

REVISING PROSE

Developed by the Center for Global Communication and Design
Revised 06/26/2018

Here is some general advice for revising prose. While these topics cover many areas, it is not an exhaustive list. When in doubt about when and/or how to revise, schedule an appointment or drop-in to Comm+D to work with a TA or mentor.

Write in the active voice. Click [here](#) for more information on how to revise for clarity.

Faulty: In each picture the responses are shown.

Better: Each picture shows the responses.

- **Use personal pronouns** (I, we, our) when they are appropriate and especially when they clarify your text:

Faulty: It has been found experimentally that genetically altered strawberries are frost-resistant.

Better: In this experiment, we found that genetically altered strawberries are frost-resistant.

- **Write sentences that have people doing things.**

Faulty: It was decided that company policy be changed to allow employee selection of personal leave days.

Better: The personnel committee decided to change company policy and allow employees to select their own personal leave days.

Avoid nominalizing (transforming verbs and adjectives into nouns). Click [here](#) for more details about nominalizations.

Faulty: We conducted an investigation of the accident.

Better: We investigated the accident.

Avoid stringing nouns together, creating what scientist Peter Medawar describes as “one huge noun-like monster in constant danger of falling apart.”

The following examples are from *Commerce Business Daily*:

“fluidized bed waste heat recovery system demonstration” and “roof rock bolt bond integrity tester development.”

The examples below are from Joseph Williams:

Faulty: Early childhood thought disorders misdiagnosis often occurs as a result of unfamiliarity with recent research literature describing such conditions.

Better: Physicians unfamiliar with the literature on recent research often misdiagnose disordered thought in young children.

Maintain parallel sentence structure.

Faulty: The new regulations could cause problems for both the winners and for those who lose.

Better: The new regulations could cause problems for both winners and losers.

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Emphasize important words by placing them where they receive natural stress, either at the beginning or, for even greater emphasis, at the end of a sentence.

Faulty: Rather than being a judge who pronounces the verdict, the teacher becomes an editor who guides students' writing with this method.

Better: With this method, the teacher becomes an editor who guides students' writing, rather than a judge who pronounces the verdict.

Place subordinate ideas in subordinate constructions.

Faulty: The value is 50 watts and is best determined by actual test.

Better: The value, which is best determined by actual test, is 50 watts.

Substitute descriptive verbs for vague verbs.

Faulty: He went to the island.

Better: He sailed to the island.

Substitute lean words for ponderous expressions.

Faulty: Align the tubes in such a manner that they all heat at the same time.

Better: Align the tubes so they all heat at the same time.

Substitute familiar for unfamiliar words.

Faulty: Everyone should be cognizant of the danger of explosion.

Better: Everyone should be aware of the danger of explosion.

Avoid overused expressions common to the business world.

Faulty: Utilization of crystal clear goals and objectives will optimize our capacity to prioritize our concerns so that we will impact upon the major thrust of our company's future plans and prospects.

Better: If we clarify our goals and objectives, we will be better able to concentrate on what is most important for our company's future.

Cut unnecessary words.

Faulty: After a time interval of one to two minutes, the tone usually stops.

Better: After one to two minutes, the tone usually stops.

Be precise.

Faulty: The cost must not be prohibitive.

Better: The cost should not exceed \$100 per thousand gallons.

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Avoid confusing pronouns.

Faulty: As the temperature falls, a compressive stress is exerted by the bezel on the glass because of its greater temperature coefficient.

Better: As the temperature falls, the bezel, because of its greater temperature coefficient, exerts a compressive stress on the glass.

Keep sentence elements in their proper order.

Faulty: The sample to be analyzed first must be put into solution.

Better: The sample to be analyzed must first be put into solution.

Avoid dangling modifiers.

Faulty: Walking up the hill, my umbrella was blown away by the wind.

Better: While I was walking up the hill, the wind blew away my umbrella.

Reduce strings of prepositional phrases.

Faulty: The October 31 deadline for submission of proposals in response to an invitation from the National Science Foundation also applies to unsolicited proposals.

Better: The deadline for both solicited and unsolicited proposals to the National Science Foundation is October 31.