Revision Strategies

We will review the following grammar errors:

- Antecedent agreement
- Subject/verb agreement

We will also review the following suggestions for style:

- Using vivid verbs
- Avoiding weak verbs
- Avoiding expletives, nominalizations, and passive voice

Ant (Antecedent Agreement)

Antecedent agreement problems are quite common in writing; perhaps this is because we often speak with errors in antecedent agreement. Antecedent agreement problems occur when pronouns and the nouns to which they refer do not agree in kind or number. Singular nouns take singular pronouns, and plural nouns take plural pronouns. This error typically occurs when some distance separates the noun and its pronoun and with collective, singular nouns. Examples should help us see this more clearly. **Pay close attention to the pronouns and antecedents. They appear in red.**

- Each member of the design team usually has one specific room that they are working on and decorating.

*Revised:* Each member of the design team usually has one specific room that he or she is working on and decorating.

- If a watcher can connect themselves or someone they know to a cast member, it raises interest in the work.

*Revised:* If watchers can connect themselves or someone they know to a cast member, it raises interest in the work.

- The audience fixed their attention on center stage.

*Revised:* The audience fixed its attention on center stage.

- Congress usually resists presidential attempts to encroach on what they consider their authority.

*Revised:* Congress usually resists presidential attempts to encroach on what it considers its authority.
S/V (Agreement)

Subject/verb agreement problems occur when your subject and verb do not agree in kind or number. Singular subjects take singular verbs, and plural subjects take plural verbs. Agreement problems happen most often when a phrase or clause separates your subject from your verb or when you use a collective, singular noun like audience or Congress (single entities made up of more than one person). Some examples should add clarity to this discussion. Pay close attention to the italicized subjects and verbs. They appear in red.

- When I watch TV, I likes to watch dramas.
  
  **Revised:** When I watch TV, I like to watch dramas.

- Jenny, Stacey, and Chris catches fish for a living.
  
  **Revised:** Jenny, Stacey, and Chris catch fish for a living. (The "and" groups them together into a plural noun like "they.")

- The writers use vivid language and heart-wrenching scenes that attaches audience members to the characters.
  
  **Revised:** The writers use vivid language and heart-wrenching scenes that attach audience members to the characters.

- Either John or Becky travel for the company.
  
  **Revised:** Either John or Becky travels for the company. (The "or" splits them into singular nouns.)

WV (Weak Verb)

Use strong, precise, and vivid verbs to create memorable prose. Avoid weak verbs, such as: be, been, is, was, were, are, do, and have. These verbs are difficult to visualize, and when we write, we want our prose to create strong, vivid impressions and images for the reader. Look at the examples below.

- Constant playing of video games is harmful to children’s development.
  
  **Revised:** Constant playing of video games stunts and distorts children’s development.

- Sidewalk artists offered to do my portrait in ten minutes.
  
  **Revised:** Sidewalk artists offered to sketch my portrait in ten minutes.

- Students are in the room.
  
  **Revised:** Students dance in the room.

- We had basic training at Fort Ord.
Revised: We sweated through basic training at Ford Ord.

Notice how the strong, vivid verbs create more meaning in each sentence. We have difficulty visualizing basic training in the first sentence because of the word “had.” However, when we change the verb to “sweated,” the reader can visualize the basic training.

Strong verbs tend to give the reader more information, too. Notice that when we write, “Students dance in the room,” the reader receives more information than if we write, “Students are in the room.”

Exp (Expletives)

Expletives are weak verb constructions, and we want to use plenty of vivid verbs while avoiding the weak verbs. Expletives begin with there or it followed by a form of be or another linking verb. Often, expletives are wordy and unnecessary constructions that slow down the opening of the sentence and that may lead to passive constructions. Let’s look at some examples. The expletives are in red.

- There are many people who fear success because they do not believe they deserve it.
  Revised: Many people fear success because they do not believe they deserve it.

- It is necessary for presidential candidates to perform well on television.
  Revised: Presidential candidates must perform well on television.

Nom (Nominalization)

Nominalizations are nouns that may be more effectively used as verbs. Precise, vivid verbs help to make our writing clear and engaging. On the other hand, abstract nouns often contribute to wordiness and, at times, confusion. Review the examples below. Notice the difference between the sentences that use nouns and those that use verbs.

- There was considerable erosion of the land from the floods. (erosion is a noun)
  Revised: The floods considerably eroded the land. (eroded is a verb)

- Our discussion concerned politics. (discussion is a noun)
  Revised: We discussed politics. (discussed is a verb)

P (Inappropriate Passive Voice)

In general, you will want to use active voice—not passive voice. Passive voice is wordier than active voice, and using it excessively makes dull and difficult reading. Passive voice may also hide important information. Review the examples below.

Passive: In Gower’s research, it was found that pythons often dwell in trees.

To change passive to active, follow these steps:
1. Locate the verb. \((\text{was found})\)
2. Identify the agent. The agent is the person or thing that performs the action. \((\text{Gower})\)
3. Put the agent before the verb. \((\text{Put Gower before found})\)

**Active:** In his research, \(\text{Gower found}\) that pythons often dwell in trees.

**Passive:** The essay was graded by the teacher.

To change passive to active, follow these steps:

1. Locate the verb. \((\text{was graded})\)
2. Identify the agent. The agent is the person or thing that performs the action. \((\text{the teacher})\)
3. Put the agent before the verb. \((\text{Put the teacher before graded})\)

**Active:** The \(\text{teacher graded}\) the essay.

**Passive:** Mistakes were made.

1. Locate the verb. \((\text{was made})\)
2. Identify the agent. The agent is the person or thing that performs the action. In this example, we do not have a clear agent. Thus, this example shows how passive voice can hide information from the reader. In other words, from this sentence, the reader does not know who made the mistakes. As writers, we rarely want to hide information from readers. Thus, as a writer, you must assign an agent. For this example, let’s assign \(\text{Bob}\) as the agent.
3. Put the agent before the verb. \((\text{Put Bob before made})\).

**Active:** Bob made mistakes

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