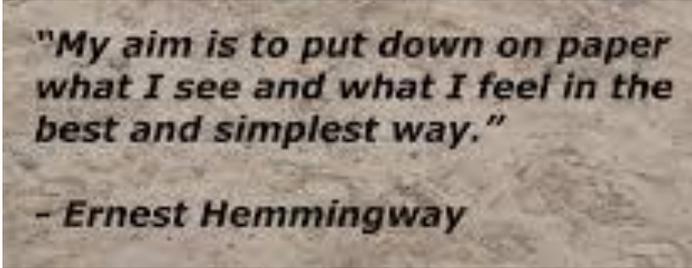


Revising Prose 5th Edition

By: Richard A. Lanham

Presented by: Megan Edgin

Purpose & Strategy



*"My aim is to put down on paper
what I see and what I feel in the
best and simplest way."*

- Ernest Hemmingway

Produce clear, concise, engaging writing.

1. Revising, not original composition
2. Translating "Official Style" into plain English
3. Rule-based
4. Sentence-based

The Paramedic Method

1. Circle the prepositions
2. Circle the “is” forms
3. Find the action
4. Put this action in a simple (not compound) active verb
5. Start fast-no slow wind-ups
6. Read the passage aloud with emphasis and feeling- consider its rhythm
7. Write out each sentence on a blank screen or sheet of paper and mark off its basic rhythmic units with a slash
8. Mark off sentence length with a slash

Those who write clearly
have readers; those who
write obscurely have
commentators.

Albert Camus

- www.writerswrite.co.za

Action

Remove words such as “process,” “situation,” and “factor” when unnecessary

“A corporation is asked to participate in the recruitment process.”

Revised:

“A corporation is asked to recruit.”

“An administrator faces a budget crunch situation.”

Revised:

“An administrator faces a budget crunch.”

The research is the easiest. The outline is the most fun. The first draft is the hardest, because every word of the outline has to be fleshed out. The rewrite is very satisfying.

Ken Follett

- www.writerswrite.co.za

Action

“This sentence is in need of an action verb.”

What is the action? **Need**

Revision: “This sentence needs an action verb.”

“In need of” is unnecessary- removing it brings the sentence to life

Lard Factor (LF) = how effective sentence is reduced from excess words “fattening” up the sentence

Divide the difference between the number of words in the original and the revision by the number of words in the original

“When something can be read
without effort, great effort has gone
into its writing.”

—Erin Gruwell

Action

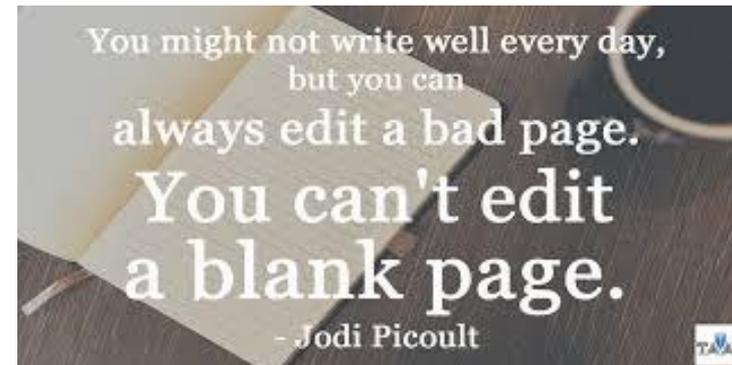
1. Circle every form of “to be” (is, was, will be, seems to be, have been, etc.)
2. Circle every prepositional phrase (of, in, by, through, from, etc.)
3. Identify the action- Look for the real action hidden behind “is” and prepositional phrases

“The history **of** new regulatory provisions **is** that there **is** generally an immediate resistance **to** them.”

Action? Resistance/Resist

Who? People in general

Revision: “People usually resist new regulations.”



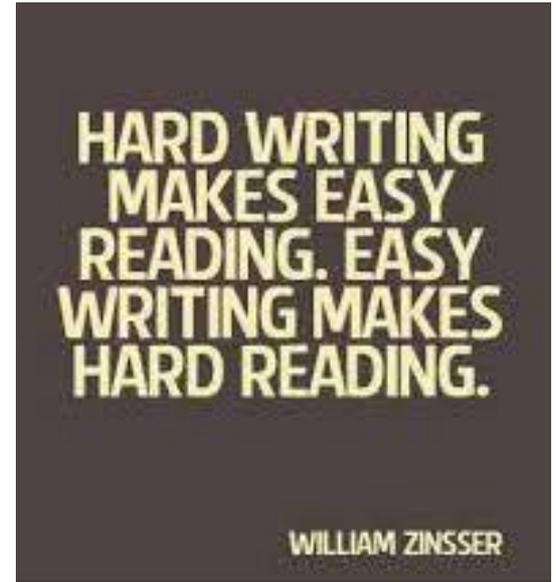
Action

“In response to the issue of equality for educational and occupational mobility, it is my belief that a system of inequality exists in the school system.”

In response
to the issue
of equality
for educational and occupational mobility,

it *is* my belief that a system

of inequality exists
in the school system.



*Place the “doer” as the subject in the format: Subject - Verb - Object

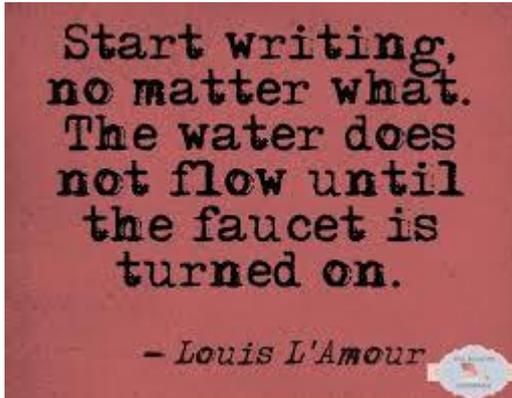
Action

“In response to the issue of equality for educational and occupational mobility, it is my belief that a system of inequality exists in the school system.”

Revision: “I believe that gender inequality exists in the schools.”

26 (# words in original) - 9 (# of words in revision) = 17 ÷ 26 (# words in original) = .65

Lard factor: 65%



Try it!

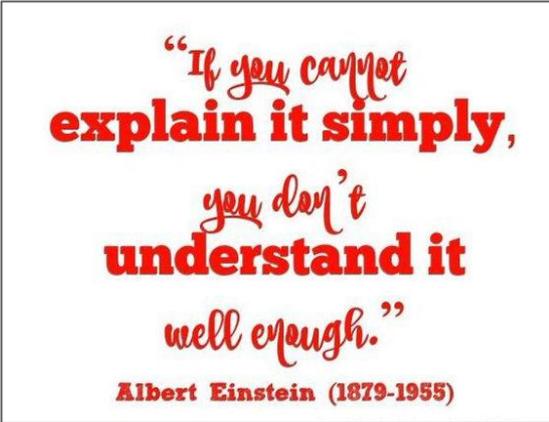
Choose a sentence from your writing

1. Circle every form of “to be” (is, was, will be, seems to be, have been, etc.)
2. Circle every prepositional phrase (of, in, by, through, from, etc.)
3. Identify the action

-Revise your sentence to focus on the action- subject-verb-object, remove prepositional phrases

-Calculate the lard factor of your revision:

of words in original - # of words in revision ÷ the number of words in the original



*“If you cannot
explain it simply,
you don't
understand it
well enough.”*
Albert Einstein (1879-1955)

Opening

Slow openings delay and weaken the main action verb

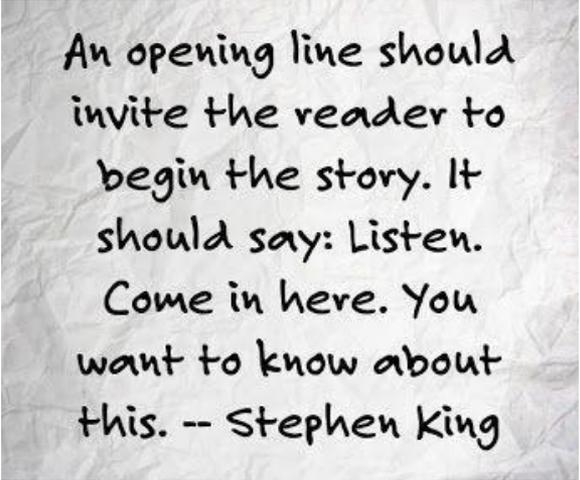
“The upshot of what Heidegger says here *is that...*”

“My point *is that* the question of the discourse of the human sciences...”

“My opinion *is that* on this point we have only two options...”

“The fact of the matter *is that* the material of this article is drawn directly from...”

or “The one thing *that* Belinda does not realize *is that* he knows exactly how to press her buttons.”



An opening line should invite the reader to begin the story. It should say: Listen. Come in here. You want to know about this. -- Stephen King

Opening

~~“The upshot of what Heidegger says here is that...”~~

~~“My point is that the question of the discourse of the human sciences...”~~

~~“My opinion is that on this point we have only two options...”~~

~~“The fact of the matter is that the material of this article is drawn directly from...”~~

~~“The one thing that Belinda does not realize is that he knows exactly how to press her buttons.”~~

Tip: Do a global search in your document for “is that” and revise it out each time it occurs



Opening

Minimize compound verbs:

“Are able to” = “can”

“Seems to succeed in creating” = “creates”

“Am hopeful that” = “hope”

“Seeks to reveal” = “shows”

Always try to use the language so as to make quite clear what you mean and make sure your sentence couldn't mean anything else.

C. S. Lewis

- www.writerswrite.co.za

Attention

“What are the behavioral factors that induce employees to load up on company stock? One factor is people’s tendency to be overconfident and excessively optimistic. Another behavioral factor deserving attention is inertia.”

-Is this attention-getting?

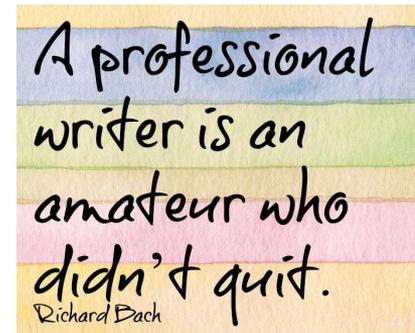
-What are behavioral factors? Are they different from plain “behavior”? Are they motives?

-Do we need “overconfident” and “optimistic?”

-It is too wordy and wastes the reader’s attention.

Revised:

“Why do employees load up on company stock? Overconfidence and inertia.”



Voice

-Shape and rhythm are not just ornaments, they are vital to gaining a reader's attention

-Read your writing with emphasis and feeling

-Become self-conscious about the sound of words

-Be aware of moments of distracting alliteration,

shifts to/from official style mid-sentence, &

sentence length & variety

And how do you learn
the craft? In the
trenches... I say write
and then write and write
and write some more and
go write some more.

August Wilson

- www.writerswrite.co.za

Voice

Men like this are stamped, early in life, and the outlines of the mold spell honesty. They fill the mold without effort; it fits them and they have no question about who they are and what they can do. They're free of the need to grimace and prance; they're free to spend themselves on a cause, for an ideal, scorning advantage and chaining the ego in some remote corner to babble and shriek and rattle its shackles. Having won, they're satisfied with the achievement; they're not driven to seek their value in the gaze and the wonder of others, and they walk off into the quiet corners of history where the truth lives, grinning to watch imposters scribbling their worthless names across the walls of the public baths.

The properties of indexical expressions and indexical actions are ordered properties. These consist of organizationally demonstrable sense, or facticity, or methodic use, or agreement among "cultural colleagues." Their ordered properties consist of organizationally demonstrable rational properties of indexical expressions and indexical actions. Those ordered properties are ongoing achievements of the concerted commonplace activities of the investigators. The demonstrable rationality of indexical expressions and indexical actions retains over the course of its managed production by members the character of ordinary, familiar, routinized, practical circumstances.

Voice

Exercise:

Choose a paragraph of your writing and a colored pen/pencil

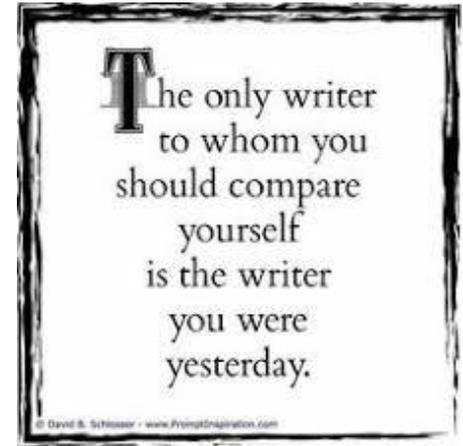
- Draw a slash after every sentence
- Do the marks occur at regular intervals?
- Where do you pause and for how long?
- How does the rhythm flow?

“The secret to editing your work is simple: you need to become its **reader** instead of its writer.”

Zadie Smith

Recap

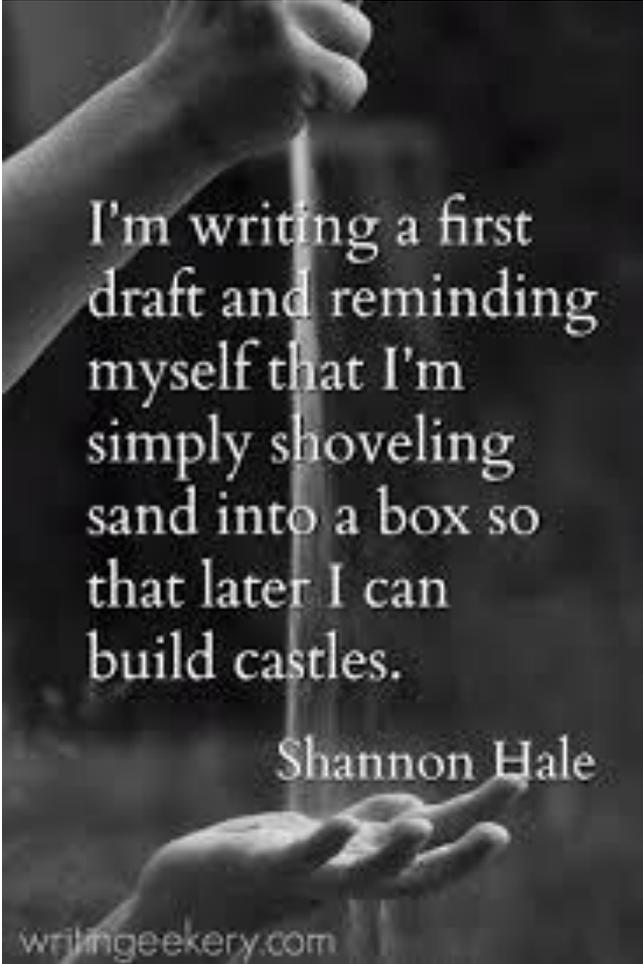
- ❖ Identify and eliminate prepositions
- ❖ Identify “is” forms and change them to active verbs
- ❖ Identify where the action occurs
- ❖ Put action into a simple, not compound, active verb
- ❖ Place the doer as the subject in the format: Subject - Verb - Object
- ❖ Start fast, look for “is that” phrases
- ❖ Eliminate unnecessary words and phrases
- ❖ Check sentence lengths with a slash between sentences
- ❖ Mark off basic rhythmic units
- ❖ Read the passage aloud with emphasis and feeling



Practice

- Select one paragraph of your writing to practice the Paramedic Method.
- Do the sentence lengths vary?
- Does your writing have a flowing rhythm?
- Read your writing aloud with emphasis and feeling
- How many words did you remove using the PM?
- What did you notice during this process?





I'm writing a first
draft and reminding
myself that I'm
simply shoveling
sand into a box so
that later I can
build castles.

Shannon Hale