Revision Strategies

Overview
Each drafting and revision learning unit in this course contains a section called “Revision Strategies” which you will complete before revising and submitting the final draft of each essay. In each of these revision strategies units, you will learn (or review) different concepts related to style, sentence structure, grammar, and/or punctuation. You’ll then be asked to complete quizzes demonstrating your understanding of these concepts.

This handout reviews the following suggestions for style:

- Avoiding first and second person point of view
- Avoiding informal and technical language
- Incorporating sentence structure variety

It also reviews the following sentence structure and punctuation errors:

- Fragments
- Run-ons
- Comma Splices

Note: You will notice abbreviations next to each section heading. Instructors often use these abbreviations to mark errors and make suggestions on student papers. Thus, you may wish to print off all of the revision strategies handouts throughout the term for easy reference.

Stylistic Considerations

1. P.O.V. (Avoiding 1st person and 2nd person point of view)

We use three types of point of view or “person” in writing:

- First person (I, me, my, we, us, and our)
- Second person (you and your), and
- Third person (he, she, it, him, her, his, its, they, them, and their).

In academic writing, you will almost always avoid the uses of first person (I, me, my, we, us, our) and second person (you, your).

Avoiding First Person

Using first person often weakens writers’ claims and results in an overly personal, informal essay. Within the context of an essay, the first-person point of view in the following examples should be eliminated:

- In my opinion, cartoons do not impact children as Pollitt claims they do.
- For me, holding Disney films responsible for sexism is unfair.
I feel that Pollitt overestimates the power of cartoons’ influence on young girls.

Each of the above examples would have the same meaning if the first person reference (highlighted in red) were deleted. Remember that readers assume the ideas in your essays are yours unless you tell them otherwise. Including language like “I believe” and “In my opinion” only weakens your ideas through unnecessary wordiness.

Unless the assignment guidelines ask you to write a personal essay, using first person can also lead to an unacceptably informal tone and personal focus which neglect the broader concerns and social implications so central to academic writing in favor your individual feelings and interests. Of course, in academic writing, you will at times bring in personal examples to help illustrate and support a point, just be sure that you use personal examples to develop a broader, more universal point.

Avoiding Second Person

We use second person in academic writing even less frequently than first person. In fact, academic conventions almost never warrant the use of second person. Why? Using second person in an essay can bring your readers too close to your ideas (maybe suggesting they believe something that they don't), and it can bring your readers in at awkward moments. Take the following sentences, for example:

- You would never expect your kid to learn that girls aren’t as important as boys just through watching cartoons. (Do I, the reader, not expect this? I don’t even have kids. The author has used the word “you” to mean “people”).

Revised: Many parents would never their children to learn that girls aren’t as important as boys just through watching cartoons.

- According to Postman, if you watch too much television, you acquire poor learning habits. (Did Postman suggest that I, the reader, watch too much television? He doesn’t even know me. Again, the writer has used “you” to reference the general population.)

Revised: According to Postman, people who watch too much television acquire poor learning habits.

2. **Jargon**, **Colloquial Language**, **Cliché**, and **Slang**

These different types of informal language (or technical language in the case of jargon) are almost always unacceptable in formal academic writing. Let’s look at each one individually to gain a better understanding of them.

- **Jargon**: Jargon consists of terms particular to a certain profession or field of expertise. Unless you are writing for a specialized audience, you want to avoid jargon because a typical audience member will feel left out of the conversation. These are a few examples of jargon:
  - Sweating (the process plumbers use to fit pipes together)
  - Crumping (when a patient’s health starts to fail)
- Dialectic (a philosophical notion that asserts an argument [thesis] and its opposing arguments [antithesis] create new notions [synthesis])
- Deconstruction (a literary theory that proposes that all texts fail in their goals and ultimately unravel)

- **Colloquial Language**: Colloquial language is the type of language we use in everyday speech. Unless you are trying to capture the tone and feel of spoken language, avoid colloquial language as it robs formality and authority from academic prose. Words and phrases like “kind of,” “nowadays,” “snooze,” “a lot,” and “having to” represent a few of the many colloquialisms to avoid.

- **Clichés**: Clichés are also in our daily speech. However, we overuse these expressions to the point that they lose meaning or may not even mean what they should anymore. As George Orwell has said of overused phrases like clichés, using them is like putting together parts of pre-made buildings, allowing us to put words or phrases into our writing without even thinking about them. These expressions don't have the pop they once did, so think about your word choice, and try to find creative, descriptive ways that are not trite to bring out your ideas vividly. These are just a few clichés.
  - On the edge of my seat
  - Cat got your tongue?
  - Level the playing field
  - Pointing the finger
  - Putting it on the table
  - Smart money
  - Speak(s) volumes

- **Slang**: Slang is perhaps the worst of informal language. It, too, is part of our daily language, but it is extremely informal, even in terms of spoken conversation. Avoid slang almost wholly, unless you are trying to make a particular point that necessitates slang’s use. These are some examples of slang so you can get a sense of what constitutes it.
  - Twenty-four seven
  - Way better
  - Dotcom
  - Duh
  - I was like...

3. **Ref** (Reference/Unclear Pronouns)

When you use a pronoun that doesn't have a clear antecedent (word it replaces or references), you diminish clarity. Be sure that the pronouns you use clearly refer to the nouns you wish them to so readers can more easily see the relationships of pronouns and their antecedents. Here are a few examples of this problem.
• **Unclear:** I drove my car to the bank, got out of it, went into it, got some cash, and got back into it.
• **Revised:** I drove my car to the bank, got out of my car, went into the bank, got some cash, and got back into my car.

• **Unclear:** Kerry told Ellen that she would have that ready by noon.
• **Revised:** Kerry told Ellen, "I will have the project ready by noon."

• **Unclear:** The car went over the bridge just before it fell into the water.
• **Revised:** The car went over the bridge just before the bridge fell into the water.

• **Unclear:** This illustrates a problem with instruction as well as student effort.
• **Revised:** Increasingly low grades illustrate a problem with instruction and student effort.

• **Unclear:** That reflects students’ susceptibility to consumer culture’s influence
• **Revised:** The expectation that classes be entertaining and easy reflects students’ susceptibility to consumer culture’s influence.

### Sentence Structure and Punctuation Errors

1. **Frag** *(Sentence Fragments)*

   A sentence fragment occurs when you use a phrase or a dependent clause as a complete sentence. Even though you may see sentence fragments in newspapers, magazines, novels, and other writings (often for dramatic effect), most people in the academic community do not accept fragments as a standard practice. Let’s turn to some examples.

   • **Fragment 1:** The only team they had lost to earlier in the season.
   • **Revised 1:** The team from Chicago was the only team they had lost to earlier in the season.

   • **Fragment:** While driving to work.
   • **Revised:** While driving to work, I received a call from my sister.

   • **Fragment:** Because she returned my books.
   • **Revised:** Because she returned my books, I can study.

   • **Fragment:** To announce new programs for crime prevention.
   • **Revised:** The mayor called a news conference last week to announce new programs for crime prevention.
2. **CS (Comma Splice)**

Student writing frequently contains multiple errors called “comma splices.” A comma splice occurs when you use a comma to separate two independent clauses (complete sentences). Only a period, a semicolon, or a coordinating conjunction (and, but, for, nor, or, so, yet) can do that. Here are three easy ways to eliminate comma splices:

1. Use a **period** to separate the independent clauses into two sentences.
   - **Comma Splice:** I know how many pages this book has, I will read it anyway.
   - **Revised:** I know how many pages this book has. I will read it anyway.

2. Use a **semicolon** to show a close relationship between the ideas in the two independent clauses.
   - **Comma Splice:** It rained all day yesterday, the clouds threaten rain again today.
   - **Revised:** It rained all day yesterday; the clouds threaten rain again today.

   **Comma Splice:** The locksmith wants the best for his family, and he works hard to provide for them, however, they don't live in the best neighborhood.
   - **Revised:** The locksmith wants the best for his family, and he works hard to provide for them; however, they don’t live in the best neighborhood.

3. Use a **comma followed by a coordinating conjunction** (FANBOYS: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so) to show a more specific relationship between the two independent clauses.
   - **Comma Splice:** After a long day’s work, John was tired, he decided to go to bed early.
   - **Revised:** After a long day’s work, John was tired, so he decided to go to bed early.

3. **Run (Fused Sentence or Run-on Sentence)**

A run-on happens when you connect two complete sentences together with no punctuation at all or when you write a long, rambling sentence combining too many thoughts. Run-ons can be fixed in the same ways as a comma splice. Here are a few examples of run-ons.
1. Use a **period**.

   - **Run-on:** The practice of journalism is changing dramatically technology has sped up news cycles.

   - **Revised:** The practice of journalism has changed dramatically. Technology has sped up news cycles. (*This revision divides the run-on into two separate sentences with a period*).

2. Use a **semicolon**.

   - **Run-on:** Many times, in writing, one cannot submit the perfect draft time constraints may force a writer to cut the revision process short.

   - **Revised:** Many times, in writing, one cannot submit the perfect draft; time constraints may force a writer to cut the revision process short. (*This sentence uses a semicolon to connect the two independent clauses*).

3. Use a **comma plus a coordinating conjunction** (FANBOYS).

   - **Run-on:** The icebergs broke off from the glacier they drifted into the sea.

   - **Revised:** The icebergs broke off from the glacier, and they drifted into the sea. (*This revision uses a comma plus the coordinating conjunction “and” [FANBOYS] to show the connection between the ideas in the two independent clauses*).

4. **Divide** overly long sentences.

   - **Run-on:** When they got home from the pool, the children were tired, so they decided to watch a movie instead of cleaning their rooms, but their mother wanted them to clean, and they wanted to spend the night at a friend’s house that evening; therefore, they decided to do their chores as quickly as possible to keep their mother happy.

   - **Revised:** When they got home from the pool, the children were tired, so they decided to watch a movie instead of cleaning their rooms; however, their mother wanted them to clean. Because they wanted to spend the night at a friend’s house that evening, the children did their chores as quickly as possible to keep their mother happy. (*This sentence separates the problematic string of sentences to eliminate the run-on*).