Revision Strategies

In this lecture we will review the following grammar errors:

- Dangling modifiers
- Misplaced modifiers
- Point-of-view and tense shifts

We will also review the following suggestions for style:

- Avoiding redundancy

DM (Dangling Modifier)
A dangling modifier is an exceptionally common error in writing—even some professional writers commit it! Dangling modifiers almost always occur at the beginning or the end of a sentence. Essentially, a dangling modifier doesn't modify anything in the sentence but rather it modifies something that is implied. Often you will need to add a subject or turn the modifier into a phrase so the modifying phrase clearly modifies the correct word. Examples should help to clarify this.

- Hanging from the telephone line, Sally could not retrieve her kite. (Does Sally hang from the telephone line? No, that probably isn't the meaning that the writer intended, right?)

Revised: Sally could not retrieve her kite that was hanging from a telephone line. (In this sentence, the kite hangs from the telephone line—not Sally!)

- Having read Faulkner's short story "A Rose for Emily," the ending surprised us. (Did the ending read Faulkner's short story? This is the meaning conveyed through the sentence, right?)

Revised: Having read Faulkner's short story "A Rose for Emily," we found the ending surprising. (In this sentence, we read Faulkner's short story—the ending did not read the story.)

- To make the study of primates less subjective and more scientifically organized, the Academy recognized Dr. Jeanne Altmann. (Did the Academy make the study of primates less subjective and more scientifically organized? This is the meaning that the sentence conveys.)

Revised: The Academy recognized Dr. Jeanne Altmann for having made the study of primates less subjective and more scientifically organized. (In this sentence, Dr. Jeanne Altmann--not the Academy--made the study of primates less subjective and more scientifically organized.)
MM (Misplaced Modifiers)
These are similar to dangling modifiers, but misplaced modifiers do modify something in the sentence. However, they are at a distance from the word or phrase that they are supposed to modify, causing confusion or an awkward, comical, or even offensive sentence, all of which can damage your credibility in the eyes of your readers. A few examples will make this issue more tangible.

- The bank offered flood insurance to homeowners subsidized by the federal government. *(Were the homeowners subsidized by the federal government?)*

**Revised:** The bank offered flood insurance subsidized by the federal government to homeowners. *(In this sentence, the insurance was subsidized by the federal government.)*

- I was told that I had been awarded the scholarship by my adviser. *(Did your adviser award you the scholarship? This is the meaning conveyed by this sentence.)*

**Revised:** I was told by my adviser that I had been awarded the scholarship. *(In this sentence, the adviser told you that you won the scholarship. The adviser did not award you the scholarship.)*

- Billowing from every window, we saw clouds of smoke. *(Can people billow from windows? This is the meaning conveyed in the sentence.)*

**Revised:** We saw clouds of smoke billowing from every window. *(In this sentence, clouds of smoke billowed from the windows.)*

- Doctors recommend a new test for cancer, which is painless. *(Is cancer painless? This is the meaning conveyed in the sentence.)*

**Revised:** Doctors recommend a new, painless test for cancer. *(In this sentence, the test is painless.)*

Tense or P.O.V. (Shifts--Tense or Person)
When you begin a paragraph (or even an essay) in one particular tense or person, stay in that same tense or person, unless you have a good reason for deviating from it. These shifts can cause confusion, as in these examples.

- I *went* to class this morning. After class, I *sleep* until 11:00 a.m. *(Do not shift from past to present tense.)*

**Revised:** I *went* to class this morning. After class, I *slept* until 11:00 a.m.

- As *we* looked around us, *you* could see that spring was in the air. *(Do not shift from first person plural point of view to second person point of view.)*

**Revised:** As *we* looked around us, *we* could see that spring was in the air.
• I liked the story because it keeps one guessing. *(Do not shift from first person point of view to third person point of view.)*

**Revised:** I liked the story because it kept me guessing.

Note: In academic writing, you will almost always avoid using the second person (you, your, and so on). 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.

**Red (Redundant)**

When you overuse a word, phrase, or sentence structure it can become overly repetitive or redundant. While emphasizing an important idea through repetition can show its importance and can create a memorable impression, you will want to use repetition with purpose and care. Repeating structures or words over and over can get tiresome for your readers, so try to avoid doing so unless you have a particular purpose.

• The readers of the magazine will often read the articles on fitness and nutrition to apply certain tips to their lifestyles. *(If they are readers of the magazine, we know that they read the articles. The use of readers and read is redundant.)*

**Revised:** The magazine readers often apply tips found in fitness and nutrition articles to their lifestyles.

• Karla is now employed at a hospital working as a registered nurse. *(If Karla is employed, we know she is working.)*

**Revised:** Karla now works at a hospital as a registered nurse.

• In a hurry, Shawn sprinted through the hallways to enter his classroom on time. *(If Shawn sprinted, we know that he is in a hurry.)*

**Revised:** Shawn sprinted through the hallways to enter his classroom on time.

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