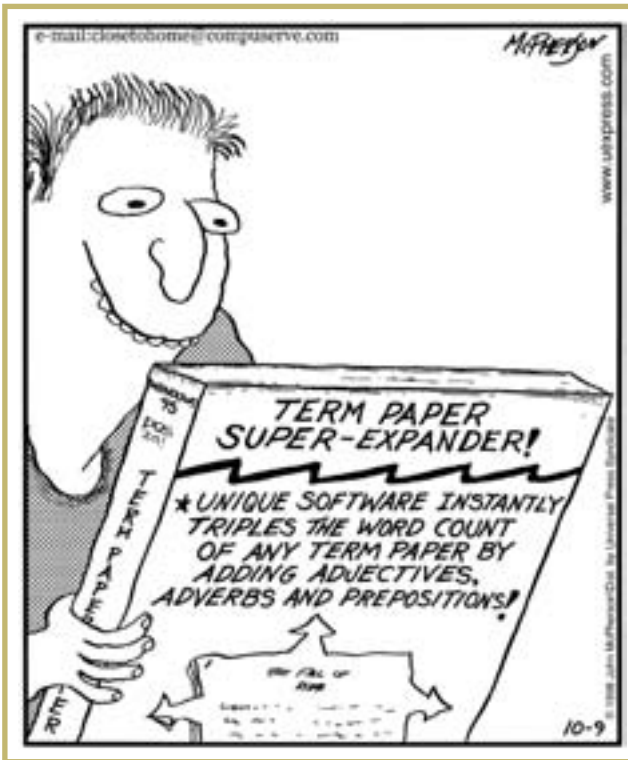


# Revising Sentences and Words



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## REVISING SENTENCES

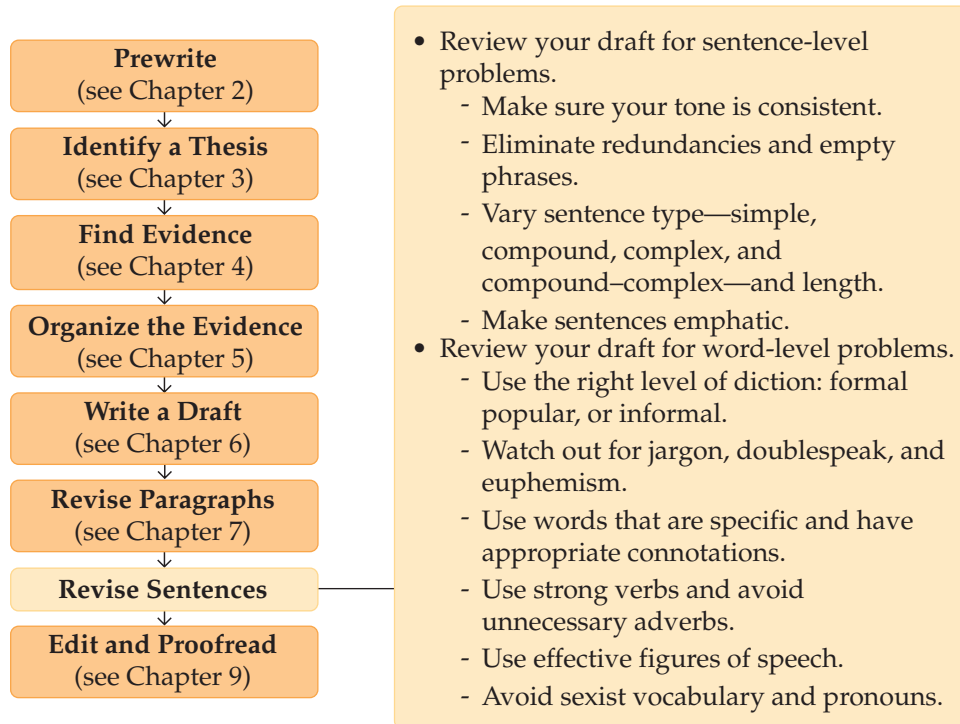
Having refined your essay's overall meaning, structure, and paragraph development, you can concentrate on sharpening individual sentences. Although polishing sentences inevitably involves decisions about individual words, for now focus on each sentence as a whole; you can evaluate individual words later (see Figure 8.1). At this point, work to make your sentences:

- Consistent with your intended tone
- Economical
- Varied in type
- Varied in length
- Emphatic

### Make Sentences Consistent with Your Tone

In Chapter 2, we saw how integral **tone** is to meaning (pages 21–22). As you revise, be sure each sentence's **content** (its images and ideas) and **style** (its structure and length) reinforce your intended tone: Both *what* you say and *how* you say it should support the essay's overall mood.

**FIGURE 8.1**  
**Process Diagram: Revising Sentences**



Consider the following excerpt from a piece by *Philadelphia Inquirer* columnist Melissa Dribben. Responding to the ongoing debate over gun control, Dribben supports legislation sought by the mayor of Philadelphia to limit handgun purchases to one per person per month. She writes:

There are people who buy a new toothbrush every month. A new vacuum-cleaner bag. A fresh box of baking soda. A pair of \$5 sunglasses. This you understand. You can never have too many.

But when you reach the point where you have a stash of 38-caliber pistols bigger than your supply of clean underwear, you have a problem. And it isn't a shopping addiction.

Dribben's tone here is biting and sarcastic, her attitude exasperated and mocking. She establishes this tone partly through sentence content (what she says). For example, to her it is outrageous that people would want to buy guns more frequently than they purchase basic household and personal necessities. Dribben's style (how she says it) also contributes to her overall tone. The three fragments in the first paragraph convey an attitude of angry disbelief. These fragments,

followed by two brief but complete sentences, build to the longer, climactic sentence at the beginning of the second paragraph. That sentence, especially when combined with the crisp last sentence, delivers a final, quick jab to those opposed to the proposed legislation. In short, content and style help express Dribben's impassioned attitude toward her subject.

## Make Sentences Economical

Besides reinforcing your tone, your sentences should be **economical** rather than wordy. Use as few, not as many, words as possible. Students sometimes pad their writing because they think the longer a paper is, the higher the grade it will receive. Most instructors, though, are skilled at spotting wordiness intended only to fill pages. Your sentences won't be wordy if you (1) eliminate redundancy, (2) delete weak phrases, and (3) remove unnecessary *who*, *which*, and *that* clauses.

### Eliminate Redundancy

**Redundancy** means unnecessary repetition. Sometimes words are repeated exactly; sometimes they are repeated by way of *synonyms*, other words or phrases that mean the same thing. When writing is redundant, words can be trimmed away without sacrificing meaning or effect. Why, for example, write "In the expert opinion of one expert" and needlessly repeat the word *expert*? Similarly, "They found it difficult to get consensus or agreement about the proposal" contains an unnecessary synonym (*agreement*) for *consensus*.

Redundancy isn't the same as repetition for dramatic emphasis. Consider the following excerpt from an address to the United Nations by John F. Kennedy:

Unconditional war can no longer lead to unconditional victory. It can no longer serve to settle disputes. It can no longer be of concern to great powers alone. . . .

Here the repetition of *unconditional* and *can no longer* drives home the urgency of Kennedy's message. Repetition used, in this way, to underscore the relationship among sentences or ideas is called *parallelism*. (For more on parallelism, see pages 121–122.)

When not used as a stylistic device, however, repetition weakens prose. Take a look at the sentence pairs below. Note how the revised versions are clearer and stronger because the redundancy in the original sentences (italicized) has been eliminated:

**Original** While under the *influence* of alcohol, many people insist they are not under the *influence* and *swear* they are sober.

**Revised** While under the influence of alcohol, many people insist they are sober.

**Original** *They designed a computer program* that increased sales by 50 percent. The *computer program they designed* showed how the TRS-80 can be *used* and *implemented* in small businesses and firms.

**Revised** Their program, which showed how the TRS-80 computer can be used in small businesses, increased sales by 50 percent.

### Delete Weak Phrases

In addition to eliminating redundancy, you can make sentences more economical by **deleting the three types of weak phrases** described here.

1. **Empty Phrases.** In speaking, we frequently use empty phrases that give us time to think but don't add to our message, expressions such as "Okay?" and "You know what I mean?" In writing, though, we have the chance to eliminate such deadwood. Here are some common culprits—expressions that are needlessly awkward and wordy—along with their one-word alternatives:

Wordy Expressions	Revised
due to the fact that	because
in light of the fact that	since
regardless of the fact that	although
in the event that	if
in many cases	often
in that period	then
at the present time	now
at this point in time	now
in the not-too-distant future	soon
for the purpose of	to
has the ability to	can
be aware of the fact that	know
is necessary that	must

Notice the improvement in the following sentences when wordy, often awkward phrases are replaced with one-word substitutes:

**Original** *It is necessary that* the government outlaw the production of carcinogenic pesticides.

**Revised** The government *must* outlaw the production of carcinogenic pesticides.

**Original** Student leaders were upset by *the fact that* no one in the administration consulted them.

**Revised** Student leaders were upset *because* no one in the administration consulted them.

Some phrases don't even call for concise substitutes. Because they add nothing at all to a sentence's meaning, they can simply be deleted. Here are some examples: "shy *type of* child," "*kind of* person," "*field of* communications," "small *in size*." The revised sentence that follows has exactly the same meaning as the original, but the meaning is expressed without the empty phrase *in color*:

**Original** The hybrid azaleas were light blue *in color*.

**Revised** The hybrid azaleas were light blue.

Other times, to avoid an empty phrase, you may need to recast a sentence slightly:

**Original** The midterm assessment is *for the purpose of letting* students know if they are failing a course.

**Revised** The midterm assessment *lets* students know if they are failing a course.

2. **Roundabout Openings with *There*, *It*, and Question Words Like *How* and *What*.** At the beginning of a sentence, you're formulating a new thought, so you may grope around a bit before pinning down what you want to say. For this reason, the openings of sentences are especially vulnerable to unnecessary phrases. Common culprits include phrases beginning with *There* and *It* (when *It* does not refer to a specific noun), and words like *How* and *What* (when they don't actually ask a question). In the following examples, note that trimming away excess words highlights the subject and verb, thus clarifying meaning:

**Original** It was their belief that the problem had been solved.

**Revised** They believed the problem had been solved.

**Original** There are now computer courses offered by many high schools.

**Revised** Many high schools now offer computer courses.

**Original** What should be done in this crisis is to transport food to the victims' homes.

**Revised** Food must be transported to the victims' homes.

**Original** How to simplify the college's registration process should be a priority.

**Revised** Simplifying the college's registration process should be a priority.

Of course, feel free to open with *There* or *It* when some other construction would be less clear or effective. For example, don't write "Many reasons can be cited why students avoid art courses" when you can say "There are many reasons why students avoid art courses."

3. **Excessive Prepositional Phrases.** Strings of prepositional phrases (word groups beginning with *at*, *on*, and the like) tend to make writing choppy; they weigh sentences down and hide main ideas. Note how much smoother and clearer sentences become when prepositional phrases (italicized in the following examples) are eliminated:

**Original** Growth *in the greenhouse effect* may result *in increases in the intensity of hurricanes*.

**Revised** The growing greenhouse effect may intensify hurricanes.

**Original** The reassurance *of a neighbor* who was the owner *of a pit bull* that his dog was incapable *of harm* would not be sufficient to prevent most parents *from calling* the authorities if the dog ran loose.

**Revised** Despite a neighbor's reassurance that his pit bull was harmless, most parents would call the authorities if the dog ran loose.

These examples show that prepositional phrases can sometimes be eliminated by substituting one strong verb (*intensify*) or by using the possessive form (*neighbor's reassurance, his pit bull*) rather than an *of* phrase.

### Remove Unnecessary *Who, Which, and That* Clauses

Often *who, which, or that* clauses can be removed with no loss of meaning. Consider the tightening possible in these sentences:

**Original** The townsfolk misunderstood the main point *that the developer made*.

**Revised** The townsfolk misunderstood *the developer's main point*.

**Original** The employees *who protested* the restrictions went on strike, *which was a real surprise to management*.

**Revised** The employees *protesting* the restrictions *surprised management* by going on strike.

## Vary Sentence Type

Another way to invigorate writing is to **vary sentence type**. Since the predictable soon becomes dull, try to offer a mixture of simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences.

### Simple Sentences

A **clause** is a group of words with both a subject and a verb. Clauses can be **independent** (able to stand alone) or **dependent** (unable to stand alone). A **simple sentence** consists of a single independent clause (whose subject and verb are italicized here):

The *president serves* four years.

*Marie Curie investigated* radioactivity and *died* from its effects.

Unlike most mammals, *birds* and *fish* see color.

Notice that a simple sentence can have more than one verb (sentence 2) or more than one subject (sentence 3). In addition, any number of modifying phrases (such as *Unlike most mammals*) can extend the sentence's length and add information. What distinguishes a simple sentence is its single *subject-verb combination*.

Simple sentences can convey dramatic urgency:

Suddenly we heard the screech of brakes. Across the street, a small boy lay sprawled in front of a car. We started to run toward the child. Seeing us, the driver sped away.

Simple sentences are also excellent for singling out a climactic point: "They found the solution." In a series, however, they soon lose their impact and become boring. Also, because simple sentences highlight one idea at a time,

they don't clarify the relationships among ideas. Consider these two versions of a passage:

### Original

Many first-year college students are apprehensive. They won't admit it to themselves. They hesitate to confide in their friends. They never find out that everyone else is anxious, too. They are nervous about being disliked and feeling lonely. They fear not "knowing the ropes."

### Revised

Many first-year college students are apprehensive, but they won't admit it to themselves. Because they hesitate to confide in their friends, they never find out that everyone else is anxious, too. Being disliked, feeling lonely, not "knowing the ropes"—these are what beginning college students fear.

In addition to sounding repetitive and childish, the simple sentences in the original version fragment the passage into a series of disconnected ideas. In contrast, the revised version includes a variety of sentence types and patterns, all of which are discussed on the pages ahead. This variety clarifies the relationships among ideas, so that the passage reads more easily.

## Compound Sentences

**Compound sentences** consist of two or more independent clauses. There are four types of compound sentences. The most basic type consists of two simple sentences joined by a *coordinating conjunction* (*and, but, for, nor, or, so, or yet*). Here's an example:

Chimpanzees and gorillas can learn sign language, *and* they have been seen teaching this language to others.

Another type of compound sentence has a semicolon (;), rather than a comma and coordinating conjunction, between the two simple sentences:

Yesterday, editorials attacked the plan; a week ago, they praised it.

A third type of compound sentence links two simple sentences with a semicolon plus a *conjunctive adverb* such as *however, moreover, nevertheless, therefore, and thus*:

Every year billions of U.S. dollars go to researching AIDS; *however*, recent studies show that a large percentage of the money has been mismanaged.

A final type of compound sentence consists of two simple sentences connected by a *correlative conjunction*, a word pair such as *either . . . or, neither . . . nor, or not only . . . but also*:

*Either* the litigants will win the lawsuit, *or* they will end up in debt from court costs.

Compound sentences help clarify the relationship between ideas. Similarities are signaled by such words as *and* and *moreover*, contrasts by *but* and *however*, cause-effect by *so* and *therefore*. When only a semicolon separates the two parts of a compound sentence, the relationship between those two parts is often a contrast. (“Yesterday, editorials attacked the plan; a week ago, they praised it.”)

### Complex Sentences

In a **complex sentence**, a dependent (subordinate) clause is joined to an independent clause. Sometimes the dependent clause (italicized in the following examples) is introduced by a subordinating conjunction such as *although*, *because*, *if*, *since*, or *when*:

*Since they have relatively small circulations*, specialty magazines tend to be expensive.

We knew there had been a power failure *because all the clocks in the building were two hours slow*.

Other dependent clauses are introduced by a relative pronoun such as *that*, *which*, or *who*:

Several celebrities revealed *that they have been stalked by delusional fans*.

Fame and wealth from his writings had little effect on author J. R. R. Tolkien, *who continued to teach until reaching retirement age*.

As you can see, the order of the dependent and independent clause isn’t fixed. The dependent clause may come first, last, or even in the middle of the independent clause, as in this example:

Nurses’ uniforms, *although they are no longer the norm*, are still required by some hospitals.

Whether to use a comma between a dependent and an independent clause depends on a number of factors, including the location of the dependent clause and whether it’s *restrictive* (essential for identifying the thing it modifies) or *nonrestrictive*.

Because a dependent clause is subordinate to an independent one, complex sentences can clarify the relationships among ideas. Consider the two paragraphs that follow. The first merely strings together a series of simple and compound sentences, all of them carrying roughly the same weight. In contrast, the complex sentences in the revised version use subordination to connect ideas and signal their relative importance.

### Original

Are you the “average American”? Then take heed. Here are the results of a time-management survey. You might want to budget your time differently. According to the survey, you spend six years of your life eating. Also, you’re likely to spend two years trying to reach people by telephone, so you should convince your friends to get answering machines. Finally, you may be married and expect long conversations



with your spouse to occur spontaneously, but you'll have to make a special effort. Ordinarily, your discussions will average only four minutes a day.

### Revised

If you're the "average American," take heed. After you hear the results of a time-management survey, you might want to budget your time differently. According to the survey, you spend six years of your life eating. Also, unless you convince your friends to get answering machines, you're likely to spend two years trying to reach them by telephone. Finally, if you're married, you shouldn't expect long conversations with your spouse to occur spontaneously. Unless you make a special effort, your discussions will average only four minutes a day.

If you find that the original paragraph resembles your writing more than the revised, don't despair. With experience, you'll develop a strong sense of how to connect and rank ideas through subordination. For now, just remember the following: Expressed as a dependent clause, an idea is relegated to a position of secondary importance; expressed as an independent clause, it's emphasized. So reserve for the independent clause the point you want to highlight.

The following sentences illustrate how meaning shifts depending on what is put in the main clause and what is subordinated:

Although most fraternities and sororities no longer have hazing, pledging is still a big event on many campuses.

Although pledging is still a big event on many campuses, most fraternities and sororities no longer have hazing.

In the first sentence, the focus is on *pledging*; in the second, it is on the *discontinuation of hazing*.

### Compound-Complex Sentences

A **compound-complex sentence** connects one or more dependent clauses to two or more independent clauses. In the following example, the two independent clauses are underscored once and the two dependent clauses twice:

The Procrastinators' Club, which is based in Philadelphia, issues a small magazine, but it appears infrequently, only when members get around to writing it.

Go easy on the number of compound-complex sentences you use. Because they tend to be long, a string of them is likely to overwhelm the reader and cloud meaning.

### Vary Sentence Length

You've probably noticed that simple sentences tend to be short, compound and complex sentences tend to be of medium length, and compound-complex

sentences tend to be long. Generally, by varying sentence type, a writer automatically **varies sentence length** as well. However, sentence type doesn't always determine length. In this example, the simple sentence is longer than the complex one:

### Simple Sentence

Hot and thirsty, exhausted from the effort of carrying so many groceries, I desired nothing more than an ice-cold glass of lemonade.

### Complex Sentence

Because I was hot and thirsty, I craved lemonade.

The difference lies in the number of **modifiers**—words or groups of words used to describe another word or group of words. So, besides considering sentence type, check on sentence length when revising.

### Short Sentences

Too many short sentences, like too many simple ones, can sound childish and create a choppy effect that muddies the relationship among ideas. Used wisely, though, a series of short sentences gives writing a staccato rhythm that carries more punch and conveys a faster pace than the same number of words gathered into longer sentences. As you read the two passages that follow, note how the first version's clipped rhythms are more effective for conveying a rush of terrifying events:

Witches bring their faces close. Goblins glare with fiery eyes. Fiendish devils stealthily approach to claw a beloved stuffed bear. The toy recoils in horror. These are among the terrifying happenings in the world of children's nightmares.

Witches bring their faces close as goblins glare, their eyes fiery. Approaching stealthily, fiendish devils come to claw a beloved stuffed bear that recoils in horror. These are among the terrifying happenings in the world of children's nightmares.

Brevity also highlights a sentence, especially when surrounding sentences are longer. Consider the dramatic effect of the final sentence in this paragraph:

Starting in June, millions of Americans pour onto the highways, eager to begin vacation. At the same time, city, state, and federal agencies deploy hundreds, even thousands of workers to repair roads that have, until now, managed to escape bureaucratic attention. Chaos results.

The short sentence "Chaos results" stands out because it's so much shorter than the preceding sentences. The emphasis is appropriate because, in the writer's view, chaos is the dramatic consequence of prolonged bureaucratic inertia.

### Long Sentences

Long sentences often convey a leisurely pace and establish a calm tone:

As I look across the lake, I see the steady light of a campfire at the water's edge, the flames tinting to copper an aluminum rowboat tied to the dock, the boat glimmering in the darkness.

However, as with short sentences, don't overdo it. Too many long sentences can be hard to follow. And remember: A sentence stands out most when it differs in length from surrounding sentences. Glance back at the first paragraph on children's nightmares (page 119). The final long sentence stands in contrast to the preceding short ones. The resulting emphasis works because the final sentence is also the paragraph's topic sentence.

### Make Sentences Emphatic

The previous section shows how sentence length affects meaning by highlighting some sentences in a paragraph but not others. Within a single sentence, you can use a number of techniques to make parts of the sentence stand out from the rest. To achieve such **emphasis**, you can: (1) place key ideas at the beginning or end, (2) set them in parallel constructions, (3) express them as fragments, or (4) express them in inverted word order.

#### Place Key Points at the Beginning or End

A sentence's start and close are its most prominent positions. So, keeping your overall meaning in mind, use those two spots to highlight key ideas.

Let's look first at the **beginning** position. Here are two versions of a sentence; the meanings differ because the openers differ.

The potentially life-saving drug, developed by junior researchers at the medical school, will be available next month.

Developed by junior researchers at the medical school, the potentially life-saving drug will be available next month.

In the first version, the emphasis is on the life-saving potential of a drug. Reordering the sentence shifts attention to those responsible for discovering the drug.

An even more emphatic position than a sentence's beginning is its **end**. Put at the close of a sentence whatever you want to emphasize:

Kindergarten is wasted on the young—especially the co-ed naptime.

Now look at two versions of another sentence, each with a slightly different meaning because of what's at the end:

Increasingly, overt racism is showing up in—of all places—popular song lyrics.

Popular song lyrics are showing—of all things—increasingly overt racism.

In the first version, the emphasis is on lyrics; in the second, it's on racism.

Be sure, though, that whatever you place in the climactic position merits the emphasis. The following sentence is so anticlimactic that it's unintentionally humorous:

The family, waiting anxiously for the results of the medical tests, sat.

Similarly, don't build toward a strong climax only to defuse it with some less important material:

On the narrow parts of the trail, where jagged cliffs drop steeply from the path, keep your eyes straight ahead and don't look down, toward the town of Belmont in the east.

In the preceding sentence, "toward the town of Belmont in the east" should be deleted. The important point surely isn't Belmont's location but how to avoid an accident.

### Use Parallelism

**Parallelism** occurs when ideas of comparable weight are expressed in the same grammatical form, thus underscoring their equality. Parallel elements may be words, phrases, clauses, or full sentences. Here are some examples:

#### Parallel Nouns

We bought *pretzels*, *nachos*, and *candy bars* to feed our pre-exam jitters.

#### Parallel Adverbs

*Smoothly*, *steadily*, *quietly*, the sails tipped toward the sun.

#### Parallel Verbs

The guest lecturer *spoke* to the group, *showed* her slides, and then *invited* questions.

#### Parallel Adjective Phrases

*Playful as a kitten* but *wise as a street Tom*, the old cat played with the string while keeping a watchful eye on his surroundings.

#### Parallel Prepositional Phrases

Gloomy predictions came *from political analysts*, *from the candidate's staff*, and, surprisingly, *from the candidate herself*.

#### Parallel Dependent Clauses

*Since our rivals were in top form*, *since their top player would soon come up to bat*, we knew that all was lost.

As you can see, the repetition of grammatical forms creates a pleasing symmetry that emphasizes the sequenced ideas. Parallel structure also conveys

meaning economically. Look at the way the following sentences can be tightened using parallelism:

### Nonparallel

Studies show that most women today are different from those in the past. They want to have their own careers. They want to be successful. They also want to enjoy financial independence.

### Parallel

Studies show that most women today are different from those in the past. They want to have careers, be successful, and enjoy financial independence.

Parallel constructions are often signaled by word pairs (correlative conjunctions) such as *either . . . or*, *neither . . . nor*, and *not only . . . but also*. To maintain parallelism, the same grammatical form must follow each half of the word pair.

*Either* professors are too rigorous, *or* they are too lax.

The company is interested in *neither* financing the project *nor* helping locate other funding sources.

When my roommate argues, she tends to be *not only* totally stubborn *but also* totally wrong.

Parallelism can create elegant and dramatic writing. Too much, though, seems artificial, so use it sparingly. Save it for your most important points.

### Use Fragments

A **fragment** is part of a sentence punctuated as if it were a whole sentence—that is, with a period at the end. A sentence fragment consists of words, phrases, and/or dependent clauses, *without an independent clause*. Here are some examples:

Resting quietly.

Except for the trees.

Because they admired her.

A demanding boss who accepted no excuses.

Ordinarily, we advise students to stay clear of fragments. However, like most rules, this one may at times be broken—if you do so intentionally and skillfully. To be on the safe side, ask your composition instructor whether an occasional fragment—used as a stylistic device—will be considered acceptable. Here’s an example showing the way fragments (underlined) can be used effectively for emphasis:

One of my aunt’s eccentricities is her belief that only personally made gifts show the proper amount of love. Her gifts

are often strange. Hand-drawn calendars. Home-brewed cologne that smells like jam. Crocheted washcloths. Frankly, I'd rather receive a gift certificate from a department store.

Notice how the three fragments focus attention on the aunt's charmingly off-beat gifts. Remember, though: When overused, fragments lose their effect, so draw on them sparingly.

### Use Inverted Word Order

In most English sentences, the subject comes before the verb. When you use **inverted word order**, however, at least part of the verb comes before the subject. The resulting sentence is so atypical that it automatically stands out.

Inverted statements, like those that follow, are used to emphasize an idea:

**Normal** My Uncle Bill is a strange man.

**Inverted** A strange man is my Uncle Bill.

**Normal** Their lies about the test scores were especially brazen.

**Inverted** Especially brazen were their lies about the test scores.

**Normal** The age-old tree would never again bear fruit.

**Inverted** Never again would the age-old tree bear fruit.

*A note of caution:* Inverted statements should be used infrequently and with special care. Bizarre can they easily sound.

Another form of inversion, the question, also acts as emphasis. A question may be a genuine inquiry, one that focuses attention on the issue at hand, as in the following example:

Since the 1960s, only about half of this country's eligible voters have gone to the polls during national elections. *Why are Americans so apathetic?* Let's look at some of the reasons.

Or a question may be *rhetorical*; that is, one that implies its own answer and encourages the reader to share the writer's view:

Yesterday, there was yet another accident at the intersection of Fairview and Springdale. Given the disproportionately high number of collisions at that crossing, *can anyone question the need for a traffic light?*

The following checklist is designed to help you and your readers evaluate the sentences in a first draft. (Activities at the end of the chapter will refer you to this checklist when you revise several essays.) To see how one student, Harriet Davids, used the checklist when revising, turn to page 135.



### REVISING SENTENCES: A CHECKLIST

- Which sentences seem inconsistent with the essay's intended tone? How could the problem be fixed?
- Which sentences could be more economical? Where could unnecessary repetition, empty phrases, and weak openings be eliminated? Which prepositional phrases could be deleted? Where are there unnecessary *who*, *which*, and *that* clauses?
- Where should sentence type be more varied? Where would subordination clarify the connections among ideas? Where would simpler sentences make the writing less inflated and easier to understand?
- Where does sentence length become monotonous and predictable? Which short sentences should be connected to enhance flow and convey a more leisurely pace? Which long sentences would be more effective if broken into crisp, short ones?
- Where would a different sentence pattern add variety? Better highlight key sentence elements? Seem more natural?
- Which sentences could be more emphatic? Which strategy would be most effective—expressing the main point at the beginning or end, using parallelism, or rewriting the sentence as a fragment, question, or inverted-word-order statement?

## REVISING WORDS

After refining the sentences in your first draft, you're in a good position to look closely at individual words. (Refer back to Figure 8.1 on page 111.) During this stage, you should aim for:

- Words consistent with your intended tone
- An appropriate level of diction
- Words that neither overstate nor understate
- Words with appropriate connotations
- Specific rather than general words
- Strong verbs
- No unnecessary adverbs
- Original figures of speech
- Nonsexist language

### Make Words Consistent with Your Tone

Like full sentences, individual words and phrases should also reinforce your intended tone. Reread the Melissa Dribben excerpt on gun control (see page 111). Earlier we discussed how sentence structure and length contribute to the excerpt's

biting tone. Word choice also plays an important role. The word *stash* mocks the impulse to hoard guns as if they were essential but depletable goods—like clean underwear. And the specific phrase *.38-caliber pistols* evokes the image of a weapon with frightening lethal power. Such word choices reinforce the overall tone Dribben wants to convey.

## Use an Appropriate Level of Diction

**Diction** refers to the words a writer selects. Those words should be appropriate for the writer's purpose, audience, point of view, and tone. If, for example, you are writing a straightforward, serious piece about on-the-job incompetence, you would be better off saying that people "don't concentrate on their work" and they "make frequent errors," rather than saying they "screw up" or "goof off."

There are three broad levels of diction: *formal*, *popular*, and *informal*. To describe feelings of pervasive sadness, clinical psychologists might use the highly formal term *dysthymia*, while the popular term for such emotions is *depression*. At the other end of the continuum, someone might use the informal phrase *down in the dumps*. Within each level of diction, there are degrees of formality and informality: *Down in the dumps* and *bumped out* are both informal, but *bumped out* is the slangier expression.

### Formal Diction

Impersonal and distant in tone, **formal diction** is the type of language found in scholarly journals. Contractions are rare; long, specialized, technical words are common. Unfortunately, many people mistakenly equate word length with education: The longer the words, they think, the more impressed readers will be. So rather than using the familiar and natural words *improve* and *think*, they thumb through a thesaurus (literally or figuratively) for such fancy-sounding alternatives as *ameliorate* and *conceptualize*. They write, "That is the optimum consequence we have the expectation of attaining" rather than "That is the best result we can expect." Remember: It's a word's ability to convey meaning clearly that counts, not its number of syllables.

Similarly, when writing for a general audience, don't show off specialized knowledge by throwing in **jargon**, insiders' terms from a particular area of expertise (say, a term like *authorial omniscience* from literary theory). Such "shoptalk" should be used only when less specialized words would lack the necessary precision. If readers are apt to be unfamiliar with a term, provide a definition.

Some degree of formality is appropriate—when, for example, you write up survey results for a sociology class. In such a case, your instructor may expect you to avoid the pronoun *I* (see page 22). Other instructors may think it's pretentious for a student to refer to himself or herself in the third person ("The writer observed that . . ."). These instructors may be equally put off by the artificiality of the passive voice (pages 129–130): "It was observed that . . ." To be safe, find out what your instructors expect. If possible, use *I* when you mean "I." Your writing will be no less objective—unless using *I* tempts you to include highly personal remarks and opinions. Even in more



formal situations, resist the temptation to dazzle readers by piling up multisyllable words. (For more on avoiding pretentious language, see below.)

### Popular Diction

**Popular**, or **mainstream**, **diction** is found in most magazines, newspapers, books, and texts (including this one). In such prose, the writer may use the first person and address the reader as “you.” Contractions appear frequently; specialized vocabulary is kept to a minimum.

You should aim for popular diction in most of the writing you do—in and out of college. Also keep in mind that an abrupt downshift to slang (*freaked out* instead of *lost control*) or a sudden turn to highly formal language (*myocardial infarction* instead of *heart attack*) will disconcert readers and undermine your credibility.

### Informal Diction

**Informal diction**, which conveys a sense of everyday speech, is friendly and casual. First-person and second-person pronouns are common, as are contractions and fragments. Colloquial expressions (*rub the wrong way*) and slang (*you wimp*) are used freely. Informal diction isn’t appropriate for academic papers, except where it is used to indicate *someone else’s* speech.

## Avoid Words That Overstate or Understate

When revising, be on the lookout for **doublespeak**, language that deliberately overstates or understates reality. Here’s an example of each.

In their correspondence, Public Works Departments often refer to “ground-mounted confirmatory route markers”—a grandiose way of saying “road signs.” Other organizations go to the other extreme and use **euphemisms**, words that minimize something’s genuine gravity or importance. Hospital officials, for instance, sometimes call deaths resulting from staff negligence “unanticipated therapeutic misadventures.” When revising, check that you haven’t used words that exaggerate or downplay something’s significance.

## Select Words with Appropriate Connotations

Mark Twain once said, “The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and the lightning bug.” Even two words listed as synonyms in a dictionary or thesaurus can differ in meaning in important ways.

The dictionary meaning of a word is its **denotation**. The word *motorcycle*, for example, is defined as “a two- or three-wheeled vehicle propelled by an internal-combustion engine that resembles a bicycle, but is usually larger and heavier, and often has two saddles.” Yet how many of us think of a motorcycle in these terms? Certainly, there is more to a word than its denotation. A word also comes surrounded by **connotations**—associated sensations, emotions, images, and ideas. For some, the word *motorcycle* probably calls to mind danger and noise. For

motorcyclists themselves, the word most likely summons pleasant memories of high-speed movement through the open air.

Given the wide range of responses that any one word can elicit, you need to be sensitive to each word's shades of meaning so you can judge when to use it rather than some other word. Examine the following word series to get a better feel for the subtle but often critical differences between similar words:

contribution, donation, handout  
 quiet, reserved, closemouthed  
 everyday, common, trite  
 follower, disciple, groupie

Notice the extent to which words' connotations create different impressions in these two examples:

The young woman emerged from the interview, her face *aglow*. Moving *briskly* to the coat rack, she *tossed* her raincoat over one arm. After a *carefree* "Thank you" to the receptionist, she *glided* from the room.

The young woman emerged from the interview, her face *aflame*. Moving *hurriedly* to the coat rack, she *flung* her raincoat over one arm. After a *perfunctory* "Thank you" to the receptionist, she *bolted* from the room.

In the first paragraph, the words *aglow*, *carefree*, and *glided* have positive connotations, so the reader surmises that the interview was a success. In contrast, the second paragraph contains words loaded with negative connotations: *aflame*, *perfunctory*, and *bolted*. Reading this paragraph, the reader assumes something went awry.

A thesaurus can help you select words with the right connotations. Just look up any word with which you aren't satisfied, and you'll find a list of synonyms. To be safe, stay away from unfamiliar words. Otherwise, you stand a good chance of using a word incorrectly and creating a howler. Several years ago, one of our students wrote in an essay, "I wanted to *bequeath* the party by midnight." What he meant was that he wanted to "*leave* the party by midnight." He had, though, already used the word *leave* several times, so, looking for a synonym, he turned to the thesaurus, where he came across the word *bequeath*. But writing "I wanted to *bequeath* the party by midnight" doesn't work because *bequeath* means to leave property or goods by means of a will. Our advice? Choose only those words whose nuances you understand.

## Use Specific Rather Than General Words

Besides carrying the right connotations, words should be **specific** rather than general. That is, they must avoid vagueness and ambiguity by referring to *particular* people, animals, events, objects, and phenomena. If they don't, readers may misinterpret what you mean.

Assume you're writing an essay about the demise of neighborhood movie houses. If, at one point, you refer to the "theaters' poor facilities," readers may

imagine you're referring to faulty sound quality and projection. If you mean the theaters' messy physical surroundings, you need specific language to send the right message: wads of gum stuck under the seats, crushed popcorn tubs everywhere, a sticky film coating the floor. Precise words like these eliminate confusion.

Besides clarifying meaning, specific words enliven writing and make it more convincing. Compare these two paragraphs:

### Original

Sponsored by a charitable organization, a group of children from a nearby town visited a theme park. The kids had a great time. They went on several rides and ate a variety of foods. Reporters and a TV crew shared in the fun.

### Revised

Sponsored by the United Glendale Charities, twenty-five underprivileged Glendale grade-schoolers visited the Universe of Fun Themepark. The kids had a great time. They roller-coastered through a meteor shower on the Space Probe, encountered a giant squid on the Submarine Voyage, and screamed their way past coffins and ghosts in the House of Horrors. At the International Cuisine arcade, they sampled foods ranging from Hawaiian poi to German strudel. Reporters from *The Texas Herald* and a camera crew from WGLD, the Glendale cable station, shared in the fun.

You may have noticed that the specific words in the second paragraph provide answers to "which," "how," and similar questions. In contrast, when reading the first paragraph, you probably wondered, "Which charitable organization? Which theme park? Which rides?" Similarly, you may have asked, "How large a group? How young were the kids?" Specific language also answers "In what way?" The revised paragraph details *in what way* the children "had a great time." They didn't just eat "a variety of foods." Rather, they "sampled foods ranging from Hawaiian poi to German strudel." So, when you revise, check to make sure that your wording doesn't leave unanswered questions like "How?", "Why?", and "In what way?" (For more on making writing specific, see pages 49 and 71–73.)

## Use Strong Verbs

Because a verb is the source of action in a sentence, it carries more weight than any other element. Replacing weak verbs and nouns with **strong verbs** is, then, another way to tighten and energize language. Consider the following strategies.

### Replace *To Be* and Linking Verbs with Action Verbs

Overreliance on *to be* verbs (*is, were, has been*, and so on) tends to stretch sentences, making them flat and wordy. The same is true of motionless **linking verbs** such as *appear, become, sound, feel, look, and seem*. Since these verbs don't communicate any action, more words are required to complete their meaning and explain what is happening. Even *to be* verb forms combined with present participles (*is laughing, were running*) are weaker than bare **action verbs** (*laughs, ran*). Similarly,

linking verbs combined with adjectives (*becomes shiny, seemed offensive*) aren't as vigorous as the action verb alone (*shines, offended*). Look how much more effective a paragraph becomes when weak verbs are replaced with dynamic ones:

### Original

The waves *were* so high that the boat *was* nearly *tipping* on end. The wind *felt* rough against our faces, and the salt spray *became* so strong that we *felt* our breath *would be* cut off. Suddenly, in the air *was* the sound I had dreaded most—the snap of the rigging. I *felt* panicky.

### Revised

The waves *towered* until the boat nearly *tipped* on end. The wind *lashed* our faces, while the salt spray *clogged* our throats and *cut off* our breath. Suddenly, the sound I had dreaded most *splintered* the air—the snap of the rigging. Panic *gripped* me.

The second paragraph is not only less wordy, it's also more vivid.

When you revise, look closely at your verbs. If you find too many *to be* and linking verb forms, ask yourself, "What's happening in the sentence?" Your response will help you substitute stronger verbs that will make your writing more compelling.

### Change Passive Verbs to Active Ones

*To be* verb forms (*is, has been*, and so on) may also be combined with a past participle (*cooked, stung*), resulting in a **passive verb**. A passive verb creates a sentence structure in which the subject is *acted on* and, therefore, is placed in a secondary or passive position. In contrast, the subject of an **active verb** *performs* the action. Consider the following active and passive forms:

#### Passive

A suggestion was made by the instructor that the project plan be revised by the students.

The employees' grievances will be considered by the union-management team when contract terms are being negotiated.

#### Active

The instructor suggested that the students revise the project plan.

The union-management team will consider employees' grievances when negotiating contract terms.

Although they're not grammatically incorrect, passive verbs generally weaken writing, making it wordy and stiffly formal. Sometimes, though, it makes sense to use the passive voice. Perhaps you don't know who performed an action. ("When I returned to my car, I noticed the door had been dented.") Or you may want to emphasize an event, not the agent responsible for the event. For example, in an article about academic dishonesty on your campus, you might deliberately use the passive voice: "Every semester, research papers are plagiarized and lab reports falsified."

Unfortunately, corporations, government agencies, and other institutions often use the passive voice to avoid taking responsibility for controversial actions.

Notice how easily the passive conceals the agent: “The rabbits were injected with a cancer-causing chemical.”

Because the passive voice *is* associated with “official” writing, you may think it sounds scholarly and impressive. It doesn’t. Unless you have good reason for deemphasizing the agent, change passive verbs to active ones.

### Replace Weak Verb-Noun Combinations

Just as *to be*, linking, and passive verbs tend to lengthen sentences needlessly, so do weak verb-noun combinations. Whenever possible, replace such combinations with their strong verb counterparts. Change “made an estimate” to “estimated,” “gave approval” to “approved.” Notice how revision tightens these sentences, making them livelier and less pretentious:

**Original** They *were* of the *belief* that the report was due next week.

**Revised** They *believed* the report was due next week.

**Original** The technical adviser *effected a replacement* of the system.

**Revised** The technical adviser *replaced* the system.

### Delete Unnecessary Adverbs

Strong verbs can further tighten your writing by ridding it of unnecessary adverbs. “She *strolled* down the path” conveys the same message as “She *walked slowly* and *leisurely* down the path”—but more economically. Similarly, why write “The crime was *extremely difficult* for the police to solve” when you can simply write “The crime *mystified* the police”?

Adverbs such as *extremely*, *really*, and *very* usually weaken writing. Although they are called “intensifiers,” they make writing less, not more, intense. Notice that the following sentence reads more emphatically *without* the intensifier:

**Original** Although the professor’s lectures are controversial, no one denies that they are *really* brilliant.

**Revised** Although the professor’s lectures are controversial, no one denies that they are brilliant.

“Qualifiers” such as *quite*, *rather*, and *somewhat* also tend to weaken writing. When you spot one, try to delete it:

**Original** When planning a summer trip to the mountains, remember to pack warm clothes; it turns *quite* cool at night.

**Revised** When planning a summer trip to the mountains, remember to pack warm clothes; it turns cool at night.

### Use Original Figures of Speech

Another strategy for adding vitality to your writing is to create imaginative, nonliteral comparisons, called **figures of speech**. For example, you might describe midsummer humidity this way: “Going from an air-conditioned building to the

street is like being hit in the face with peanut butter.” Or you might describe someone’s raw, sunburned face by saying it is “as red as a skinned tomato.” Notice that in both cases the comparisons yoke essentially dissimilar things (humidity and peanut butter, a face and a tomato). Such unexpected connections surprise readers and help keep their interest.

Figures of speech also tighten writing. Since they create sharp images in the reader’s mind, you don’t need many words to convey as much information. If someone writes, “My teenage years were like a perpetual root canal,” the reader immediately knows how painful and never-ending the author found adolescence.

### Similes, Metaphors, Personification

Figures of speech come in several varieties. A **simile** is a direct comparison of two unlike things using the words *like* or *as*: “The moon brightened the yard *like* a floodlight.” In a **metaphor**, the comparison is implied rather than directly stated: “The girl’s *barbed-wire hair* set off *electric shocks* in her parents.” In **personification**, an inanimate object is given human characteristics: “The couple robbed the store without noticing a silent, hidden eyewitness who later would tell all—a video camera.” (For more on figures of speech, see page 157.)

### Avoid Clichés

Trite and overused, some figures of speech signal a lack of imagination: *a tough nut to crack*, *cool as a cucumber*, *green with envy*. Such expressions, called **clichés**, are so predictable that you can hear the first few words (*Life is a bowl of . . .*) and fill in the rest (*cherries*). Clichés lull writer and reader alike into passivity since they encourage rote, habitual thinking.

When revising, either eliminate tired figures of speech or give them an unexpected twist. For example, seeking a humorous effect, you might write, “Beneath his rough exterior beat a heart of lead” (instead of “gold”); rather than, “Last but not least,” you might write, “Last but also least.”

### Two Other Cautions

First, if you include figures of speech, *don’t pile one on top of another*, as in the following sentence:

Whenever the dorm residents prepared for the first party of the season, hairdryers howled like a windstorm, hairspray rained down in torrents, stereos vibrated like an earthquake, and shouts of excitement shook the walls like an avalanche.

Second, guard against *illogical* or *mixed* figures of speech. In the following example, note the ludicrous and contradictory comparisons:

They rode the roller coaster of high finance, dodging bullets and avoiding ambushes from those trying to lasso their streak of good luck.

To detect outlandish comparisons, visualize each figure of speech. If it calls up some unintentionally humorous or impossible image, revise or eliminate it.

## Avoid Sexist Language



Sexist language gives the impression that one gender is more important, powerful, or valuable than the other. You may have noticed such language in certain reading selections in this book—for example, selections that refer to the average person as *he*. Some of these essays were written before people became alert to sexist overtones; others reveal the tenacity of long-standing habits and attitudes. Fortunately, a growing number of writers—female and male—are replacing sexist language with **gender-neutral** or **nonsexist** terms that convey no sexual prejudice. You, too, can avoid sexist language. But to do so, you need to be aware of the situations in which it is apt to occur.

### Sexist Vocabulary

Using nonsexist vocabulary means staying away from terms that demean or exclude one of the sexes. Such slang words as *stud*, *jock*, *chick*, and *fox* portray people as one-dimensional. Just as adult males should be called *men*, adult females should be referred to as *women*, not *girls*. Similarly, men shouldn't be empowered with professional and honorary titles while professional women are assigned only personal titles. Why, for example, years ago should Ronald Reagan have been referred to as *President* Reagan while the Prime Minister of England, Margaret Thatcher, was called *Mrs.* Thatcher? In addition, consider replacing *Mrs.* and *Miss* with *Ms.*; like *Mr.*, *Ms.* doesn't indicate marital status.

Be alert as well to the fact that words not inherently sexist can become so in certain contexts. Asking “What does the *man* in the street think of the teachers' strike?” excludes the possibility of asking women for their reactions.

Because language in our culture tends to exclude women rather than men, we list here a number of common words that exclude women. When you write (or speak), make an effort to use the more inclusive alternatives given.

Sexist	Nonsexist
the average guy	the average person
chairman	chairperson, chair
congressman	congressional representative
fireman	fire fighter
foreman	supervisor
layman	layperson
mailman	mail carrier, letter carrier
mankind, man	people, humans, human beings
policeman	police officer
salesman	salesperson

Sexist	Nonsexist
statesman	diplomat
spokesman	spokesperson
workmen	workers

Also, be on the lookout for phrases that suggest a given profession or talent is unusual for someone of a particular sex: *woman judge*, *woman doctor*, *male secretary*, *male nurse*.

### Sexist Pronoun Use

*Indefinite singular nouns*—those representing a general group of people consisting of both genders—can lead to **sexist pronoun use**: “On *his* first day of school, a young child often experiences separation anxiety,” or “Each professor should be responsible for monitoring *his* own students’ progress.” These sentences exclude female children and female professors from consideration, although the situations being described apply equally to them. But writing “On *her* first day of school, a young child often experiences separation anxiety” or “Each professor should be responsible for monitoring *her* own students’ progress” is similarly sexist because the language excludes males.

*Indefinite pronouns* such as *anyone*, *each*, and *everybody* may also pave the way to sexist language. Although such pronouns often refer to a number of individuals, they are considered singular. So, wanting to be grammatically correct, you may write a sentence like the following: “Everybody wants *his* favorite candidate to win.” The sentence, however, is sexist because *everybody* is certainly not restricted to men. But writing “Everybody wants *her* candidate to win” is equally sexist because now males aren’t included.

Here’s one way to avoid these kinds of sexist constructions: Use *both* male and female pronouns, instead of just one or the other. For example, you could write “On *his or her* first day of school, a young child often experiences separation anxiety,” or “Everybody wants *his or her* favorite candidate to win.” If you use both pronouns, you might try to vary their order; that is, alternate *his or her* with *her or his*, and so on. Another approach is to use the gender-neutral pronouns *they*, *their*, or *themselves*: “Everybody wants *their* favorite candidate to win.” Be warned, though. Some people object to using these plural pronouns with singular indefinite pronouns, even though the practice is common in everyday speech. To be on the safe side, ask your instructors if they object to any of the approaches described here. If not, feel free to choose whichever nonsexist construction seems most graceful and least obtrusive.

If you’re still unhappy with the result, two alternative strategies enable you to eliminate the need for *any* gender-marked singular pronouns. First, you can change singular general nouns or indefinite pronouns to their plural equivalents and then use nonsexist plural pronouns:

<b>Original</b>	<i>A workaholic</i> feels anxious when <i>he</i> isn’t involved in a task-related project.
<b>Revised</b>	<i>Workaholics</i> feel anxious when <i>they’re</i> not involved in task-related projects.
<b>Original</b>	<i>Everyone</i> in the room expressed <i>his</i> opinion freely.
<b>Revised</b>	<i>Those</i> in the room expressed <i>their</i> opinions freely.



Second, you can recast the sentence to omit the singular pronoun:

**Original** A *manager* usually spends part of each day settling squabbles among *his* staff.

**Revised** A manager usually spends part of each day settling *staff squabbles*.

**Original** No *one* wants *his* taxes raised.

**Revised** No one wants *to pay more taxes*.

The following checklist is designed to help you and your readers evaluate the words in a draft. (Activities at the end of the chapter will refer you to this checklist when you revise several essays.) To see how one student, Harriet Davids, used the checklist when revising, turn to page 135.



### REVISING WORDS: A CHECKLIST

- Which words seem inconsistent with the essay's tone? What words would be more appropriate?
- Which words seem vague and overly general? Where would more specific and concrete words add vitality and clarify meaning?
- Where is language overly formal? Which words are unnecessarily long or specialized? Where is language too informal (colloquial or slangy)? Where do unintended shifts in diction level create a jarring effect?
- Which words overstate? Which understate? What alternatives would be less misleading?
- Which words carry connotations unsuited to the essay's purpose and tone? What synonyms would be more appropriate?
- Where could weak verbs be replaced by vigorous ones? Which *to be* and linking verb forms should be changed to action verbs? Which passive verbs could be replaced by active ones? Where could a noun-verb combination be replaced by a strong verb?
- Which adverbs, especially intensifiers (*very*) and qualifiers (*quite*), could be eliminated?
- Where would original similes, metaphors, and personifications add power? Which figures of speech are hackneyed, illogical, or mixed? How could these problems be fixed?
- Where does sexist language appear? What gender-neutral terms could be used instead? How could sexist pronouns be eliminated?

## SAMPLE STUDENT REVISION OF SENTENCES AND WORDS



Reprinted here is the introduction to Harriet Davids's first draft—as it looked after she entered on a word processor the changes she made in overall meaning, structure, and paragraph development (see page 106). To help identify problems with words and sentences, Harriet asked someone in her editing group to read the revised version aloud. Then she asked the group to comment on her paper, using the checklists on pages 124 and 134. The marginal notes indicate her ranking of the group's comments in order of importance. The above-line changes show how Harriet revised in response to these suggestions for improving the paragraph's sentences and words.

In the 50s and 60s, parents had it easy, <sup>Reruns of</sup> TV comedies <sup>from the</sup> that  
'50s and '60s dramatize the kinds of problems that parents used to have.  
period show <sup>the</sup> the Cleavers scolding Beaver about his dirty hands, <sup>the</sup>  
<sup>dock</sup> the Nelsons <sup>'s allowance because he forgets</sup> telling Ricky <sup>to</sup> clean his room. Being a parent today  
is much more difficult, <sup>than it was a generation ago.</sup> Nowadays parents must protect their  
children from many things--from a growing number of distractions,  
from sexually explicit material, and from <sup>life-threatening</sup> dangerous situations.

Once you, like Harriet, have carefully revised sentences and words, your essay needs only to be edited (for errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling) and proofread. In the next chapter, you'll read about these final steps. You'll also see a student essay that has gone through all phases of the writing process.

- ① Combine into one sentence idea of '50s/'60s parents and TV shows
- ② Make each family's problems a separate sentence
- ③ Use stronger verbs (not "telling")
- ④ Make "dangerous situations" more specific

Continues  
on  
page 144

### ACTIVITIES: REVISING SENTENCES AND WORDS



1. Revise the following wordy, muddy sentences, making them economical and clear.
  - a. What a person should do before subletting a rental apartment is make sure to have the sublet agreement written up in a formal contract.
  - b. In high school, it often happens that young people deny liking poetry because of the fact that they fear running the risk of having people mock or make fun of them because they actually enjoy poetry.

- c. In light of the fact that college students are rare in my home neighborhood, being a college student gives me immediate and instant status.
  - d. There were a number of people who have made the observation that the new wing of the library looks similar in appearance to several nearby buildings with considerable historical significance.
  - e. It was, in my opinion, an apt comment when the professor noted that most of the students who complain about how demanding the requirements of a course are tend to work at part-time or even full-time jobs.
2. Using only simple or simple and compound sentences, write a paragraph based on one of the following topic sentences. Then rewrite the paragraph, making some of the sentences complex and others compound-complex. Examine your two versions of the paragraph. What differences do you see in meaning and emphasis?
    - a. The campus parking lot is dangerous at night.
    - b. Some students have trouble getting along with their roommates.
    - c. Silent body language speaks loudly.
    - d. Getting on a teacher's good side is an easily mastered skill.
  3. The following sentences could be more emphatic. Examine each one to determine its focus; then revise the sentence, using one of the following strategies: placing the most important item first or last, parallelism, inverted word order, a fragment. Try to use a different strategy in each sentence.
    - a. The old stallion's mane was tangled, and he had chipped hooves, and his coat was scraggly.
    - b. Most of us find rude salespeople difficult to deal with.
    - c. The politician promises, "I'll solve all your problems."
    - d. We meet female stereotypes such as the gold digger, the dangerous vixen, and the "girl next door" in the movies.
    - e. It's a wise teacher who encourages discussion of controversial issues in the classroom.
  4. The following paragraph is pretentious and murky. Revise to make it crisp and clear.

Since its founding, the student senate on this campus has maintained essentially one goal: to upgrade the quality of its student-related services. Two years ago, the senate, supported by the opinions of three consultants provided by the National Council of Student Governing Boards, was confident it was operating from a base of quality but felt that, if given additional monetary support from the administration, a

significant improvement in student services would be facilitated. This was a valid prediction, for that is exactly what transpired in the past fifteen months once additional monetary resources were, in fact, allocated by the administration to the senate and its activities.

5. Write a sentence for each word in the series that follows, making sure your details reinforce each word's connotations:
  - a. chubby, voluptuous, portly
  - b. stroll, trudge, loiter
  - c. turmoil, anarchy, hubbub
6. Write three versions of a brief letter voicing a complaint to a store, a person, or an organization. One version should be charged with negative connotations; another should "soft pedal" the problem. The final version should present your complaint using neutral, objective words. Which letter do you prefer? Why?
7. Describe each of the following in one or two sentences, using a creative figure of speech to convey each item's distinctive quality:
  - a. a baby's hand
  - b. a pile of dead leaves
  - c. a sophisticated computer
  - d. an empty room
  - e. an old car
8. Enliven the following dull, vague sentences. Use your knowledge of sentence structure to dramatize key elements. Also, replace weak verbs with vigorous ones and make language more specific.
  - a. I got sick on the holiday.
  - b. He stopped the car at the crowded intersection.
  - c. A bird appeared in the corner of the yard.
  - d. The class grew restless.
  - e. The TV broadcaster put on a concerned air as she announced the tragedy.
9. The following paragraph contains too many linking verbs, passives, adverbs, and prepositions. In addition, noun forms are sometimes used where their verb counterparts would be more effective. Revise the paragraph by eliminating unnecessary prepositions and providing more vigorous verbs. Then add specific, concrete words that dramatize what is being described.

The farmers in the area conducted a meeting during which they formulated a discussion of the vandalism problem in the county

in which they live. They made the estimate that, on the average, each of them had at least an acre of crops destroyed the past few weekends by gangs of motorcyclists who have been driving maliciously over their land. The increase in such vandalism has been caused by the encroachment of the suburbs on rural areas.

10. Revise the following sentences to eliminate sexist language.
  - a. The manager of a convenience store has to guard his cash register carefully.
  - b. When I broke my arm in a car accident, a male nurse, aided by a physician's assistant, treated my injury.
  - c. All of us should contact our congressman if we're not satisfied with his performance.
  - d. The chemistry professors agree that nobody should have to buy her own Bunsen burner.

*An important note:* When revising essay drafts in activities 11 and 12, don't worry too much about grammar, punctuation, and spelling. However, do save your revisions, so you can focus on these matters after reading the next chapter.

11. In response to activity 1 in Chapter 7 (page 107), you revised the overall meaning, structure, and paragraph development of Harriet Davids's first draft. Find that revision so that you can now focus on its sentences and words. Get together with at least one other person and ask yourselves questions like these: "Where should sentence type, length, or pattern be more varied?" and "Where would more specific and concrete words add vitality and clarify meaning?" For further guidance, refer to the checklists on pages 124 and 134. Summarize and rank any perceived problems in marginal annotations or a feedback chart. Then type your changes into a word processor or enter them between the lines of the draft. (Save your revision so you can edit and proofread it after reading the next chapter.)
12. Return to the draft you prepared in response to activity 2, activity 3, activity 4, or activity 5 in Chapter 7 (pages 107–109). Get together with several people and request that one of them read the draft aloud. Then, using the checklists on pages 124 and 134, ask the group members focused questions about any sentences and words that you feel need sharpening. After evaluating the feedback, revise the draft. Either key your changes into a computer or do your revising by hand. (Save your revision so you can edit and proofread it after reading the next chapter.)

For additional writing, reading, and research resources, go to [www.mycomplab.com](http://www.mycomplab.com) and choose **Nadell/Langan/Comodromos' *The Longman Writer*, 7/e.**