

Style: Sentence Combination and Word Choice

Clarity is one of the most important elements of any written text. Before turning in any assignment, make sure you read it over for awkward sentences, phrases, or unclear language. You have a number of options for fixing unclear language, including combining sentences, reducing a clause to a phrase, and reducing a phrase to a single word.

Combining Sentences

Look at sets of sentences in your draft. You may be able to communicate your thoughts more concisely by reducing the information in one sentence to a group of words that can be included in another sentence. For example,

The Honda Civic was introduced in the United States in 1972. It is one of the most popular cars in America.
Introduced in the United States in 1972, the Honda Civic is one of the most popular cars in America.

Reducing a Clause to a Phrase

Look at the places in your draft where you use adjective clauses. Often, you can condense an adjective clause to a simpler phrase. Some useful ways to reduce phrases are as follows:

1. Dropping the opening relative pronoun and its verb.

*Ben and Jerry's, **which is my favorite kind of ice cream**, started in 1978 in Vermont.*
*Ben and Jerry's, **my favorite kind of ice cream**, started in 1978 in Vermont.*

2. Reducing the clause to a single word.

*The women at church all got together and had a party for the church members **who were new**.*
*The women at church all got together and had a party for the **new** church members.*

3. Reducing a phrase to a single word.

***Despite being full of luxuries**, the hotel room could never be quite like home.*
*The **luxury** hotel room could never be quite like home.*

4. Creating elliptical constructions.

When they were given the commands**, some soldiers behaved bravely, **while others behaved



with cowardice.

*Given the commands, some soldiers behaved bravely, **others with cowardice.***

Using Strong Verbs

Make sure you are using strong verbs, or verbs that indicate action, throughout your paper. Verbs like “be” and “have” are not strong, and lead you to create wordy sentences.

*My paper **has to do with** the implications of U.S foreign policy for the domestic economy.*

*My paper **addresses** the implications of U.S. foreign policy for the domestic economy.*

When you look for weak verbs, you should also look for nouns derived from verbs with suffixes added (-ance, -ment, -tion). To reduce wordiness in your paper, turn these words back into verbs.

*The woman **had the appearance** of someone who was highly distressed.*

*The woman **appeared** to be highly distressed.*

Word Choice

Word choice matters. Be careful to only use those words that most clearly and precisely communicate your thoughts. In addition, make sure that your word choice reflects an awareness of your intended audience.

*The **little fat kid** waddled down the stairs.*

*The **small overweight child** descended the stairs.*

Guidelines for Effective Use of Language

1. Use proper level of formality.
2. Avoid slang or inappropriate colloquial words.
3. Avoid biased language. This includes sexist, racist, or any other form of emotionally loaded language.
4. Avoid clichés (love conquers all, dead as a doornail).