

Analyzing and Improving Sentence Style

DIRECTIONS: Read your essay and follow these instructions to analyze and improve your sentence style. Write your revisions on a separate sheet of your own paper or you can write rewrites in a colored ink on your rough draft if there is room. You will turn in both this analysis (with answers and rewrites) with your rough draft when you turn in your final paper.

1. How long are your sentences? Count the words in your paper, the number of sentences, and divide to arrive at an average sentence length. Record this information at the top of your draft.

2. Find your longest sentence: _____ words. What is the length of the sentence before it? _____ words After it? _____ words If that long sentence is not either preceded or followed by a short sentence, change one of them to a short sentence. Why is this more effective?

3. What forms are your sentences? Do you have at least two of each of the following? Find and mark each type (3a, 3b, etc).

(a) simple sentences

(b) compound sentences

(c) complex sentences

(d) compound-complex sentences

4. Circle and count the number of being verbs (am, is, are, was, were) that are the main verb of a sentence (i.e., not a helping verb). Rewrite some of these sentences using a more vivid action verb. Mark which sentences were revised.

5. Count the number of parallel constructions. If you have fewer than three in your paper, rewrite three sentences so they contain parallel elements. Mark those sentences.

6. How do your sentences begin? Mark each sentence beginning (6a, 6b, etc) and then list the number of each below.

(a) subject beginnings: _____

(b) adverb beginnings: _____

(c) prepositional beginnings: _____

(d) gerund beginnings: _____

(e) subordinate clause beginnings: _____

(f) participial beginnings: _____

(g) infinitive beginnings: _____

If more than half your sentences begin with the subject, rewrite so that this is not true, and be sure to have at least one of each type above.

7. Find all instances of there is and there are and eliminate as many as possible by rewriting the sentences. Mark sentences that were revised.

8. Check your comma use by applying these four rules.
 - (a) Use a comma before and, but, for, or, nor, so, yet, and still *when those words join independent clauses*.
 - (b) Use a comma between all items in a series.
 - (c) Use a comma to set off parenthetical openers and afterthoughts.
 - (d) Use two commas to enclose interrupting clauses, phrases, parenthetical insertions.
9. Have you used any semicolons? If not, find a sentence or a pair of sentences that would be better punctuated with a semicolon and rewrite it. Put a 9 in the margin of any sentences using a semicolon.
10. Have you used any dashes? If not, find a sentence that would improve with a dash and rewrite it. Place a 10 in the margin of any sentence using a dash.
11. Find all of the “which” clauses, and rewrite half of them to eliminate the which. Mark the sentences that are revised with an 11. (See [Writing to Eliminate Wordiness](#) from Guilford College for more examples.)
12. Underline of, in, to, by, and who wherever they occur. Rewrite sentences to eliminate as many as possible. Mark the sentences that are revised with a 12. (See [Writing to Eliminate Wordiness](#) from Guilford College for more examples.)