**3-2 Editing**

After revising our paragraph (perhaps several times) until we're satisfied with its basic content and structure, we still need to edit our work. In other words, we need to examine our sentences to make sure that each one is clear, concise, forceful, and free of mistakes.

Use this checklist as a guide when editing paragraphs and essays.

1. Is each sentence clear and complete?
2. Can any short, choppy sentences be improved by combining them?
3. Can any long, awkward sentences be improved by breaking them down into shorter units and recombining them?
4. Can any wordy sentences be made more concise?
5. Can any run-on sentences be more effectively coordinated or subordinated?
6. Does each verb agree with its subject?
7. Are all verb forms correct and consistent?
8. Do pronouns refer clearly to the appropriate nouns?
9. Do all modifying words and phrases refer clearly to the words they are intended to modify?
10. Is each word in the essay appropriate and effective?
11. Is each word spelled correctly?
12. Is the punctuation correct?
    * 1. **Sentence Effectiveness**
13. **Fragment Sentences**

A sentence fragment lacks at least one of the three features of a complete sentence: a subject, a verb, and/or a complete thought. As a result, the logical progression of your writing may be unclear, potentially confusing the reader. Although incomplete sentences are regularly used in creative writing and journalism, this sentence structure is too informal for academic writing, with the exception of certain table and figure legends and brief summaries.

* **Sentence Fragment Rules:**
* Every sentence must have a subject and a verb and must express a complete thought.
* If a group of words lacks a subject or a verb or does not express a complete thought, it is a fragment, which is an error.
* Fix a fragment by supplying what it is missing (the subject, the verb, or the complete thought).
* Sometimes, the best solution is to combine a fragment with another complete sentence.

Sentence fragments may be more difficult to identify when they consist of a dependent clause that has both a subject and a verb but cannot stand alone. For example:

* *The insulin levels increased. Whereas the glucagon levels decreased.*
* *The insulin levels increased. And the glucagon levels decreased.*

In both cases, each clause has a subject and a verb (“levels increased” and “levels decreased”). However, in each example, the first sentence is a complete thought, whereas the second sentence is incomplete because it begins with a subordinating (first example) or coordinating (second example) conjunction. These conjunctions are used to link two independent clauses; if only one phrase is associated with a conjunction, the sentence’s meaning may be unclear. Both cases can be addressed by merging the complete and incomplete sentences and adding a comma:

* *The insulin levels increased, whereas the glucagon levels decreased.*
* *The insulin levels increased, and the glucagon levels decreased.*

The conjunctions now properly link the two independent clauses “The insulin levels increased” and “the glucagon levels decreased.” Alternatively, the fragments could be restructured into complete sentences by using transitions instead of conjunctions:

* *The insulin levels increased. In contrast, the glucagon levels decreased.*
* *The insulin levels increased. Additionally, the glucagon levels decreased.*

1. **Run-on Sentences**

A run-on sentence occurs when two or more independent clauses are not joined correctly. An independent clause is a group of words that can stand alone as a sentence, as in, “the dog runs.” Your writing may be confusing or unclear if independent clauses are joined incorrectly.

There are two types of run-on sentences: **fused sentences** and **comma splices**.

**A fused sentence** occurs when independent clauses run together with no marks of punctuation or coordinating conjunctions to separate them.

***Fused sentence*:** *My professor read my paper she said it was excellent.*

*independent clause independent clause*

**A comma splice** occurs when two or more independent clauses are joined only by a comma.

***Comma splice:*** *My cat meowed angrily, I knew she wanted food.*

*independent clause independent clause*

**Solution**

***Revise run-on sentences in one of four ways:***

* ***Use a comma and a coordinating conjunction*** (and, but, yet, so, or, nor, for). When you join two independent clauses with a coordinating conjunction, place a comma before the coordinating conjunction.

***Run-on:*** *My professor read my paper she said it was excellent.*

***Correction:*** *My professor read my paper****, and*** *she said it was excellent.*

* Use a semicolon (or, in some cases, a colon or a dash). You can use a semicolon alone or with a transitional expression (e.g., however, at any rate, in contrast, as a result, etc.).

***Run-on:*** *My cat meowed angrily, I knew she wanted food.*

***Correction:*** *My cat meowed angrily****;*** *I knew she wanted food.*

***Correction with a transitional expression:*** *My cat meowed angrily****; therefore,*** *I knew*

*she wanted food.*

* **Separate the independent clauses into sentences**. This is an especially good technique when one of the independent clauses is very long.

***Run-on:*** *It seemed to Wanda that her daughter had more than enough crayons, they*

*were strewn across the bedroom floor and some of them were broken, and,*

*worse still, someone had used the stub of a red crayon to mark a sinister smiley*

*face on the wall.*

***Correction:*** *It seemed to Wanda that her daughter had more than enough crayons. They*

*were strewn across the bedroom floor, and some of them were broken.*

*Worse still, someone had used the stub of a red crayon to mark a sinister*

*smiley face on the wall.*

* **Restructure the sentence by subordinating one of the clauses.** You can subordinate a clause if one of the independent clauses seems less important than the other. Here are a few examples in which one of the clauses has been subordinated (indicated here by underlining). Note that a subordinated clause is no longer independent—it cannot stand on its own as a sentence.

***Run-on:*** *The largest tree by volume in the world is the General Sherman Sequoia, it is a*

*little over 52,500 cubic feet.*

***Correction:*** *The largest tree by volume in the world is the General Sherman Sequoia,*

*which is a little over 52,500 cubic feet.*

***Run-on:*** *Toni Morrison is a professor at Princeton University, she wrote the novel The*

*Bluest Eye.*

***Correction:*** *Toni Morrison, a professor at Princeton University, wrote The Bluest Eye.*

***Run-on:*** *I told my roommate I would be late, she still locked me out.*

***Correction:*** *Although I told my roommate I would be late, she still locked me out.*

***Run-on:*** *I told the children I would read to them they said they wanted to sit by me so*

*they could look at the pictures.*

***Correction:*** *When I told the children I would read to them, they said they wanted to sit*

*by me so they could look at the pictures.*

1. **Faulty Parallelism**

Parallel structure (also called parallelism) is the repetition of a chosen grammatical form within a sentence. By making each compared item or idea in your sentence follow the same grammatical pattern, you create a parallel construction.

***Example***

***Not Parallel:***

Ellen likes hiking, the rodeo, and to take afternoon naps.

***Parallel:***

Ellen likes hiking, attending the rodeo, and taking afternoon naps.

**OR**

Ellen likes to hike, attend the rodeo, and take afternoon naps.

Below are THREE rules to consider when checking for Parallel Structure in your writing:

* Parallel Structure should be used when elements are joined by coordinating conjunctions:
* ***Incorrect:*** *I am allergic to the dog’s hair and how it smells.*
* ***Correct:*** *I am allergic to the dog’s hair and its smell.*
* Parallel Structure should be used when writing elements in the form of a list or a series:
* ***Incorrect:*** *The class valued respect, honesty, and being on time in a teacher.*
* ***Correct:*** *The class valued respect, honesty, and promptness in a teacher.*
* Parallel Structure should be used when comparing or contrasting elements (A is better than B – X is less than Y):
* ***Incorrect:*** *James enjoys reading more than to write.*
* ***Correct:*** *James enjoys reading more than writing.*

1. **Correctness or Wordiness**

In speech or writing, the term **conciseness** refers to language that's brief and to the point. To be effective, concise writing must deliver a clear message using an economy of words. Concise writing doesn't waste time with circumlocution, padding, or verbosity. Repetition, unnecessary jargon, and needless details are to be avoided. When you minimize clutter, readers are more likely to remain engaged, understand and remember your message and even act on it, should that be your goal.

* **Rules for Concise Writing**
* Avoid jargon.
* Keep it simple. The less flowery your prose, the more accessible will be.
* Use shorter words instead of long ones when appropriate.
* Edit out empty phrases and delete common redundancies.

Look at the following example to see how some of these rules can be applied:

**Example:**

* ***Wordy:*** *Following the author’s study of "The Naval Chronicle" (which goes into detail on the wars with Napoleon), a trip aboard a freighter from California to Central America, and his trip back home to England, the first book in the series was plotted.*
* ***Revision:*** *After studying "The Naval Chronicle," which details the Napoleonic Wars, the author took a freighter voyage from California to Central America. He plotted the first book in the series upon returning home to England.*
* **Ways to Cut Wordiness**
* ***Replace Vague Words with Specific Ones***

Vague or abstract words tend to conceal your meaning. On the other hand, specific words precisely and shortly convey your meaning.

**Example:**

* ***Vague:*** *The Acme Corporation is developing a new consumer device that allows users to communicate vocally in real time.*
* ***Specific:*** *The Acme Corporation is developing a new cell phone.*
* ***Avoid Overusing Expletives at the Beginning of Sentences***

Expletives are phrases of the form it + be-verb or there + be-verb.

**Example 01:**

* ***Wordy:*** *It is the governor who signs or vetoes bills.*
* ***Concise:*** *The governor signs or vetoes bills.*

**Example 02:**

* ***Wordy:*** *There are four rules that should be observed.*
* ***Concise:*** *Four rules should be observed.*
* *Avoid Overusing Noun Forms of Verbs*

Use verbs when possible rather than noun forms known as nominalizations.

**Example:**

* ***Wordy:*** *The function of this department is the collection of accounts.*
* ***Concise:*** *This department collects accounts.*
* ***Eliminate Unnecessary Words***

Unnecessary words can come in many forms like excessive detail, repetitive words, or redundant words.

* **Excessive Details**
* ***Before:*** *I received and read the email you sent yesterday about the report you’re writing for the project. I agree it needs a thorough, close edit from someone familiar with your audience.*
* ***After:*** *I received your email about the project report and agree it needs an expert edit.*
* **Repetitive words**
* ***Before:*** *The engineer considered the second monitor an unneeded luxury.*
* ***After:*** *The engineer considered the second monitor a luxury.*
* **Redundant words**
* ***Before:*** *The test revealed conduction activity that was peculiar in nature.*
* ***After:*** *The test revealed peculiar conduction activity.*
* ***Replace Multiple Negatives with Affirmatives***

Affirmatives, instead, convey concise meaning that needs no interpretation.

* ***Before:*** *Your audience will not appreciate the details that lack relevance.*
* ***After:*** *Your audience will appreciate relevant details.*

1. **Subject-Verb Agreement**

Singular subjects need singular verbs, and plural subjects need plural verbs because both must agree in number. Singular verbs in the present tense end in **“s”** or **“es”** .Usually in English the subject comes first and then the verb, but in many direct questions and when **“here”** or **“there”** begins the sentence, the verb comes first in the sentence. Prepositional phrases that follow the subject can be troublesome for students. Nothing in the prepositional phrase can be the subject of the sentence. Always eliminate prepositional phrases first, and then find the subject and verb.

**Examples:**

* *Everyone in our company (plans, plan) to go to the company picnic on Saturday.*

Delete the prepositional phrase “in our company.” Find the subject “Everyone,” which is singular. Choose the singular verb “plans” to agree with the singular subject.

* *Here (is, are) the announcers for the local charity benefit taking place today.*

“Announcers” is the subject; choose the plural verb “are” to agree in number with the plural subject “announcers.” “Here” is never a subject.

Placing subjects close to their verbs reduces subject-verb agreement errors. If the subject of a sentence is singular, the verb must be singular; if the subject is plural, the verb must be plural. Subjects and verbs are italicized in the following sentences.

**Example01:**

* *Each* of the female characters, as well as the male characters they interact with, *seem* to have difficulty with the transition from traditional to modern values.
* **Revision:** *Each* of the female characters, as well as the male characters they interact with, *seems* to have difficulty with the transition from traditional to modern values.

**Example02:**

* There *is* three *reasons* for the government's reaction.
* **Revision:** There *are* three *reasons* for the government's reaction.

**Example03:**

* The poetic *devices and constructs* that help to reinforce the effects of the imagery *is* the final topic of discussion.
* **Revision:** *The poetic* *devices and constructs* that help to reinforce the effects of the imagery *are* the final topic of discussion.

1. **Unclear Pronoun Reference**

Always make clear to whom or to what pronouns refer. In addition, be sure that pronouns and their antecedents agree in number and gender. The unclear pronouns are italicized in the following examples.

**Example01:**

* To keep the birds from eating seeds, soak *them* in blue food coloring.
* Revision: Soak *the seeds* in blue food coloring to keep the birds from eating them.

**Example02:**

* Writers should spend a great deal of time thinking about their arguments to make sure *they* are not superficial.
* **Revision:** Writers should spend a great deal of time thinking about their arguments to make sure that those arguments are not superficial.

**Example03:**

* Our lab group originally determined dominance on the basis of *its* fins.
* **Revision:** Our lab group originally determined the fish's dominance on the basis of its fins.

1. **Dangling or Misplaced Modifiers**

A 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:**

* 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.
* 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 such constructions, 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.

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.

1. 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.

1. **Shifts**

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:

**Example01:**

* *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:

**Example02:**

* *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:

**Example:**

* ***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 Numbers**

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.*