

Mastery Series: Clarity and Concision

Alison W. Scharmota, MA

Graduate Writing Center

Naval Postgraduate School

AY2020



Clarity



Clarity

- **Logical arrangement of the elements of your argument**
- **Logical arrangement of the elements of your sentence**

Clarity of Argument

Sequence

- Chronological order
- Cause before effect
- Context before detail
- Definition before use of theory (or term)
 - Purpose of list before list

Clarity of Sentence

- Mysspelangs
- Homophones
- Subject/Pronoun Agreement
 - Vague pronouns
- Subject/Verb Agreement
- Vague Word Choice
- Passive Voice
- Hyphenated Modifiers
- Dangling (Misplaced) Modifiers
- Parallelism

Homophones!

(And other tricky words)

- Affect / Effect
- Its / It's
- There / Their / They're
- Two / Too / To
- Angel / Angle
- Assets / Assess
- Casual / Causal
- Council / Counsel
- Cue / Queue
- Disinterested / Uninterested
- Further / Farther / Furthermore
- Lay / Lie
- Lose / Loose
- Material / Materiel
- Personal / Personnel
- Principle / Principal
- Regardless (Irregardless)
- Tenants/ Tenets
- Than / Then
- That / Which
- Threw / Through (~~thru~~)
- Toward / Towards
- Versus / Verses (~~vice~~)

Subjects and Pronouns!

- **Subject/Pronoun Agreement**
 - The United States values their freedom
 - The United States values *its* freedom
 - The United States citizens value *their* freedom
 - A combatant accepts that they must risk their life to perform their duty
 - A combatant accepts that he/she must risk his/her life to perform his/her duty
 - Combatants accept that they must risk their lives to perform their duties
- **Vague Pronouns**
 - The Russian invasion into Georgia in 2008 proved its willingness to protect its interests and was a warning that he would defend them militarily if the West further encroached into the post-Soviet space.
 - The Russian invasion into Georgia in 2008 proved Russia's willingness to protect its interests and was a warning that Putin would defend those interests militarily if the West further encroached into the post-Soviet space.

Subjects and Verbs!

- The United States are a complex country

- The United States *is* a complex country

- Each participant,

wish they were somewhere else.

- Each participant,

wishes to be somewhere else.

Vagueness

- Sometimes
- A lot
- People
 - Sometimes, a lot of people do things.
 - From 2009 to 2015, the number of adult Americans who received a flu vaccination increased by 15.6%.
*-Centers for Disease Control, Flu Vaccination Coverage, United States, 2014-15
Influenza Season*
- One could argue...
- It could be seen as...
 - Although a team of researchers at MIT recently argued that social media is actually improving interpersonal skills based on the fact that increased connectivity and immediate gratification compel dialogue and participation, ...

Passive Voice

Enemy of clarity when you omit the subject from the sentence altogether

- The Warsaw pact was signed into existence on May 14, 1955
- The Warsaw pact was signed into existence on May 14, 1955, *by eight Eastern European nations.*

Fun with
hyphens!

Compound Adjectives

The hyphen makes a big difference



I saw a man-eating alligator.

I saw a man eating alligator.



A hyphen can make a difference in meaning.

Source: English Leap

More fun with
hyphens!



Fun with
Dangling
Modifiers!

The kind mother gave
bologna sandwiches to all
the children in Ziplock
bags.



Misplaced Modifiers

- In the aftermath of 9/11, the United States founded the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in 2002.
 - In 2002, in the aftermath of 9/11, the United States founded the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).
- By 1890, among adults, half the men and a third of the women knew how to read in Kansas.
 - By 1890, among adults in Kansas, half the men and a third of the women knew how to read.

More fun with Misplaced Modifiers!

- Approved by only the House of Representatives, the Senate is unlikely to pass the new federal minimum wage.
- Approved by only the House of Representatives, the new federal minimum wage has little chance of survival in the hands of the Senate.
- When most vulnerable and susceptible to the elements, the antagonizing force struck the guerrillas.
- ?

Parallelism

Making lists parallel means using the same structure in each individual element of the list

- **All adverbs**
 - You can analyze your research findings qualitatively, quantitatively, or by comparing them.
 - You can analyze your research findings qualitatively, quantitatively, or comparatively.
- **All gerunds**
 - The U.S. military is responsible for waging war, securing borders, and to protect U.S. citizens.
 - The U.S. military is responsible for waging war, securing borders, and protecting U.S. citizens.
- **All infinitives**
 - We need to gather data, to analyze that data, and finally making recommendations.
 - We need to gather data, to analyze that data, and to make recommendations.

More fun with
Parallelism!

What's wrong with these lists?

- **The writer will sit, eat, and interview the subject.**
- **The organization promotes sustainable landscaping practices, green building-construction methods and products, and minimizing pesticide use in the home.**

Concision

Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city. Fog on the Essex marshes, fog on the Kentish heights. Fog creeping into the cabooses of collier-brigs; fog lying out on the yards and hovering in the rigging of great ships; fog drooping on the gunwales of barges and small boats. Fog in the eyes and throats of ancient Greenwich pensioners, wheezing by the firesides of their wards; fog in the stem and bowl of the afternoon pipe of the wrathful skipper, down in his close cabin; fog cruelly pinching the toes and fingers of his shivering little 'prentice boy on deck.

- -Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (New York: Diversion Books, 2016), 1-2

Excessive fog afflicted all of London.

Enemies of Concision

- **Wordiness**
- **Repetition and Redundancy**
- **Stating the Obvious**
- **Prepositions**
- **Passive Voice**

Redundancy

- **Absolutely essential / absolutely necessary**
- **Advance planning / advance warning**
- **Added bonus**
- **Alternative choice**
- **Anonymous stranger**
- **Ask the question**

Stating the Obvious

- I believe, I think, I argue...
- It is necessary to...
- Needless to say...

Prepositions!

(and other pitfalls)

Prepositions, by their very nature, send your reader's attention in new directions

- Taking observations **from** leadership involved **in** the troubles detailed **in** the case study, the following analysis **through** the lens **of** social identity perspective will provide intelligence leaders **with** guidance **on** how **to** more effectively balance security and liberty interests **within** their organizations, thereby setting **up** the intelligence organization **to** more likely succeed **in** its long term endeavors.
- The case study detailed the leadership's observations regarding their troubles. Analyzing these observations using the social identity perspective will help guide intelligence leaders to more effectively balance security and liberty within their organizations. Ultimately, this will foster long-term organizational success.

What?!

More Passive Voice?

How lucky are we?

Enemy of concision because it requires more words.

- The Warsaw pact **was signed** into existence on May 14, 1955, **by** eight Eastern European nations.
- Eight Eastern European nations signed the Warsaw pact into existence on May 14, 1955.

- Particle aggregation **is minimized** and dispersion behavior **is improved by** applying an ultrasonic bath along with PH controlling of the nanofluids. (21 words)
- Applying an ultrasonic bath, with PH controlling the nanofluids, minimized particle aggregation and improved dispersion behavior. (16 words)

Strong Verbs

- **It is his belief that writing is easy.**
 - **He believes that writing is easy.**
- **He made a comparison between apples and oranges.**
 - **He compared apples and oranges.**
- **His success was caused by continued work.**
 - **He succeeded because he continued to work.**
- **Give an analysis of the data and then create a summary.**
 - **Analyze the data and then summarize it.**

Paramedic Method

- Circle the prepositions (of, in, about, for, on, into, with, by...)
- Draw a box around the “to be” verb forms
- Ask, "Where's the action?"
- Change the "action" into a simple verb
- Underline the subject (who's kicking whom?) and move the subject in front of the verb
- Eliminate any unnecessary slow wind-ups
- Eliminate any redundancies

In this paragraph is a demonstration of the use of good style in the writing of a report.

Action in sentence; eliminate slow wind-ups

Revision

This paragraph demonstrates good style in reports (or) ...good style in report writing.

The doer is in the subject

Paramedic Method Practice Exercises!

Apply the Paramedic Method to these sentences:

- After reviewing the results of your previous research, and in light of the relevant information found within the context of the study, there is ample evidence for making important, significant changes to our operating procedures. (35 words)
- The decision by the managers was that the committee for road improvement would cease its activity for the duration of the term. (22 words)
- Controlling the quality and level of television shows that children watch is a continuing challenge to parents that they must meet on a daily basis. (25 words)

For more information on grammar
and writing, check out:

Mastery Series: Punctuation

Mastery Series: Grammar

Writing Winning Arguments: The Art of Academic Persuasion