

Technical Writing: Elements of Style

**Sentences**

- Place the Main Point near the Beginning

Ex:

*After reviewing the growth of the Calgary office, it was decided by the corporate staff that an additional lab should be constructed at the Calgary location.*

Revision

The corporate staff decided to build a new lab in Calgary after reviewing the growth of the office there.

- Focus on the Main Clause

*The hiring committee planned to interview Jim Steinway today, but bad weather delayed his plane departure, and the committee had to reschedule the interview tomorrow.*

Revision

The hiring committee had to change Jim Steinway's interview from today to tomorrow because bad weather delayed his flight.

- Replace Abstract Nouns with Verbs

*The acquisition of the property was accomplished through long and hard negotiations.*

Revision

We acquired the property after long and hard negotiation.

- Shorten Wordy Phrases

due to the fact that - because

for the purpose of - for

in the proximity of - near

- Avoid "There Are", "It Is"

Use concrete nouns for the subjects and action words for the verbs.

Examples:

There are many projects that could be considered for design awards.

It is clear to the hiring committee that writing skills are important.

Revisions

Many projects could be considered for design awards.

The hiring committee believes that writing skills are important.

- Avoid using “This” as the subject unless a noun follows it

- Use Active and Passive Voices Properly

Active voice – “We reviewed aerial photographs in our initial assessment of possible fault activity on the site.”

Passive voice – “Aerial photographs were reviewed in our initial assessment of possible fault activity on the site.”

Use active voice to

- emphasize who is responsible for the action – *The vice-president will ...*
- place the action first – *Figure 1 shows*
- write shorter sentences

Use the passive voice

- to emphasize the receiver of the action – *Test samples will be sent...*
- to emphasize the action itself – *The documents were delivered.*
- to avoid “I” and “we”
- when responsibility is obvious – *Students are required to take courses.*

### **Paragraphs**

Most paragraphs contain four basic elements: a topic sentence, development of the main idea, transitional elements, and a closing sentence. The topic sentence states the main idea of the paragraph; it usually appears first. The development of the main idea contains concrete supporting ideas, not generalizations.

### **Parallelism**

- In lists

Example of a nonparallel list:

*Here is the sequence we plan to follow:*

1. *construction of the proposal*
2. *do library research*
3. *interview with the company president*
4. *first draft*
5. *revision of the first draft*
6. *after we get your approval, typing of the final draft*

Revision: parallel list

*Here is the sequence we plan to follow:*

1. *construct the proposal*
2. *do library research*
3. *interview the company president*
4. *write the first draft*
5. *revise the first draft*
6. *type the final draft, after we get your approval*

- In sentences

Example

*Our present system is costing us profits and reduces our productivity.*

Revision

*Our present system costs us profits and reduces our productivity.*

References:

Technical Communication, Fourth Canadian Edition, 4/E by William S. Pfeiffer and J. Boogerd

*Technical Communication* by Mike Markel