

Writing Revision: Revising Sentences with the Paramedic Method

New students often perceive academic writing as wordy, difficult, and long. In fact, academic writing requires clear action, simplicity, and brevity, not big words and long sentences. One technique used by writers called the Paramedic Method excels at turning any sentence, but especially long, confusing sentences, into clear academic writing. Follow the steps below:



Identify the Problem

1): Circle the Prepositions	2): Draw Box around "be" Verbs	3): Highlight the Action & Actor
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes <i>of, in, on, to, for, at, etc.</i> Clusters of prepositional phrases make a sentence difficult to read Log Test: Find prepositions with "X the log." For example, "<u>on</u> the log" or "<u>through</u> the log." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes <i>is, were, was, has, had, etc.</i> "Be" verbs describe a state of existence but perform no action. Remove them when possible. For example, use "John walks" instead of "John is walking" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask "what was done" and "who or what is doing it?" Mark those words. If the actor and action are far apart, the sentence likely has issues. If you have trouble finding the actor, passive voice can be the culprit
<p>Example: In this sentence the use of good style in the writing of reports was demonstrated.</p>	<p>Example: In this sentence the use of good style in the writing of reports was demonstrated.</p>	<p>Example: In this sentence the use of good style in the writing of reports was demonstrated.</p>

Rebuild the Sentence

4): Change Action to Simple Verb	5): Write Sentence in Simplest Form	6): Remove & Rebuild
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suggest (simple) versus Suggested, Suggesting, Suggestion (complex) Academic writing favors simple, active verbs over passive voice. By X Test: If you can ask "by who" after the action, you likely have passive voice. For example "the dog was walked (by who?)." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bring the actor and action together in the simplest form of the sentence. Academic sentences use clear subjects next to simple verbs at the start of the sentence. Finding the "core" of a complex sentence gives a foundation to rebuild the sentence around. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Add back any essential information from the original sentence. Keep the sentence "core" in place and add information to the right. Eliminate or reduce circled prepositions Remove unnecessary descriptive words, repetitions, and redundancies
<p>Example: ... was demonstrated → demonstrates.</p>	<p>Example: This sentence demonstrates.</p>	<p>Example: This sentence demonstrates good report writing style.</p>

Original (15 words)
 In this sentence the use of good style in the writing of reports was demonstrated.

Which sounds better?

Revised (7 words)
 This sentence demonstrates good report writing style.

Remember, practice these techniques as you write. Eventually you will write in a strong, clear academic style from the start and not need to revise as much.

In the meantime, always keep in mind that good academic writing should be:

- Clear: Who is doing what should be obvious
- Simple: Academic writing should never talk above its reader – use simple words when possible
- Concise/Brief: Said in as few words as possible
- Active: Active voice is when a sentence's subject does something; passive voice is when that subject has something done to it -- "The dog was walked by John" (Passive) vs "John walked the dog." (Active)

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Try revising the sentences below. Compare your revision's word count to the original.

1. An evaluation of the effect of Class C fly ash on the properties of ternary mixtures for use in concrete pavements was undertaken and is presented in this paper. (29 words)

2. In so far as manifestations of infestation were evident in the residential facilities provided for the agricultural laborers, an unwillingness to occupy, utilize, or in any manner inhabit the facilities was therefore demonstrated by the laborers. (36 words)

3. Systematic instruction in the theory and practice of chemistry finally received serious interest in full from institutions of higher learning during the opening decades of the 19th century (28).