Mastery Series: Clarity and Concision

Alison W. Scharmota, MA
Graduate Writing Center
Naval Postgraduate School
AY2020
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 (viee)
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.
  - *wishes to be somewhere else.*
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, \textit{by eight Eastern European nations}. 
Fun with hyphens!

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!

COUNTER TERRORISM

COUNTER-TERROURISM
The kind mother gave bologna sandwiches to all the children in Ziplock bags.
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.
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.
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, 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.
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.
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

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