



Paradigm
Online Writing Assistant

Global and Local Perspectives

Revision means "re-seeing." To revise well, you must be a creative and imaginative reader of your own work, a reader who can anticipate another reader's response and see new ways the writing might evolve. Strong revisers develop a "critical zoom lens" that allows them to shift perspective from broad overview to minute detail, and to see how these levels of composition relate.

Knowing you'll revise later makes it easier to relax early in your writing process. If you know your words can be changed later, you won't worry about writing the perfect first draft. You can speak your mind, knowing you'll revise the draft before anyone else sees it.

That's one important difference between writing and speaking. When you speak, you get only one chance. Whatever you say, no matter how foolish or inappropriate, has been said. Maybe that's why we have the sayings, "Think before you speak," and "Make sure brain is in gear before engaging tongue." If you write something inappropriate, however, you can always tear it up and throw it away. With writing you get a second chance, or a third or a fourth if you need it. And every time you revise, you see new opportunities, new potential in the evolving text.

Too often, inexperienced writers don't see this distinction. They are too careful and self-critical at the start of a project and too accepting, too easily satisfied, toward the end. Having agonized through a first draft, they make a quick check for grammar and mechanics, and consider themselves done.

More experienced writers, however, usually do just the reverse. Early on, they work at discovering what to say, getting their ideas out into the open and onto disk or paper. They write quickly, accepting chance discoveries, trusting hunches and gut-feelings, willingly making mistakes. Gradually, though, they feel a need to look back over their work, to ask whether it makes sense, whether it will have the desired effect on their readers. Thus begins the process of revision.

Spotting grammatical and mechanical problems is only a minor concern here. Much more important is the need to see the big picture, the overall effect of your words on your reader. Consider the structure, the level of complexity. Then focus in on individual sentences and words. Read for fluency and precision. Step back and imagine you're another person coming to this piece for the first time:

- Is the style authentic and engaging?
- Does the writing have a clear sense of purpose?
- Could the major divisions and subpoints be presented in a better order?
- Are sentences fluent, tight, and well-constructed?
- Is the language precise and appropriate to the writing context?

Learning to revise well means learning to ask and answer such questions about your own writing. It requires keeping an open mind about your work and being willing to go back over it again and again, until you get it just right.

Developing Your Style

Everyone has an individual writing style, not only professional writers. We all--the Hell's Angel in leather jacket and red

bandanna, the banker in business suit and bifocals--reveal our personalities and values in our appearance, in our possessions, and in our language.

Do you have a sense of humor? Is it biting and sarcastic or lighthearted and jolly? Are you direct and blunt? Or do you like to hint and suggest what's on your mind? Do you get emotionally involved or stay coolly detached? Are you casual or formal? Confident or insecure? What part of the country do you come from? How much education do you have? By studying a few pages of your writing, an experienced reader should be able to form a fairly accurate impression of you as a person. Style refers to the way you, the person behind the writing, come across to your readers; more precisely, it refers to the elements of your writing that mark it as being uniquely and individually yours.

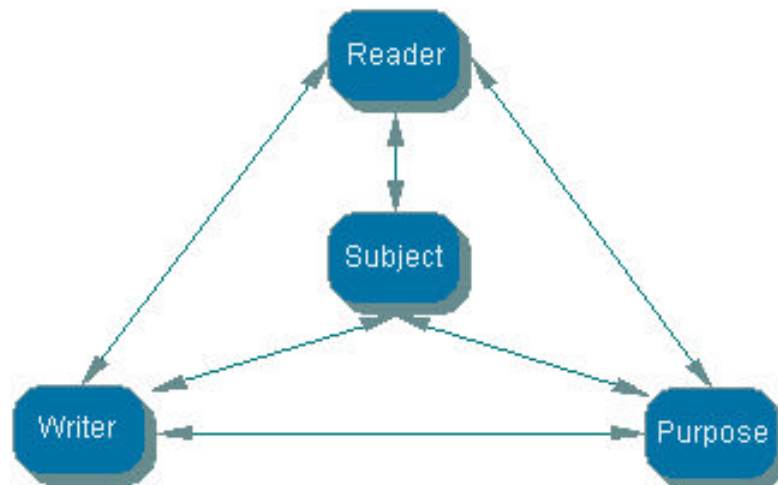
If you think about it, you'll probably realize that sometimes when reading you've had strong feelings about the personality behind the writing. Letters from friends or relatives, for instance, are often valued less for their news--Uncle Henry got a new toupee, or your little sister lost her second tooth--than for the individual voice that comes across, the familiar expressions and ways of thinking, the tone of friendliness and caring. Or maybe you know a qualified person who was passed over for a job interview because the selection committee thought the candidate's letter of application sounded "too arrogant and condescending" or "too desperate and insecure."

Such impressions are often subliminal. That is, we may not be fully aware of our feelings, and we might not be able to say exactly what features of the language are responsible. Style is subtle, perhaps more so in writing than in other areas of life. Still, developing your individual writing style is essential, not just because style is an expression of your self, but because stylistic awareness helps you gauge the impression your words will make on others.

Writer, Reader, Purpose--The Writing Context

Few people enjoy writing so much that they do it just for fun. Sometimes an event or object may inspire us to sit down and write "just for the heck of it," without any sense of readers or purpose. That's how poems and journals often begin. If you've done that kind of writing, you know it can be enjoyable and worthwhile. It lets you explore your experience and capture your feelings, keeping them, like snapshots, to look at later and, perhaps, to share with a friend. Yet even such expressive writing grows out of a real life situation that calls forth language: all writing is situation bound. It's a response prompted by various needs, desires, and demands from both inside and outside.

The fact that writing is an individual response to specific circumstances has many implications. The better you understand the circumstances that prompt your writing, the more effectively you can respond, refining and adjusting your style to suit these different contexts. The following figure may help you envision the variables of the *writing context* :



When you write, you may first look at the *subject* primarily from your own point of view. As you size up the situation, however, you should begin to ask: Who is my *reader* ? What *purpose* do I hope to achieve? What will I need to say in

order to accomplish this purpose?

As you ask such questions, you may realize that your *reader* will be looking at the *subject* from a different perspective. Your more thoughtful readers are likely to ask questions such as: What sort of person wrote this? What purpose does this person hope to accomplish? How has the writing's content been shaped by the writer's experience and motives?

Understanding the writing context requires seeing from multiple viewpoints, but it also requires understanding that these viewpoints intersect and interrelate. Now some new questions begin to appear: What sort of person will my reader envision me to be? To what extent will my reader understand and sympathize with my purpose in writing? What kinds and amounts of information should my reader be given? How should I present this information in order to achieve my purpose in writing? Consider the following example:

Writer: A college freshman away from home and working part-time at a fast-food restaurant to pay her expenses, a serious student majoring in premedicine but getting mentally and emotionally exhausted from the various pressures in her life.

Reader: Her parents, but especially her father who, she knows, will make the final decision after talking the issue out with her mother. Her father is a successful banker, generally loving and supportive but a bit old-fashioned in that he wants the daughter to get the kind of education that would fit her for a more conventional "woman's role" in society, maybe dental hygiene or nursing since she is interested in medicine. Her mother almost always remains subordinate to the father, but exerts a great deal of influence on the father and has at least hinted that she supports the girl's desire to become a doctor.

Purpose: To persuade her father to temporarily increase his level of financial support by a hundred dollars a month so that she can quit her job and concentrate more on her studies.

This is a tricky situation, but no more so than many others, once you analyze them closely. Thinking about the three points of our triangle, the girl begins to make decisions about the **content** of her message, *what* she wants to say and *how* she wants to say it. She wonders how to phrase the actual request for money and whether it should begin or end the letter. She wants to be sure to tell her parents the restaurant requires her to work every Thursday evening and she usually has a Chemistry quiz on Friday morning. She wants to sound respectful, mature, and serious--not desperate or insistent. Very importantly, she wants to tell them that whatever they decide, she'll understand that they believe it to be in her best interest. She wonders whether she should speak of the money as a loan and offer to repay it the following summer. Finally, though, she decides against this, choosing to save it for a follow-up request if necessary.

You might be thinking you'd have approached the situation differently, omitting certain points and including others. If so, you're getting the idea of what it means to size-up the **writing context**.

Activity

3.1 Prepare a brief situation statement covering the four elements of the **writing context**: writer, reader, purpose, content. Imagine you are writing a letter asking someone to do a favor or help with a problem. If possible, choose a real person and a real problem. Use the following format:

SITUATION STATEMENT

Writer:

Reader:

Purpose:

Content:

The Writer's Voice: A Personal Response

Style refers to the ways in which we consciously or unconsciously reveal ourselves in our writing, and it should be tailored to meet the needs of the specific situation that prompts the writing. These two statements seem contradictory, the first suggesting that each of us has a unique, individual *voice* that comes across in all our the writing and the second that, chameleonlike, we should change our style to get what we want or to impress a reader.

One way to resolve this is to see style as an activity, a way of relating yourself to and distinguishing yourself from others. Thus, while you always behave in ways that are characteristically and uniquely your own, you understand that building

successful relationships with other people demands sensitivity and responsiveness to their needs and interests. A sprinkling of profanity might be just the thing in a letter to an old Marine Corps buddy, but chances are you'd leave it out of a letter to your grandmother. When you go out to play touch football, you throw on your faded sweatpants and your old high-school football jersey. Later, when you eat at a nice restaurant, you put on your best western shirt, your tooled leather belt with the silver buckle, and your lizard skin boots.

Being yourself, being natural and authentic, doesn't mean being inflexible and one-dimensional; it means having the confidence to respond authentically to the variety of situations that comprise your life.

A Reminder

Style in writing, as in other areas of life, is a highly personal matter. Different people have different ways of expressing themselves, and any individual may have several ways, depending on the situation. The more you grow as a writer, the more confidence you'll gain in your ability to respond readily, naturally, and effectively to the many different writing situations that you encounter.

Such confidence, however, can't be gained entirely from reading. True, you can learn the dynamics of various writing situations, develop your awareness of how slang or technical jargon affects certain readers, and become more aware of different ways to state and structure your thoughts. Such knowledge is vital to developing an effective style. But more important than abstract knowledge is the actual experience of writing. In the act of writing, and especially in sharing your writing and receiving a response, you develop a sensitivity to style, especially your own style, that no textbook can give.

Activities

3.2 The adjectives in **List I** could be used to describe various aspects of a person's style. **List II** contains brief descriptions of three different writing situations. Which qualities from list I might you try to incorporate in your style for each situation in **List II**? Some terms may be appropriate to more than one situation, while others may be totally inappropriate. You may think of a few terms that don't appear in **List I** but seem appropriate for one of the writing situations. If so, jot them down.

List I

Clever, sophisticated, grateful, confident, eager, dismayed, plain, frank, dignified, relaxed, furious, amused, worried, abrupt, cute, powerful, intelligent, sarcastic, concerned, playful, sincere, zany, friendly, distant, submissive, aloof, formal, informal, carefully considered, spontaneous, exaggerated, understand, witty.

List II

a. Your water was shut off by the city while you were on vacation. You spent a whole day trying to call them, but all you got was a recording. Your payment was two weeks overdue but is now in the mail. You have never paid late before. The neighbor was unable to water your lawn or garden. You are writing to the director of the city water and sewage department.

b. You have four weeks left in the term. You have just learned that you have mononucleosis and will be unable to attend classes for the remainder of the term. You have told your professors. They have all been very understanding, giving you your assignments and generally going out of their way to help you finish the courses on schedule, all except your German professor. She says there is very little chance of your passing. She wants you to drop the course and take it again because so much of the grade is based on class participation and recitation. Unfortunately, you need this course so that you can get into German II next term. As nearly as you can figure, your grade is about a B-. You are writing to your teacher.

c. You've just returned home from an exciting week as a guest at a close friend's cabin in the mountains. Your friend was not there. You caught plenty of fish. You explored some of the local attractions. You met a few of your friend's neighbors. You put a hole in the bottom of your friend's canoe. You had the hole fixed. It looks pretty good but not quite perfect. You were thrown out of the canoe when it hit some rocks in a fast part of the river. You were bruised but not seriously injured. You are writing to your friend.

3.3 Write a letter responding to a situation from **List II** in the last exercise. Use your imagination to fill in the details. When you've finished, share and compare your letter with those your partner has done on the same topic. Discuss the similarities and differences in your responses. What do these similarities and differences reveal about your perceptions of the situation? What do they reveal about you as writers?

Unity of Purpose

As you revise you'll want to get all parts of your paper working together to produce a **unified effect**. Just as a basketball team whose members work as a unit has a better chance of success than one whose members work at cross-purposes, the papers you write--whether letters, reports, or essays--will more likely succeed if they're unified, if they have a singleness of purpose to which every word contributes.

Hardly ever do you write something unless you have a purpose. That purpose may be to ask a favor, to inform, to console, or a hundred other things; but it will be there even if only partially defined in your own mind. *The first step toward creating unity is to make that purpose clear, first to yourself and then to your reader. In other words, know why you're writing and let your reader know also.* See if you can discover the purpose of the following letter:

Dear D & L Lawn Sprinkling:

As you know, we've had an unusually hot summer, hot and dry. It hasn't rained for weeks, and though the farmers are glad for a chance to dry out their hay, I'm not a farmer, and I'm not so glad to see my lawn drying out and turning brown.

The other day I had some friends over for supper, and even though they didn't say anything about it, I'm sure they wondered why my yard looked like a miniature dust bowl.

Of course it's important to conserve water, and I've been using a lot less water on my lawn lately. That will save me some money, but not enough to pay the \$535 bill you sent for overhauling my sprinklers, which still don't work right.

You've spent two weeks on this problem with no luck, and I'm starting to wonder how long it will take and whether I'll have any lawn left to sprinkle when you get done or whether I should just pave my yard and use it for parking.

Sincerely,

Arthur Bledsoe

Mr. Bledsoe is clearly unhappy about his sprinkler system, but his letter isn't clear about whether he intends to pay the \$535 bill, and the points about the farmers, about conserving water, and about turning his yard into a parking lot cloud the letter's overall purpose.

If you can state your purpose clearly in one sentence, so much the better. That sentence can serve as a center around which to organize your ideas. Whether you use it in your writing or not, it will help you clarify your thoughts so you can decide what you should say and what you should leave out. If, for instance, Mr. Bledsoe said to himself after writing his first draft, "I want the sprinkler company to know that I'm not paying anything until my sprinklers are working. Will everything I've written help to do that?" he would hardly leave the letter as it stands. Probably he would see that some of what he'd written was irrelevant and delete it. After that, he might decide what was left didn't look like much and develop it a little, but without losing sight of his purpose. The end result might look something like this:

Dear D & L Lawn Sprinkling:

Yesterday I was surprised to receive your bill for \$535 for repairing my sprinkler system. Although your men have been working on the system for two weeks, it still doesn't work. During this period my yard has been torn up, and what remains of my grass has turned brown and may be past saving.

I don't know what the problem is. I've talked to the repairmen, and they don't know either. I do know, however, that I have no intention of paying this bill or any other you may send until my sprinklers are working.

If you have a suggestion as to how we can resolve this problem, please contact me. I just want to get my

sprinklers working again and will be happy to pay you a fair price once the job is completed.

Sincerely,

Arthur Bledsoe

Notice how the clearly defined purpose provides a basis for deciding what should be cut out and what should be kept and developed. Of course if you have a definite purpose before you begin, so much the better.

Activities

3.4 Revise the following letter for unity of purpose. What is the writer's main idea? Is it ever stated directly? How could it be made more clear? What parts ought to be cut or expanded?

Dear Friend of the Arts:

As you know, the budget deficit is a big problem for all Americans, and we must all do our share to reduce it. In the last presidential campaign several candidates spoke about this issue. Some say the problem is with congress. Others blame the administration.

Only a small portion of the budget goes to the arts, and many people think this is too much. They think artists are just a bunch of beatniks who should get regular jobs instead of asking for tax money to pay for works that they don't like. But who are these people, anyway? Didn't we elect them? And what about the Air Force? They whine if someone even talks about closing a base.

So, as you can see, the arts are suffering. Please write your representative or even the president, and send us a contribution so we can keep the arts alive.

Sincerely,

Eunice P. Gladstone
State Arts Campaign

3.5 Go back over a piece of your earlier writing and edit it for unity of purpose. First try to phrase your most important point in one sentence. Next, cut out everything that doesn't clearly relate to your central purpose. As you your new draft emerges, you may want to expand and develop some points that relate to your main idea. If you find it helpful, use your purpose sentence as part of your revised paper.

Creating Emphasis: Selection, Placement, Repetition

If writing is like making a movie, *emphasis* could be compared to a photographer's zoom lens, moving in for a close-up one moment and back for a wide-angle shot the next. *Emphasis* allows you to create similar special effects by magnifying, reducing, or even eliminating certain details. By learning to control *emphasis*, you can focus your readers' attention on what is most important. In speech we create emphasis by pausing or speaking louder, but in writing we don't have that opportunity. Still, besides underlining and using exclamation marks, you can focus attention by using *selection*, *placement*, and *repetition*.

Selection	Placement	Repetition
---------------------------	---------------------------	----------------------------

Selection

If you've been using the discovery aids in [Discovering What to Write](#), you've probably noticed that you must constantly make decisions about what to include and what to leave out. Failure to make such decisions causes you to lose sight of your main point as you wade through irrelevancies. By keeping your purpose in mind, however, you have a basis for deciding what to say and what to leave out.

Imagine, for instance, that two reporters have been sent to cover a tennis tournament: one is in the fashion department and one in the sports department of the local newspaper. Even if they spend most of their time together, their final reports will have little in common. The fashion reporter will concentrate on describing the clothing, hairstyles, and manners of the players and spectators. The sports reporter, on the other hand, will describe the shots made and missed, the players' energy cycles, anything that helps readers get into the feel of the action. Probably, though, the players' clothes will be mentioned only briefly if at all. The same thing happens, although perhaps in a more subtle way, in all writing. Simply because we have different personalities, purposes, and readers, we see some aspects of our subject as more important than others.

Placement

In any piece of writing--a sentence, a paragraph, an essay, a whole book--the first and last positions are vitally important. At the beginning of any of these units, the reader's mind is clear, fresh, and ready to absorb whatever it encounters. That's why [the topic sentence of a paragraph](#) so often comes at the beginning. Again, at the end of even so short a unit as a sentence, comes a place just before completion where expectations and attention are very high, where readers expect to get the essence of the message, the point of it all.

By effective *placement*, we can take advantage of these expectations. We can use openings and closings as locations for concepts or facts that we want to highlight. Putting the topic sentence in the first position of a paragraph is a good example of using placement effectively, as is saving the most important detail for last rather than sandwiching it between two less important points where it could go unnoticed. Likewise, getting the most important words of a sentence up front focuses attention on them, while placing a key word at the end of a sentence will cause it to linger a while in the reader's mind.

Repetition

Used carelessly, **repetition** can easily weaken writing by making it monotonous and predictable, but effective repetition can strengthen writing by [setting up reader expectations](#) which can be satisfied or frustrated as you choose. For this reason and also because repetition gets [key words](#) and concepts before your reader more than once, you can use it to center attention on vital facts and thought patterns. Probably you have already used some repetition in your own writing without realizing it. You won't necessarily strengthen your paper by adding more and may in fact weaken it. For now, use repetition sparingly but deliberately. Repeat consciously, rather than unconsciously.

Tightening

Tightening means cutting extra words, all those that don't contribute anything important to your message. Most writers use far more words than necessary. They don't attach enough value to the individual word. As a result, their writing often seems cluttered. It's hard to focus on the central ideas because so many unimportant words get in the way. Let's look at an example:

All my intentions were is to experience prison from the inside looking out and not from the outside looking in. I knew if I played my cards right and if the opportunity presented itself I wouldn't hesitate or be afraid to experience a short period behind bars, walls, fences, or prison for that matter in order to get an insider's view.

The idea here is interesting, but too many words are used to convey it. We could easily streamline the passage by cutting some excess. Maybe a little meaning is lost, but nothing crucial, and notice how much more smoothly it reads:

My intentions were to experience prison from the inside, and I wasn't afraid to spend a short period behind bars to get an insider's view.

And we could tighten it even more:

I wasn't afraid to spend a short time behind bars just for the experience.

The sixty-one words in the first version have been cut to fourteen. Not all writing can be tightened this much, but most early drafts profit by being trimmed to the essentials. Not only does the meaning become clearer, the writing becomes easier to read, more vivid and lively. A hidden bonus is that many [grammatical problems](#) eliminate themselves during tightening since they are as often the result of overburdened sentences as of a failure to understand rules.

One chance to tighten often occurs when you can join several short sentences into a longer one:

I have always had this one dream. My dream has been to be a famous writer. Everyone would read my books. I would become very wealthy.

This could all be made into one sentence:

I have always dreamed of being a wealthy, famous writer, read by everyone.

Besides cutting five words, we've eliminated the choppy rhythm, creating a more fluid and mature sounding sentence. Tightening isn't hard, although there is a kind of knack to it, and a person tends to get better with practice. The following suggestions may help:

1. Look for words that don't do their share of work:

Change: There's a light on the scoreboard that flashes on and off.
to: The scoreboard light flashes on and off.

2. Use strong verbs:

Change: In a cautious manner the car went around the corner.
to: The car negotiated the corner.

3. Don't pile up modifiers in front of nouns:

Change: He was a weak, timid sort of individual.

to: He was a mouse.

4. Make the agent the subject:

Change: The report was read to us by Mr. Coleman.

to: Mr. Coleman read us the report.

5. Keep it clear and simple:

Change: Bluegrass music might be said to have certain qualities which render it in a disagreeable light to a clear majority of my peers.

to: Most of my friends don't like bluegrass music.

6. Try combining several short sentences into a longer one:

Change: I have this beautiful watch. It is silver. It was given to me by my father. He gave it to me last year.

to: Last year my father gave me this beautiful silver watch.

The aim in every case is to make your writing more smooth and vivid, more expressive of your meaning. In fact, that's the aim of revision in general: to make every word work.

Activities

3.6. Tighten the following sentences. As you do, remember that any of several possibilities may work well. Sometimes you will find that many words can be cut out, other times only a few. Compare your revisions with those of your classmates.

a. Several unnecessary words can be cut here. They can be cut by combining the two sentences together into one single sentence.

b. My last English teacher was somewhat older. His hair was gray, but it still had some black flecks left in it.

c. We are going to North Carolina and West Virginia. Both are very beautiful states located in the southeastern portion of the country.

d. By having a good physical appearance, a job in general would be easier to find. An employer wants a person who is neat looking in his appearance.

e. Well, it seems I kind of got off the track of what I was intending to write about, but I don't really care.

f. Regular gasoline is what is needed to make it run. This fact makes it an economical car, so practical at this time of rising prices and inflation.

g. It even seems as though they could be of the same species because of the color coordination and also the similar shapes.

h. Because of the great amount of people in such a small area, there is of course a high amount of crime in this area.

i. The late fall is that time of year where temperatures make fishing next to impossible. It is at that time that Jim takes to the woods armed with his gun and camera. In many cases Jim's camera gets more action than his gun does.

j. The average person, male or female, who is in good physical condition likes to let others know it. Whether it be on the beach with a muscle man shirt on or in the park with shorts on, people in good shape will let you know they are in shape.

3.7 Go back over an early draft of a paper you wrote and cut all unnecessary words. Don't cut any that carry important meaning, just those that only take up space. Then exchange your paper with a partner and see if you agree on your decisions. Can you find more words that should be cut? Can you find some that shouldn't have been cut?

Designing Effective Sentences

Variations on S /VC	Periodic and Cumulative Structure
Expletives and Passives	Relative Clauses
Combining Sentences	Participial Phrases
Balance and Parallelism	Further Possibilities

Variations on S /VC

Basic Sentence Concepts explains the *subject verb/complement pattern* and shows how you can expand that pattern almost indefinitely with a few simple principles such as [coordination](#) and [subordination](#). Now we'll look at some more advanced sentence strategies. Again the aim is to increase your versatility as a writer, to help you see the full range of options for solving writing problems. As your flexibility increases, you'll not only satisfy minimal standards of clarity and correctness, you'll express yourself with new found energy and power.

While the *S V/C pattern*, with agent as subject, is by far the most common pattern for building English sentences, it's by no means the only one. Nor is it best in every situation. Sometimes you may wish to turn things around in order to create a particular kind of emphasis or rhythm:

She always caught fly balls. She usually missed grounders.

Fly balls she always caught. Grounders she usually missed.

Sometimes you'll see more than one possible variation.

My bicycle stood by the tree.

By the tree stood my bicycle.

By the tree my bicycle stood.

Such *inverted sentences* can be used to vary the rhythm or shift your reader's attention to an important word or phrase. When used carelessly or too often, however, they can produce an artificial, even awkward style.

Activity

3.8 Try inverting the following sentences. Come up with at least one variation for each. When you're finished, compare your results with those of your classmates. Are any sentences better in normal order? Does inversion ever change the meaning?

- a. The night is tender.
 - b. My brother burst into the house.
 - c. The lion climbed onto the table.
 - d. Some rain must fall into each life.
 - e. Lithuania lost the war.
 - f. A rifle hung in the truck's rear window.
 - g. Money is the root of all evil.
 - h. The bottle was empty.
 - i. A rolling stone gathers no moss.
-

Expletives and Passive Constructions

These common sentence patterns are undeniably useful, but both are overused by beginners who don't see that these constructions can rob their style of vigor and confuse meaning.

Expletives, as the term is used here, are words used primarily to take up space. They fill a slot in a sentence or round out a rhythm. Their meaning isn't important. They're commonly placed in the subject slot when a writer either doesn't know or doesn't want to name the agent. Notice how "it" and "there" work in the following examples.

With expletive: It has been decided that we will meet next Monday.

Without expletive: We have decided to meet next Monday.

With expletive: There are good job opportunities in computer science.

Without expletive: Computer science offers good job opportunities.

In both cases the second choice is more economical, more direct, and therefore preferable for most situations. Another concern with using expletives as subjects is [subject-verb agreement](#). Because "there" is neither singular nor plural, it can't tell you whether you'll need a singular or a plural verb. To learn that, you need to look at the complement.

Not in agreement: There's two good catchers on our team.

In agreement: There are two good catchers on our team.

Can you rewrite the sentence without an expletive? Is it weaker or stronger?

In Passive constructions the subject is the receiver of the action rather than the agent. Like constructions that open with expletives, passives can be useful when you wish to emphasize the results of an action or when you don't want to draw attention to the doer of the action.

Passive: Most of those mansions were built by wealthy lumber barons.

Active: Wealthy lumber barons built most of those mansions.

Which is stronger? It's hard to say. True, the second sentence is slightly shorter, but the guiding factor here probably would be whether the writer wanted to emphasize the mansions or the lumber barons.

Passive voice most often causes problems when it adds unnecessary words without producing any clear benefits. Find weak passive constructions in the following passage:

I played the fish slowly and carefully, not wanting to take a chance that it might snap the thin tippet at the end of my line. At last it grew tired. When it finally turned over on its side in exhaustion, I eased it into my net. The fly was carefully taken from its mouth, but as I paused for a moment to admire the trout's colors before putting it away in my creel, one last leap was made by it, out of my hands and back into the stream.

Activity

3.9 Read the following sentences to see if any could be improved by using expletives or passive constructions differently. Some may be fine as they stand; if so, make no change. Otherwise, rewrite the sentence to make it stronger.

- a. It's supposed to rain again this afternoon.
 - b. My motorcycle was bought by a dentist. My stereo was bought by a young girl. Everyone bought something.
 - c. There's several ways of solving the problem.
 - d. A person can solve the problem in several ways.
 - e. There are many benefits to come from living in the city.
 - f. Last night a very funny story about my father was told to me by a total stranger.
 - g. Whoever was there at the time built a quaint cabin near the marsh.
 - h. There's a candidate for every office.
 - i. It's amazing to me that I could have flunked chemistry.
 - j. There was only one point that was raised by him that I objected to.
-

Combining Sentences

Most of the following activities will give you practice in combining, "de-combining," or even "re-combining" sentences. Others will ask you to write sentences that imitate specific patterns. Combining short sentences into longer ones can eliminate unnecessary words and provide more expressive flexibility. Both advantages, but especially the second, are important stylistically. As you do the activities, remember that the ultimate goal is to discover new options for self-expression.

If you practice combining sentences, you'll discover several alternatives for expressing a single idea, and you can weigh the advantages and disadvantages of each. You can build rhythmic effects that create precisely the kinds of fluid and dynamic structures needed to express thoughts with individuality and distinction, and you can see how different patterns change the emphasis or meaning of an essential concept.

Balance and Parallelism

Balance in sentences is similar to balance in other areas of life. Imagine a high-wire artist above the circus ring's sawdust floor, placing one foot carefully in front of another, holding a long pole crosswise, exactly in the middle. Now read the following sentence, and notice how it does a kind of balancing act as it moves forward.

From Lowman to Cape Horn the weather was rainy, but from Cape Horn to Stanley it was clear.

Here the balance point is the coordinator "but." Probably you can feel how it centers the sentence.

From _____ to _____ the weather was _____, but
from _____ to _____ it [the weather] was _____.

The two [independent clauses](#) balance each other, and the balance is further emphasized by the prepositional phrase that opens each clause. The structure and even certain [key words](#) from one sentence part are repeated in another. That patterned repetition is the key to balance.

Sometimes the balance will be perfect, and sometimes a sentence that seems essentially balanced will have some unbalanced parts. Because these qualities are easier to see and recognize than to analyze and understand, a few more examples may be helpful:

The men wore coats and ties, and the ladies wore long dresses and heels.

Can you locate the balance point in the sentence above? Can you see why you should signal that point with a [comma](#)?

Some people may find such elaborately balanced structures too artificial, even too repetitious. They'll want to disturb the balance by dropping a few words from one clause:

The men wore coats and ties, the ladies, long dresses and heels.

That technique can work well, but be careful not to destroy the balance completely and cause the whole sentence design to come apart:

By all the men coats and ties were worn, and the ladies were all dressed up in long dresses and heels.

When two or more sentence parts have similar meaning or purpose, it's almost always effective to highlight that similarity with balanced structure.

One especially useful kind of balance is called *parallelism*. See if you can find any parallel structures in the following sentence:

It was a very sad time in my life, living alone, looking for work, dreaming of home.

Because the three phrases at the end of the sentence all serve the same purpose, telling why the writer was sad, it makes sense to use structural patterns that point up the similarity. Notice what happens when we disrupt the parallelism:

It was a very sad time in my life, living alone, to look for work, dreaming of home.

Besides being less rhythmic, this version loses a little clarity. Does "to look for work" explain why the writer was living alone or why the writer was sad? No such problems arise in the first version, where parallel structure helps keep the rhythm smooth and the meaning clear.

Activities

3.10 For each of the following sentences write an equivalent using the same pattern but filling in the missing words as needed.

Example: Every _____ _____ed into _____, and

every _____ ed into _____.

Every wedding turned into a joke, and every joke turned into a nightmare.

a. In a year of movies, it's the movie of the year.

In a _____ of _____, it's the _____ of the _____.

b. The atmosphere was great, but the food was greasy.

The _____ was _____, but the _____ was _____.

c. My cousin likes to play the fiddle, tap the rhythm, and call the tune.

My _____ s to _____ the _____, _____ the _____, and _____ the _____.

d. With her eyes closed, her teeth clenched, and her arm extended, the old woman pulled the trigger.

With _____ d, _____ d, and _____ d, the _____.

e. Money and power are the goals of the greedy, but peace and love are the rewards of the faithful.

_____ and _____ are the _____ of the _____, but _____ and _____ are the _____ of the _____.

3.12 As you read the following sentences, look for balanced structures, especially for parallelism. Underline any examples you find. If you find sentences that could be improved by repeating a structural pattern, rewrite them so they're stronger.

a. With tears running from his eyes and that fell onto his fatigues, Peterson finally surrendered.

b. My new puppy is shaggy as a bear and mean as a rattlesnake.

c. Some people love to drink, and some people drink to love.

d. I've got to bear down on my studies after flunking Chemistry and I got a D in Algebra I.

e. More than he ever wanted anything before, more than he had even wanted her to leave, Harvey wanted Alice to come back.

f. If you believe you can do it and by working on it hard enough, you can usually succeed.

g. Firecrackers and rockets don't convey the true spirit of Independence Day anymore than the real spirit of Christmas can be seen through Santa Claus and his reindeer.

h. What you see is what you get.

i. This is the place where girls become women, boys become men, dreams become reality.

j. There in the meadow stood a solitary elk, peaceful, majestic, quietly.

3.13 Combine each of the following groups of sentences into one single sentence containing balanced or parallel structures.

Example: We rode the Silver Twister. It was huge. It was fast. Its speed was like lightning. Our stomachs churned. Our blood pumped. We screamed with delight.

Stomachs churning, blood pumping, we screamed with delight as we rode the huge, lightning fast Silver Twister.

a. We were trying to reach the summit. The summit was of Mt. Greylock. We were tired. We were hungry. We were determined.

b. Our group was small. Our group was young. We played in a hall. The hall was immense. The hall was old.

c. The dust was everywhere. It was in our mouths. We got it in our hair. It was in our eyes. We even got it in our noses.

d. Jim Thorpe was outstanding at sports. The sports were many. One was football. Track was also good for him. So was soccer.

e. The people are looking for answers. The answers are to economic questions. The people are looking to the president. The president is looking for answers. His questions are the same. He is looking to his advisors.

Periodic and Cumulative Structure

Read the following two sentences and see if you can tell how they differ:

If you're the kind of person who likes to cry at the movies, you'll love *Casablanca* .

You'll love *Casablanca* if you're the kind of person who likes to cry at movies.

Which sentence has the base clause at the end? That sentence is *periodic* . Which sentence has the [base clause](#) at the beginning? That sentence is *cumulative* . When speaking of periodic structure, we'll call the elements that lead up to the base clause *leaders* . When speaking of cumulative structure, we'll call the elements that follow the base clause *trailers* .

Periodic structure:

If you're the kind of person who likes to cry at the movies, (**leader**)

you'll love *Casablanca* . (**base clause**)

Cumulative structure:

You'll love *Casablanca* (**base clause**)

if you're the kind of person who likes to cry at movies. (**trailer**)

Some sentences, like the following, use both leaders and trailers and therefore are not purely periodic or cumulative, but rather a combination:

After three triple cheeseburgers, two orders of fries, and two steins of beer, I stood up slowly, steadying myself by holding onto the edge of the table while I contemplated the chaos in my belly.

Can you find the base clause in that sentence? The leader? The trailer? Try switching them around, putting the trailer first and the leader last. What do you think of the results?

Periodic Structure

Beginning a sentence with a leader, besides adding variety to your sentence patterns, can help keep your reader's attention level high. So accustomed are we to reading sentences built on the SVC pattern that we start, almost immediately, to look for a [base clause](#). Of course we aren't aware that we're looking for this, but until we find it, our attention level is especially

high. As a matter of fact, this unconscious need to locate the start of the base clause is the reason you often need to [set off introductory elements with a comma](#), to indicate that the leader is complete and the base clause is about to begin. Notice the difference:

After he had eaten my brother got sick.

After he had eaten, my brother got sick.

My brother got sick after he had eaten.

"After" signals that we're in a dependent clause. We know, therefore, that "he" can't be the subject of the base clause, so we continue scanning for a subject. "Brother" seems a likely candidate, but wait, isn't it the complement of "had eaten"? Is this a story about cannibalism? Then we see the verb "got sick" and realize that "brother" has to be the subject. At last we can process the information.

True, the first sentence keeps our attention level high clear through to the end, but it causes unnecessary confusion along the way. The second sentence indicates with a comma that the leader is complete. The third sentence is clear and correct, but lacks the energy of the second. Now look at the following two sentences:

Between the time I graduated from high school and the time I was discharged from the Navy, I never thought about my future.

I never thought about my future between the time I graduated from high school and the time I was discharged from the Navy.

The first sentence uses the leader to establish a time interval and arouse curiosity about what happened during that time. Then the base clause fills the gap. The second sentence, however, fills the gap even before it's created, and the information about the timeframe is like an afterthought. Instead of building toward a strong ending, the sentence fades off into insignificance.

Activity

3.14 Combine each of the following sentence groups into a single sentence containing at least one leader before the base clause. Don't forget to set off the leader with a comma.

- a. The preacher paused in his sermon. My father woke up.
- b. Annie was about to enter the strange room. She pushed the door back hard. She wanted to make sure no one was hiding behind it.
- c. The old man went from one island to another. He wandered over storm-troubled seas. He was searching for home.
- d. Renee said goodbye to her mother. She picked up her purse. She boarded the bus.
- e. The car coughed and sputtered fitfully. It did this for a few moments. It shook hard one last time. It died with a hideous gasp.

Cumulative Structure

The main function of **cumulative structure** is to clarify or qualify an idea stated in a preceding [base clause](#). Phrases and clauses at the beginning of the sentence may clarify also, but with an important difference. When we read periodic modifiers, we don't yet know what they'll modify.

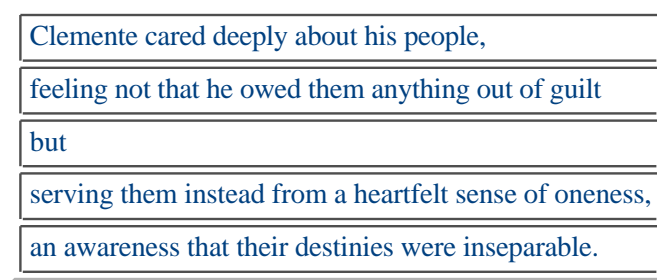
For that reason, and also because too long a delay of the main clause can be frustrating, leaders are generally not good places to stack up phrases and clauses intended to offer supplementary comment on the main idea. Such dependent structures are usually stronger after the base clause, as trailers. Compare the following sentences:

Clemente cared deeply about his people, not feeling that he owed them anything out of guilt but serving them instead with a heartfelt sense of oneness, an awareness that their destinies were inseparable.

Not feeling that he owed them anything out of guilt but serving them instead from a heartfelt sense of oneness, an awareness that their destinies were inseparable, Clemente cared deeply about his people.

Here the writer wants to explain Roberto Clemente's commitment to his people. Putting that general idea in the base clause and getting it up front makes sense. Then the two trailers clarify the reasons for Clemente's caring, so that by the end of the sentence we have a more precise understanding of the central idea. It's a process of gradual clarification and refinement. The second example frustrates because it leaves us disoriented for so long. By the time we find the base clause, we're likely to have dismissed or forgotten the information in the trailers.

The following diagram will help you to see how the structure of the sentence about Roberto Clemente works:



What does the first trailer modify? What does the second one modify? Can you find an example of parallel structure? Now read the following sentence and try to answer some questions about it:

While she wrote *Ariel*, Plath was not the happiest of people, living in a cramped London apartment, trying hard to play the role of the ideal mother, a part for which she was neither trained nor temperamentally suited, consuming herself in frustrated rage and passion.

What is the base clause? What three structures are parallel? What do they all modify? What does "a part for which she was neither trained nor temperamentally suited" modify? Rewrite the sentence, beginning with "Living in a cramped London apartment . . ." Is the sentence stronger or weaker?

Activity

3.15 Combine each of the following groups of sentences into a single sentence that makes use of cumulative structure. Put the central idea in the base clause and position the base clause at or near the beginning of the sentence. Use [parallelism](#) to keep related ideas in similar form.

- The morning fog was thick. It obscured the sun. It blurred the horizon. It lent nearby objects an aura of mystery. This was especially true of sea shells and driftwood.
- It was after a bad start. The Yankees got a tongue lashing from their owner. This woke them up. This made them angry. This turned their season around.
- The restaurant was small. It was really a shack. It was located along Highway 101. This is on the Oregon coast. It is in the town of Yachats. Yachats is a city of fine restaurants. These restaurants serve seafood. The seafood is fresh-caught.
- The people were angry. They were angry about plans for the new highway. It would run through the middle of their neighborhood. This would force many people to move. It would also split the neighborhood in half. The neighborhood would be split with a barrier. The barrier would be made of concrete. It would be made of steel. It would be made of carbon monoxide.
- Alicia was delighted with her birthday present. It was a mountain bike. It was extremely lightweight. Yet it was strong. It was a pleasure to look at. It was a joy to ride.

Relative Clauses

One effective way of combining ideas into a single sentence is to place one of the ideas in a *relative clause*. This means that one of the ideas is joined to the base clause with a *relative pronoun*, such as *who*, *whom*, *whose*, *which*, or *that*. After looking at the following example, you'll probably recognize this as a familiar process.

Uncombined: Albert Einstein suffered from dyslexia.

Albert Einstein formulated the theory of relativity.

Changing: Albert Einstein suffered from dyslexia.

(who) formulated the theory of relativity.

Combined: Albert Einstein, who formulated the theory of relativity, suffered from dyslexia.

You can see how our substitution of the relative pronoun "who" for "Albert Einstein" allows us to fold one sentence into the other. You may have noticed also that the second sentence could have served as the carrier and the first as the relative, thus you could write either of the following, depending on what you wanted to emphasize.

Albert Einstein, who formulated the theory of relativity, suffered from dyslexia.

or:

Albert Einstein, who suffered from dyslexia, formulated the theory of relativity.

Both sentences are correct, and when they appear in isolation like this, it's hard to say which is better. What can we say, though, is that the effects of the sentences are very different. The first emphasizes Einstein's dyslexia, and the second emphasizes his formulation of the theory of relativity. As you can see, the idea in the base clause, or *carrier*, receives emphasis.

Choosing which relative pronoun to use needn't be difficult if you remember a few guidelines:

1. *Who* and *whom* are used to refer to people.

The one who pays the piper calls the tune.

Uncle Teddy, whom you haven't met, is a rare bird.

2. *Whose* is used to show possession.

I caught a ride with Tony, whose car barely made it up the hill.

3. *Which* is used to refer to animals and things.

Their guacamole, which I had never tasted before, turned out to be delicious.

The white cat, which Susan left behind in her move, took up residence in an abandoned Chevy.

4. *That* is used to refer to animals, things, and people.

The dream that I didn't nurture finally died.

The wild horses that roam central Oregon are becoming a problem.

The little girl that I'm looking for is my daughter.

Often, especially with *whom* and *that*, the relative pronoun may be omitted, making the sentence more compact and less formal.

The people whom the senator held in contempt voted him out of office.

or:

The people the senator held in contempt voted him out of office.

Alex returned the book that I had checked out from the library.

or:

Alex returned the book I had checked out from the library.

Before concluding this section on the *relative clause*, two final points should be recalled. First, the *antecedent* of the relative pronoun must be immediately and unmistakably clear. See the discussion of [pronoun reference](#) if you need to review this. Second, nonrestrictive relative clauses should be set off with commas; see rule 3 for [using commas](#), if you need to review this.

Activities

3.16 In each of the following sentences, **boldface** the base clause, *italicize* the relative pronoun and underline its antecedent, and use commas to set off the relative clause if necessary.

Example: **Chubby Checker**, *who* popularized the twist, **isn't all that chubby**.

- a. He learned that trick from General Custer who used it at the Little Big Horn.
- b. The course that you most dread often turns out to be the most needed.
- c. Even watching television which is my favorite hobby grew boring.
- d. This document was reviewed by an attorney whose understanding of the law is formidable.
- e. Samuel T. Broderick whose understanding of the law is formidable reviewed this document.
- f. The last minister whom we liked was rather liberal.
- g. The new restaurant that opened in the mall specializes in health foods.
- h. A new restaurant that specializes in health foods opened in the mall.
- i. Any money that you earn in tips must be reported on your income tax form.
- j. All key terms are listed in the index which you will find in the back of the book.

3.17 Combine each of the following groups of sentences into a single sentence that contains at least one relative clause.

- a. Peterson was elected chairman of the board. The board consists of eleven members. These members make all major policy decisions for the theatre.
- b. The Foreign Relations Committee is currently conducting confirmation hearings. These hearings are expected to produce a recommendation for the nominee's approval.
- c. The car was made in Italy. It looks like an imitation of a Hyundai.
- d. A Justice sits on the bench of the Supreme Court. This is the highest court in the land. This Justice is becoming senile.
- e. The sunflower is the state flower of Kansas. It grows wild along roadsides. It is painted on state highway signs.
- f. My cousin is a carpenter. This hutch was built by him.

Participial Phrases

You probably have been using *participial phrases* unknowingly, both in your papers and in the exercises in this chapter. Because they're so convenient and effective, they deserve a closer look.

Ruined by the recession, Mr. Alvarez closed the door to his shop, turning the key in the lock.

The preceding contains two participial phrases, one at the beginning and one at the end, and the [base clause](#) is between them. Now read the following sentences and identify what they are missing.

Mr. Alvarez ruined by the recession.

Mr. Alvarez turning the key in the lock.

If you said that both sentences need to have *was* or *is* or some other helping word inserted after the subject, you're well on your way to understanding what participles are and how they work in sentences. What you've seen is that a participle is part of a verb, that by itself it can't serve as the main verb of a sentence.

You may also have noticed that there are two different kinds of participles: present and past. A present participle is formed by adding *ing* to the verb stem. The result is the form that would be used with the helping verb *is*. The past participle is the verb form that would be used with the helping verb *have*, and it is usually, but not always, formed by adding *ed* to the verb stem. You can use the chart below to see how this works.

<i>Verb Stem</i>	<i>Present Participle</i>	<i>Past Participle</i>
form	(is) forming	(have) formed
lose	(is) losing	(have) lost
climb	(is) climbing	(have) climbed
ring	(is) ringing	(have) rung

While the participle can't serve as the main verb of a sentence without its helper, it can be used, either alone or in combination with other words, as a [modifier](#):

[Formed over ten thousand years ago,] these lava beds have changed very little.

Every evening we could hear the bell [ringing somewhere in the distance.]

In the preceding sentences, the bracketed word groups are called *participial phrases*. The underlined words are those the phrases modify. It's important that your reader can immediately see exactly what the phrase modifies. Notice the possibilities for confusion in the following sentences.

Bill found a rusty pocket knife climbing the volcano.

Curling gently around the mountains, Sarah watched the clouds.

In both cases, confusion results from the fact that the phrases are positioned too far from the words they modify. Can you revise the sentences to eliminate the problem? If not, or if you find yourself having problems with the following activities, you should review the discussion of **Misrelated Modifiers** in [Six Problem Areas](#).

Activities

3.18 Bracket each participial phrase, and *italicize* the word it modifies. If you find a *misrelated modifier*, rewrite the sentence to eliminate the problem.

- a. Tired from the long ride, the travelers stopped at a small café surrounded by trucks.
- b. Out of a small purse decorated with flowers, Andreana took a little book bound in green plastic.
- c. Hoping to avoid the heavy traffic, the back roads were selected for our trip home.
- d. Stripped of all but his dignity, Marquez took the beating in silence, never looking down, never showing his pain.
- e. This new home, built of the finest straw, will withstand even the strongest wind.

3.19 Combine each of the following groups of sentences into a single sentence containing at least one participial phrase.

- a. The watch had a blue face. The face was scratched from years of use.
- b. An old Harley Davidson pulled up beside me. It was covered with dust. The dust was light red.
- c. The new lion looks sleepy. He is lying in the corner of his cage. He is flicking his tail. He is retired from a career in the circus.
- d. Under every stone we found worms. The worms were wiggling. They were small. They were pink. Their wiggling was frantic.
- e. Dr. Higginson was leaning on the lectern. He was discussing the paintings of Edgar Degas. He was praising the painter's sense of color and of movement.
- f. The main burner was clogged. It was clogged with grease. It was clogged with food particles. These particles were tiny. They prevented the flow of gas.
- g. The Red Sox were refreshed. They were refreshed by the cool autumn air. They staged a rally. The rally catapulted them into first place.
- h. The singer swung his arm. He swung it like a windmill. The windmill was in a tornado. The arm was his left one. He held a microphone in his right hand. He sometimes caressed it with his lips. He sometimes shook it. The shaking was violent. It was at the audience.

Further Possibilities

The activities in this section will give you more practice with the constructions and processes you've been working with. They ask you to draw upon what you've been learning about sentence structure and to use that knowledge to make decisions about stylistic effectiveness. The goal is to become more aware of the options available and to make effective choices among them. In the end you'll be more nearly able to say exactly what you want to say in precisely the way you want to say it.

Activities

3.20 Read the following groups of sentences carefully, paying particular attention to their construction. When you've finished, look back over the sentences and decide which one you think is most effective. Then find the one you think is least effective. Be prepared to explain your choices.

- a. Most Effective _____ Least Effective _____

1. Maria, annoyed by her father's suggestion that she hadn't studied enough, argued that she had overstudied for the test.
2. Annoyed by her father's suggestion that she hadn't studied enough, Maria argued that she had

overstudied for the test.

3. Maria argued that she had overstudied for the test, annoyed by her father's suggestion that she hadn't studied enough.

4. Maria, whose father's suggestion that she hadn't studied enough annoyed her, argued that she had overstudied for the test.

5. Arguing that she had overstudied for the test, Maria was annoyed by her father's suggestion that she hadn't studied enough.

b. Most Effective _____ Least Effective _____

1. Berra peeled off his face mask and, wiping the sweat from his forehead, walked slowly toward the shower after the last out of the last game of what had turned out to be a dismal season.

2. After the last out of the last game of what had turned out to be a dismal season, Berra peeled off his face mask and, wiping the sweat from his forehead, walked slowly toward the shower.

3. Berra, peeling off his face mask and wiping the sweat from his forehead after the last out of the last game of what had turned out to be a dismal season, walked slowly toward the shower.

4. Peeling off his face mask and wiping the sweat from his forehead, Berra walked slowly toward the shower after the last out of the last game of what had turned out to be a dismal season.

5. Berra walked slowly toward the shower after the last out of the last game of what had turned out to be a dismal season wiping the sweat from his forehead and peeling off his face mask.

c. Most Effective _____ Least Effective _____

1. Doubtful that it would become permanent now that it had finally been arranged, both sides were anxious that the cease-fire should hold.

2. Having fully arranged the cease-fire, both sides were anxious that it should hold but doubtful that it would become permanent.

3. The cease-fire, with both sides doubtful that it would become permanent but anxious that it should hold, had now finally been arranged.

4. Now that the cease-fire had finally been arranged, both sides were anxious that it should hold but doubtful that it would become permanent.

5. With both sides anxious that it should hold but doubtful that it would become permanent, a cease-fire had finally been arranged.

d. Most Effective _____ Least Effective _____

1. The best tomatoes to plant in this area are Jet Star, a hardy variety that thrives in our arid climate, or Avalanche, a new hybrid that looks promising, developed by university researchers.

2. In this area the following to kinds of tomatoes are the best to plant: Jet Star, a hardy variety that thrives in our arid climate, and Avalanche, a promising new hybrid recently developed by university researchers.

3. In this area a hardy variety that thrives in our arid climate, Jet Star, or a promising new hybrid that university researchers developed recently, Avalanche, are the tomatoes best planted.

4. In this area the best tomatoes to plant are Jet Star, a hardy variety that thrives in our arid climate, or Avalanche, a promising new hybrid recently developed by university researchers.

5. Jet Star, a hardy variety that thrives in our arid climate, and Avalanche, a promising new hybrid recently developed by university researchers, are the best kinds of tomatoes to plant in this area.

e. Most Effective _____ Least Effective _____

1. Cleansing both body and spirit, we loved to bathe in a clear mountain pool where the stream collected briefly after cascading two hundred feet from a rocky shelf high above us.

2. In a clear mountain pool where the stream collected briefly after cascading two hundred feet from a rocky shelf high above us was where we loved to bathe, cleansing both body and spirit.

3. Where the stream collected briefly in a clear mountain pool after cascading two hundred feet from a rocky shelf high above us, cleansing both body and spirit, we loved to bathe.

4. In a clear mountain pool where we loved to bathe, cleansing both body and spirit, the stream collected briefly after cascading two hundred feet from a rocky shelf high above us.

5. After cascading two hundred feet from a rocky shelf high above us, the stream collected briefly in a clear mountain pool where we loved to bathe, cleansing both body and spirit.

3.21 Long sentences aren't always preferable to short ones. Loose sentences that run on without shape or direction should always be avoided, and sometimes even a well-constructed sentence can get too complex and unwieldy. Also, occasional short sentences help add variety and emphasis to your writing. Break the following long sentences into at least two or three shorter ones.

a. Looking at this new paperback Bible, Arlo remembered another, older one, edged in gold and bound in black leather which had been worn smooth through the years of being carried back and forth to church where it had been thumbed through, passed around, and even sat on, carrying the grit, perspiration, and even the tearstains of several generations of his family.

b. Although we all wanted to go to my father's favorite restaurant, a quaint place run by an old Italian family that had arrived here a few years back with some delicious seafood recipes, my mother objected, saying that she preferred a Spanish place called Alexandro's, which did have excellent paella but was located clear across town and was much more expensive.

c. Among the many treasures left by my late Aunt Lillie, a woman of refined and sophisticated tastes, was a small, gold peacock pin which my sister Gladys tried to claim, saying that Aunt Lillie had once promised it to her, which everyone knew was a lie made up on the spot because Lillie had too much taste to like Gladys as much as me.

3.22 Use your own good judgment and imagination to combine the following sentences into a clear, effective paragraph. This activity asks you to look beyond individual sentences to a sequence of sentences. You may want to follow a few periodic sentences with a cumulative sentence, a few long ones with a very short one. Besides rhythm and pacing, you'll need to think about emphasis, determining which ideas you want to put in a base clause and which ones to put in modifiers.

SPRING TUNE-UP

Leo reached into the bag. The bag was large. The bag was brown. The bag sat on the workbench. The workbench was old. The workbench was in his garage. He took out four quarts of oil. He took out an oil filter. He took out a pouring spot. He stacked them neatly in a pile. Next he picked up a smaller bag. This bag was gray. He shook it gently. Four spark plugs fell out. A set of points fell out. A rotor fell out. A condenser fell out. He arranged them in another pile. He was going to give his car a tune-up. The tune-up was for spring. He had never done this before. He was uncertain. His uncertainty was about where to begin. He decided to lift up the hood. Changing the oil looked easiest. He had seen other people do it. He decided to tackle that job first. He spilled drops. The drops were few. He did this when he changed filters. He watched the sludge. The sludge was thick. The sludge was black. It was draining. The draining was slow. The draining was into a pan. The pan was made of plastic. The plastic was yellow. The pan was under the crankcase. He replaced the plug. He poured the new oil. This oil was clear. He poured it into a hole. The hole was in the valve cover. So far, so good. Now came the hard part. First he changed the spark plugs. He set the gaps carefully. He did this with a feeler gauge. The gauge had been borrowed from a friend. Then he removed the distributor cap. He replaced the rotor. He replaced the condenser. He replaced the points. He gapped them very carefully. He was following the instructions in his shop manual. At last he recapped the distributor. He climbed into the driver's seat. He held his breath. He turned the key. The engine caught. It ran smoothly. He breathed a sigh. The sigh was long. It was of satisfaction.

The Best Word

In every kind of writing, it's essential to choose the best word to express your intended meaning. If you take time to **choose** the best word rather than simply **accepting** the first word that comes to mind, you'll be taking an important step toward writing effectiveness. Use the following four questions to help you choose the best word for your needs.

[Is this word specific enough?](#)

[Does this word have unwanted connotations?](#)

[Will my reader understand this word in the same way I do?](#)

[Is this word overused?](#)

1. Is this word specific enough?

Just as "large" is the opposite of "small" and "fast" is the opposite of "slow," "specific" is the opposite of "general," and understanding one concept depends largely upon understanding the other. Briefly, a *general* word refers to a large group of loosely related members, while a *specific* word refers to a smaller group of more closely related members. For instance, because the word "animal" could refer to any of a million different creatures from ants to elephants, it is a very general term. The word "fire ant," however, narrows the range of possible reference to a more limited and closely related group and is therefore more specific.

General:	animal
	invertebrate
	insect
	ant
Specific:	fire ant

As the above diagram shows, *general* and *specific* are *relative* rather than *absolute* terms. That is, a given word may be either *general* or *specific* depending upon what it's being compared with, just as a runner who is fast when compared with college teammates may be slow at the N.C.A.A. Outdoor Meet. Yet the runner's speed may not have changed at all in an absolute sense, only in relation to the competitors. So it is with words. If compared with "animal," "insect" seems *specific* because it refers to a group with fewer and more closely related members. When compared with "fire ant," however, "insect" seems *general* because it can refer to so many different kinds of creatures.

In choosing the *specific* word over the *general* one you limit the number of possible meanings. When you restrict meaning in this way, you increase the sharpness of the image your reader receives and decrease the chance of misunderstanding and communication failure.

2. Does this word have unwanted connotations?

Up to now we've been talking only about the representational part of a word's meaning, but this isn't the only important aspect of a word's total meaning. It's quite common, in fact, for several words that mean the same, or nearly the same, thing to have vastly different impacts on a reader. This is because in addition to the strictly rational part of meaning (called *denotation*) words also carry emotional overtones (called *connotations*). These *connotations* are stronger in some words than in others. While a word like "mixed-breed" is a neutral way to describe a dog that is not "pure-bred," "mongrel" adds a slightly unfavorable judgment about the dog, and "mutt" proclaims it nearly worthless.

Learning to recognize the emotional overtones in our language allows us greater control over the way readers respond to our writing. Not only do we avoid creating an undercurrent that works against our central purpose, we gain a valuable tool for shaping readers' attitudes toward our subject. Notice the very different effects of these two sentences whose denotative meanings are substantially the same:

That primitive cabin set miles from the reach of developers has been allowed to stand undisturbed for centuries.

That rickety shack in the middle of nowhere hasn't been cared for in ages.

Either of these could be an effective topic sentence for a descriptive paragraph, depending on whether we wanted to get the cabin preserved or torn down.

Be especially careful of connotations if you're in the habit of using a thesaurus to find **synonyms** for words in your active vocabulary since the difference in meaning between two words listed in a single thesaurus entry is often due to the different connotations they have. If you substitute a less familiar word for a more familiar one, you need to be aware of this and be sure the connotations of the new word are suited to your needs.

3. Will my reader understand this word in the same way I do?

How a word is finally understood depends on many factors, not all of which are under the writer's control. Writers must anticipate how readers will respond to language, estimating whether certain words are within their vocabularies and whether others, such as *environmentalist* , have the same connotations for both reader and writer. Anticipating the reader's reactions is always important, and no place is it more so than in choosing your words.

Failure to take the reader sufficiently into account often shows up in a writer's abuse of *jargon* , which in one sense means the specialized vocabulary of people in a particular group or profession and in a broader sense means the use of technical or scientific language in place of equally appropriate everyday words.

Jargon in the first sense can be an effective way to communicate with members of a profession who understand the jargon and who recognize by your use of the specialized vocabulary that you belong to the group. The problem comes when you unconsciously use jargon on people outside the group, who may not know what it means. The stock expressions that seem clear and apt to those within your group may bewilder and frustrate an outsider.

Jargon in the second sense is almost always bad. Unless you're writing a diplomatic agreement, a warranty, or an insurance policy, in which you *want* to baffle the reader, prefabricated phrases such as "assume the initiative," "render inoperative," and "prioritization of values," would be better replaced by the clearer and more vivid "take charge," "break," "decide what matters most."

As George Orwell and others have pointed out, writers who rely on such inflated diction are usually trying to dress up ordinary ideas, to make them look more important than they really are, so the reader will be impressed and slightly mystified.

Most readers, however, recognize the trick and regard writers who use jargon with justified suspicion. If you find yourself writing this way, slow down and carefully choose synonyms that are fresher, more vivid, and more generally understood.

Put yourself in the reader's place and look back at what you've written. What words might be unfamiliar? Can you find substitutes? If not, should you take a sentence or two to define them? Are any words *ambiguous*, capable of meaning more than one thing?

I already own a fine comb.

What should "fine" be changed to so that its intended meaning will come across to the reader? Are you using any words in a special or unusual way that your reader might not be aware of? If so, shouldn't you explain?

4. Is this word overused?

The words and expressions we hear and see most often in our daily lives become integral parts of us and naturally find their way into our writing. This is as it should be, unless a particular word or expression has been used so often it gets stale or *trite*. If your readers encounter a phrase too often, they'll be numb to it, and it will no longer evoke a fresh image for them. "Stood out like a sore thumb," for instance, has become so familiar we no longer think about how noticeable a sore thumb is and how difficult to hide. Words like "groovy" or "Mickey Mouse" (in the sense of meaning pointless and easy) have lost most of their former impact because the novelty of hearing them has worn off.

The writer who uses such tired language may not suffer from being misunderstood, but may very well be thought too unimaginative and lazy to find a fresh way to get the point across. Such overused expressions are called *clichés*. You should avoid them because they make your writing, and therefore your thoughts, appear routine, predictable, and stale.

Activities

3.23 With each group below, arrange the terms in order from least to most specific.

- a. animal, living thing, mammal, leopard, cat
- b. western seaport, seaport, place, Seattle, Pier 45
- c. sport, kick off, activity, football, team sport
- d. clogged fuel line, situation, problem, engine trouble, car problem
- e. quadrangle, shape, parallelogram, geometric figure, rectangle

3.24 With a partner discuss the connotations of the *italicized* words. Then change each one to a word with a similar denotation but a different connotation.

- a. We had an *uneventful* stay there.
- b. Curtiss is quite *confident*, isn't he?
- c. Mr. Simpson would be here himself, but he's *busy*.
- d. The *stench* was everywhere.
- e. You could hear the loud cars *cruising* past all night.
- f. I'll have the *ground beef sandwich*.
- g. The Rockefellers are a *rich* family.
- h. Next, Sarah *strolled* in and *plopped* down.
- i. His face was *weathered* and *lined*.

j. Ms. Prochaska's *inexpensive* , unadorned designs delighted the *stuffy* board of directors.

3.25 Look up each of the following words in your word processor's thesaurus. For each word, use two alternatives in a complete sentence.

examine, event, produce, undesirable, magic, disobedience

3.26 For each sentence you wrote in

Activity 3.25

, substitute a third word for the original. How is the effect of the sentence changed by the substitution.

3.27 Translate the following jargon-clogged sentences into more vivid, effective English.

a. These dividend dollars give you the opportunity to increase your insurance from \$25,000 to \$50,000 with a minimal out-of-pocket expenditure of cash commencing in five years from the initial application date.

b. All emergency floatation devices have been conspicuously located on both port and starboard sides to facilitate passenger accessibility.

c. The following program has been determined to contain material intended for viewing by mature audiences: parental discretion advised.

d. This regulation supersedes all comparable regulations currently in effect.

e. Faculty advisers assist students in defining goals to be reached during college, give information regarding appropriate curricula and courses, and discuss personal problems students may have, especially problems related to the student's progress and plans for subsequent work.

f. It is inevitable that a President confronted by our current complex international relations will want a staff near at hand to meet his needs and to be sensitive to his political position.

g. After being apprehended in the act of commission, the suspect was released on her own recognizance.

h. The current reciprocal trade agreement has ceased to be mutually beneficial.

i. Continued uninterrupted service depends upon your immediate settlement of all delinquent accounts.

j. I promise to pay such TOTAL (together with any other charges due thereon) subject to and in accordance with the agreement governing the use of such card.

3.28 Rewrite each of the following clichés, making the same point more vividly and clearly in your own language.

a. I was hungry enough to eat a horse.

b. We ran up against a brick wall.

c. Don't make a federal case out of it.

d. You're on thin ice with that excuse.

e. Now it's a whole new ball game.

f. That really gets my goat.

g. Since my back operation my tennis hasn't been up to par.

h. Our new branch manager really delivers the goods.

i. Ever since then she's kept her nose clean.