

Exercises in Style

This worksheet will be based around five principles that are must-haves in good writing. Read this, and complete all the exercises. Remember to apply all of the principles in your writing: in the exercises for section 5, for example, remember apply the lessons you've learned from sections 1,2,3 and 4 as well.

§1: Have something to say, and think it through.

What is the most difficult challenge of a writer? It's figuring out, from all the possible things that you can say, exactly what your points are and then explaining them precisely with adequate reasoning and support. Before you begin writing, you should figure out exactly what you're trying to say. Writing without a clear goal in mind is a surefire method to ruin an essay.

§2: Omit needless words

Oftentimes, we use more words than we actually need. The best language for analytical writing is short and to the point. Of course, using higher-level vocabulary every once in a while, and using it appropriately, helps give your essay an educated feel. Conciseness and verbosity are two separate things; being able to use erudite vocabulary while maintaining brevity will demonstrate your mastery of the English language to the reader far more than wanton use

Exercises:

Delete at least four consecutive words in the following sentences, replace those words with just one word. You may rephrase ideas and rearrange sentences, but don't change the meaning.

- Even assuming that the fog caused injury to Roelke, Amskills had no duty to prevent that injury because it was idiosyncratic and Amskills could not have been expected to foresee such injury.
- At no time prior to the initial public offering did the underwriters or any officers, directors, or employees have knowledge of any facts that would suggest that "Palm Harbor" could not be completed on schedule and in accordance with specifications.
- Beale has wholly failed to allege facts that, if true, would establish that competition among the nation's law schools would be reduced or that the public has been in any way injured, and this failure to allege facts that would establish an injury to competition warrants the dismissal of her restraint-of-trade claim.
- The Business Corporation Law does not address the ability of a New York corporation to indemnify individuals who are not its employees.
- The court examined a number of cases and stated that there appeared to be only a limited number of instances in which there would exist a duty to disclose the illegal conduct of persons who, through political campaigns, seek election to a public office.

§3: Keep the subject, verb, and direct object together, near the beginning of the sentence.

This rule is self-explanatory.

Exercises:

Edit the following sentences so that the related words are no longer separated:

- Ms. Lenderfield, during the course of her struggle to provide for her children as a single parent, accrued considerable debt to her family and others.
- Chesapeake's assertion that it is not a proper defendant in this case and, therefore, that relief cannot be granted is incorrect.
- The court, in finding that Officer McGee was acting more as a school employee than as a police officer in searching Robinson, ruled that an official's primary role is not law enforcement.

§4: Prefer the active voice over the passive.

Using the active voice will give your writing a crisp and direct feel. Using the passive voice also makes it more likely that your writing will be over-wordy.

Exercises:

Edit the following sentences to eliminate the passive voice:

- Testimony was heard from the plaintiff and from three witnesses on behalf of the corporation.
- This is a purely legal question to be determined by the court.
- McCormick's motion for partial summary judgment on the duty to defend should be denied.
- Plaintiff's opposition violates Rule 313 of the California Rules of Court and may be disregarded by the court.

§5: Use parallel phrasing for parallel thoughts.

Parallelism is so important to good writing that it is not even an option. When you're explaining two ideas that are parallel, or similar, then you must also use parallel phrasing.

Wrong: The actress moved back home to Ohio, deciding that she was tired of living in Los Angeles, working night jobs as a waitress, and she disliked dealing with her landlord.

Correct: The actress moved back home to Ohio, deciding that she was tired of living in Los Angeles, working night jobs as a waitress, and dealing with her landlord.

Exercises:

Revise the following sentences to take care of the unparallel phrasing:

- The court relied heavily on the district court's statement that the would-be intervenors retained the right to appear through counsel, to participate in the fairness hearing, to conduct discovery, and standing to appeal the court's approval or disapproval of the class-action settlement.
- Tenant will probably not be able to have the lease declared void and unenforceable for vagueness because it contains all the essential elements of a lease: a description of the premises, the amount of rent to be paid, the term of the lease, and identifies the parties.
- The *Younger* doctrine also applies to a state civil proceeding that is (1) ongoing, (2) implicates important state interests, and (3) affords an adequate opportunity to raise federal claims.