



BUILDING BETTER SENTENCES

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Great sentences make sense, maintain grammatical correctness, hinge on one or more strong (active) verbs and a specific subject (appropriate to the idea and well-placed), demonstrate economical prose, logically connect to their siblings (sentences that come before and after them), and, crucially, optimize the reader's experience.

SENTENCE EXERCISES

DIVE FOR THE VERB (the action).

1. Some countries with a wealth of oil become poor.
2. The consequences of the resource curse depend on the management of the increased revenue.
3. The oil market is a volatile market with frequent booms and busts.

IDENTIFY THE SUBJECT (the actor).

4. Some countries with a wealth of oil become poor.
5. The consequences of the resource curse depend on the management of the increased revenue.
6. The oil market is a volatile market with frequent booms and busts.

CHANGE FRAGMENTS INTO COMPLETE SENTENCES.

7. While I walked to the ocean. I realized that it was going to rain.
8. I wrote my thesis on an interesting topic. So, I enjoyed it.
9. Chapter II reviewed literature applicable to China U.S. historical relations as well as recent cyber-events. Because the China U.S. cyber agreement is so recent that not much data exists.

ARE THE COMMAS HERE PROPERLY CONNECTING TWO INDEPENDENT CLAUSES (ICs)?

10. I walked to the ocean, I realized that it was going to rain.
11. I attended the security training, so I enjoyed it.

FANBOYS?

ARE THE COMMAS HERE PROPER?

12. I do not know what to write for my thesis, or how to write it.
13. Chapter II reviewed literature applicable to China U.S. historical relations as well as recent cyber-events, because the China U.S. cyber agreement is so recent that not much data exists.

WHAT ABOUT SEMI-COLONS CONNECTING TWO ICs? ARE THESE CORRECT?

14. I walked to the ocean; I realized it was going to rain.

15. I attended the security training; and I enjoyed it.

OKAY, THEN, ARE THESE SEMI-COLONS BEING PROPERLY USED?

16. I do not know what to write for my thesis; or how to write it.

17. Chapter II reviewed literature applicable to China U.S. historical relations as well as recent cyber-events; because the China U.S. cyber agreement is so recent that not much data exists.

HOW ABOUT THESE?

18. I do not know what to write for my thesis; however, I will figure it out.

19. Chapter III gave my methodology for researching a new design for the electoral college; subsequently, Chapter IV examines one case study to demonstrate the usefulness of my proposed framework.



IS THE ACTUAL ACTOR THE SUBJECT HERE?

20. My brother was attacked by a herd of turkeys.

21. The legislation was stalled by a group of lobbyists.

22. Clean air is necessary for people.

23. The door was locked by the murderer.

24. Passive sentences are being used by the students.

25. The executive order was signed by the president.

26. The Nobel Prize was received by me.

IDENTIFY THE ACTUAL ACTOR IN THE SENTENCES BELOW.

The legislation that would save humanity was presented by the people. After six months of seeing no congressional action, the people were frustrated by the waiting. Toilet paper and rotten eggs were gathered by some of the people. The ensuing stench of Capitol Hill was documented by many people on Facebook.

READ THE FOLLOWING SENTENCES AND ADD “BY ZOMBIES” AFTER THE VERB PHRASE TO SEE IF IT’S IN THE PASSIVE VOICE.

27. My brother was attacked. The legislation was stalled. The door was locked. Passive sentences were being used. The executive order was signed. The Nobel Prize was received. Many people were killed.

PRACTICE CUTTING UNNECESSARY USE OF THE CONTINUOUS TENSE IN THE SENTENCES BELOW.

28. A wild herd of turkeys were attacking my brother.
29. A group of lobbyists were stalling the legislation.
30. People are needing clean air.
31. The murderer was locking the door.
32. The students were using passive sentences.
33. The president was signing the executive order.
34. I was receiving the Nobel Prize.

CUT THE FLUFF

35. There exist four ways to resolve conflict.
36. Writing papers is something that requires planning.
37. The passive voice was taught to me by my second grade teacher.
38. I think conflict teaches us lessons about ourselves.
39. I believe it is important to consider strategy before engaging in war. Considering strategy first produces more effective tactics.

REDUX (all mixed up)

Correct any errors, prevent zombie hacking, and cut any fluff. Some sentences may be fine already.

40. Therefore Congress will vote on the ACA.
41. The thesis examines cybersecurity, and finds that it can be improved.
42. At the heart of things Jeff wants to help people.
43. Jeff wants to help people however he sometimes forgets to take care of himself.
44. Jeff has cultivated strength, Jeff also cultivates empathy.
45. Although Jeff wants to see the world change. He doesn’t always know how to help. Still he tries.
46. My paper analyzes three ways to prevent corruption so the Venezuelans can enjoy a higher quality of life.

47. Uber gives the drivers about a 40% cut but the drivers pay for their own gas.
48. Freewriting each day in increasing minutes increments per week helps build writing muscles.
49. Chapter I introduced the importance of increasing on-ship communications, and reviewed the communications improvements of the last twenty-five years as well as the current challenges.
50. DOD cybersecurity challenges include management of two different groups of people.
51. Chapter IV presents my methodology; my reasoning stems from a core understanding that we must save as many lives as possible.
52. United States capital cities include: Lansing, Michigan, Sacramento, California, and Carson City, Nevada.
53. Congress votes on ACA; tomorrow.
54. Most experience tough times, however, the kindness that people demonstrate to each other can make all the difference.
55. The chapter showed the history and development of the Italian police forces; next up, the current challenges.
56. The students were challenged by the very idea of writing a thesis.
57. The thesis writing process is made easier by daily practice.
58. Students can receive help from the Thesis Processing Office.
59. Many people were saved.
60. Successful students were offered new positions.
61. There are three important reasons to study the financial system, including...
62. It is important to consider diplomacy as core to military strategy.
63. I am sure that things will work out.

For answers, the Building Better Sentences reference or presentation slides, or to make a coaching appointment, please email Carla Orvis Hunt at cohunt@nps.edu.

Great sentences increase the likelihood of your ideas being implemented and boost your grades.