conscious - Try to be conscious of all the vowels after the "sc" in this word's ending.

definite (ly) - This word definitely gets confused as having an "a" in the middle but there are e's on the ends and i's in the middle.

grammar - If you're pointing out errors in grammar, then be sure not to end this word in "er."

independent - Please be independent but not in your spelling of this word. It ends in -ent.

indispensable - Knowing that this word ends on -able is indispensable to good writing.

mischievous - This mischievous word holds two traps: [i] before [e] and [o] before [u]. Four of the five vowels in English reside here.

misspell - What is more embarrassing than to misspell the name of the problem? Just remember that it is mis + spell and that will dispel your worry about spelling "misspell."

noticeable - The [e] is noticeably retained in this word to indicate the [c] is "soft," pronounced like [s]. Without the [e], it would be pronounced "hard," like [k], as in "applicable."

occasionally - Writers occasionally tire of doubling so many consonants and omit one but this word has 2 c's in the front and 2 l's in the back.

occurrence - Remember not only the occurrence of double double consonants in this word, but that the suffix is -ence, not -ance. No reason, just the English language keeping us on our toes.

perseverance - All it takes is perseverance and you, too, can be a (near-) perfect speller. The suffix is -ance for no reason at all.

playwright - Since they write plays, they should be "play-writes," right? Wrong. Remember that a play writer in Old English was called a "play worker" and "wright" is from an old form of "work" (wrought iron, etc.)

weird - This word is an exception to the rule about [i] before [e] except after...? So, rules can be broken!

ANSWERS

POSSIBLE ANSWERS FOR EXERCISE IN SIMPLICITY SECTION

ELIMINATING WORDINESS:

A large number of people enjoy reading murder mysteries regularly. As a rule, these people are not themselves murderers, nor would these people really ever enjoy seeing someone commit an actual murder, nor would most of them actually enjoy trying to solve an actual murder. They probably enjoy reading murder mysteries because of this reason: they have found a way to escape from the monotonous, boring routine of dull everyday existence.

Many people who do not desire to commit, see, or solve a murder still like to read murder mysteries in order to escape the monotony of everyday life.

To such people the murder mystery is realistic fantasy. It is realistic because the people in the murder mystery are as a general rule believable as people. They are not just made up pasteboard figures. It is also realistic because the character who is the hero, the character who solves the murder mystery, solves it not usually by trial and error and haphazard methods but by exercising a high degree of logic and reason. It is absolutely and totally essential that people who enjoy murder mysteries have an admiration for the human faculty of logic.

Murder mysteries are realistic fantasies because the characters are not pasteboard figures but believable, and the hero solves the mystery not haphazardly but with logic and reason. Murder mystery fans must admire logic.

But murder mysteries are also fantasies. The people who read such books of fiction play a game. It is a game in which they suspend certain human emotions. One of these human emotions that they suspend is pity. If the reader stops to feel pity and sympathy for each and every victim that is killed or if the reader stops to feel terrible horror that such a thing could happen in our world of today, that person will never enjoy reading murder mysteries. The devoted reader of murder mysteries keeps uppermost in mind at all times the goal of arriving through logic and observation at the final solution to the mystery offered in the book. It is a game with life and death. Whodunits hopefully help the reader to hide from the hideous horrors of actual life and death in the real world.

But murder mysteries are also fantasies. To enjoy the mystery, readers must suspend pity and play a game and not stop to feel sympathy for every victim or horror for every crime. Devoted readers focus on logic and observation to solve the game of life and death. Whodunits hide from hideous, real life horrors.

POSSIBLE ANSWERS FOR POINT OF VIEW SECTION
--

Revise the following sentences to make the point of view consistent.

1. A Student should seek help from counselors to make sure **he or she has** student educational plans. OR LESS WORDY: Students should seek help from counselors to make sure **they have** student educational plans.
2. Professor Garcia's classes teach students critical thinking while **they** also **help students** improve their writing.
3. **New students** must work hard to learn about the college resources **they** may need as they begin their college careers.
4. If **teachers want** more active participation in class, **they** will appeal to different learning styles.

Revise the following sentences to remove the unnecessary use of first person.

5. Skyline College has great programs to help students get a good education, so **I think** local high school students should seriously consider starting their education here.
6. **In my opinion**, California should provide more funding to community college students because **I believe** education should be a top priority for the government.

POSSIBLE ANSWERS FOR WORD CHOICE SECTION
--

1. I wrote a great research paper. **REVISED:** My research paper did an excellent job of incorporating evidence from both sides of the issue while also providing a clear, consistent argument.
2. College students have a lot of freedom. **REVISED:** College students have a lot of scheduling freedom as they can take classes during the daytime, evenings, and even online.
3. The book was very interesting. **REVISED:** *Drive* gave me a better understanding of how constant praise can negatively affect motivation.
4. Skyline College has a lot of great resources. **REVISED:** Skyline College offers health services, psychological counseling, academic counseling, tutoring, and career counseling.
5. John let the cat out of the bag when he told my parents which college I chose to attend. **REVISED:** John **accidentally revealed my secret** when he told my parents which college I chose to attend.
6. Travelling to different parts of the world has taught me to not judge a book by its cover. **REVISED:** Travelling to different parts of the world has taught me to **take the time to understand cultural differences and not make quick and in accurate judgments**.

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.

POSSIBLE ANSWERS FOR EXERCISES FROM SENTENCE COMBINING SECTION
--

UNDERLYING SUBJECTS AND VERBS IN A SENTENCE:

In the following sentences, underline the subject (the doer of the action) once, and the verb (the action) twice.

- (a) Schools educate.
- (b) Better funding should be given to schools.
- (c) Students learn best in environments with quality materials and instructors.

COORDINATING SENTENCES: (possible answers—answer can vary)

(d) Schools educate, **so** better funding should be given to schools.

OR Schools educate; **therefore** better funding should be given to schools.

(e) Students learn best in environments with quality materials and instructors, **but** increased funding is difficult for schools to secure.

OR Students learn best in environments with quality materials and instructors; **however** increased funding to is difficult for schools to secure.

(f) Better prepared students produce smarter citizens, **and** more educated citizens raise the overall quality of a society. OR Better prepared students produce smarter citizens; more educated citizens raise the overall quality of a society.

SUBORDINATING SENTENCES: (possible answers—answer can vary)

(g) **Because** schools educate, better funding should be given to schools.

(h) **Although** students learn best in environments with quality materials and instructors, increased funding is difficult for schools to secure.

(i) We are going to have a better educated populace **when** state funding priorities are adjusted to provide larger budgets for school.

EMBEDDING SENTENCES: (possible answers—answer can vary)

Combine each grouping of sentences into one sentence using embedding.

(j) Pancho, Jose's cousin who graduated from Stanford top of his class, came to the party.

(k) The exhausted clown was juggling for twelve hours in the crowded circus tent next to the live animal acts that smelled badly.

(l) After 10 grueling years, my neighbor Suzanne, achieved her goal, which was getting a PhD from Berkeley in English Literature with an emphasis in French literature.

GENERAL SENTENCE COMBINING EXERCISES: (possible answers—answer can vary)**Paragraph 1: Sentence Combining**

Three games down, the Boston Red Sox had to win the next four to advance, and fans were worried because they had not won a World Series since 1918. No team had ever come back from a three-game deficit. As the fourth game began, Red Sox fans watched anxiously while Yankee fans watched confidently. Anything could happen, and people wanted a good series, but no one expected such a nail biter! David Roberts stole second base, the series turning point. No one believed the Red Sox would win, but they did. The Yankees would not win the World Series for another 5 years until 2009.

Paragraph 2: Sentence De-Combining (1 sentence into 15 sentences)

The characteristics are rare.

He shows not giving up.

He doesn't give up in the face of overwhelming odds.

He shows applying good hard work.

He shows applying good persistence.

He shows applying old-fashioned hard work.

He show applying old-fashioned persistence.

He shows tedious hard work.

He shows tedious persistence.

He shows repetitive hard work.

He shows repetitive persistence.

They have become frighteningly rare.

Rare in the U.S.

Rare today.

People have bloated senses of entitlement.

POSSIBLE ANSWERS FOR EXERCISES FROM PARALLELISM SECTION
--

- (1) At the store my duties are to keep the shelves stocked, **to work** ~~I work~~ the registers, and **to assist** ~~assisting~~ customers.
- (2) She is both happy about the raise and ~~she is feeling~~ nervous about the extra responsibility.
- (3) Wizards tend to have the same personality traits: craftiness, **resourcefulness** ~~being resourceful~~, **rebelliousness** ~~they are rebellious~~, and ~~they have a lot of~~ determination.
- (4) Hearing her sing in person was ten times better than **hearing** ~~if you heard~~ her on the radio.
- (5) The passengers were preparing for departure while the flight attendants **were trying** ~~are going to try~~ to get all the drinks served.
- (6) They not only ate all the food in the house but ~~they also~~ **left** ~~didn't clean up the~~ a mess.

Possible revisions to the paragraph:

Many college courses require students to write essays as part of the class curriculum. An academic essay for a college course should contain a thesis, body, and **conclusion** ~~to conclude~~. It is important for students to perform some type of pre-writing or **clustering** ~~to cluster~~ before **they start typing** ~~typing is attempted~~ on the computer. Pre-writing will usually help students ~~to~~ find and expand new ideas for the paper. After pre-writing, students should type a rough draft using their previous cluster. Students are always nervous in writing the rough draft and **starting** ~~started~~ the paper. It is better for students to write to the end of the rough draft than **to stop** ~~stopping~~ every few sentences to check the grammar. If students do not expand their rough draft, the essay will not only be short but ~~will be~~ also disorganized. Revising the essay for a strong thesis, organization, and proper **support** ~~supporting~~ is the most important part of the writing process. This is what separates the strong writers from **the weak writers** ~~writers who are weaker~~. The final step in writing a college paper is editing. This is where students will check the paper for grammatical errors, proper **punctuation** ~~punctuating~~, and spelling errors. A strong writing process will allow students to write a proper college essay.