**Reviewing sentence effectiveness (2)**

**7.Dangling or Misplaced Modifiers**

modifier has nothing to modify (a dangling modifier), add or change words so that it has something to modify. If a modifier is in the wrong place (a misplaced modifier), put it as close as possible to the word, phrase, or clause it modifies.

Examples:

(1) Hanging from the ledge high over a mountain, Danielle saw the trees with their brightly colored fall leaves.

*(Danielle is not hanging over the mountain—the trees are.)*

Rewritten:

Danielle saw the trees with their brightly colored fall leaves hanging from the ledge high over a mountain.

(2) Studying for a test, the baby finally went to sleep.

(As worded, this sentence suggests that the baby is studying. Words need to be added to correct this dangling modifier.)

Rewritten:

Studying for a test, Molly was happy that her baby finally went to sleep.Dangling or misplaced modifiers refer to the wrong word in the sentence. To revise suchconstructions, use the word to which the modifier refers as a subject of the main clause(example 1), or move the modifier closer to the word it modifies (examples 2 and 3).The problem modifiers in the following sentences are italicized.

1. *After reading the original study*, the article remains unconvincing.

(The article did not read the study; a person did.)

**Revision:** After reading the original study, I remain unconvinced.

1 H. Ramsey Fowler and Jane E. Aaron. *The Little Brown Handbook,* (Boston: Scott, Foresman and

Company, 1989), p. 283.

2. Of major importance to the creation of the legend of Custer was the public battle in which he was engaged for several months preceding his death *with President Grant.*

**Revision:** Important to the creation of the Custer legend was the public battle between President Grant and Custer in the months preceding Custer's death.

3. But Levi could not survive the burden of life after the Holocaust, and in 1987, he committed suicide, *a successful author and a scientist*.

**Revision:** Although Levi was a successful author and scientist, he could not survive the burden of life after the Holocaust and committed suicide in 1987.

**8.Shift**

A shift is a confusing change in person, verb tense, voice, mood, or number; it is kind of like wearing two different shoes. Your reader looks at your writing to be dressed one way, but elements of the sentence just don't fit.  The key is consistency—of voice, verb tense, person, and mood, —and proofreading your writing to ensure that this consistency is maintained.

**Shifts in Verb Tense**

A verb tense shift is a shift in time, for example, from present to past, or past to future tense.  Sometimes such shifts make perfect sense, as when one describes an event that takes place before another event:

At the first Fall concert, the choir will sing a few spirituals that they learned over the summer.

But sometimes, writers slip up and shift tense when there should be no shift, as in the following sentence:

Incorrect: The football team was good, and is still improving.

Correct:  The football team is good, and is still improving.

Incorrect: Last semester, I had more homework in math than I have in all my other classes combined.

Correct: Last semester, I had more homework in math than in all my other classes combined.

**Shifts in Voice: Passive vs. Active Voice**

A sentence is said to be in active voice when the subject performing the action is emphasized:

John visited the Smithsonian Institute on his last trip to Washington D.C.

A sentence is in passive voice when the subject performing the action is de-emphasized:

The Smithsonian Institute was visited by John on his last trip to Washington D.C.

Most often writers use active voice in order to emphasize agency—a subject performing some action, and to make writing energetic.   Occasionally, however, writers want to emphasize the object in a sentence rather than a subject's actions.  Consider the emphasis in these active and passive sentences:

Passive: The cake was made by Marla.

Active: Marla made the cake.

Problems arise, however, when a writer shifts from active to passive or from passive to active voice within the same sentence:

Incorrect: Jake was running late this morning and had to run to get to his first class, where it was discovered that the teacher had cancelled class.

Correct: Jake was running late this morning and had to run to get to his first class, where he discovered that the teacher had cancelled class.

**Shifts in Mood**

Mood in sentences is not like mood in people, who have emotional moods—joyful, melancholy, irritable, lazy, etc. In writing, there are two moods: indicative and subjunctive. A sentence in the indicative mood is a statement of fact, an assertion. A sentence in the subjunctive mood indicates that something is conditional, hypothetical, or doubtful. In a sentence in the subjunctive mood, therefore, it is very common to see an "if" clause.  In addition, in the subjunctive mood, "I was" becomes "I were," and "It was" becomes "it were."  Take a look at the following sentences in the subjunctive mood:

If I were rich, I would buy a ranch far away from everybody.

If it were not for you, I never would have made it this far.

If they were not so kind, I would have been deeply embarrassed.

It is not correct to write "If I was rich. . . or "If I was you . . . etc.  These mistakes are considered shifts in mood.

**Shifts in Person**

There are three forms of narrative voice in writing:

1st person: "I" or "We"

2nd person: "You" or "You" (plural)

3rd person: "They," "He," "She," "One" "People" "Anyone" "Persons" etc.

It is common for students to shift person in written sentences, because in everyday speech, such shifts are common, for example,

Incorrect: I used to think school wasn't important, but as you get older, you get a lot wiser.

Correct: I used to think school wasn't important, but as I get older, I am getting wiser.

Incorrect: If one reads The Harry Potter books, they will discover that the books are far better than the films.

Correct: If fans of the Harry Potter films would read the Harry Potter books, they would discover that the books are far better than the films.

Incorrect: We had better arrive early because you never know what might happen.

Correct: We had better arrive early because we don't know what might happen.

Note: In general, it is better to avoid "you" constructions altogether in academic writing.  The personal "you" is a bit too informal and too direct for academic writing.

**Shifts in Number**

A shift from singular to plural, or vice versa is a definite no-no.  These shifts confuse the reader and break the coherence and unity of your writing. One source of shifts in number is an indefinite pronoun such as "anyone" or "none" or "all, especially when these pronouns are followed by a prepositional phrase such as "of us" or "of the students."

Incorrect: Anyone is capable of being the next manager because they have had excellent training.

Correct:  Anyone is capable of being the next manager because each of them has had excellent training.

Incorrect: Every student is doing their best.

Correct: All of the students are doing their best.