Grammaticus eBook

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Writing Tips for Software Engineers

Do you want to be a better writer?

Introduction

Grammaticus is designed to help software engineers improve their written communications skills. Having said that, any non-engineer can use the advice offered in this space to improve as a writer. All of us have to do some writing during our work days. All of us have to show proficiency in our written communications skills.

Why not strive to be the best writer you can possibly be?

If you are willing to learn and you are prepared to take the time to thoroughly explore the subject categories here, you cannot help but become a better writer. And a more confident writer!

History

The content contained in *Grammaticus* started with a writing blog I began in 2014. It is a public WordPress site called *Grammaticus*. I posted a writing example almost every day (355 total postings) from September 5, 2014, until September 5, 2015. *Grammaticus* is a reorganization of the chronological blog into these subject areas:

- Acronyms (3 examples)
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Why *Grammaticus*?

Grammaticus contains 24 subject categories. There are 254 examples in these categories. Almost every example shows a piece of writing that needs improvement. A detailed discussion *why* the writing needs improvement follows. We make changes to the writing that needs improvement, but—this is very important—we explain **why** we make the changes.

Typically, an engineer writes documentation and a technical writer or editor follows by making lots of changes. The technical writer usually does not explain why changes were made. Also, the engineer might be too busy (or uninterested!) to ask about the changes. The writer and the engineer pass like ships in the night. This happens all the time in the industry. If the engineer and writer don't communicate, what does the engineer learn about better writing from this experience? It is safe to say that most of the time the engineer learns nothing. Is that not true?

Writing is a Life Skill

Grammaticus is designed to help engineers become better writers. I ask again: Do you want to be a better writer? If so, you have come to the right place!

If you go through all the examples—and truly understand all the examples—**I guarantee** your writing will improve. Will it be easy? No. It won't be easy because going through all the examples is going to force you to think—and thinking is hard. On the other hand, you won't be forced to study a dry and lifeless style guide or memorize a lot of English rules. You won't have some humorless English teacher bleeding red ink all over your exam paper. If you have a learning style that benefits from intelligent discussion, rather than rote memory or reward-and-punishment academic exercises, you cannot help but learn.

I encourage you to take issue with my comments. We all have opinions. In *Grammaticus*, I give you my opinions. If you disagree with me, that's great! It shows you are thinking critically.

Grammaticus is like a college course. That is the best way to look at it. I am your professor and you are the ambitious student. *Grammaticus* is like a college semester of a challenging subject. Yes, you will have to work hard, but the end result is you are enhancing your professional skill set.

Consider the big picture. A semester is a small amount of time when it means you are polishing a life skill.

Audience for *Grammaticus*

There are four groups of people who should find *Grammaticus* especially useful. Do you answer "Yes" to any of the following questions?

- Do you want to be a manager?
- Do you want to be a subject matter expert (SME)?
- Do you want to be a technical writer?
- Is English your second language?

Do you want to be a manager?

Managers do **a lot** of writing. Managers must be competent with both the technology and with people. However, aspiring mangers with poor writing skills will have a difficult time moving up the ladder.

One of the evaluation factors for performance reviews is good oral and written communications skills. This is especially important for a large, world-wide organization where managers constantly use email, messaging, and other written communications tools to interact with the men and women in their units and with their bosses higher on the food chain. Furthermore, managers write technical reports, white papers, proposals, and other think pieces. Crucially, many of the folks who read your communication efforts are business decision-makers. That is, they are **not** engineers. Often they have a business or finance background. They may find your poor writing and engineering jargon off-putting.

Do you want to be an SME?

Most of the content for the software industry is written by SMEs, not technical writers. There is a reason for this. The technical content must be accurate. Therefore, engineers write the first draft. Engineers are the experts. Many technical writers do not have an engineering background or, if they do, their engineering expertise may not be relevant to the task at hand. The primary mission of technical writers is to clean up the language, make it more readable, and apply the necessary formatting.

The SMEs who are effective writers will advance in the organization. Those who don't write well and refuse to learn, may find themselves at a disadvantage. They stay in place or move on to other opportunities.

Do you want to be a technical writer?

If you are an engineer who enjoys writing, *Grammaticus* can help you in two ways:

- Enable you to cross train as a technical writer, thus enhancing your skills as a career engineer.
- Enable you to transition from engineering into a new career as a technical writer.

Let's look at the second bullet point.

Engineers with above-average writing skills are in great demand in the documentation business. The pay is good, the work is interesting most of the time, and often there are not enough skilled writers to fill all the open positions. If you find this prospect appealing, study the writing examples here and see if this kind of work is something you might like to try.

Is English your second language?

The *Grammaticus* blog maintained from September 2014 to September 2015 was designed for engineers in my company, but the blog was followed by dozens of engineers on the outside. It had a large following in Silicon Valley in California. Most of the Silicon Valley engineers following the blog were from China or were ethnic Chinese from other parts of the world. These young men and women were trying to improve their English skills. Instead of studying an English grammar book and memorizing a lot of stuff, the analysis of bad writing vs. good writing proved to be an effective way for them to get better at English composition. By extension, the conversational approach to writing found in *Grammaticus* should help any person from any culture who is struggling with the English language. If you are trying to master the English language, let *Grammaticus* help you get to where you want to go.

Knowledge Transfer

I have been in this business for over 40 years. I am approaching retirement. In many ways, what you see here is a knowledge transfer for the next generation. I hope you find it useful. Good luck!

Acknowledgements

I want to express a special thanks to senior manager Dan O'Leary for his continuing support. He helped me with the *Grammaticus* blog project and then with *Business Writing Resources* on the company website. In 2014, he could see that my novel approach might have some value for those engineers eager to learn. Dan gave me the creative freedom to design and build the blog. With his encouragement, I reorganized the blog content into this writing resource.

Dave Baldwin

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May 2017

Acronyms

IMPORTANT: This topic is about **acronyms**. However, all of the following examples contain discussions of multiple subjects—not just acronyms. Therefore, in addition to acronyms, you are going to learn a lot of different things about good writing and rewriting.

Example 1

REWRITE THIS PARAGRAPH

> A WSDL (Web Service Description Language) is an XML document that defines the operations, parameters, requests, and responses used in web service interactions. You can think of a WSDL as the contract that defines the language and grammar used by web service clients and servers. When you look at the Awesome FPS WSDL, for example, you find in it all of the Awesome FPS operation names, parameters, request and response structures.

PROBLEM

- The acronym is formatted incorrectly—Web Service Description Language should appear first, and then WSDL should follow in parentheses
- Replace the *can do something* construction with more direct language
- Add a serial comma in the last sentence

DISCUSSION

Acronyms

Begin with the spelled out term—Web Service Description Language—and put the acronym WSDL in parentheses.

Can Do Something

Don't say this:

> You can think of a WSDL as the contract that defines the language and grammar used by web service clients and servers.

Say this:

> Think of a WSDL as the contract that defines the language and grammar used by web service clients and servers.

Serial Comma

For clarity, add the word *structures* after *request*, and then put the serial comma after *structures*. The sentence should read:

> When you look at the Awesome FPS WSDL, for example, you find in it all of the Awesome FPS operation names, parameters, request structures, and response structures.

REVISION

Before

> A WSDL (Web Service Description Language) is an XML document that defines the operations, parameters, requests, and responses used in web service interactions. You can think of a WSDL as the contract that defines the language and grammar used by web service clients and servers. When you look at the Awesome FPS WSDL, for example, you find in it all of the Awesome FPS operation names, parameters, request and response structures.

After

> A Web Service Description Language (WSDL) is an XML document that defines the operations, parameters, requests, and responses used in web service interactions. Think of a WSDL as the contract that defines the language and grammar used by web service clients and servers. For example, when you look at the Awesome FPS WSDL, you find in it all of the Awesome FPS operation names, parameters, request structures, and response structures.

Example 2

> SMC, or Smart Management Center, is a new breed of network management systems, designed to give enterprises the most comprehensive visibility, efficiency, and agility possible. In this review, the Smart Management Center (SMC) is reviewed across five categories that match the demands of today's evolving datacenters . . . In mapping SMC to the WXYZ model, the following graphic shows that the Smart Management Center does much more than the monitoring, alerting, and basic analysis as it offers functionality across the WXYZ model, at multiple level.

PROBLEM

In our example, SMC is an acronym that stands for Smart Management Center. The problem sequence of sentences is all over the map in calling out Smart Management Center and its acronym SMC.

DISCUSSION

Unless your organization's style sheet has a different way of dealing with acronyms, follow these rules.

Spell out the acronym the first time it appears on the web page, and use the acronym thereafter on that page. After you spell out the acronym once, use the acronym—and only the acronym—thereafter.

Avoid these annoying habits:

- Don't spell out the acronym repeatedly in the same web topic.
- Don't switch back and forth between the spelled out term and the acronym itself.

If the term appears **just once** on the web page, don't spell out the entire term followed by the acronym in parentheses. Write the term and don't bother putting the acronym in parentheses. Why? The point of having an acronym is to keep the reader from reading a long term over and over. But if the long-form term appears only once, the term itself is sufficient.

If the acronym is commonly known in the industry by the acronym and not the long form, don't even bother to spell it out. For example, everyone knows OS stands for operating system and HTTP means Hypertext Transfer Protocol.

If the acronym is for a plural form (for example, the term *terms of use*), don't make the acronym itself a plural form inside the parentheses. It should read, *terms of use (TOU)*, not *terms of use (TOUs)*. But it is OK to do this in text: *Automatic incremental capture of TOUs for existing guests engaging with a site/app for the first time.*

REVISION

Before

> SMC, or Smart Management Center, is a new breed of network management systems, designed to give enterprises the most comprehensive visibility, efficiency, and agility possible. In this review, the Smart Management Center (SMC) is reviewed across five categories that match the demands of today's evolving data centers . . . In mapping SMC to the WXYZ model, the following graphic shows that the Smart Management Center does much more than the monitoring, alerting, and basic analysis as it offers functionality across the WXYZ model, at multiple levels.

After

> Smart Management Center (SMC), is a new breed of network management systems, designed to give enterprises the most comprehensive visibility, efficiency, and agility possible. In this review, the SMC is reviewed across five categories that match the demands of today's evolving data centers . . . In mapping SMC to the WXYZ model, the following graphic shows that the SMC does much more than the monitoring, alerting, and basic analysis as it offers functionality across the WXYZ model, at multiple levels.

Example 3

REWRITE THIS PARAGRAPH

R.E.A.D. is an acronym for Rules Engine Accountability Database. It is the intake form we use for all our public facing interactive products—mobile apps, websites, smart TV apps, smart toys, etc to make sure everything is cleared and hits market compliantly. R.E.A.D. is a global corporate requirement.

PROBLEM

These issues:

- Acronyms
- Latin phrases
- Punctuation
- Simple sentences

DISCUSSION

Acronyms

The first sentence reads:

R.E.A.D. is an acronym for Rules Engine Accountability Database.

This is how it done:

Rules Engine Accountability Database (READ)….

Spell out the acronym first. Then put the acronym in parentheses. Do not put periods after each letter.

Once you call out an acronym, use the acronym, and only the acronym, thereafter on the same web page.

Finally, when you spell out the acronym on the web page, do not spell it out again. Once is enough.

Latin Phrases

If you are going to use *etc.*, make sure you close it with a period. It is an abbreviation for the Latin word *etcetera*.

Punctuation

Make these fixes:

- Don't add periods for the letters in the acronym
- Add a period after *etc*
- Add a comma after *etc.* (because of the serial comma rule)

Simple Sentences

The example sentence is too long. Break it up. See the **Revision** section for the results.

REVISION

Before

> R.E.A.D. is an acronym for Rules Engine Accountability Database. It is the intake form we use for all our public facing interactive products—mobile apps, websites, smart TV apps, smart toys, etc to make sure everything is cleared and hits market compliantly. R.E.A.D. is a global corporate requirement.

After

> Rules Engine Accountability Database (READ) is the intake form we use for all our public-facing interactive products. It is for mobile apps, websites, smart TV apps, smart toys, and so on. We use it to make sure everything is cleared and is compliant with the market. READ is a global corporate requirement.

Active vs. Passive Voice

IMPORTANT: This topic is about **active vs. passive voice**. However, all of the following examples contain discussions of multiple subjects—not just active vs. passive voice. Therefore, in addition to active vs. passive voice, you are going to learn a lot of different things about good writing and rewriting.

Example 1

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> The resource template is used for the path portion of the URI.

PROBLEM

Active voice is more forceful and clear than passive voice. Active voice should always predominate in technical writing. Readers prefer it. Passive voice should be the exception, not the rule.

There are certain situations where passive voice is the preferred construction. But in this example, there is no reason why we cannot rewrite our problem sentence in the active voice.

DISCUSSION

Our problem sentence has the passive voice construction, *is used*. The obvious question is—is used by whom or by what? Is it a person, a machine, or a process? Don't you think that is an important piece of information?

Who is the actor? Who uses the resource template?

The problem sentence happens to be plucked out of a procedural sequence. The intended subject in this case is second-person singular; that is, *You* is the subject of the sentence.

Here is the deal with passive-voice sentences: the subject of the sentence typically is omitted from the sentence.

To illustrate, in our problem sentence, the second-person singular *You* is understood in the passive-voice construction. If you make the subject explicit in our passive-voice sentence, this is what it looks like:

> The resource template is used **by you** for the path portion of the URI.

Ugly. Don't do that!

However, once you know for sure who or what is the actor, you can convert a passive-voice sentence to active voice.

Remember, it is the same subject (that is, *You*) whether the sentence is written in the active voice or the passive voice. The spoken *You* is the subject of an active voice sentence, while the unspoken *You* is the subject of the passive-voice sentence.

REVISION

Before

> The resource template is used for the path portion of the URI.

After

> You can use the resource template for the path portion of the URI.

Example 2

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> If set to `true`, the operation is executed on all objects, even if one of the operations fails due to a CMS error.

PROBLEM

Two problems:

- We need to change the passive voice to active voice.
- The word order is awkward, so let's see if we can rearrange the words.

DISCUSSION

Passive to Active Voice

Instead of this:

the operation is executed on all objects

Say this:

the system executes the operation on all objects

Word Order

Instead of this:

even if one of the operations fails due to a CMS error

Say this:

even if a CMS error causes one of the operations to fail

REVISION

Before

If set to `true`, the operation is executed on all objects, even if one of the operations fails due to a CMS error.

After

If set to `true`, the system executes the operation on all objects, even if a CMS error causes one of the operations to fail.

Example 3

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> The following system-defined reserved variables are supported by the API management gateway.

PROBLEM

The sentence is in the passive voice. Make it active voice.

DISCUSSION

Who or what in the sentence is doing the supporting? Easy. The API management gateway.

The API management gateway is the actor in the sentence.

REVISION

Before

> The following system-defined reserved variables are supported by the API management gateway.

After

> The API management gateway supports these system-defined reserved variables.

Example 4

REWRITE THIS LIST

Future solutions to meet security criteria may include:

- Instances spawned from FakeCorp AMIs can be configured to auto-patch during defined windows or be patched by system administrators from enterprise tools.
- Instances from non-FakeCorp AMIs will be configurable by FakeCorp-supplied configuration scripts to auto-patch during defined windows.

PROBLEM

Do the following:

- Divide the first bullet point into two bullet points
- Change the passive voice to active voice

DISCUSSION

This is a complicated description. In this scenario, three different actors do the patching:

- You, the user
- The system admin
- Scripts

First Bullet Point

This is the first bullet point:

Instances spawned from FakeCorp AMIs can be configured to auto-patch during defined windows or be patched by system administrators from enterprise tools.

Divide it into two bullet points:

- Instances spawned from FakeCorp AMIs can be configured to auto-patch during defined windows
- [Instances spawned from FakeCorp AMIs] can be patched by system administrators from enterprise tools.

Change both bullet points to active voice (see the following **Revision** section).

Second Bullet Point

Change it to active voice (see the **Revision** section).

Use the Can Do Something Construction or the Future Tense

We are talking about features that are not available to the user now, but will be in the future. You can use the future tense or the *can do something* construction.

REVISION

Before

Future solutions to meet security criteria may include:

- Instances spawned from FakeCorp AMIs can be configured to auto-patch during defined windows or be patched by system administrators from enterprise tools.
- Instances from non-FakeCorp AMIs will be configurable by FakeCorp-supplied configuration scripts to auto-patch during defined windows.

After

Future solutions to meet security criteria may include the following enhancements. During defined windows:

- You will configure instances spawned from FakeCorp AMIs to auto-patch
- System administrators will use enterprise tools to patch
- FakeCorp-supplied configuration scripts will configure instances from non-FakeCorp AMIs to auto-patch

Or

Future solutions to meet security criteria may include the following enhancements. During defined windows:

- You can configure instances spawned from FakeCorp AMIs to auto-patch
- System administrators can use enterprise tools to patch
- FakeCorp-supplied configuration scripts can configure instances from non-FakeCorp AMIs to auto-patch

Example 5

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> The default client configuration attributes for the notification message are used when the message is created.

PROBLEM

Two instances of the passive voice in one sentence—amazing!

DISCUSSION

This sentence has two different actors:

1. The system initiates the default client configuration attributes for the notification message.
2. The user creates the message.

Now that you know who and what does the acting, rewrite the sentence.

REVISION

Before

> The default client configuration attributes for the notification message are used when the message is created.

After

> The system uses the default client configuration attributes for the notification message when the user creates the message.

Example 6

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> While the UserControllerExceptionHandler handles situations where we throw a `UserControllerException`, typically containing a single, short-circuiting UCError, in most cases we will choose to accumulate one or more errors to be returned in addition to data payloads after going through a complete request process flow.

PROBLEM

Here is the checklist of things to fix:

- Passive voice
- Present vs. future tense
- Punctuation
- Simple sentences
- Word order

DISCUSSION

Passive Voice

This passage contains an example of passive voice (the passive-voice verb form is in boldface type):

> in most cases we will choose to accumulate one or more errors **to be returned**

One or more errors are returned by whom or what? Who or what is the actor in this instance?

The *system* is the actor. Therefore, rephrase it to make that clear.

Present vs. Future

This passage uses the future tense:

> in most cases **we will choose** to accumulate

This activity happens now. It will continue to happen in the future, also. Since it happens both now and in the future, use the present tense.

Punctuation

Same passage:

> in most cases we will choose to accumulate

Add a comma after the word *cases*. The words *in most cases* form a dependent clause. Always add a comma after an introductory dependent clause.

Simple Sentences

The example sentence expresses three distinct ideas:

- The `UserControllerExceptionHandler` handles situations where we throw a `UserControllerException`.
- Typically, this contains a single, short-circuiting UCError.
- However, most of the time after we go through a complete request process flow, we prefer to have the system return one or more errors in addition to data payloads.

Divide the example into the three simple sentences in your rewrite.

Word Order

You correct the awkward word order when you fix the passive voice.

Also, this word order:

> in most cases we will choose to accumulate one or more errors to be returned in addition to data payloads after going through a complete request process flow.

Is corrected to read:

> most of the time after we go through a complete request process flow, we prefer to have the system return one or more errors in addition to data payloads.

The process flow is the first thing to happen. The results follow the completion of the process flow. Make your language reflect the natural course of events.

REVISION

Before

> While the `UserControllerExceptionHandler` handles situations where we throw
> a `UserControllerException`, typically containing a single, short-circuiting UCError,
> in most cases we will choose to accumulate one or more errors to be returned in
> addition to data payloads after going through a complete request process flow.

After

> The `UserControllerExceptionHandler` handles situations where we throw
> a `UserControllerException`. Typically, this contains a single, short-circuiting
> UCError. However, most of the time after we go through a complete request process
> flow, we prefer to have the system return one or more errors in addition to data
> payloads.

Example 7

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

An NRT account can be identified using the /validate API.

PROBLEM

The example sentence has two basic problems:

- Word order
- Passive voice

DISCUSSION

Word Order

Before you can accomplish something, you need to pick up the tool to do the work. In the real world, this is the natural order of events. Action precedes the accomplishment.

This sentence is awkward because the author puts the accomplishment (that is, the identification of the NRT account) before pointing out what tool to use (that is, using the **/validate** API).

The example sentence may not look like it, but it could easily be a procedure. It is explaining how to identify an NRT account. For a step, this is the recommended word order:

Use the **/validate** API to identify an NRT account.

If you simply want to write a descriptive sentence and not a step, say this:

You can use the **/validate** API to identify an NRT account.

Passive Voice

The example sentence is an excellent demonstration why grammarians inveigh against the passive voice so much. Here it is again:

An NRT account can be identified using the **/validate** API.

Don't write in such a roundabout, mealy-mouthed way. Just cut to the chase—be direct, and then move on to the next sentence.

REVISION

Before

An NRT account can be identified using the **/validate** API.

After

[Description]

You can use the **/validate** API to identify an NRT account.

Or better

[Step]

Use the **/validate** API to identify an NRT account.

Example 8

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> Signing in a new guest for the first time is done by using the registration page.

PROBLEM

Passive voice.

DISCUSSION

This sentence is doubly awkward. Not only is it in the passive voice, but it seems to go out of its way to hide the true identity of the actor. Of course, the actor is the new guest. The new guest does his or her own signing-in on the registration page. However, the sentence obscures this obvious fact.

REVISION

Before

Signing in a new guest for the first time is done by using the registration page.

After

The new guest uses the registration page to sign in for the first time.

Or

The new guest signs in for the first time by using the registration page.

Example 9

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> If the override is still dependent, a plan is required for the retirement of the override.

PROBLEM

This sentence is a procedure, but you would never know it by the passive voice construction.

DISCUSSION

A plan is required by whom? In this case, you are the actor. It is you who must make a plan.

Remember, a passive voice sentence goes out of its way to hide the identity of the actor. That is certainly the case with the example sentence.

IMPORTANT: You must always put a procedure (that is, a step) in the active voice. Never forget that.

REVISION

Before

If the override is still dependent, a plan is required for the retirement of the override.

After

If the override is still dependent, retire the override.

Example 10

REWRITE THESE SENTENCES

> Some emails seen by users as part of registration, login, account recovery, or permissions, can be customized.
>
> In order for logins from Facebook to be supported, specify values in the client configuration.
>
> Confluence access is required to use this resource.

PROBLEM

Change the passive voice to active voice.

DISCUSSION

Don't say this:

> Some emails … can be customized….
>
> In order for logins from Facebook to be supported….
>
> Confluence access is required….

Say this:

> You can customize some emails….
>
> To support logins from Facebook….
>
> You must have access to Confluence….

REVISION

Before

Some emails seen by users as part of registration, login, account recovery, or permissions, can be customized.

In order for logins from Facebook to be supported, specify values in the client configuration.

Confluence access is required to use this resource.

After

You can customize some emails seen by users as part of registration, login, account recovery, or permissions.

To support logins from Facebook, specify values in the client configuration.

You must have access to Confluence to use this resource.

Example 11

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> The Client ID request form is required before the Client ID provisioning process can begin.

PROBLEM

Passive voice.

DISCUSSION

First Instance

Don't say this:

> The Client ID request form is required….

Say this:

> You must submit the Client ID request form….

Second Instance

Don't say this:

> …before the Client ID provisioning process can begin.

Say this:

> …before you begin the Client ID provisioning process.

REVISION

Before

> The Client ID request form is required before the Client ID provisioning process can begin.

After

> You must submit the Client ID request form before you begin the Client ID provisioning process.

Example 12

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

This parameter is ignored when you create a user account, but required for an NRT account.

NOTE: NRT is an acronym for non-registered transactor.

PROBLEM

Passive voice.

DISCUSSION

Don't say this:

This parameter is ignored [by whom or what?]….

Say this:

The system ignores this parameter….

REVISION

Before

This parameter is ignored when you create a user account, but required for an NRT account.

After

The system ignores this parameter when you create a user account, but requires the parameter for an NRT account.

Or

The system ignores this parameter when you create a user account, but requires it for an NRT account.

Example 13

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> This section describes the flow that occurs when the data for a guest account is changed or the profile data is deleted.

PROBLEM

Change the passive voice to active voice.

DISCUSSION

First Instance

Don't say this:

… when the data for a guest account is changed….

Say this:

… when you change the data for a guest account….

Second Instance

Don't say this:

…the profile data is deleted

Say this:

…you delete the profile data

REVISION

Before

This section describes the flow that occurs when the data for a guest account is changed or the profile data is deleted.

After

This section describes the flow that occurs when you change the data for a guest account or you delete the profile data.

Example 14

REWRITE THE SECOND SENTENCE (IN BOLD)

Content Migrator 4.2 is not compatible with earlier versions of Publisher. **However, data exported from earlier Publisher versions using the appropriate version of Content Migrator can be imported into a 4.2 system using Content Migrator 4.2.**

PROBLEM

Two things:

- Use the active voice.
- Don't wait until the end of a long sentence to identify the tool that works in this situation. Tell the user what tool to pick up and use for the desired action, and then describe the action.

DISCUSSION

Active Voice

Question: Who or what is doing the action?

Answer: You are.

Write accordingly.

Word Order

When you write a procedure, first tell the reader what tool to pick up and use before you tell the reader what to do with the tool. In this situation, tell the reader the tool to use is Content Migrator 4.2. This is how you say it:

> …you can use Content Migrator 4.2 to import into a 4.2 system the data exported from earlier Publisher versions.

REVISION

Before

Content Migrator 4.2 is not compatible with earlier versions of Publisher. However, data exported from earlier Publisher versions using the appropriate version of Content Migrator can be imported into a 4.2 system using Content Migrator 4.2.

After

Content Migrator 4.2 is not compatible with earlier versions of Publisher. However, you can use Content Migrator 4.2 to import into a 4.2 system the data exported from earlier Publisher versions.

Example 15

> Though the exported file may be manually manipulated prior to being imported, care must be taken to adhere to the rigid format requirements.

PROBLEM

These issues:

- Passive voice
- Overly formal, stilted language

DISCUSSION

Passive Voice

We have been over this point many times on *Grammaticus*. When the author says, *care must be taken*, who or what is supposed to *take care*? Who is the action agent? Who is the star of this blockbuster movie?

The answer, of course, is *You*. Use the second person singular.

See the **Revision** section for the active voice rewrite.

Formal, Stilted Language

Don't say this:

> prior to

Say this:

> before

Don't say this:

> care must be taken to adhere to

Say this:

> make sure you follow

Word Order

Don't say this:

the exported file may be manually manipulated

Say this:

you can manipulate the exported file manually

REVISION

Before

Though the exported file may be manually manipulated prior to being imported, care must be taken to adhere to the rigid format requirements.

After

Though you can manipulate the exported file manually before you import, make sure you follow the rigid format requirements.

Example 16

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> What is displayed in the call history window is a list of supported API methods, which are described throughout the site.

PROBLEM

Fix these problems:

- Passive voice
- Run-on sentence
- Awkward word order

DISCUSSION

Passive Voice

Don't say this:

> What is displayed in the call history window is a list of supported API methods….

Say this:

> A list of supported API methods appears in the call history window.

Or better:

> The call history window shows a list of supported API methods.

Simple Sentences

Divide the sentence into two sentences. Please see the **Revision** section for the rewrite.

Word Order

The word order is improved when (a) you change the passive voice to active voice and (b) when you divide the example sentence into two sentences.

REVISION

Before

> What is displayed in the call history window is a list of supported API methods, which are described throughout the site.

After

> A list of supported API methods appears in the call history window. These APIs are described throughout the site,

Or better

> The call history window shows a list of supported API methods. These APIs are described throughout the site,

Example 17

REWRITE THESE SENTENCES

> Until moderation is completed, a temporary system-generated display name is provided.
>
> An unmoderated namespace is not reviewed by a moderator before it becomes active.

PROBLEM

More passive voice sentences.

DISCUSSION

Question: In the first sentence, who or what does the providing?

Answer: The system. We know this because of the *temporary system-generated display name*.

Question: In the second sentence, who or what does not review an unmoderated namespace.

Answer: A moderator.

Also, in the second sentence, I prefer the usage of the verb *is* over the verb *becomes*. However, either verb is acceptable.

REVISION

Sentence 1

Before

> Until moderation is completed, a temporary system-generated display name is provided.

After

> Until you complete your moderation, the system generates a temporary display name.

Sentence 2

Before

An unmoderated namespace is not reviewed by a moderator before it becomes active.

After

The moderator won't review an unmoderated namespace before it is active.

Example 18

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> If a CMS solr search service is not desired, the service can simply be disabled in the CMS properties file.

PROBLEM

Passive voice, wordiness, and usage.

DISCUSSION

Passive Voice

Don't say this:

> If a CMS solr search service is not desired

Say this:

> If you don't want a CMS solr search service

And don't say this:

> the service can simply be disabled in the CMS properties file

Say this:

> disable the service in the CMS properties file

Wordiness

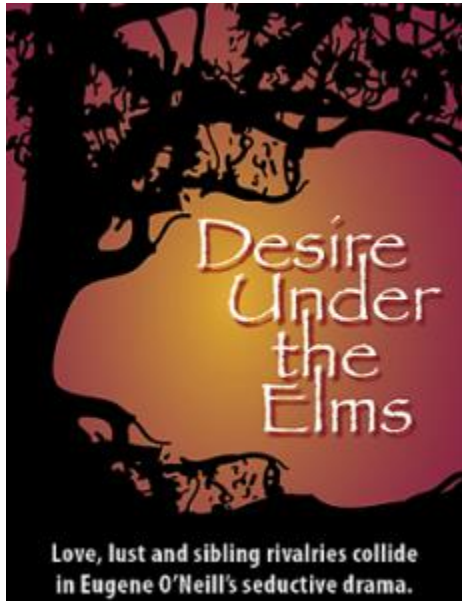The excess verbiage is in brackets:

> If a CMS solr search service is not desired, [the service can simply be disabled] in the CMS properties file.

See the **Revision** section for a more direct way to say the same thing.

Usage

Don't say *desire*. It is a loaded word. Say *want.*

The word *desire* has connotations not *desirable* in technical writing. The simple English verb form *to want* is sufficient.

Love, lust and sibling rivalries collide in Eugene O'Neill's seductive drama.

REVISION

Before

> If a CMS solr search service is not desired, the service can simply be disabled in the CMS properties file.

After

> If you don't want a CMS solr search service, disable the service in the CMS properties file.

Example 19

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> The **autoCommit** settings can reduce the time required for the final commit to be completed.

PROBLEM

Passive voice.

DISCUSSION

Don't say this:

> …for the final commit to be completed.

Say this:

> …to complete the final commit.

REVISION

Before

> The **autoCommit** settings can reduce the time required for the final commit to be completed.

After

> The **autoCommit** settings can reduce the time required to complete the final commit.

Example 20

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

Two new APIs are available for working with temporary files (i.e., the files created when uploading a managed file prior to creating or updating the associated content object).

PROBLEM

Things to fix:

- Passive voice
- Use English words instead of *i.e.* (this is my personal preference)
- Use *before* instead of *prior to* (this is my personal preference)
- To improve readability, break the sentence into two sentences
- Avoid using parentheses when the information enclosed is not trivial

DISCUSSION

Passive Voice

Someone or something is the actor in this sentence. Who or what might that be? We learn that "Two new APIs are available for working with temporary files." Available to what or to whom? Why, it is **you**, dear reader. Since you are the star of the example sentence, let's put you front and center. Say this:

Two new APIs enable you to work with temporary files….

Further, don't say this:

when uploading a managed file

Say this:

when you upload a managed file

Finally, don't say this:

prior to creating or updating

Say this:

before you create or update

Latin Phrases

Latin phrases are fine in most work organizations. I don't allow them in my work organization documentation because many of my authors don't seem to know the true meanings of *i.e.*, *e.g.*, *via*, and *etc.*, and I am tired of correcting my authors. Just stick to American English and you will never go wrong.

Sic transit gloria mundi.

Usage

The phrase *prior to* has the musty smell of the law office. Use *before*.

Simple Sentences

See the **Revision** section for a good way to divide the sentence into two sentences.

Parentheses

The example sentence talks about how temporary files are created and why they are important. This is NOT trivial information, as you might find in an aside or an offhand comment. DO NOT put important information in parentheses. If it is important, it deserves to be on equal footing with the other sentences.

Speaking as an ordinary reader, I find too much material enclosed in parentheses to be an annoying mannerism. Parentheses break up the natural flow of a sentence or sentences.

To make my point—when was the last time you read an exciting, page-turner novel that used an excessive amount of parentheses? Good authors avoid them.

REVISION

Before

Two new APIs are available for working with temporary files (i.e., the files created when uploading a managed file prior to creating or updating the associated content object).

After

Two new APIs enable you to work with temporary files. You create the temporary files when you upload a managed file before you create or update the associated content object.

Or

You create temporary files when you upload a managed file before you create or update the associated content object. Two new APIs enable you to work with these temporary files.

Example 21

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

The language that notification emails use is set by the country determined by the geolocation feature, which maps a country to a guest's IP address.

PROBLEM

This meandering sentence is in serious need of an overhaul. I propose to do two things:

- Divide it into at least two sentences.
- Make everything active voice.

DISCUSSION

Active Voice

Who or what is the main actor in the sentence? Who or what sets the language?

The actor is the *geolocation feature*, which is near the end of the sentence next to the caboose. Start the sentence with the *geolocation feature*. Say this:

> The geolocation feature determines the language in which the notification email is sent.

How does the geolocation feature do this? It uses the IP address to identify the country. By identifying the country, it identifies the appropriate language.

Simple Sentences

The example sentence expresses three thoughts. This means you can have three short, logically-sequenced sentences replace one long rambling sentence:

- The geolocation feature determines the language in which the notification email is sent.
- It uses the IP address to identify the country.
- By identifying the country, it identifies the appropriate language.

REVISION

Before

The language that notification emails use is set by the country determined by the geolocation feature, which maps a country to a guest's IP address.

After

The geolocation feature determines the language in which the notification email is sent. It uses the IP address to identify the country. By identifying the country, it identifies the appropriate language.

Example 22

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

During the summer of 2015, required testing was completed in order to certify Microsoft SQL Server 2014 for use with FakeCorp CMS 8.1.

PROBLEM

Passive voice. Fix it.

DISCUSSION

Who or what is doing the testing? We are. Don't be shy about it.

Say this:

During the summer of 2015, we completed the required testing….

REVISION

Before

During the summer of 2015, required testing was completed in order to certify Microsoft SQL Server 2014 for use with FakeCorp CMS 8.1.

After

During the summer of 2015, we completed the required testing in order to certify Microsoft SQL Server 2014 for use with FakeCorp CMS 8.1.

Example 23

How Texas Teaches History

By Ellen Bresmore Rockwell, Dartmouth College

Reprinted from the New York Times Opinion section, October 21, 2015

A TEXAS high school student and his mother recently called attention to a curious line in a geography textbook: a description of the Atlantic slave trade as bringing "millions of workers" to plantations in the American South. McGraw-Hill Education, the publisher of the textbook, has since acknowledged that the term "workers" was a misnomer.

The company's chief executive also promised to revise the textbook so that its digital version as well as its next edition would more accurately describe the forced migration and enslavement of Africans. In the meantime, the company is also offering to send stickers to cover the passage.

But it will take more than that to fix the way slavery is taught in Texas textbooks. In 2010, the Texas Board of Education approved a social studies curriculum that promotes capitalism and Republican political philosophies. The curriculum guidelines prompted many concerns, including that new textbooks would downplay slavery as the cause of the Civil War.

This fall, five million public school students in Texas began using the textbooks based on the new guidelines. And some of these books distort history not through word choices but through a tool we often think of as apolitical: grammar.

In September, Bobby Finger of the website Jezebel obtained and published some excerpts from the new books, showing much of what is objectionable about their content. The books play down the horror of slavery and even seem to claim that it had an upside. This upside took the form of a distinctive African-American culture, in which family was central, Christianity provided "hope," folk tales expressed "joy" and community dances were important social events.

But it is not only the substance of the passages that is a problem. It is also their form. The writers' decisions about how to construct sentences, about what the subject of the sentence will be, about whether the verb will be active or passive, shape the message that slavery was not all that bad.

I teach freshman writing at Dartmouth College. My colleagues and I consistently try to convey to our students the importance of clear writing. Among the guiding principles of clear writing are these: Whenever possible, use human subjects, not abstract nouns; use active verbs, not passive. We don't want our students to write, "Torture was used," because that sentence obscures who was torturing whom.

In the excerpts published by Jezebel, the Texas textbooks employ all the principles of good, strong, clear writing when talking about the "upside" of slavery. But when writing about the brutality of slavery, the writers use all the tricks of obfuscation. You can see all this at play in the following passage from a textbook, published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, called Texas United States History:

Some slaves reported that their masters treated them kindly. To protect their investment, some slaveholders provided adequate food and clothing for their slaves. However, severe treatment was very common. Whippings, brandings, and even worse torture were all part of American slavery.

Notice how in the first two sentences, the "slavery wasn't that bad" sentences, the main subject of each clause is a person: slaves, masters, slaveholders. What those people, especially the slave owners, are doing is clear: They are treating their slaves kindly; they are providing adequate food and clothing. But after those two sentences there is a change, not just in the writers' outlook on slavery but also in their sentence construction. There are no people in the last two sentences, only nouns. Yes, there is severe treatment, whippings, brandings and torture. And yes, those are all bad things. But where are the slave owners who were actually doing the whipping and branding and torturing? And where are the slaves who were whipped, branded and tortured? They are nowhere to be found in the sentence.

In another passage, slave owners and their institutionalized cruelty are similarly absent: "Families were often broken apart when a family member was sold to another owner*."*

Note the use of the passive voice in the verbs "were broken apart" and "was sold." If the sentence had been written according to the principles of good draftsmanship, it would have looked like this: Slave owners often broke slave families apart by selling a family member to another owner. A bit more powerful, no? Through grammatical manipulation, the textbook authors obscure the role of slave owners in the institution of slavery.

It may appear at first glance that the authors do a better job of focusing on the actions of slaves. After all, there are many sentences in which "slaves" are the subjects, the main characters in their own narrative. But what are the verbs in those sentences? Are the slaves suffering? No, in the sentences that feature slaves as the subject, as the main actors in the sentence, the slaves are contributing their agricultural knowledge to the growing Southern economy; they are singing songs and telling folk tales; they are expressing themselves through art and dance.

There are no sentences, in these excerpts, anyway, in which slaves are doing what slaves actually did: toiling relentlessly, without remuneration or reprieve, constantly subject to confinement, corporal punishment and death.

The textbook publishers were put in a difficult position. They had to teach history to Texas' children without challenging conservative political views that are at odds with history. In doing so, they made many grammatical choices. Though we don't always recognize it, grammatical choices can be moral choices, and these publishers made the wrong ones.

[Ellen Bresler Rockmore](#) is a lecturer in the Institute for Writing and Rhetoric at Dartmouth.

Agreement

IMPORTANT: This topic is about **agreement**. However, all of the following examples contain discussions of multiple subjects—not just agreement. Therefore, in addition to agreement, you are going to learn a lot of different things about good writing and rewriting.

Example 1

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

When a guest forgets their password or member name, they can request that their password or the list of member names be sent to them.

PROBLEM

These plural words:

- their
- they
- their
- them

do not go with the singular word *guest*.

DISCUSSION

A pronoun refers to a noun or takes the place of that noun. You must use the correct singular or plural version of the pronoun in technical writing. If the pronoun takes the place of a singular noun, you have to use a singular pronoun. On the other hand, if the pronoun takes the place of a plural noun, use a plural noun.

In our rewrite, we'll look at both the singular and the plural version.

REVISIONS

Before

> When a guest forgets their password or member name, they can request that their password or the list of member names be sent to them.

After

[singular]

> When a guest forgets his or her password or member name, the guest can ask to be sent the password or the list of member names.

[plural]

> When guests forget their passwords or member names, guests can ask to be sent their passwords or the list of member names.

Example 2

REWRITE THESE SENTENCES

> Either the piano or the book cases has to go.
>
> Either the book cases or the piano have to go.
>
> Bread and water is his punishment.

PROBLEM

In each case, there is a lack of agreement between subject and verb.

DISCUSSION

The subject of a sentence generally is defined as the noun or pronoun engaging in the activity of the verb. When a sentence has two or more subjects, that is called a *compound subject.*

RULE: When the subjects are joined by *or* or *neither/nor*, the verb agrees with the subject that is closest to the verb.

1

In the first example sentence:

> Either the piano or the book cases has to go.

The subject closest to the verb is *book cases* (plural). Therefore, the verb must be plural:

> Either the piano or the book cases **have** to go.

2

Once again, when the subjects are joined by *or* or *neither/nor*, the verb agrees with the subject that is closest to the verb. In the second example sentence:

> Either the book cases or the piano have to go.

The subject closest to the verb is *piano* (singular). Therefore, the verb must be singular:

> Either the book cases or the piano **has** to go.

3

In the third example sentence, we have subjects joined by *and.*

RULE: When two or more subjects are joined by *and*, the compound subject must agree with the pronoun *they*. Therefore, the correct verb form looks like this:

> Bread and water **are** his punishment.

Or

> [They] are his punishment.

REVISIONS

Before

> Either the piano or the book cases has to go.
>
> Either the book cases or the piano have to go.
>
> Bread and water is his punishment.

After

> Either the piano or the book cases have to go.
>
> Either the book cases or the piano has to go.
>
> Bread and water are his punishment.

Example 3

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> This is an array of content type IDs indicating which types of content is permitted in this section.

PROBLEM

We do not have agreement of subject and verb. In the dependent clause at the end of the sentence (beginning with the word *indicating*), the subject *types* is plural, but the verb *is* is singular.

DISCUSSION

The sentence has an independent clause:

This is an array of content type IDs.

And a dependent clause (that is, it is a fragment):

indicating which types of content is permitted in this section.

In the dependent clause, the subject is *types* and the verb that goes with types should be *are,* not *is*.

It is possible the author thinks the word *content* is the subject of the dependent clause, but actually *content* is a modifier. It modifies the plural noun *types*. You could rearrange the wording this way:

indicating which content types are permitted in this section.

Do you see that?

REVISION

Before

This is an array of content type IDs indicating which types of content is permitted in this section.

After

This is an array of content type IDs indicating which types of content are permitted in this section.

Example 4

REWRITE THESE SENTENCES

The hospitality and the weather is perfect.

The functionality and service has not been implemented yet.

Bacon and eggs is my favorite breakfast.

PROBLEM

We do not have agreement of subject and verb in either of the first two sentences.

The third sentence is not so clear cut because the phrase *bacon and eggs* appears to be a single entity.

DISCUSSION

In the first sentence, you could say *the hospitality is perfect* or *the weather is perfect*. Since you have two nouns, *hospitality* and *weather*, you have a plural subject. The plural subject does not agree with the singular verb *is*. Make the verb *are*, to agree with the plural subject.

In the second sentence, we have another plural subject, *functionality and service*, two different things. The verb form *has not been implemented* is singular. Make the verb form *have not been implemented*.

In the last sentence, the speaker did not say *bacon* (singular) *is my favorite breakfast*. Nor did the speaker say *eggs* (plural) *are my favorite breakfast*. The speaker referred to *bacon and eggs* as a single entity. If it is a single entity, as it appears in the example sentence, the verb form should be singular.

REVISIONS

Before

The hospitality and the weather is perfect.

The functionality and service has not been implemented yet.

Bacon and eggs is my favorite breakfast.

After

The hospitality and the weather are perfect.

The functionality and service have not been implemented yet.

Bacon and eggs is my favorite breakfast. [no change]

Example 5

> Not one of the job applicants were qualified.

PROBLEM

The subject does not agree with the verb.

DISCUSSION

What is the subject of the sentence?

- One (singular)
- Job applicants (plural)

Do you know?

The verb in this sentence is *were*. *Were* is plural. The phrase *job applicants* also is plural. Evidently, the author thinks *applicants* is the subject of the sentence, but the author is wrong. The noun *one* is the subject. The word "one" is singular. Therefore, the correct verb form is *is*, which is singular.

REVISION

Before

Not one of the job applicants were qualified.

After

Not one of the job applicants is qualified.

Example 6

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> When a student comes to class, you should have your homework ready.

PROBLEM

The sentence starts out in the third person *(a student)*, but ends in the second person *(you … your)*. The sentence must be entirely in the first person, the second person, or the third person. You need to be consistent from beginning to end.

DISCUSSION

You must agree in person. Don't ever mix first, second, or third person in the same sentence.

If you are writing in the first person *(I)*, don't confuse your reader by switching to the second person *(you)* or third person *(he, she, they, it, etc.)*. Similarly, if you are using the second person, don't switch to first or third person.

REVISION

Before

When a student comes to class, you should have your homework ready.

After

When you come to class, you should have your homework ready.

Or

When a student comes to class, the student should have his or her homework ready.

Example 7

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> Direct access to the REST APIs are no longer supported in most instances.

PROBLEM

The problem is lack of agreement between subject and verb. The subject of the sentence is *access* (singular). The verb in the sentence is *are* (plural).

DISCUSSION

The author thinks the subject of the sentence is *REST APIs* (plural).

REVISION

Before

Direct access to the REST APIs are no longer supported in most instances.

After

Direct access to the REST APIs is no longer supported in most instances.

Example 8

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> If they choose to create a new account in that time interval, the user's email is pre-populated in automatically in the new profile form.

PROBLEM

The sentence starts out with a dependent clause that has a plural pronoun, *they:*

> If they choose to create a new account in that time interval

Then it moves into an independent clause with the singular subject, the *user's* email

> the user's email is pre-populated in automatically in the new profile form.

DISCUSSION

You need to match up the pronoun *they* with the subject *user*. Clearly, we are talking about one user, not multiple users. Therefore, *they* is incorrect.

REVISION

Before

> If they choose to create a new account in that time interval, the user's email is pre-populated in automatically in the new profile form.

After

> If the user chooses to create a new account in that time interval, the user's email is pre-populated in automatically in the new profile form.

Example 9

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> The addition of the JSON Editor and the Ace code editor allow us to offer a robust solution for adding, editing, and validating complex JSON information in Workstation Editor.

PROBLEM

The author thinks the verb form of the sentence—*to allow*—should be plural. Apparently, he or she believes the JSON editor and the Ace code editor are a plural subject of the sentence. At first glance, it is plausible. Plausible, but wrong.

DISCUSSION

Actually, the word *addition* is the subject of the sentence. To prove my point, let's take the phrase **of the JSON Editor and the Ace code editor** completely out of the sentence. This is what is left:

> The addition … allow us to offer a robust solution for adding, editing, and validating complex JSON information in Workstation Editor.

The two types of editors modify the noun *addition*. Therefore, for agreement, we need to change *allow* to *allows*.

> The addition … allows us to offer a robust solution for adding, editing, and validating complex JSON information in Workstation Editor.

Finally, if you begin the sentence without the noun *addition*, the plural verb form *allow* is correct. Here it is:

> The JSON Editor and the Ace code editor allow us to offer a robust solution for adding, editing, and validating complex JSON information in Workstation Editor.

Do you see the difference?

REVISION

Before

The addition of the JSON Editor and the Ace code editor allow us to offer a robust solution for adding, editing, and validating complex JSON information in Workstation Editor.

After

The addition of the JSON Editor and the Ace code editor allows us to offer a robust solution for adding, editing, and validating complex JSON information in Workstation Editor.

Example 10

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> Direct access to the core services are not supported.

PROBLEM

The verb *are* (plural) does not agree with the subject *access* (singular).

DISCUSSION

The author thinks the plural word *services* is the subject of the sentence. The author is correct if this is the sentence:

> Core services are not supported.

Instead, we have this:

> Direct access [to the core services] is not supported.

REVISION

Before

> Direct access to the core services are not supported.

After

> Direct access to the core services is not supported.

Example 11

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> These users still see their email address, but they are no longer be able to view or edit their username.

PROBLEM

Lack of agreement—in two places in the sentence.

DISCUSSION

Singular

user = address

[user] = username

Or

[he or she] = username

Plural

users = addresses

[users] = usernames

Or

[they] = usernames

REVISION

Before

> These users still see their email address, but they are no longer be able to view or edit their username.

After

> These users still see their email addresses, but they are no longer be able to view or edit their usernames.

Or

> Each user still sees his or her email address, but can no longer view or edit the username.

Example 12

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> During registration, before a user profile is created, all of the fields required for a site visitor to create a user profile is returned to the FakeCorp ID UI for display to the user.

PROBLEM

The verb *is*.

DISCUSSION

The subject of the sentence is the word *fields*. The word *fields* is plural.

Don't say this:

> …fields … is….

Say this:

> …fields … are….

REVISION

Before

> During registration, before a user profile is created, all of the fields required for a site visitor to create a user profile is returned to the FakeCorp ID UI for display to the user.

After

> During registration, before a user profile is created, all of the fields required for a site visitor to create a user profile are returned to the FakeCorp ID UI for display to the user.

Example 13

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

The following sequence of method calls are made in the user controller every time a user account is created.

PROBLEM

Two problems:

- Agreement of subject and verb
- Passive voice

DISCUSSION

Agreement

The subject of the sentence is the word *sequence*. Apparently, the author thinks the subject of the sentence is the word *calls*, which is plural. However, the phrase *method calls* is just a modifier for *sequence*, which is singular.

Thus, the agreement goes like this:

sequence…is made

Passive Voice

Don't say this:

…every time a user account is created.

Say this:

…every time you create a user account.

REVISION

Before

> The following sequence of method calls are made in the user controller every time a user account is created.

After

> The following sequence of method calls is made in the user controller every time you create a user account.

Example 14

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE THAT INTRODUCES A LIST

> The following topics describes how to use all of the APIs that fall under AuthenticationPlus:

PROBLEM

Lack of agreement of subject and verb.

DISCUSSION

The subject in the sentence is *topics*. The verb is *describes*. Do you see the disconnect?

Don't say this:

> The following topics describes….

Say this:

> The following topics describe….

REVISION

Before

> The following topics describes how to use all of the APIs that fall under AuthenticationPlus:

After

> The following topics describe how to use all of the APIs that fall under AuthenticationPlus:

Example 15

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> They need to create the full account in the specified time-to-live (TTL) after becoming a new prospect.

PROBLEM

The sentence begins with a plural subject, *They*, but it ends by describing the subject as *a new prospect*, which is singular. You need to change *They* to *The user*.

DISCUSSION

Don't say this:

> They need to create…after becoming a new prospect.

Say this:

> The user needs to create…after becoming a new prospect.

REVISION

Before

> They need to create the full account in the specified time-to-live (TTL) after becoming a new prospect.

After

> The user needs to create the full account in the specified time-to-live (TTL) after becoming a new prospect.

Bad Shortcuts

IMPORTANT: This topic is about **bad shortcuts**. However, all of the following examples contain discussions of multiple subjects—not just bad shortcuts. Therefore, in addition to bad shortcuts, you are going to learn a lot of different things about good writing and rewriting.

Example 1

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> You'll see how to log in through Facebook/Google+.

PROBLEM

Do not use the forward slash in **formal** documentation except in these circumstances:

- With fractions
- Between the lines of quoted poetry (not likely to happen in software documentation!)
- In Internet addresses (URLs) and pathnames
- In descriptive phrases such as 9/11 or 24/7

Facebook/Google+ is not acceptable in formal documentation. You might see it in informal, backend documentation. That is OK as long as it stays there.

DISCUSSION

DO NOT use the forward slash as a signifier of alternatives, options, or choices in formal software documentation. The forward slash is not a punctuation mark according to the AP style guide, and it is discouraged in the Chicago and Microsoft style guides. The reason is obvious. It is not clear whether the forward slash means *or* or *and*. Don't leave your reader guessing. Write around it.

The expression *and/or* is precisely the kind of ambiguity we want to avoid in technical writing. Make up your mind, and then rewrite the sentence.

The forward slash in TCP/IP is acceptable. This is the most common occurrence of the forward slash found in software documentation, but there are others. Check with your lead technical writer for guidance.

As for the backslash (\), its use generally is restricted to computing. For example, URL addresses take backslashes.

REVISION

Before

You'll see how to log in through Facebook/Google+.

After

You'll see how to log in through Facebook and Google+.

Example 2

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

The UI highlights the account(s) that have the fakeParameter field's value set to true.

PROBLEM

The word *account(s)*. This is a bad shortcut.

DISCUSSION

The author is trying to say the user interface may highlight only one account or it may highlight more than one account. In other words, the user should not be surprised to see more than one account highlighted. However, to use the "(s)" construction as a suffix is incorrect. Don't do that. Say *account or accounts*.

REVISION

Before

The UI highlights the account(s) that have the fakeParameter field's value set to true.

After

The UI highlights the account or accounts that have the fakeParameter field's value set to true.

Example 3

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> This command returns guest profile data that matches your query parameter(s).

PROBLEM

parameter(s).

I see this a lot at my current place of business. I am not aware of any style guide that recommends this practice. It's a bad shortcut.

DISCUSSION

Don't ever do this.

You have two solutions:

- Use the phrase *parameter or parameters*
- Use the plural form—the reader can assume the plural includes a single query parameter

REVISION

Before

This command returns guest profile data that matches your query parameter(s).

After

This command returns guest profile data that matches your query parameter or parameters.

Or

This command returns guest profile data that matches your query parameters.

Bullet Lists

IMPORTANT: This topic is about **bullet lists**. However, all of the following examples contain discussions of multiple subjects—not just bullet lists. Therefore, in addition to bullet lists, you are going to learn a lot of different things about good writing and rewriting.

Example 1

REWRITE THIS TEXT

EXAMINING THE INSTALLATION SITE

The [first switch] and [second switch] switches must be used indoors.

Mount your switch in a rack and make sure:

- Adequate clearance is reserved at the air inlet and exhaust vents for ventilation.
- The rack has a good ventilation system
- Identify the hot aisle and cold aisle at the installation site, and make sure that ambient air flows into the switch from the cold aisle and exhausts to the hot aisle.
- Identify the airflow designs of neighboring devices, and prevent hot air flowing out of the bottom device from entering the top device.
- The rack is sturdy enough to support the switch and its accessories.
- The rack is well earthed.

PROBLEM

- The bulleted items lack parallelism.
- The end punctuation of the bulleted items is not consistent.
- All sentences and bulleted items should be in the active voice unless there is a compelling reason for passive voice.
- The term *well earthed* may not be understood by the American English audience. This is a localization issue.

DISCUSSION

Parallelism

We have six bullet points. Bullet points 3 and 4 are complete sentences. The first two and last two bullet points are not complete sentences. They are *fragments*. They are fragments because they complete the introductory line, *Mount your switch in a rack and make sure*….

For example, the first bullet point reads as follows:

> Mount your switch in a rack and make sure adequate clearance is reserved at the air inlet and exhaust vents for ventilation.

Here is the iron-clad rule: All bullet point must be either standalone complete sentences or fragments that complete the introductory line. You need to make a decision one way or the other. Of course, if you go with complete sentences, you must also revise the introductory line.

My advice to you is to go with complete sentences. Let me explain.

You see a lot of introductory lines that lead into fragmented bullet points in sales and marketing material where the bullet points tend to be concise. This is fine for fast-paced PowerPoint presentations.

In engineering documentation, however, bulleted lists typically contain lots of complex technical information. Thus, if the bulleted item is a long-winded fragment that completes the introductory line, you put a heavy burden on the reader to comprehend everything, especially if the introductory is more than a few lines up the page.

In the revision that follows, I am going with complete sentences.

End Punctuation

The author forgot to put a period at the end of the second bullet point. In effect, all of the bulleted items are complete sentences, whether they complete the introductory line or they stand alone. For that reason, each bullet point requires a period.

End punctuation for list items *must* be consistent throughout. It's all or nothing.

Active Voice

Wherever possible, change the passive voice to active voice.

Well Earthed?

The American English reader is more familiar with the term *well grounded*. Make that change so it is perfectly clear to your American audience.

This a good example of a localization problem. Here is the backstory for our example.

The company that made these switches and produced the original documentation is based in China. What you see here is an English translation from the Chinese. I don't know if the translator is British-educated or what, but you must find a more suitable word or expression for the American reader.

REVISION

Before

EXAMINING THE INSTALLATION SITE

The [first switch] and [second switch] switches must be used indoors.

Mount your switch in a rack and make sure:

- Adequate clearance is reserved at the air inlet and exhaust vents for ventilation.
- The rack has a good ventilation system
- Identify the hot aisle and cold aisle at the installation site, and make sure that ambient air flows into the switch from the cold aisle and exhausts to the hot aisle.
- Identify the airflow designs of neighboring devices, and prevent hot air flowing out of the bottom device from entering the top device.
- The rack is sturdy enough to support the switch and its accessories.
- The rack is well earthed.

After

EXAMINING THE INSTALLATION SITE

It is important that you never use the [first switch] and [second switch] switches outdoors. These switches are for indoor use only.

Mount your switch in a rack, and make sure you do the following:

- Provide adequate clearance at the air inlet and exhaust vents for ventilation.
- Ensure the rack has a good ventilation system.
- Identify the hot aisle and cold aisle at the installation site, and make sure that ambient air flows into the switch from the cold aisle and exhausts to the hot aisle.
- Identify the airflow designs of neighboring devices, and prevent hot air flowing out of the bottom device from entering the top device.
- Ensure the rack is sturdy enough to support the switch and its accessories.
- Verify the rack is well grounded.

Example 2

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> The administrator can also specify a different order of context menus for content in the workbench, collection and reference fields and a default for all other content grid context menus, as well as add a new "More" sub-menu for each type of context menu.

PROBLEM

- Convert this meandering run-on sentence into a list
- The word *More* is an interface feature, which means it should be in bold type—it should not be in quotation marks

DISCUSSION

The sentence is a loose collection of ideas and observations. These are the facts stated in the sentence:

- The administrator can specify a different order of context menus for content in the workbench, collection, and reference fields.
- The administrator can specify a default for all other content grid context menus.
- The administrator can add a new **More** sub-menu for each type of context menu.

REVISION

Before

The administrator can also specify a different order of context menus for content in the workbench, collection and reference fields and a default for all other content grid context menus, as well as add a new "More" sub-menu for each type of context menu.

After

The administrator can do the following:

- Specify a different order of context menus for content in the workbench, collection, and reference fields.
- Specify a default for all other content grid context menus.
- Add a new **More** sub-menu for each type of context menu.

Example 3

REWRITE THIS BULLET LIST

There are five use cases to verify:
- Fake operation (FO) has entitlement in DB—entitlement not expired
- FO has entitlement in DB—entitlement is expired in DB, but entitlement not expired at the carrier
- FO has entitlement in DB—entitlement is expired in DB, and entitlement is expired at the carrier
- FO does not have entitlement in DB—entitlement is not expired at the carrier
- FO does not have entitlement in DB—entitlement is expired or not found at the carrier

PROBLEM

The five bullet points lack parallelism. Can you make them all identical in structure?

DISCUSSION

From the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Writing Center:

> Parallelism is the use of similar patterns of words (or grammatical forms) to express similar or related ideas or ideas of equal importance. Using parallel structures creates rhythm and balance and enables the writer to present ideas clearly, concisely, and smoothly. Perhaps even more important, parallelism can help a writer highlight or emphasize information or make a powerful point. Without parallelism, writing can become clunky, awkward, and needlessly confusing. With it, reading can become easy to understand, pleasing to the ear, and even persuasive.

We need to make each one of the five bullet points exactly the same in structure. I will give you two different looks.

REVISION

Before

There are five use cases to verify:

- Fake operation (FO) has entitlement in DB—entitlement not expired
- FO has entitlement in DB—entitlement is expired in DB, but entitlement not expired at the carrier
- FO has entitlement in DB—entitlement is expired in DB, and entitlement is expired at the carrier
- FO does not have entitlement in DB—entitlement is not expired at the carrier
- FO does not have entitlement in DB—entitlement is expired or not found at the carrier

After

[with verbs after the dash]

There are five use cases to verify:

- Fake operation (FO) has entitlements in DB—entitlement is not expired
- FO has entitlements in DB—entitlement is expired, but entitlement is not expired at the carrier
- FO has entitlement in DB—entitlement is expired in DB and at the carrier
- FO does not have entitlement in DB—entitlement is not expired at the carrier
- FO does not have entitlement in DB—entitlement is expired or is not found at the carrier

Or

[without verbs after the dash]

There are five use cases to verify:

- Fake operation (FO) has entitlements in DB—entitlement not expired
- FO has entitlements in DB—entitlement expired, but entitlement not expired at the carrier
- FO has entitlement in DB—entitlement expired in DB and at the carrier
- FO does not have entitlement in DB—entitlement not expired at the carrier
- FO does not have entitlement in DB—entitlement expired or not found at the carrier

Example 4

REWRITE THIS PARAGRAPH AS A LIST

> The IP address of the access device must be the same as the source IP address of the CIRCLE packets sent from the switch. Make sure you select the address in this order: The IP address specified with nas-ip on the switch; the IP address specified with circle nas-ip on the switch; and the IP address of the outbound interface (the default).

PROBLEM

It is much easier to digest the information when it is arranged as a list.

DISCUSSION

There are several ways to make a list of bullet points:

1. You can have each list item contain the language already there in the original.
2. You can have each list item begin with *IP address* followed by a dash.
3. You can have each list item begin with *IP address* followed by a colon.

In our rewrite, we are going to look at all three versions.

REVISIONS

Before

The IP address of the access device must be the same as the source IP address of the CIRCLE packets sent from the switch. Make sure you select he address in this order: The IP address specified with **nas-ip** on the switch; the IP address specified with circle **nas-ip** on the switch; and the IP address of the outbound interface (the default).

After

1

The IP address of the access device must be the same as the source IP address of the CIRCLE packets sent from the switch. Make sure you select the address in this order:

- IP address specified with **nas-ip** on the switch
- IP address specified with circle **nas-ip** on the switch
- IP address of the outbound interface (the default)

2

The IP address of the access device must be the same as the source IP address of the CIRCLE packets sent from the switch. Make sure you select the address in this order:

- IP address—specified with **nas-ip** on the switch
- IP address—specified with circle **nas-ip** on the switch
- IP address—the outbound interface (the default)

3

The IP address of the access device must be the same as the source IP address of the CIRCLE packets sent from the switch. Make sure you select he address in this order:

- IP address: specified with **nas-ip** on the switch
- IP address: specified with circle **nas-ip** on the switch
- IP address: the outbound interface (the default).

NOTE: Words are never capitalized after a dash or colon unless the word is a proper noun. The information after the dash or colon is considered to be part of the same sentence.

Example 5

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> Errors that are of an informative, yet not blocking nature are ADVISORY, others might be ACTIONABLE_INPUT for which the calling system should ask the user to provide or correct input, or FAILURE_BY_DESIGN when a business rule, such as permissions, are not being met in order to service a request.

PROBLEM

This 49-word sentence is a true word salad. We need to completely reorganize it.

DISCUSSION

Let's start with the basic information. What is the author trying to say? The author is describing three types of errors: ADVISORY, ACTIONABLE_INPUT, and FAILURE_BY_DESIGN.

That's it!

Now that we know the gist of the sentence, I recommend we reorganize the information as a bullet list.

REVISION

Before

> Errors that are of an informative, yet not blocking nature are ADVISORY, others might be ACTIONABLE_INPUT for which the calling system should ask the user to provide or correct input, or FAILURE_BY_DESIGN when a business rule, such as permissions, are not being met in order to service a request.

After

There are three types of errors:

- An ADVISORY error is an Informative error that does not block.
- An ACTIONABLE_INPUT error is one in which the calling system asks the user to provide or correct input.
- A FAILURE_BY_DESIGN error is one in which a business rule, such as permissions, is not met in order to service a request.

Example 6

REWRITE THIS BULLET LIST FROM A RELEASE NOTES DOCUMENT

New features

- Inserts floating button bar
- Removed email support button from troubleshooting page
- Search content by date range for created and last modified dates
- Always show the Quick Search box (configurable, off by default)
- Auto open cloned object (configurable, off by default)
- Ability to share saved searches
- Drag and drop to and from reference properties
- Support for editing unmanaged external file properties
- Tri-state confirmation box for administration tools when navigating away from unsaved changes
- Added typeahead to Editor field in search by user
- Ability to publish or unpublish child content from a collection property
- My Locked Content left navigation module updated to expand, which allows you to select All Locked Content, My Locked Content or Content locked by a specific user
- Section browser refreshes root sections when you collapse and expand the module
- Ctrl+F for find and replace in all text fields
- Moved event search link to a tab under More search options
- Renamed Cancel button to Close in the content edit form
- When you close the content, the home screen appears if the previous view is not a data grid or scheduled task admin tool, which can be configured
- Maximize button in markup editor
- Add label added to context menu of child content in collections and references
- Open in new tab added to context menu of child content in collections and references
- Lock status polling (configurable. off by default)

PROBLEM

Generally speaking, release notes are less formal and more casual than typical documentation. When your company releases a new product or an upgrade to an existing product, the release notes summarize the basics for managers and IT personnel alike, using a friendly, familiar style of writing.

Nevertheless, the principles of good expository writing still apply. One of those principles is parallel grammatical construction.

As you can see, the bullet items are not consistently parallel. You need to fix that.

DISCUSSION

When you fix a list that is not parallel, you need to come up with a strategy in which all of the bullet items have a consistent grammatical style. You really have to put on your thinking cap and find a way where each and every bullet item is the same grammatically.

In this example for today, my recommendation is to begin each bullet item with a past tense verb form. It is past tense because your company, FakeCorp, did all these things for this release:

- Inserted
- Removed
- Added
- Enabled
- Updated
- Moved
- Renamed
- Configured

Let's take these bullet items one by one.

1

Don't say this:

Inserts floating button bar

Say this:

Inserted floating button bar

2

This is OK:

Removed email support button from troubleshooting page

3

Don't say this:

Search content by date range for created and last modified dates

Say this:

Enabled content search by date range for created and last modified dates

4

Don't say this:

> Always show the **Quick Search** box (configurable, off by default)

Say this:

> **Added** the **Quick Search** box (configurable, off by default), which always shows

5

Don't say this:

> Auto open cloned object (configurable, off by default)

Say this:

> **Added** auto open cloned object (configurable, off by default)

6

Don't say this:

> Ability to share saved searches

Say this:

> **Enabled** the sharing of saved searches

7

Don't say this:

> Drag and drop to and from reference properties

Say this:

> **Added** drag and drop to and from reference properties

8

Don't say this:

Support for editing unmanaged external file properties

Say this:

Added support for editing unmanaged external file properties

9

Don't say this:

Tri-state confirmation box for administration tools when navigating away from unsaved changes

Say this:

Added tri-state confirmation box for administration tools when navigating away from unsaved changes

10

This is OK:

Added typeahead to **Editor** field in search by user

11

Don't say this:

Ability to publish or unpublish child content from a collection property

Say this:

Enabled publish or unpublish child content from a collection property

12

Don't say this:

> **My Locked Content** left navigation module updated to expand, which allows you to select **All Locked Content**, **My Locked Content** or **Content locked by a specific user**

Say this:

> **Updated** my **Locked Content** left navigation module to expand—this allows you to select **All Locked Content**, **My Locked Content** or **Content locked by a specific user**

13

Don't say this:

> Section browser refreshes root sections when you collapse and expand the module

Say this:

> **Enabled** section browser to refresh root sections when you collapse and expand the module

14

Don't say this:

> **Ctrl+F** for find and replace in all text fields

Say this:

> **Added Ctrl+F** for find and replace in all text fields

15

This is OK:

> **Moved** event search link to a tab under **More** search options

16

This is OK:

> **Renamed Cancel** button to **Close** in the content edit form

17

Don't say this:

> When you close the content, the home screen appears if the previous view is not a data grid or scheduled task admin tool, which can be configured

Say this:

> When you close the content, **configured** the home screen to appear if the previous view is not a data grid or scheduled task admin tool (which can be configured)

18

Don't say this:

> Maximize button in markup editor

Say this:

> **Added** a maximize (**+**) button in the markup editor

19

Don't say this:

> Add label added to context menu of child content in collections and references

Say this:

> **Added** label to context menu of child content in collections and references

20

Don't say this:

> Open in new tab added to context menu of child content in collections and references

Say this:

> **Added** open in new tab to context menu of child content in collections and references

21

Don't say this:

> Lock status polling (configurable. off by default)

Say this:

> **Added** lock status polling (configurable. off by default)

REVISION

Before

> **New features**
>
> - Inserts floating button bar
> - Removed email support button from troubleshooting page
> - Search content by date range for created and last modified dates
> - Always show the Quick Search box (configurable, off by default)
> - Auto open cloned object (configurable, off by default)
> - Ability to share saved searches
> - Drag and drop to and from reference properties
> - Support for editing unmanaged external file properties
> - Tri-state confirmation box for administration tools when navigating away from unsaved changes
> - Added typeahead to Editor field in search by user
> - Ability to publish or unpublish child content from a collection property
> - My Locked Content left navigation module updated to expand, which allows you to select All Locked Content, My Locked Content or Content locked by a specific user
> - Section browser refreshes root sections when you collapse and expand the module
> - Ctrl+F for find and replace in all text fields
> - Moved event search link to a tab under More search options
> - Renamed Cancel button to Close in the content edit form
> - When you close the content, the home screen appears if the previous view is not a data grid or scheduled task admin tool, which can be configured
> - Maximize button in markup editor
> - Add label added to context menu of child content in collections and references
> - Open in new tab added to context menu of child content in collections and references
> - Lock status polling (configurable. off by default)

After

New features

- Inserted floating button bar
- Removed email support button from troubleshooting page
- Enabled content search by date range for created and last modified dates
- Added the **Quick Search** box (configurable, off by default), which always shows
- Added auto open cloned object (configurable, off by default)
- Enabled sharing of saved searches
- Added drag and drop to and from reference properties
- Added support for editing unmanaged external file properties
- Added tri-state confirmation box for administration tools when navigating away from unsaved changes
- Added typeahead to **Editor** field in search by user
- Enabled publish or unpublish child content from a collection property
- Updated my **Locked Content** left navigation module to expand—this allows you to select **All Locked Content**, **My Locked Content** or **Content locked by a specific user**
- Enabled section browser to refresh root sections when you collapse and expand the module
- Added **Ctrl+F** for find and replace in all text fields
- Moved event search link to a tab under **More search options**
- Renamed **Cancel** button to **Close** in the content edit form
- When you close the content, configured the home screen to appear if the previous view is not a data grid or scheduled task admin tool (which can be configured)
- Added a maximize button (**+**) in the markup editor
- Added label to context menu of child content in collections and references
- Added open in new tab to context menu of child content in collections and references
- Added lock status polling (configurable. off by default)

Example 7

REWRITE THIS PARAGRAPH

> The Headline News Service is an external stateless workflow driven REST service that performs many actions on the behalf of editors. The service provides easy social media credential management, performs the step by step processes necessary for curating breaking news within the CMS, and integrates with numerous external endpoints such as Bit.ly, Twitter, and Facebook. The rationale behind a separate service is to minimize the impact on the customer's content model, decouple the limitations of CMS listener events from workflow actions, and simplify the upgrade or hotfix process by allowing the CMS to remain always on.

PROBLEM

The main problem with this paragraph is the second sentence (in hot pink):

> The Headline News Service is an external stateless workflow driven REST service that performs many actions on the behalf of editors. The service provides easy social media credential management, performs the step by step processes necessary for curating breaking news within the CMS, and integrates with numerous external endpoints such as Bit.ly, Twitter, and Facebook. The rationale behind a separate service is to minimize the impact on the customer's content model, decouple the limitations of CMS listener events from workflow actions, and simplify the upgrade or hotfix process by allowing the CMS to remain always on.

In my opinion, the information in the highlighted sentence is better served by a list.

You could also make a case for a list in the last sentence, but we will leave it as-is in this exercise.

DISCUSSION

Make a list out of the second sentence. See the **Revision** section for the results.

REVISION

Before

The Breaking News Service is an external stateless workflow driven REST service that performs many actions on the behalf of editors. The service provides easy social media credential management, performs the step by step processes necessary for curating breaking news within the CMS, and integrates with numerous external endpoints such as Bit.ly, Twitter, and Facebook. The rationale behind a separate service is to minimize the impact on the customer's content model, decouple the limitations of CMS listener events from workflow actions, and simplify the upgrade or hotfix process by allowing the CMS to remain always on.

After

The Breaking News Service is an external stateless workflow-driven REST service that performs many actions on the behalf of editors. The service does the following:

- Provides easy social media credential management
- Performs the step-by-step processes necessary for curating breaking news in the CMS
- Integrates with numerous external endpoints such as Bit.ly, Twitter, and Facebook

The rationale behind a separate service is to minimize the impact on the customer's content model, decouple the limitations of CMS listener events from workflow actions, and simplify the upgrade or hotfix process by allowing the CMS to remain always on.

Example 8

REWRITE THIS PARAGRAPH

Review branding and UX standards for onboarding to FakeCorp ID, including the approval process and supporting roles/responsibilities prior to going live. Examples: Dual branding, logo presentation, copy text, field labels, font, button designs, color palette, background, etc.

PROBLEM

Fix these problems:

- Don't use bad shortcuts
- Don't use *for example* and *etc.* in the same context
- Make a bullet list of the examples
- Don't use *prior to*

DISCUSSION

Bad Shortcuts

Don't say this:

roles/responsibilities

Say this:

roles and responsibilities

Latin Phrases

Don't say this:

etc.

Say this:

and so on

Never begin a string of items with e.g., which means *for example*, and end the string of items with etc., which means *and so on*. Use one or the other. To use them both is redundant.

Lists

Don't say this:

> Examples: Dual branding, logo presentation, copy text, field labels, font, button designs, color palette, background, etc.

Say this:

> Pay close attention to the following:

- Dual branding
- Logo presentation
- Copy text
- Field labels
- Fonts
- Button designs
- Color palette
- Background

Usage

Don't say this:

> prior to

Say this:

> before

REVISION

Before

Review branding and UX standards for onboarding to FakeCorp ID, including the approval process and supporting roles/responsibilities prior to going live. Examples: Dual branding, logo presentation, copy text, field labels, font, button designs, color palette, background, etc.

After

Review the branding and UX standards for onboarding to FakeCorp ID, including the approval process and supporting roles and responsibilities before going live.

Pay close attention to the following:

- Dual branding
- Logo presentation
- Copy text
- Field labels
- Fonts
- Button designs
- Color palette
- Background

Example 9

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE AS A LIST

> These sections include a page header for all main FakeCorp ID UI pages, a value proposition on the create section of the login page, and value propositions above the marketing checkboxes and the legal terms-of-use checkboxes.

PROBLEM

This long sentence (38 words) calls out three items. It presents some readability problems.

First of all, the sentence is too long. Break it up to open up more white space. Second, whenever you have a sentence with three or more items, you should consider converting it to a list.

DISCUSSION

The first two items are singular:

- A page header
- A value proposition

For clarity, you need to add the article *A* or the article *The* before the first two bullet items.

The third item is plural:

- Value propositions above the marketing checkboxes and the legal terms-of-use checkboxes

The article *The* is optional for the plural items, but you might include *The* to ensure consistency.

REVISION

Before

These sections include a page header for all main FakeCorp ID UI pages, a value proposition on the create section of the login page, and value propositions above the marketing checkboxes and the legal terms-of-use checkboxes.

After

These sections include the following:

- A page header for all main FakeCorp ID UI pages
- A value proposition on the create section of the login page
- Value propositions above the marketing checkboxes and the legal terms-of-use checkboxes

Or

These sections include the following:

- A page header for all main FakeCorp ID UI pages
- A value proposition on the create section of the login page
- The value propositions above the marketing checkboxes and the legal terms-of-use checkboxes

Example 10

REWRITE THIS BULLET LIST

> With an existing or newly-created test account, inspect any of the available API methods. The methods fall into these categories:
>
> - **Event Management** – This page provides methods that handle the setting or clearing of event notifications.
> - **Initialization/Configuration** – This page provides methods that handle the initialization or configuration of the FakeCorpID Web instance.
> - **Registration** – This page provides methods that handle registration of a user's username or password.
> - **Session Management** – This page provides methods that handle session management.
> - **Account Recovery** – This page provides methods that handle recovery of a user's username or password.
> - **View/Edit User Info** – This page provides methods that handle reviewing or editing user data.

PROBLEM

Wordiness!

To begin each bullet point with *This page provides methods that handle* is repetitious and is deadening on the ears.

You need to pare down the words in the list to the bare minimum. Cut out the words *This page etc.* in each bullet point and begin with the verb.

DISCUSSION

For example, don't say this:

> **Event Management** – This page provides methods that handle the setting or clearing of event notifications.

Say this:

> **Event Management** – Sets or clears event notifications.

REVISION

Before

With an existing or newly-created test account, inspect any of the available API methods. The methods fall into these categories:

- **Event Management** – This page provides methods that handle the setting or clearing of event notifications.
- **Initialization/Configuration** – This page provides methods that handle the initialization or configuration of the FakeCorpID Web instance.
- **Registration** – This page provides methods that handle registration of a user's username or password.
- **Session Management** – This page provides methods that handle session management.
- **Account Recovery** – This page provides methods that handle recovery of a user's username or password.
- **View/Edit User Info** – This page provides methods that handle reviewing or editing user data.

After

With an existing or newly-created test account, inspect any of the available API methods. The methods fall into these categories:

- **Event Management** – Sets or clears event notifications.
- **Initialization/Configuration** – Initializes or configures the FakeCorpID Web instance.
- **Registration** – Registers a user's username or password.
- **Session Management** – Handles session management.
- **Account Recovery** – Recovers a user's username or password.
- **View/Edit User Info** – Reviews or edits user data.

Example 11

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> Residential development within the subarea would include medium-density and high-density housing options including apartments, condominiums, townhouses, cottage housing, small-lot detached single-family housing, and conventional standard detached single-family housing.

PROBLEM

This long sentence from an environmental impact statement can be divided easily. Let me show you how.

DISCUSSION

The sentence makes two statements:

- Residential development within the subarea would include medium-density and high-density housing options
- [these options include] apartments, condominiums, townhouses, cottage housing, small-lot detached single- family housing, and conventional standard detached single-family housing

Therefore, in your rewrite, write two sentences reflecting this division of content. Also, in your second sentence, create a list showing the different options in a more readable arrangement.

REVISION

Before

> Residential development within the subarea would include medium-density and high-density housing options including apartments, condominiums, townhouses, cottage housing, small-lot detached single-family housing, and conventional standard detached single-family housing.

After

> Residential development within the subarea would include medium-density and high-density housing options. These options include:

- Apartments
- Condominiums
- Townhouses
- Cottage housing
- Small-lot detached single-family housing
- Conventional standard detached single-family housing

Can Do Something

IMPORTANT: This topic is about **can do something**. However, all of the following examples contain discussions of multiple subjects—not just *can do something*. Therefore, in addition to *can do something*, you are going to learn a lot of different things about good writing and rewriting.

Example 1

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

It can deliver content based on device-specific context and access type.

PROBLEM

Instead of saying:

It can deliver content

say:

It delivers content.

DISCUSSION

Use direct speech. Saying you *can do* something could be construed as an option.

Suppose you need to order someone to drive to Seattle to pick up a package at the home office. You don't say, *You can drive to Seattle and pick up the package.* You say, *Drive to Seattle and pick up the package.* Do you see the difference? Remember, procedures are more like giving orders than making suggestions.

Statements that are less than clear cut are a problem when your documentation is translated into other languages. Translators like unambiguous statements.

REVISION

Before

It can deliver content based on device-specific context and access type.

After

It delivers content based on device-specific context and access type.

Example 2

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> You can configure the spinner size and color to complement the specified color and graphic theme.

PROBLEM

In technical writing, we tell people what to do and how to do it. When you put this particular sentence back into its original context in the documentation, it is obvious the user *must* make configuration changes. It is not an option. Therefore, we should not phrase it as a suggestion if the user is in the mood to make changes.

DISCUSSION

Avoid the helping verb *can* as much as possible. Use the main verb and skip the *can* construction in situations where the user does not have options.

Use plain speech and be direct.

REVISION

Before

You can configure the spinner size and color to complement the specified color and graphic theme.

After

Configure the spinner size and color to complement the specified color and graphic theme.

Example 3

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> If you do not need to notify a user you are deleting the account mapping, you can call the `guestAccountMapping` API using the optional query parameter `overwrite`.

PROBLEM

The problem part of the sentence follows the comma. Currently, the independent clause of the sentence looks like this:

> You can call the `guestAccountMapping` API using the optional query parameter `overwrite`.

DISCUSSION

Can Do Something

Don't use the *can do something* construction if you are commanding the user to perform an action. Skip the word *can* and simply use the main verb. In this sentence, the main verb is *to call*.

Word Order in a Procedure

Start by instructing the user to pick up the tool to use. In this sentence, the tool is the optional query `parameter overwrite`. Say this:

> Use the optional query `parameter overwrite` to call [blah blah blah].

REVISION

Before

> If you do not need to notify a user you are deleting the account mapping, you can call the `guestAccountMapping` API using the optional query parameter `overwrite`.

After

> If you do not need to notify a user you are deleting the account mapping, use the optional query parameter `overwrite` to call the `guestAccountMapping` API.

Example 4

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> Business units that want to suppress a partial profile update from being triggered whenever there is a change in marketing lists available, can do so by setting the `ppuRule` attribute in their client configuration.

PROBLEM

This sentence is nearly incoherent. We need to isolate the component parts of the example sentence, and then reconstruct the whole shebang.

DISCUSSION

Simple Sentences

What are the component parts of the example sentence? Here is the break-out:

- Marketing list changes trigger partial profile updates.
- What do you do if you want to avoid triggering a partial profile update when there is a change?
- A business unit sets the `ppuRule` attribute in its client configuration.

Word Order

Start with a simple statement of fact:

Marketing list changes trigger partial profile updates.

For the rest of the sentence, begin with this dependent clause:

To avoid triggering a partial profile update when there is a change

Add a comma at the end of the dependent clause, and then finish with this independent clause:

a business unit sets the `ppuRule` attribute in its client configuration.

Can Do Something

Don't say this:

>   Business units … can do so by setting….

Say this:

>   …a business unit sets….

NOTE: I changed the subject from *business units* (plural) to *a business unit* (singular) because, collectively, business units do not set attributes. Each individual business unit sets its own attributes.

REVISION

Before

>   Business units that want to suppress a partial profile update from being triggered whenever there is a change in marketing lists available, can do so by setting the `ppuRule` attribute in their client configuration.

After

>   Marketing list changes trigger partial profile updates. To avoid triggering a partial profile update when there is a change, a business unit sets the `ppuRule` attribute in its client configuration.

Example 5

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> Tree fields can be configured via custom metadata `searchLeavesOnly` to only search for tree leaves when using the `typeahead`.

PROBLEM

I see four problems with the example sentence:

- Can do something
- Latin phrases
- Passive voice
- Word order

DISCUSSION

Can Do Something

I can do lots of things if I am in the mood. For example, I can run for president in 2016. After all, I was born in the USA and I am way over the minimum age. I may or may not do that. I'll have to think about it.

Do you see my point?

Look once more at the example sentence:

> Tree fields can be configured via custom metadata `searchLeavesOnly` to only search for tree leaves when using the `typeahead`.

To say you *can do something* indicates you have some sort of option. But where is the option here? Is there more than one way to configure the tree fields? Actually, no. There is only one way to configure the tree fields. You do it by using the custom metadata `searchLeavesOnly`.

Latin Phrases

Technically, this is not a "problem." It is my editorial preference to use English words instead of Latin phrases. Using Latin phrases is OK in many if not most work organizations. Follow the style standards of your organization.

If authors always used Latin phrases correctly, I would not have any complaints. However, many authors obviously don't know the correct meanings of *etc.*, *i.e.*, *e.g.*, and *via*. I get tired of making changes. In my work organization, I tell my authors not to use Latin phrases. That way our readers are never befuddled by the misuse of a Latin phrase.

Passive Voice

The user is the actor in this configuration drama. Make the user the subject of the sentence. Setting the sentence in the active voice is especially important because in this example you are writing a procedure. I cannot think of any situation where it is better to put a procedure in the passive voice.

Word Order

When writing a procedure, I think it is preferable to set the stage before you tell the reader what to do. For example, to save a document, you need to tell the reader to go to the **File** menu on the user interface first. Similarly, you tell the reader what tool to use first before you tell him or her what to do with the tool.

So, in this example, set the stage first. Say this:

> To only search for tree leaves when using the typeahead,

Before you give the procedure:

> use custom metadata `searchLeavesOnly` to configure tree fields.

REVISION

Before

> Tree fields can be configured via custom metadata `searchLeavesOnly` to only search for tree leaves when using the typeahead.

After

> To only search for tree leaves when using the typeahead, use custom metadata `searchLeavesOnly` to configure tree fields.

Example 6

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

You can download the latest ContentMigratorDeployment.zip from on the Content Migrator 4.2 page.

PROBLEM

When giving explicit instructions to a user, skip the c*an do something* construction.

DISCUSSION

What's the different between *You can do something* and *do something*? The first sentence sounds like you have an option. The second is a command.

Sometimes, the *can do something* construction presents localization problems because, in some cultures, users are confused by what seems like an ambiguous statement. When you write a mandatory procedure, do not leave any doubt. Make a command sound like a command.

REVISION

Before

You can download the latest ContentMigratorDeployment.zip from on the Content Migrator 4.2 page.

After

Download the latest ContentMigratorDeployment.zip from on the Content Migrator 4.2 page.

Capitalization

IMPORTANT: This topic is about **capitalization**. However, all of the following examples contain discussions of multiple subjects—not just capitalization. Therefore, in addition to capitalization, you are going to learn a lot of different things about good writing and rewriting.

Example 1

REWRITE THESE SENTENCES

The following section provides most of the information you need for the service used by your Business Unit (BU).

FakeCorp maintains a Suppression List containing the email addresses of users who indicate they don't want to get any more promotional email from a particular line of business.

EVA Server mediates the communication with AuthenticationPlus in the case of Token Generation.

Defining the correct metrics enables us and the BU to measure and track use of the service according to the Taxonomy, which in turn supports the ongoing management of the service.

The refresh also updates the Cached Guest Data in in the CorpID Session.

PROBLEM

These words should not be capitalized:

- business unit
- suppression list
- server
- token generation
- taxonomy
- cached guest data
- session

DISCUSSION

Why Capitalization Should be Kept to a Minimum

Do not capitalize any more than is absolutely necessary. Use lowercase unless there is a specific reason for uppercase.

There are two reasons why we want to minimize capitalization.

- Excessive capitalization impairs readability. Unnecessary capitalization makes text more difficult to read. When text is difficult to read, users have a tendency to skip hard-to-read passages, skim the text, or quit reading entirely. You want to avoid these outcomes.
- Excessive capitalization can be a problem with localization. If there is excessive capitalization, in-house translators or vendors might need more time for translations.

When We Capitalize

We capitalize:

- Proper names
- Specified product names
- The feature or technology name if there is a marketing or branding campaign around the name

When We Do Not Capitalize

We do not capitalize:

- General references to ordinary software tools
- General references to an area on the user interface—not to the specific UI feature
- General references to a software process—not to the specific process that might have a formal name

Why the Following Words Are Not Capitalized

- **business unit**—This a general reference to a business unit.
- **suppression list**—We are talking generally about the suppression list as part of an overall process description. We are not referring to a specific suppression list, nor are we talking about the words *suppression list* as a specific feature on the user interface. Thus, suppression list is all lower case in this sentence.
- **server**, **token generation**—EVA is a type of software. It is an actual product name, The word *server* is not part of the product name; therefore, it is lower case. Do not capitalize *token generation*. In this sentence, we have a general reference to the process of token generation.
- **taxonomy**—Basically, a *taxonomy* is a way to group things together. In this sentence, the word *taxonomy* is not capitalized because it is not a proper name and it is not a specific product name. It refers to the concept of taxonomy.
- **cached guest data**, **session**—We have a general reference to the *cached guest data*. This is not a proper name or a product name. The word *session* is not a proper name or a product name in this context. It should be lower case.

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REVISIONS

Before

> The following section provides most of the information you need for the service used by your Business Unit (BU).
>
> FakeCorp maintains a Suppression List containing the email addresses of users who indicate they don't want to get any more promotional email from a particular line of business.
>
> EVA Server mediates the communication with AuthenticationPlus in the case of Token Generation.
>
> Defining the correct metrics enables us and the BU to measure and track use of the service according to the Taxonomy, which in turn supports the ongoing management of the service.
>
> The refresh also updates the Cached Guest Data in in the CorpID Session.

After

> The following section provides most of the information you need for the service used by your business unit (BU).
>
> FakeCorp maintains a suppression list containing the email addresses of users who indicate they don't want to get any more promotional email from a particular line of business.
>
> EVA server mediates the communication with AuthenticationPlus in the case of token generation.
>
> Defining the correct metrics enables us and the BU to measure and track use of the service according to the taxonomy, which in turn supports the ongoing management of the service.
>
> The refresh also updates the cached guest data in in the CorpID session.

REMARKS

The style rules for capitalization in software documentation are rarely understood by the persons who author most of the initial documentation—the computer programmers and software engineers. Since they do not understand the industry-accepted guidelines for capitalization, these authors have a lamentable tendency to over-capitalize. If the software tool, product, or process is important, it probably warrants capitalization.

A lot of engineers take this approach: When in doubt, make it upper case.

People not versed in the rules of documentation style tend to capitalize things they think are important. For example, if you are sending your kids to college because you spend years of your life working on a software tool called *suppressionlist*, you might think it is reasonable to call it Suppression List.

Then there is pride of authorship. Now that you decide Suppression List is appropriate, you might not appreciate some English major telling you it is incorrect. Consequently, the technical writer, who comes late to the party, may face stiff resistance when enforcing industry standards about capitalization.

Writers and editors—my advice to you is to enforce the industry standards to the best of your ability, but do not go to war over capitalization. It's not worth it. Pick your battles. No one ever died because a word was incorrectly capitalized or incorrectly made all lower case.

Example 2

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> In most computer programming languages, a boolean data type is a data type with only two possible values: true or false.

PROBLEM

The word *boolean* is all lower case.

DISCUSSION

Boolean should always be initial-capped because it is named after a person, the English mathematician George Boole.

There is an exception to the rule in software documentation. When you refer to the data type Boolean as it appears in a specific line of code, and the actual word in code is all lower case, do not capitalize it. Often the referenced word *Boolean* is set in Courier font in the text to distinguish it from the other words.

REVISION

Before

> In most computer programming languages, a boolean data type is a data type with only two possible values: true or false.

After

> In most computer programming languages, a Boolean data type is a data type with only two possible values: true or false.

Example 3

REWRITE THESE SENTENCES

> The error_description is the data block that comes with the error. IF it is appropriate, this block usually contains a guest object. If it is NOT appropriate, this data block contains appropriate information to fix the error.

PROBLEM

There is nothing wrong with these three sentences. You do not need to rewrite anything.

Oh, wait. Did you notice the two words in all upper case letters, IF and NOT? Do you feel someone is shouting at you?

DISCUSSION

Most style guides frown on the practice of using all caps for emphasis. Use italic type.

REVISION

Before

> The error_description is the data block that comes with the error. IF it is appropriate, this block usually contains a guest object. If it is NOT appropriate, this data block contains appropriate information to fix the error.

After

> The error_description is the data block that comes with the error. *If* it is appropriate, this block usually contains a guest object. If it is *not* appropriate, this data block contains appropriate information to fix the error.

Example 4

> Both filters should be added to your service, with the Token Validation Filter handling the request first, and then passing it on to the Token Scope Filter.
>
> Awesome Technologies has upgraded the capabilities of the FakeApp Server … If the FakeApp Server successfully validates the assertion, the response is the standard authorization response, including a refresh token.

PROBLEM

We capitalize the feature or technology name if there is a marketing or branding campaign around the name. Otherwise, do not initial-cap ordinary software tools.

DISCUSSION

In the first example, the token validation filter and the token scope filter are just tools and don't merit initial caps. Both terms should be all lower case.

In the second example, Awesome Technologies has a device called the FakeApp Server. You see the marketing language in the first part of the quote. The word *Server* is capitalized for branding reasons. Much later in the document (after the ellipses), the author describes the actions of the FakeApp server. At this point, we are talking about a software tool.

Technical writers and technical editors must understand the rules for capitalization and enforce those rules. Some engineers love to capitalize their nouns. Don't let them get away with it.

Capitalization can be a big issue for localization as translators and international editors are forced to clean up excessive capitalization for their target audiences. It's an unnecessary waste of your company's time and money.

REVISIONS

Before

Both filters should be added to your service, with the Token Validation Filter handling the request first, and then passing it on to the Token Scope Filter.

Awesome Technologies has upgraded the capabilities of the FakeApp Server … If the FakeApp Server successfully validates the assertion, the response is the standard authorization response, including a refresh token.

After

Both filters should be added to your service, with the token validation filter handling the request first, and then passing it on to the token scope filter.

Awesome Technologies has upgraded the capabilities of the FakeApp Server … If the FakeApp server successfully validates the assertion, the response is the standard authorization response, including a refresh token.

Example 5

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> Data Solutions is a set of services that allows users to Ingest, Store and Access, Transform, and Manage their data via a set of REST APIs.

PROBLEM

Capitalization in this sentence is a problem. Data Solutions is a brand. It should be capitalized. REST stands for representational state transfer (REST) based communications. It is always all caps.

These words should be all lower case:

- ingest
- store and access
- transform
- manage

DISCUSSION

The words *ingest*, *store* and *access*, *transform*, and *manage* are simply verbs in the infinitive form:

- to ingest
- [to] store and access
- [to] transform
- [to] manage

They should not be capitalized.

Also, we need to replace the Latin phrase *via* with *by using*.

REVISION

Before

Data Solutions is a set of services that allows users to Ingest, Store and Access, Transform, and Manage their data via a set of REST APIs.

After

Data Solutions is a set of services that allows users to ingest, store and access, transform, and manage their data by using a set of REST APIs.

Example 6

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> If you were utilizing an iPhone app, the delivery profile would be the device id combined with an app id.

PROBLEM

Usage:

utilizing

Capitalization:

id (twice)

Present vs. Past / Perfect Tenses (see the bold type):

If you were utilizing an iPhone app, **the delivery profile would be** the device id combined with an app id.

DISCUSSION

Don't use *utilizing* or *utilization* if you can avoid it. The words *use* (verb) and *use* (noun) or *usage* (noun) mean the same thing.

ID is the correct abbreviation for identification.

Instead of saying *if you were*, say *if you are*. Instead of saying *the delivery profile would be*, say *the delivery profile is*. Avoid the perfect tense. Use the present tense.

REVISION

Before

If you were utilizing an iPhone app, the delivery profile would be the device id combined with an app id.

After

If you use an iPhone app, the delivery profile is the device ID combined with an app ID.

Example 7

REWRITE THESE SENTENCES AND THE BULLET LIST

A Feature Gap can be anything that the FakeCorp ID product does not currently support. A Feature Request is called a "DISDKAN". DISDKANs are logged when the Feature meets any of the following criteria:

- Will take more than 12 hours to complete; or
- Requires stakeholder visibility (e.g. Legal compliance, business unit feature request, etc); or
- Requires multiple teams to deliver

PROBLEM

Fix these problems:

- Can do something
- Capitalization
- Latin phrases
- Parallelism
- Passive voice
- Punctuation
- Usage
- Word order

DISCUSSION

Can Do Something

Don't say this:

A Feature Gap can be anything….

Say this:

A Feature Gap is anything….

Capitalization

In the FakeCorp software documentation, it is clear that the phrases *feature gap* and *feature request* are not product names, nor are they phrases belonging to a larger branding campaign of FakeCorp Marketing. The words are ordinary software terminology. There is no reason to make these words initial capped. Leave both phrases all lower case.

Also, the word *legal* does not need capitalization in this instance because it a generic reference to legal requirements, not to the Legal department.

Latin Phrases

Never use the Latin phrase *e.g.* and the Latin phrase *etc.* together in the same context!

Parallelism

The bullet list does not have parallel grammatical construction. Don't say this:

- Will take
- Requires
- Requires

Say this:

- Takes
- Requires
- Requires

Passive Voice

Don't say this:

> DISDKANs are logged….

Say this:

> Log the DISDKANs….

Punctuation

Make these fixes:

- Remove the quotation marks from DISDKAN
- Add a comma after e.g.
- Add a period after etc

Usage

When you build a bullet list, don't end bullet items with ; *or* . Just write the bullet items—with no end punctuation, if possible. However, remember that if one bullet item takes end punctuation, all bullet items must have end punctuation.

Word Order

Don't say this:

> A feature gap is anything that the FakeCorp ID product does not currently support.

Say this:

> A feature gap is anything that the FakeCorp ID product does not support currently.

For the word order of *currently*, there is this exception. If you want to emphasize the fact it is now supported—as opposed to being unsupported in the past—inset the word *currently* into the middle of the verb form. By breaking up the verb form, you draw attention to the word *currently*.

REVISION

Before

> A Feature Gap can be anything that the FakeCorp ID product does not currently support. A Feature Request is called a "DISDKAN". DISDKANs are logged when the Feature meets any of the following criteria:
>
> * Will take more than 12 hours to complete; or
> * Requires stakeholder visibility (e.g. Legal compliance, business unit feature request, etc); or
> * Requires multiple teams to deliver

After

> A feature gap is anything that the FakeCorp ID product does not support currently. A feature request is called a DISDKAN. Log the DISDKANs when the feature meets any of the following criteria:
>
> * Takes more than 12 hours to complete
> * Requires stakeholder visibility (For example, legal compliance and business unit feature request)
> * Requires multiple teams to deliver

Example 8

> Prior to completing an onboarding request and being approved for onboarding to FakeCorp ID, Business Units should have gone through the READ process with Legal.

PROBLEM

These issues:

- Capitalization
- Perfect tenses and present vs. past—these issues are related
- Usage

DISCUSSION

Capitalization

The phrase *business units* should be all lowercase. It is not a product name or a proper name.

It is correct to capitalize the word *Legal*. This is a reference to the corporate Legal department.

Perfect Tenses, Present vs. Past

Don't say this:

should have gone through

Say this:

should go through

Be direct and use the present tense.

Usage

The word *before* is preferable to *prior to*.

On the subject of *prior to* vs. *before*, this comes from the Language Usage Weblog:

> Today's first tip is about a controversial phrase, 'prior to.' The debate is about whether the phrase is grammatically correct since 'prior' is an adjective. As Rhett Butler said, "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn." There's a simple reason that 'prior to' should be used only sparingly, and it has nothing to do with grammar and prepositional phrases and the like. It is this: 'prior to' is pretentious and wordy. Why use 'prior to' when 'before' is a perfectly good word just waiting to be used? Lovers of language have this to say about the use of 'prior to:'
>
> *Bill Bryson*—There is no difference between the two except length and a certain inescapable affectedness on the part of prior to.
>
> *Jack Lynch*—For a less stuffy and bureaucratic tone, replace prior to or prior with before or earlier whenever possible.
>
> *H.W. Fowler*—Previous to and prior to are grammatically blameless, but that does not justify their use as substitutes for before because they are thought to be grander or more genteel.

REVISION

Before

> Prior to completing an onboarding request and being approved for onboarding to FakeCorp ID, Business Units should have gone through the READ process with Legal.

After

> Before you complete an onboarding request and get approval for onboarding to FakeCorp ID, business units should go through the READ process with Legal.

Example 9

SHOULD THESE JOB TITLES BE CAPITALIZED?

Contact your FakeCorp Solutions Engineer for help.

As the first African American president in the long history of the law review, Obama drew widespread media attention and a contract from Random House to write a book about race relations.

The last president to use the Oval Office regularly for desk work may have been John F. Kennedy.

PROBLEM

All three sentences contain job titles:

- Solutions Engineer
- President
- president

Are there any errors in capitalization?

DISCUSSION

From the website Your Dictionary, here are the basic rules for capitalization:

Rules for Capitalization of Job Titles

The easiest rules to remember are:

- Capitalize a job title that comes *before* the person's name. Example would be: Professor Plum or Reverend Green. The title might give more information, like: Dean of Students Harry Houdini, Speaker of the House Thomas Thumb, or Chairman Scarlett.
- If the job title comes right *after* the person's name then it is capitalized, as in: Sarah Smith, Chairman, will attend the meeting.

In signature lines at the end of a letter or email, the job title would be capitalized, like:

Sincerely,

Mary Contrary, President

If a job title is not preceded or followed by a person's name, it may still be capitalized, if it is used as a name. For example: "I saw the Prime Minister today." In this case, it is being used as name and not a general kind of job, as in "We have had eleven prime ministers in this century."

To summarize the capitalization of job titles, you capitalize the job title when it comes immediately before the name or immediately after the name. It is not capitalized if it comes after the name if there is a "the" before it.

Here are some examples of these rules in sentences:

- Colonel Mustard killed Mr. Boddy.
- Professor of Archeology Bill Diggs is looking for Atlantis.
- Mr. Waters, President of Neverland, will give a speech.
- Mrs. Butterworth, the chairwoman of Pancakes Anonymous, is retiring.
- Will Writealot, who was the managing editor, got fired.
- Did you see the Queen of England at the party?

Another rule of capitalization of job titles concerns abbreviations. Doctor Seuss would be Dr. Seuss and General Grant would be Gen. Grant. So the rule could be: capitalize job titles or abbreviations that come immediately before or after a person's name.

* * * * * * * * * *

Example Sentence 1 – Incorrect

The job title *solutions engineer* is not capitalized. Why? In this sentence, the job title is simply a generic reference. It is not tied to a specific individual.

Example Sentence 2 – Correct

It is correct to say:

- President Barack Obama
- Barack Obama, President

However, the lack of capitalization in this example sentence is correct. The word *president* should be lower case. Why? Because the phrase *African American president* is merely descriptive. It does not represent a formal job title.

Example Sentence 3 – Correct

The word *president* is not capitalized. Why? This is a general reference to those who held the presidential office. Of all those presidents, JFK is the one who actually used the Oval Office for day-to-day work. The other presidents, not so much.

REVISION

Before

Contact your FakeCorp Solutions Engineer for help.

As the first African American president in the long history of the law review, Obama drew widespread media attention and a contract from Random House to write a book about race relations.

The last president to use the Oval Office regularly for desk work may have been John F. Kennedy.

After

Contact your FakeCorp solutions engineer for help.

As the first African American president in the long history of the law review, Obama drew widespread media attention and a contract from Random House to write a book about race relations. [no change]

The last president to use the Oval Office regularly for desk work may have been John F. Kennedy. [no change]

Deconstructing a Long Sentence

IMPORTANT: This topic is about **deconstructing a long sentence**. However, all of the following examples contain discussions of multiple subjects—not just deconstructing a long sentence. Therefore, in addition to deconstructing a long sentence, you are going to learn a lot of different things about good writing and rewriting.

Example 1

When you see an extremely long and complicated sentence, don't despair! Every long sentence has component parts. The key to good rewriting is to focus entirely on the component parts of the sentence. Once you learn how to do that, you will be amazed how it easy it is to write effectively for your intended audience.

Take this long-winded sentence:

> Typically, the opt-in list is populated when a guest registers or chooses to enter a promotional sweepstakes or contests, and the guest submits a form on which are a number of items that include a variety of email choices, which are usually pre-checked by default.

Step 1: Capture the entire sentence and paste it into a worksheet

Step 2: Strip out the component parts

- Identify the component parts
- One by one, paste the component parts into a bullet list

Here is my list of component parts for the example sentence:

- Typically, the opt-in list is populated when a guest registers
- [Typically, the opt-in list is populated when a guest] chooses to enter a promotional sweepstakes or contests
- the guest submits a form on which are a number of items that include a variety of email choices
- [a variety of email choices] which are usually pre-checked by default.

See how easy it is to do that?

Step 3: Reconstruct each component part as a simple sentence

- *Component part 1:* Typically, the opt-in list is populated when a guest registers

This sentence is OK as-is. Don't change anything.

> Typically, the opt-in list is populated when a guest registers.

- *Component part 2:* [Typically, the opt-in list is populated when a guest] chooses to enter a promotional sweepstakes or contests

This sentence has the same subject (in brackets) as the first component part. You can rewrite the second component part this way:

> Also, the list is populated when the guest chooses to enter a promotional sweepstakes or contests.

- *Component part 3:* the guest submits a form on which are a number of items that include a variety of email choices

This component part is OK. Leave it alone:

> The guest submits a form on which are a number of items that include a variety of email choices.

- *Component part 4:* [a variety of email choices] which are usually pre-checked by default.

Say this:

> Usually, these email choices are pre-checked by default.

Step 4: Reassemble the content into a sequence of simple sentences

By focusing exclusively on the component parts, the rewriting project is much easier. Here is my final version:

> Typically, the opt-in list is populated when a guest registers. Also, the list is populated when the guest chooses to enter a promotional sweepstakes or contests. The guest submits a form on which are a number of items that include a variety of email choices. Usually, these email choices are pre-checked by default.

Summary of Steps

- Capture the entire sentence and paste it into a worksheet
- Strip out the component parts
- Reconstruct each component part as a simple sentence
- Reassemble the content into a sequence of simple sentences

One final note. The rewritten version has almost the same language as the original. However, by breaking the original sentence into four simple sentences, the fog index dropped from 23 years of education to just 11 years. Eleven years of education is an ideal reading level for software documentation.

FINAL REMARKS ON DECONSTRUCTING LONG SENTENCES

After you do this a few times, you won't need to copy and paste to a worksheet. You will start doing this in your head. You'll be able to identify the component parts of the sentence and you'll be making your changes on the fly.

Example 2

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE:

> If client site A requires FAKECORP-TOU and ppV2, and a user creates an account and accepts these two legally required documents, and the user goes to log into client site B with that same account and client site B requires DI-COOKIEPOLICY-NL and ppV2, the system prompts the user to accept DI-COOKIEPOLICY-NL on that login to comply with the legal requirements for logging in to client site B.

PROBLEM

The example sentence is 66 words long! It has a reading level of 31 years of education! **Break it up into shorter sentences.**

DISCUSSION

Here is how you deconstruct a long sentence:

- Capture the entire sentence and paste it into a worksheet
- Strip out the component parts
- Reconstruct each component part as a simple sentence
- Reassemble the content into a sequence of simple sentences

So, here we go.

The author lays out an elaborate set of circumstances before getting to the action in the sentence. Here is the setup:

- If client site A requires FAKECORP-TOU and ppV2
- [if] a user creates an account and accepts these two legally required documents
- [if] the user goes to log into client site B with that same account
- [if] client site B requires DI-COOKIEPOLICY-NL and ppV2

The example sentence takes 43 words just to lay out all the conditions! Obviously, that is a lot of information to process.

Using the previous deconstruction formula, I suggest our example sentence logically contains three major component parts. The first two components lay out all the conditions. The third component explains the action:

- [suppose] the client site A requires FAKECORP-TOU and ppV2, and a user creates an account and accepts these two legally required documents

- the user then goes to log into client site B with that same account and client site B responds by requiring DI-COOKIEPOLICY-NL and ppV2
- the system prompts the user to accept DI-COOKIEPOLICY-NL on that login to comply with the legal requirements for logging in to client site B

Also, for clarity, add a brief introductory sentence before you write the three component parts. Say something like this:

Here is an example scenario.

REVISION

Before

> If client site A requires FAKECORP-TOU, and ppV2, and a user creates an account, and accepts these two legally required documents, and the user goes to log into client site B with that same account and client site B requires DI-COOKIEPOLICY-NL and ppV2, the system prompts the user to accept DI-COOKIEPOLICY-NL on that login to comply with the legal requirements for logging in to client site B.

After

> Here is an example scenario. Suppose the client site A requires FAKECORP-TOU and ppV2, and a user creates an account and accepts these two legally required documents. The user then goes to log into client site B with that same account and client site B responds by requiring DI-COOKIEPOLICY-NL and ppV2. In that situation, the system prompts the user to accept DI-COOKIEPOLICY-NL on that login to comply with the legal requirements for logging in to client site B.

Or

> Here is an example scenario. Suppose you have this chain of events:
>
> - Client site A requires FAKECORP-TOU and ppV2
> - A user creates an account and accepts these two legally required documents
> - The user then goes to log into client site B with that same account
> - Client site B responds by requiring DI-COOKIEPOLICY-NL and ppV2
>
> In that situation, the system prompts the user to accept DI-COOKIEPOLICY-NL on that login to comply with the legal requirements for logging in to client site B.

COMMENT

The reading level now is 13 years of education as sentences or 11 years as a combination of sentences and a list.

Example 3

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE:

> The intent of the compliance section is to provide the UI with all the information it needs to know, and what fields are required on user forms as well as what fields can be edited once during an action or not at all.

PROBLEM

This meandering passive-voice sentence can be divided into three shorter sentences.

DISCUSSION

Here is how you deconstruct a long sentence:

- Capture the entire sentence and paste it into a worksheet.
- Strip out the component parts.
- Reconstruct each component part as a simple sentence.
- Reassemble the content into a sequence of simple sentences.

OK, let's do that.

Here are your three component parts:

- The intent of the compliance section is to provide the UI with all the required information.
- For example, it indicates what fields are required on user forms.
- Also, it tells you what fields you can or cannot edit during an action.

Word Order

Don't say this:

> …what fields can be edited once during an action or not at all.

Say this:

> …what fields you can or cannot edit during an action.

Anthropomorphisms

The author is attributing human qualities to (a) the compliance section and (b) the user interface (UI) by saying this:

The intent of the compliance section is to provide the UI with all the information it needs to know….

This figure of speech is called an *anthropomorphism*. These are the anthropomorphic characteristics:

- The compliance section has an intent to provide
- The UI has all the information it needs to know

We are talking about computer operations here, not people. Avoid anthropomorphic usage in your technical writing.

Don't say this:

> The intent of the compliance section is to provide the UI with all the information it needs to know.

Say this:

> Use the compliance section to provide the UI with all the required information.

REVISION

Before

> The intent of the compliance section is to provide the UI with all the information it needs to know, and what fields are required on user forms as well as what fields can be edited once during an action or not at all.

After

> Use the compliance section to provide the UI with all the required information. For example, the compliance section indicates what fields are required on user forms. Also, it tells you what fields you can or cannot edit during an action.

Direct Speech

IMPORTANT: This topic is about **direct speech**. However, all of the following examples contain discussions of multiple subjects—not just direct speech. Therefore, in addition to direct speech, you are going to learn a lot of different things about good writing and rewriting.

Example 1

REWRITE THIS PARAGRAPH

When a page which uses the SnappyApp is browsed to or refreshed, and if *hiddenAutoLogin* is turned on, then it will attempt to check the logged-in state of the user, and if the user needs to be logged in, it will automatically sign them in. When this is complete the SnappyApp will call the *loginSuccess* function. This function may modify the webpage to display a logged-in state, but sometimes this process takes some time. To prevent a user from temporarily seeing a logged-out state before being logged in, we recommend using code similar to this.

[a block of code follows]

PROBLEM

Here are the problems

- Fix the convoluted, roundabout language—we need to use direct speech in the active voice.
- Replace *which* with *that.*
- Fix the run-on sentences—break long sentences into shorter sentences.
- Instead of making a recommendation, simply tell the reader what to do. Recommendations and polite suggestions might be interpreted as optional.

DISCUSSION

The following revision speaks for itself.

REVISION

Before

> When a page which uses the SnappyApp is browsed to or refreshed, and if*hiddenAutoLogin* is turned on, then it will attempt to check the logged-in state of the user, and if the user needs to be logged in, it will automatically sign them in. When this is complete the SnappyApp will call the *loginSuccess* function. This function may modify the webpage to display a logged-in state, but sometimes this process takes some time. To prevent a user from temporarily seeing a logged-out state before being logged in, we recommend using code similar to this.

> [a block of code follows]

After

> When the user opens or refreshes a page that uses SnappyApp, and *hiddenAutoLogin* is turned on, the system checks the logged-in state of the user. If the user is not logged in, the system does that automatically. SnappyApp then calls the *loginSuccess* function. This function modifies the webpage to indicate the user is logged in. However, there may be a long wait before the user gets the message he or she is actually logged in. To ensure the user does not see a logged-out state before being logged in, use the following code.

> [a block of code follows]

Or if you use the second-person singular (*You*)

> When you open or refresh a page that uses SnappyApp, and *hiddenAutoLogin* is turned on, the system checks your logged-in state. If you are not logged in, the system does that automatically. SnappyApp then calls the *loginSuccess* function. This function modifies the webpage to indicate you are logged in. However, there may be a long wait before you get the message you are actually logged in. To ensure you do not see a logged-out state before being logged in, use the following code.

> [a block of code follows]

Example 2

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> The second example shows how the URI might look after you have replaced the appropriate values and included the required HTML-formatted @ symbol in the URL.

PROBLEM

Don't say, *have replaced … and [have] included….*

Say, *replace … and include….*

DISCUSSION

Be direct with your reader. Don't fill up your sentences with weaselly language. Use the present tense whenever possible!

See the **Revision** section for the rewrite.

REVISION

Before

> The second example shows how the URI might look after you have replaced the appropriate values and included the required HTML-formatted @ symbol in the URL.

After

> The second example shows how the URI might look after you replace the appropriate values and include the required HTML-formatted @ symbol in the URL.

Example 3

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> Any persisted data should be saved and the update retried using the eTag
> returned by the get call.

PROBLEM

The author is giving a command in the most roundabout way imaginable. The author's use
of the passive voice lacks forcefulness.

Also, we have two code references (`eTag` and `get`). We need to put those words in
monospace type.

DISCUSSION

When you give a command, begin with the tool:

Use the `eTag` returned by the `get` call [to do something].

Always use the active voice when you write a command.

REVISION

Before

Any persisted data should be saved and the update retried using the eTag returned
by the get call.

After

Use the `eTag` returned by the `get` call to save any persisted data and retry the
update.

Example 4

> The second example shows how the URI might look after you have replaced the appropriate values.

PROBLEM

The shortest distance between two points is a straight line. This sentence violates that principle in two places (in brackets):

> The second example shows how the URI [might look] after you [have replaced] the appropriate values.

DISCUSSION

might look

Don't say this:

> The second example shows how the URI **might look**….

Say this:

> The second example shows how the URI **looks**….

COMMENT: Don't turn a straightforward descriptive sentence into a conditional statement—unless you are describing a true conditional situation. Use the present tense.

have replaced

Don't say this:

> …after you **have replaced** the appropriate values.

Say this:

> …after you **replace** the appropriate values.

COMMENT: Whenever possible, use direct, present-tense speech when you communicate with your readers.

REVISION

Before

   The second example shows how the URI might look after you have replaced the appropriate values.

After

   The second example shows how the URI looks after you replace the appropriate values.

Example 5

REWRITE THIS PARAGRAPH

NTA is an environment that you configure to have visibility to the network flow data that the devices in your network provide. NTA out-of-the-box provides the potential for network flow data collection, analysis, and reporting and you realize this potential through your configuration of NTA. This requires an understanding network flow records, the devices in your environment that generate network flow records, and how to configure NTA to process the data and present the reports you need.

PROBLEM

The example paragraph is poorly written because the author does not speak plainly. See the **Discussion** section.

DISCUSSION

Let's lay out these three sentences and examine them one by one.

Sentence 1

NTA is an environment that you configure to have visibility to the network flow data that the devices in your network provide.

This sentence is very awkward. Here is a clear rewrite.

NTA enables you to view the network flow data provided by the devices in your network.

Sentence 2

NTA out-of-the-box provides the potential for network flow data collection, analysis, and reporting and you realize this potential through your configuration of NTA.

More awkwardness. Here is a better way to say it.

Out-of-the-box configuration of NTA provides the potential of network flow data collection, analysis, and reporting.

Sentence 3

> This requires an understanding network flow records, the devices in your environment that generate network flow records, and how to configure NTA to process the data and present the reports you need.

The author is still using an elaborate, roundabout way of saying things. In my rewrite, I have two sentences out of the original one.

> NTA users must have an understanding of network flow records and the devices in the environment that generate network flow records. Also, users need to know how to configure NTA to process the data and present reports.

REVISION

Before

> NTA is an environment that you configure to have visibility to the network flow data that the devices in your network provide. NTA out-of-the-box provides the potential for network flow data collection, analysis, and reporting and you realize this potential through your configuration of NTA. This requires an understanding network flow records, the devices in your environment that generate network flow records, and how to configure NTA to process the data and present the reports you need.

After

> NTA enables you to view the network flow data provided by the devices in your network. Out-of-the-box configuration of NTA provides the potential of network flow data collection, analysis, and reporting. NTA users must have an understanding of network flow records and the devices in the environment that generate network flow records. Also, users need to know how to configure NTA to process the data and present reports.

Example 6

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> Let them know what all needs to be included if there are multiple files going out at the same time.

PROBLEM

The first part of the sentence is not as concise as if could be. See the words in brackets.

> Let them know [what all needs to be included] if there are multiple files going out at the same time.

DISCUSSION

Replace the verbose part of the sentence with more direct language.

REVISION

Before

> Let them know what all needs to be included if there are multiple files going out at the same time.

After

> Let them know what to include if there are multiple files going out at the same time.

Example 7

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> The API module is the module you will use to expose your service through the API management gateway.

PROBLEM

The example sentence is supposed to be a procedure. Instead, it sounds as if the author is merely passing along nice-to-know information.

DISCUSSION

Be direct with your reader. Say this:

Use the API module to expose your service through the API management gateway.

REVISION

Before

The API module is the module you will use to expose your service through the API management gateway.

After

Use the API module to expose your service through the API management gateway.

Example 8

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> When editing the address, you must specify one of the following address types.

PROBLEM

You can eliminate the words in brackets:

When editing the address, [you must] specify one of the following address types.

DISCUSSION

Once again—be direct. See the **Revision** section for the slimmed-down sentence.

REVISION

Before

When editing the address, you must specify one of the following address types.

After

When you edit the address, specify one of the following address types.

Example 9

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> This workflow is intended to be used in cases when you need to assure the user is in a high trust state.

PROBLEM

The sentence gets off to a very wobbly start because the author doesn't speak plainly. The suspect part of the sentence is in brackets:

> [This workflow is intended to be used in cases] when you need to assure the user is in a high trust state.

DISCUSSION

The example sentence has a passive, roundabout beginning:

> This workflow is intended to be used….

It sounds weak and timid. A better way to say it is to begin with the action:

> Use this workflow….

Also, it is not clear what the word *assure* means in this context. *Question:* Are you assuring the user or are you assuring yourself about the user? *Answer:* What the author means is letting the user know everything is OK. See the **Revision** section for a better way to say it.

REVISION

Before

> This workflow is intended to be used in cases when you need to assure the user is in a high trust state.

After

> Use this workflow when you need to assure the user that he or she is in a high trust state.

Example 10

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> Users start out in a high trust state for 30 minutes after they have signed in to FakeCorpID.

PROBLEM

The phrase:

> …after they have signed into FakeCorpID.

DISCUSSION

Don't say this:

> …after they **have signed in** to FakeCorpID.

Say this:

> …after they **sign in** to FakeCorpID.

The phrase *have signed in* is more words and less direct. Be straightforward with your readers. Stick to the present tense.

REVISION

Before

> Users start out in a high trust state for 30 minutes after they have signed in to FakeCorpID.

After

> Users start out in a high trust state for 30 minutes after they sign in to FakeCorpID.

Example 11

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE THAT INTRODUCES A LIST

> After a user has chosen a primary account, the following behaviors are enabled:

PROBLEM

The sentence has two clauses. It begins with the dependent clause,

> After a user has chosen a primary account….

And ends with the independent clause,

> the following behaviors are enabled:

You can use more forceful language to rewrite both clauses.

DISCUSSION

Dependent Clause

Don't say this:

> After a user has chosen a primary account…

Say this:

> After a user choses a primary account…

Independent Clause

Don't say this:

>...the following behaviors are enabled:

Question: Who or what is doing the enabling?

Answer: The system, the computer, the program, the app, or something else—identify the "actor" and make the actor the subject of the sentence.

Say this:

>...the system enables the following behaviors:

REVISION

Before

>After a user has chosen a primary account, the following behaviors are enabled:

After

>After a user choses a primary account, the system enables the following behaviors:

Example 12

> Alternatively, if you see a response such as the one below, this would indicate that you need to provide those two legal options to the user.

PROBLEM

This sentence, though brief, needs a lot of work. Here are the problems:

- It uses a conditional mood statement instead of the straightforward present tense.
- The word *alternately* is an ugly polysyllabic word. Besides that, *alternately* is not a synonym for *on the other hand*, which is what the author intends to say. The meaning is different.
- The sentence contains some wordiness.

DISCUSSION

Conditional Mood

Don't say this:

> …this would indicate that you need to provide…

Say this:

> …you must provide…

Wordiness

The wordy passage is in brackets:

> Alternatively, if you see a response such as the one below, [this would indicate that you need to provide] those two legal options to the user.

Usage

Use of the word *alternately* is confusing in this context. It implies you may have another option. You don't. What the author really means to say is this: If you get the following response, you must take a specific action.

Don't say this:

> Alternately….

Say this:

> On the other hand….

REVISION

Before

> Alternatively, if you see a response such as the one below, this would indicate that you need to provide those two legal options to the user.

After

> On the other hand, if you see a response such as the one that follows, you must provide those two legal options to the user.

Fog Index

IMPORTANT: This topic is about the **fog index**. However, all of the following examples contain discussions of multiple subjects—not just the fog index. Therefore, in addition to the fog index, you are going to learn a lot of different things about good writing and rewriting.

Example 1

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> For environments that have many devices that generate network flow data and many interfaces for which administrators want to collect data, careful planning of NTA traffic analysis task management is essential.

PROBLEM

We like to make fun of inept writing in this space, but this is not a bad sentence. Actually, it is a well-put-together general statement about the network traffic analyzer (NTA) service module. The author is a well-educated senior network engineer. The quote comes from a nine-page white paper.

The problem with this sentence, which is representative of the entire white paper, is it is addressed to other senior network engineers. As a technical writer professional, you might be asked to make the paper readable for a more general audience.

As an exercise, let's take a small step first. Can you make the example sentence more readable?

DISCUSSION

According to the Gunning Fog Index formula, it takes 23 years of education to understand the example sentence in the first reading. That is a tiny audience.

Obviously, if you could rewrite it as two or three sentences, the required education level drops dramatically. This is why I stress over and over again that you keep your sentences as short as possible. You want your reader to read a sentence just once, then move on to the next sentence. Long sentences cause the reader to read difficult sentences more than once.

The sentence begins with a long dependent clause:

> For environments that have many devices that generate network flow data and many interfaces for which administrators want to collect data

and ends with the independent clause:

> careful planning of NTA traffic analysis task management is essential.

Dependent Clause

Environments have two things:

- Many devices that generate network flow data
- Many interfaces for which administrators want to collect data

You might turn those two bullet points into simple declarative sentences:

> Environments have many devices that generate network data flow. The environments also have many interfaces for which administrators want to collect data.

Or you could phrase it this way:

> Environments have two things. They have many devices that generate network data flow and they have many interfaces for which administrators want to collect data.

That sounds better. Now, let's look at the independent clause.

Independent Clause

Here is the independent clause:

> careful planning of NTA traffic analysis task management is essential.

The first thing we do is rewrite it in the active voice:

> It is essential that you carefully plan the management of your NTA traffic analysis tasks.

Next, you need to edit out redundancy (see the red words below). NTA stands for network traffic analysis. Literally, the original text reads as follows:

> careful planning of network traffic analysis traffic analysis task management is essential.

How about this?

> It is essential that you carefully plan the management of your network traffic analysis tasks.

REVISION

Before

[one sentence, 31 words]

> For environments that have many devices that generate network flow data and many interfaces for which administrators want to collect data, careful planning of NTA traffic analysis task management is essential.

After

[three sentences, 40 words]

> It is essential that you carefully plan the management of your network traffic analysis tasks. Environments have two things. They have many devices that generate network data flow and they have many interfaces for which administrators want to collect data.

NOTE: The education level is 13.3 years now. We dropped the reading level from post-doctoral to college freshman.

Gunning Fog Index

THE GUNNING FOG INDEX IS 13.33

- The number of major punctuation marks, eg. [.], was 3
- The number of words was 40
- The number of 3+ syllable words, highlighted in blue, was 8

You can edit the numbers above and recalculate

Recalculate

Example 2

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> You can also optionally override the origin resource path and even specify a different origin base URI to use for the resource.

PROBLEM

This sentence is a classic case of joining two independent clauses for no good reason. Apparently, the author is not going to be satisfied by writing two short declarative sentences. But that is exactly what the author should be doing!

Keep it short and simple. Your reader will thank you.

One more thing. I don't like the word *optionally*. *As an option* is more direct, easier to read, and it has fewer syllables.

DISCUSSION

As written, the example sentence takes 19.71 years of education to understand with the first reading.

This example sentence has two distinct ideas:

- As an option, you can override the origin resource path.

- You can specify a different origin base URI for the resource.

There you go—just say it that way.

REVISION

Before

> You can also optionally override the origin resource path and even specify a different origin base URI to use for the resource.

After

> As an option, you can override the origin resource path. You can specify a different origin base URI for the resource.

NOTE: Our revision lopped six years off the years of education required to understand the sentence on the first pass.

THE GUNNING FOG INDEX IS 13.72

- The number of major punctuation marks, eg. [.], was 2
- The number of words was 21
- The number of 3+ syllable words, highlighted in blue, was 5

You can edit the numbers above and recalculate

Example 3

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE FROM A FINANCIAL STATEMENT

> Please notify your Financial Advisor if there have been any changes in your financial situation or investment objectives, or if you wish to impose any reasonable restrictions on the management of your Investment Advisory accounts, or to reasonably modify existing restrictions.

PROBLEM

Gunning Fog Index

According to the Gunning Fog Index, it takes 31 years of education to understand the example sentence on the first reading. That is a ridiculously high education level.

Gunning Fog Index

THE GUNNING FOG INDEX IS **31.03**

- The number of major punctuation marks, eg. [.], was 1
- The number of words was 41
- The number of 3+ syllable words, highlighted in blue, was 15

You can edit the numbers above and recalculate

Recalculate

The sentence is 41 words long. Of the 41 words, 15 words have three or more syllables:

- Notify
- Financial
- Advisor
- Financial
- Situation
- Investment
- Objectives
- Reasonable
- Restrictions
- Management
- Investment
- Advisory
- Reasonably
- Modify
- restrictions

Compound Sentence

This is a compound sentence (that is, it is two or more independent clauses joined by the connector word *or*). It is easy to divide the sentence into at least three simple sentences.

How do you get three or more sentences? See the following discussion.

Usage

Use the word *want* instead of *wish*. Wishing for something is like hoping to get it. The verb form *to want* is more direct.

Use the Present Tense

Change *have been* to *are*.

DISCUSSION

Do you ever wonder why you hate to read mortgage loan papers when you buy a home? Or the fine print in your insurance policies? Or the legalese on a financial statement, such as you see here with our example sentence?

It's because legal documentation can be horrible. Let's make this sentence *not horrible*.

The first thing you do is to break it up into two or more sentences. That improves the readability considerably. Actually, all the words following *or if you wish to impose* lead into another compound sentence. You can break that into two parts also.

Second, rewrite everything in the present tense. Avoid the perfect tenses.

As for the big words, remember this is legal documentation. Lawyers choose their words for very specific reasons. Even if you changed the three-syllable words to more humble words, the lawyers are probably going to restore the three-syllable words. Lawyers are most concerned about their version of accuracy. Readability is not a concern at all.

REVISIONS

Before

> Please notify your Financial Advisor if there have been any changes in your financial situation or investment objectives, or if you wish to impose any reasonable restrictions on the management of your Investment Advisory accounts, or to reasonably modify existing restrictions.

After

> Are there changes in your financial situation or investment objectives? Make sure you talk to your Financial Advisor. You may impose any reasonable restrictions on the management of your Investment Advisory accounts. Also, you may reasonably modify existing restrictions.

Example 4

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> Is it too much to imagine that Mrs. Clinton wanted to conceal the record of her communications as America's top diplomat because she might have been doing a great deal of interesting work in those emails, not only with respect to immediate and unfolding international events but with respect to those who would like to make a positive impression on the American secretary of state by making contributions to the Clinton Foundation, which not only funds many noble causes but is the seat of operations of Clinton Inc. and its numerous offices, operatives, hangers-on and campaign-in-waiting?

PROBLEM

This is the third paragraph of Peggy Noonan's March 5, 2015, column in the *Wall Street Journal* titled, Stuck in Scandal Land: As long as she is in public life, Hillary will protect and serve herself."

No question Noonan is an excellent writer. But this is a shockingly bad example of expository writing. The example sentence has four principal errors:

- Too long—96 words
- Incredibly high fog index—45 years of education required to comprehend the sentence in just one reading (NOTE: The Gunning Fog Index counts this sentence as three sentences because of the periods after *Mrs.* and *Inc*. That is one of the flaws in the Gunning algorithm. It is still one sentence.)
- Vocabulary usage—contains 20 three-syllable words (every fifth word!)
  - imagine
  - communications
  - America's
  - diplomat
  - interesting
  - immediate
  - unfolding
  - international
  - positive
  - impression
  - American
  - secretary
  - contributions
  - Foundation
  - operations
  - numerous
  - offices

- o operatives
- o hangers-on
- o campaign-in-waiting
- Past tense—should be present tense because according to Noonan these issues with Mrs. Clinton started years ago and continue into the present. Noonan gives us a confusing mixture of past and present tense; it is hard to follow her narrative. If the problems are still happening now, we should use the present tense. See the **Revision** section for one way to do it.

Because Noonan is an A-list columnist, it is possible the *Wall Street Journal* lets her upload her columns to the WSJ website without any copy-editor review. Those pesky editors just slow down the process!

We are not going to let her off so easy.

Ready? Let's have some fun!

DISCUSSION

OK, you know the drill. This is your process:

- Capture the entire sentence and paste it into a worksheet
- Strip out the component parts and arrange them in a bullet list
- Reconstruct each component part as a simple sentence
- Reassemble the content into a sequence of simple sentences

Before we begin, however, we need to keep in mind she frames this long sentence as a question. That is her intent. We need to keep the entire passage in the context of a question. Even our rewritten declarative sentences must support her general interrogative objective.

Here are the component parts for the example sentence:

- Why is Mrs. Clinton hiding her email record as our top diplomat?
- Is it because she is doing good work with respect to immediate and unfolding international events?
- Or is she shielding those who want to make an impression on her by contributing to the Clinton Foundation?
- The Clinton Foundation funds many noble causes.
- However, it is also the seat of operations of Clinton Inc. and its numerous offices, operatives, hangers-on and campaign-in-waiting.

Did you notice we replaced some of the three-syllable words with more readable synonyms?

REVISION

Before

> Is it too much to imagine that Mrs. Clinton wanted to conceal the record of her communications as America's top diplomat because she might have been doing a great deal of interesting work in those emails, not only with respect to immediate and unfolding international events but with respect to those who would like to make a positive impression on the American secretary of state by making contributions to the Clinton Foundation, which not only funds many noble causes but is the seat of operations of Clinton Inc. and its numerous offices, operatives, hangers-on and campaign-in-waiting?

After

> Why is Mrs. Clinton hiding her email record as our top diplomat? Is it because she is doing good work with respect to immediate and unfolding international events? Or is she shielding those who want to make an impression on her by contributing to the Clinton Foundation? The Clinton Foundation funds many noble causes. However, it is also the seat of operations of Clinton Inc. and its numerous offices, operatives, hangers-on and campaign-in-waiting.

COMMENT

Now, seriously, don't you think our rewrite is more readable? And **more effective**? We increased the number of sentences from one to five. We reduced the number of words from 96 to 73. We reduced the fog index from 45 years of education to 11 years. We reduced the number of three-syllable words from 20 to 15.

Did we lose anything in the process? Did we leave anything out?

We lose Noonan's long, free-flowing, stream-of-consciousness sentence structure. We lose her breezy conversational style. But what good is a magnificent run-on sentence if you have to read it three or four times? Instead of gliding along from beginning to end, as Noonan intends, you have to start and stop several times.

Example 5

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> It is Israel's policy of continued settlement in the West Bank—settlement that endangers the two-state solution, and therefore Israel's future as a democracy and as a haven for the Jewish people—that puts daylight between Jerusalem and Washington, not a president who calls Israel out for its settlement policy.

PROBLEM

This sentence comes from an article written by Max Fisher at Vox. The headline is, "One sentence that explains the breakdown in US-Israel relations." Fisher cites a quote by Jeffrey Goldberg in the June 29, 2015, *Atlantic*. Yes, it concisely summarizes the strained relationship between the United State and Israel. However, from the standpoint of readability, this 48-word sentence is a disaster.

Allow me to explain.

DISCUSSION

Let's talk about readability and why it is important.

Whether you are writing software documentation or a piece about foreign policy, the basic principles of readability apply. Short, declarative, simple sentences are easier to read than long, complicated sentences. Can we all agree on that?

I would submit Jeffrey Goldberg is less concerned about you, the reader, than he is about designing a magnificent sentence that explains everything you need to know about what's wrong with US-Israel relations.

Readers of *Grammaticus*, don't fall into that trap. Don't ever put your ego ahead of your intended audience.

What is Goldberg saying? I see four distinct ideas. Let's break out his sentence into its component parts:

- President Obama is not the cause of poor relations between Israel and the United States.
- Israel's own settlement policies in the West Bank are far more worrisome.
- These settlements endanger the two-state solution.
- Also, the settlements endanger Israel's future as a democracy and a haven for the Jewish people.

OK, to prove my readability point, let's run the example sentence through the fog index and compare the results to my four-sentence rewrite. Here is the example sentence again:

Click the **Calculate** button.

Ouch! Thirty-one years of education to understand the sentence on the first reading! Do you really want your reader to read the sentence three or four times to get the meaning? The question answers itself.

Now take my four-sentence rewrite, and drop those sentences into the fog index:

Click **Calculate**.

Even though we are using the same vocabulary, we cut the fog index in half. We're down to the junior year of college. Much better!

Finally, ask yourself: Did we lose anything by converting a 48-word sentence into four sentences totaling 49 words? Maybe no one will praise you by writing an article titled, "Four sentences that explain the breakdown in US-Israel relations," but so what? If you get your point across in a clear and concise manner, consider yourself a success!

REVISION

Before

It is Israel's policy of continued settlement in the West Bank—settlement that endangers the two-state solution, and therefore Israel's future as a democracy and as a haven for the Jewish people—that puts daylight between Jerusalem and Washington, not a president who calls Israel out for its settlement policy.

After

President Obama is not the cause of poor relations between Israel and the United States. Israel's own settlement policies in the West Bank are far more worrisome. These settlements endanger the two-state solution. Also, the settlements endanger Israel's future as a democracy and a haven for the Jewish people.

Future vs. Present Tense

IMPORTANT: This topic is about the **future vs. present tense**. However, all of the following examples contain discussions of multiple subjects—not just the future and present tense. Therefore, in addition to the future and present tense, you are going to learn a lot of different things about good writing and rewriting.

Example 1

REWRITE THESE SENTENCES

> Any descriptors missing will be deleted from the content type.
>
> Any properties missing from a descriptor will revert back to the defaults.
>
> If set to True, the operation will be executed on all objects even if one of the operations fails due to a CMS error.
>
> If set to False, execution will halt immediately when a failure occur.

PROBLEM

Each example sentence is written in the future tense. We need to rewrite them using the present tense because these are things that are happening now, not just in the future.

DISCUSSION

Whenever you are tasked to write about something that is happening now in the present and will continue to happen in the future, it is always best to write in the present tense. Why? Because we live in the present. We do not and cannot live in the future.

Writing in the present tense includes both the present and the future. That inclusiveness is key. Unless we are told otherwise, we assume conditions of the present continue unchanged into the future.

Whenever you are tasked to write about something that is *not* happening now, but *will* happen at some point in the future, that is the time to use the future tense.

Typically, your reader needs to solve problems that exist right now. Continual reference to the future can be an irritating mannerism. Don't risk annoying your reader. Keep your narrative in the present tense as much as possible.

REVISIONS

1

Before

Any descriptors missing will be deleted from the content type.

After

Any descriptors missing are deleted from the content type.

2

Before

Any properties missing from a descriptor will revert back to the defaults.

After

Any properties missing from a descriptor revert back to the defaults.

3

Before

If set to True, the operation will be executed on all objects even if one of the operations fails due to a CMS error.

After

If set to True, the operation is executed on all objects even if one of the operations fails due to a CMS error.

Or

If set to True, the operation executes on all objects even if one of the operations fails due to a CMS error.

4

Before

If set to False, execution will halt immediately when a failure occurs.

After

If set to False, execution halts immediately when a failure occurs.

Example 2

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

An error will be thrown if the value is not included.

PROBLEM

- Use the present tense instead of the future tense
- Change the passive voice to active voice

DISCUSSION

Passive Voice

An error will be thrown…. By whom or by what? Answer: The system. Make the word *system* the subject of the sentence.

Future Tense

In our example sentence, the system throws the error now, in the present, and will continue to throw the error in the future. It is an ongoing phenomenon. Unless we are told otherwise, we assume things that happen now will continue to happen in the future. The present tense includes the future tense—until conditions change.

However, this inclusiveness only runs in one direction. If a sentence is written in the future tense, you cannot automatically assume it works backwards to the present. It may include the present or it may not.

To be absolutely clear every time, write in the present tense.

REVISION

Before

An error will be thrown if the value is not included.

After

The system throws an error if you do not include the value.

Example 3

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

As a consumer of the FakeApp 2.0 SDK, you will never have to worry about updating the guest data directly.

PROBLEM

Our problem sentence talks about something that will happen in the future. But when you look carefully at the sentence, it is clear it describes something that is happening right now, too.

We live in the present, not the future. Don't write in the future tense unless you have no choice. Excessive use of the future tense makes for tedious reading.

DISCUSSION

As a rule, always use the present tense *unless* the activity you describe *only* exists in the future. Use the present tense if the thing described exists now and will continue to exist in the future. On the other hand, if you describe a new activity the user can only perform after next year's release, use the future tense.

REVISION

Before

> As a consumer of the FakeApp 2.0 SDK, you will never have to worry about updating the guest data directly.

After

> As a consumer of the FakeApp 2.0 SDK, you never have to worry about updating the guest data directly.

Example 4

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> In order to facilitate a restriction on the number of concurrent active sessions, FakeMethod will need to track authorizations and token refreshes.

PROBLEM

Two problems:

- Wordiness
- Use of the future tense in the independent clause—it should be the present tense

DISCUSSION

Wordiness

Here is the sentence with the wordiness in brackets:

> [In order] to [facilitate a restriction on] the number of concurrent active sessions, FakeMethod will need to track authorizations and token refreshes.

Present vs. Future

The sentence begins with the dependent clause—*In order to facilitate a restriction on the number of concurrent active sessions*.

The independent clause follows—*FakeMethod will need to track authorizations and token refreshes*.

Yes, it needs to track authorizations and token refreshes in the future. Does it do the tracking only in the future? How about right now?

You know the answer. It does the tracking now and continues to do the tracking in the future. Since it does the tracking now and continues to do the tracking in the future, don't use the future tense. Put the independent clause in the present tense.

REVISION

Before

In order to facilitate a restriction on the number of concurrent active sessions, FakeMethod will need to track authorizations and token refreshes.

After

To restrict the number of concurrent active sessions, FakeMethod needs to track authorizations and token refreshes.

Example 5

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> This is the temporary file name used in a subsequent call to create or update the content object to which the file will be attached.

PROBLEM

The sentence ends with these words:

>   to which the file will be attached

Is the author describing current behavior or behavior that only happens in the future?

DISCUSSION

Yes, the file *will be attached* on occasions in the future. But think about it. Is this an activity that will only be available after some future software release, but is not available now? No. The author is describing a current feature. It is happening now.

When you write a feature description about something that happens now and will continue to happen in the future, write in the present tense. Do not write in the future tense.

Remember this always—*we live in the present, not the past or the future*. Thus, do your best to always write in the present tense.

REVISION

Before

>   This is the temporary file name used in a subsequent call to create or update the content object to which the file will be attached.

After

>   This is the temporary file name used in a subsequent call to create or update the content object to which the file is attached.

Example 6

REWRITE THESE SENTENCES

This will have a consistent look and feel with the App Editor.

When you are inside the text field, pressing **Enter** will trigger the **OK** button.

Prompt will close when the user presses either **OK** or **Cancel**.

When the form appears, the field will get its focus and the text will be selected.

This is what will populate the input field.

Bool will disable the **OK** button.

This will populate the message area of the popup window.

PROBLEM

In this short topic (270 words, including code snippets), the author shows us he really, really, really likes the future tense. Yet, when you examine each sentence, not one of the seven example sentences describes events that happen *only* in the future. These events happen *now* as well.

DISCUSSION

Since these events are happening now (present tense) and will continue to happen in the future (future tense), rewrite each sentence in the present tense. It is my firm belief that readers prefer the present tense over the past or future tenses. Why? Because we don't live in the past or the future; we live in the present.

REVISIONS

Before

This will have a consistent look and feel with the App Editor.

When you are inside the text field, pressing **Enter** will trigger the **OK** button.

Prompt will close when the user presses either **OK** or **Cancel**.

When the form appears, the field will get its focus and the text will be selected.

This is what will populate the input field.

`Bool` will disable the **OK** button.

This will populate the message area of the popup window.

After

This has a consistent look and feel with the App Editor.

When you are inside the text field, pressing **Enter** triggers the **OK** button.

Prompt closes when the user presses either **OK** or **Cancel**.

When the form appears, the field gets its focus and the text is selected.

This is what populates the input field.

`Bool` disables the **OK** button.

This populates the message area of the popup window.

Example 7

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

This setup will be expected in order to make updates without having to repeatedly answer prompts for your password.

PROBLEM

Two problems:

- Use the present tense, not the future tense
- Clean up the wordiness

DISCUSSION

Future Tense

Don't use the future tense for stuff that is happening right now. Here is the example sentence again:

> This setup will be expected in order to make updates without having to repeatedly answer prompts for your password.

Are we talking about things that happen only at some point in the future? No, of course not. The statement describes current behavior.

Wordiness

The beginning of the sentence is wordy:

> This setup will be expected in order to make updates

Say this instead:

> You need this setup to make updates

The second part of the sentence is wordy, too:

> without having to repeatedly answer prompts for your password

Say this instead:

> without repeatedly answering prompts for your password

REVISION

Before

[19 words]

    This setup will be expected in order to make updates without having to repeatedly answer prompts for your password.

After

[14 words]

    You need this setup to make updates without repeatedly answering prompts for your password.

Example 8

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> Once a snapshot is build from the `develop` branch, the corresponding documents will be pushed to the branch `gh-pages-develop`, likewise a commit to `master` will trigger a document update on `gh-pages-master`.

PROBLEM

We need to fix these things:

- Passive voice
- Present vs. future
- Punctuation
- Simple sentences
- Spelling

DISCUSSION

Passive Voice and Spelling

The sentence begins:

> Once a snapshot is build from the `develop` branch….

Who builds the snapshot? You do. Make the sentence active voice with *You* as the subject.

In the original passive voice construction, the word *build* is incorrect. The verb should be *built*. However, in our revision, with *You* as the subject, the verb *build* is correct.

> Once you build a snapshot from the `develop` branch….

Present vs. Future, Punctuation, and Simple Sentences

The sentence reads:

> …the corresponding documents will be pushed to the branch `gh-pages-develop`, likewise a commit to `master` will trigger a document update on `gh-pages-master`.

We have a comma fault before the word *likewise*. Start a new sentence there.

Change the future tense *will be pushed* to *are pushed*, and change the future tense *will trigger* to *triggers*.

Change the entire passage to this:

> …the corresponding documents are pushed to the branch `gh-pages-develop`. Also, your commit to `master` triggers a document update on `gh-pages-master`.

REVISION

Before

> Once a snapshot is build from the `develop` branch, the corresponding documents will be pushed to the branch `gh-pages-develop`, likewise a commit to `master` will trigger a document update on `gh-pages-master`.

After

> Once you build a snapshot from the develop branch, the corresponding documents are pushed to the `branch gh-pages-develop`. Also, your commit to `master` triggers a document update on `gh-pages-master`.

Example 9

REWRITE THIS API DESCRIPTION

> Sets the preferred language for the current user session. This preference will indicate the language in which UI rendering and email sending will occur.

PROBLEM

In every place where you see the future tense, change it to the present tense.

DESCRIPTION

People, we do not live in the future. We live in the present. Everything mentioned in this API description happens right now. Write accordingly.

Here is the example API description again with the future tense in hot pink:

> Sets the preferred language for the current user session. This preference will indicate the language in which UI rendering and email sending will occur.

REVISION

Before

> Sets the preferred language for the current user session. This preference will indicate the language in which UI rendering and email sending will occur.

After

> Sets the preferred language for the current user session. This preference indicates the language in which UI rendering and email sending occurs.

Example 10

> When a third party sends email on our behalf, we will provide the third party with a URL where suppression requests will be sent, and they will link to this URL in the email body.

PROBLEM

This sentence is in the future tense. Convert everything to the present tense.

DISCUSSION

1

Don't say this:

> we will provide

Say this:

> we provide

2

Don't say this:

> where suppression requests will be sent

Say this:

> where suppression requests are sent

3

Don't say this:

> and they will link to this URL in the email body

Say this:

> and they link to this URL in the email body

REVISION

Before

> When a third party sends email on our behalf, we will provide the third party with a URL where suppression requests will be sent, and they will link to this URL in the email body.

After

> When a third party sends email on our behalf, we provide the third party with a URL where suppression requests are sent, and they link to this URL in the email body.

Legal

Example 1

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

Temporary Contractor acknowledges that he or she is an employee of
Agency, and nothing in this Agreement shall be construed as creating an
employer-employee relationship, a partnership, or a joint venture between
Total Global Domination Software, Inc., and Temporary Contractor.

PROBLEM

No matter how much you dislike this sentence, you cannot change *anything*. The language
and the capitalization are set in concrete.

DISCUSSION

The nice thing about legal disclaimers is you don't have to worry about them. Let the
lawyers do their thing. If you mess with their writing, you may end up in hot water.

REVISIONS

Before

Temporary Contractor acknowledges that he or she is an employee of Agency, and
nothing in this Agreement shall be construed as creating an employer-employee
relationship, a partnership, or a joint venture between Total Global Domination
Software, Inc., and Temporary Contractor.

After

[No change]

Parallelism

IMPORTANT: This topic is about **parallelism**. However, all of the following examples contain discussions of multiple subjects—not just parallelism. Therefore, in addition to parallelism, you are going to learn a lot of different things about good writing and rewriting.

Example 1

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

Ellen likes hiking, the rodeo, and to take afternoon naps.

My best friend took me dancing and to a show.

My dog not only likes to play fetch, but also chase cars.

I would rather pay for my education than financial aid.

* These examples are borrowed from the Evergreen Writing Center website at Evergreen State College, Olympia, WA.

PROBLEM

Each sentence lacks parallel construction. Here is parallelism as defined in the Wikipedia entry for *Parallelism (grammar)*:

> In grammar, parallelism, also known as parallel structure or parallel construction, is a balance within one or more sentences of similar phrases or clauses that have the same grammatical structure. The application of parallelism improves writing style and readability, and is thought to make sentences easier to process.

DISCUSSION

See the **Revisions** section.

REVISIONS

Sentence 1

 Ellen likes hiking, the rodeo, and to take afternoon naps.

Rewrites:

 Ellen likes hiking, the rodeo, and taking afternoon naps.

Explanation—*hiking*, *the rodeo*, and *taking afternoon naps* function as nouns.

Or

 Ellen likes to hike, attend the rodeo, and take afternoon naps.

Explanation—each activity uses the infinitive form: *to hike*, *[to] attend the rodeo*, and *[to] take afternoon naps.*

Sentence 2

 My best friend took me dancing and to a show.

Rewrite:

 My best friend took me to a dance and a show.

Explanation—*dancing* is a gerund (that is, a noun formed as a verb) and *show* is a noun. Since you cannot easily make *show* a gerund (*showing* doesn't work in this context), the easiest solution is to make each a noun.

Sentence 3

 My dog not only likes to play fetch, but also chase cars.

Rewrites:

 My dog not only likes to play fetch, but he also likes to chase cars.

Or

 My dog likes not only to play fetch, but also to chase cars.

Explanation—In the original, the first activity is the infinitive form (that is, *to play fetch*), but the second activity lacks the infinitive word *to* (that is, *but also [to] chase cars*). You need to add the word *to* to the second activity to make everything parallel. That is true for both of the previous rewrites.

Sentence 4

I would rather pay for my education than financial aid.

Rewrite:

I would rather pay for my education than receive financial aid.

Or

I would rather pay for my education than get financial aid.

Explanation—as written, the speaker is saying he or she would rather pay for … education or pay for financial aid. That does not make sense. You need to add a verb (for example, *receive* or *get*) before the words *financial aid*.

Example 2

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

Along with ruggedizing the device, the above changes led to a significant improvement in the RF performance, lower operational temperature limits, and operational life of the new GPS device referred to as the Flight Imagery Recorder Locator (FIRLo).

PROBLEM

The sentence lacks parallel structure.

Incidentally, the word *ruggedize* is a word. According to Merriam-Webster, it means:

> **Definition of RUGGEDIZE**
>
> transitive verb:
>
> to strengthen (as a machine) for better resistance to wear, stress, and abuse <a *ruggedized* camera>

DISCUSSION

The sentence ends with a string of new improvements. These improvements flow out of the verb form *led to*:

- [led to] a significant improvement in the RF performance
- [led to] lower operational temperature limits
- [led to] operational life of the new GPS device referred to as the Flight Imagery Recorder Locator (FIRLo)

Do you see which one of the three improvements needs revision?

REVISION

Before

Along with ruggedizing the device, the above changes led to a significant improvement in the RF performance, lower operational temperature limits, and operational life of the new GPS device referred to as the Flight Imagery Recorder Locator (FIRLo).

After

Along with ruggedizing the device, the above changes led to these benefits:

- Significant improvement in the RF performance
- Lower operational temperature limits
- Improved operational life of the new GPS device referred to as the Flight Imagery Recorder Locator (FIRLo)

Or

Along with ruggedizing the device, the above changes led to significant improvement in the RF performance, lower operational temperature limits, and improved operational life of the new GPS device referred to as the Flight Imagery Recorder Locator (FIRLo).

Example 3

WHICH BULLET ITEM IS NOT LIKE THE OTHERS?

Multiple accounts single email (MASE) occurs when a user tries to log in with his or her email address. The system then provides multiple accounts associated with that email address. However, no account is marked as the primary account. Here are some reasons:

- Other accounts share the same email address (often legacy accounts)
- Child accounts match the parent's email address
- Accounts where the username is actually an email that matches the email account used to log in

---

PROBLEM

The first two bullet items are complete sentences with subjects and verbs. The third bullet item is a fragment.

DISCUSSION

The third bullet item does not have a verb. You need to remove the word *that*. When you do that, the word *matches* becomes the verb in the sentence.

Do you see why the presence of the word *that* make the difference between a complete sentence and a fragment? When you have *that* in this sentence, it merely leads to a dependent clause (in italics):

- Accounts where the username is actually an email *that matches the email account used to log in*

But when you take *that* out, *matches* become the verb form you need to make a complete sentence.

- Accounts where the username is actually an email matches the email account used to log in

REVISION

Before

Multiple accounts single email (MASE) occurs when a user tries to log in with his or her email address. The system then provides multiple accounts associated with that email address. However, no account is marked as the *primary* account. Here are some reasons:

- Other accounts share the same email address (often legacy accounts)
- Child accounts match the parent's email address
- Accounts where the username is actually an email that matches the email account used to log in

After

Multiple accounts single email (MASE) occurs when a user tries to log in with his or her email address. The system then provides multiple accounts associated with that email address. However, no account is marked as the *primary* account. Here are some reasons:

- Other accounts share the same email address (often legacy accounts)
- Child accounts match the parent's email address
- Accounts where the username is actually an email matches the email account used to log in

Example 4

MAKE THESE HEADINGS PARALLEL

> The following headings come from a topic titled Zone Management. Stylistically, they lack parallelism. Make them parallel:
>
> Zones
>
> Creating Your First Zone
>
> Requesting Access to an Existing Zone
>
> Adding Others as Zone Members
>
> Adding Others as Zone Owners
>
> Usage and Billing Reports
>
> Quotas

PROBLEM

The headings are not parallel grammatically.

Three headings are nouns or noun phrases:

- Zones
- Usage and Billing Reports
- Quotas

The other four headings are gerunds:

- Creating Your First Zone
- Requesting Access to an Existing Zone
- Adding Others as Zone Members
- Adding Others as Zone Owners

DISCUSSION

Your task is to make all seven headings consistent with the same grammatical structure. You can go either way.

Nouns or Noun Phrases

You can make them all nouns or noun phrases:

- Zones
- Your First Zone
- Access to an Existing Zone
- Zone Members
- Zone Owners
- Usage and Billing Reports
- Quotas

Gerunds

What is a gerund? From the English grammar website **Purdue OWL**:

> A gerund is a verbal that ends in *-ing* and functions as a noun. The term *verbal* indicates that a gerund, like the other two kinds of verbals, is based on a verb and therefore expresses action or a state of being. However, since a gerund functions as a noun, it occupies some positions in a sentence that a noun ordinarily would, for example: subject, direct object, subject complement, and object of preposition.

You can make them all gerunds:

- Managing Zones
- Creating Your First Zone
- Requesting Access to an Existing Zone
- Adding Others as Zone Members
- Adding Others as Zone Owners
- Reporting Usage and Billing Data
- Managing Quota

REVISION

Before

Zones

Creating Your First Zone

Requesting Access to an Existing Zone

Adding Others as Zone Members

Adding Others as Zone Owners

Usage and Billing Reports

Quotas

After

[nouns or noun phrases]

Zones

Your First Zone

Access to an Existing Zone

Zone Members

Zone Owners

Usage and Billing Reports

Quotas

Or

[gerunds]

Managing Zones

Creating Your First Zone

Requesting Access to an Existing Zone

Adding Others as Zone Members

Adding Others as Zone Owners

Reporting Usage and Billing Data

Managing Quota

Example 5

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> You need to review and update these applications periodically to ensure compliance, functionality, and closing of security gaps.

PROBLEM

The author talks about ensuring three things:

- Compliance
- Functionality
- Closing of security gaps

Compared to the first two bullet points, the third bullet point is not parallel. We need to make all three bullet points grammatically parallel.

DISCUSSION

Instead of this:

Closing of security gaps

Say this:

Security

Now the three attributes are parallel:

- Compliance
- Functionality
- Security

I think it is OK to just use the word *security*. The "closing of [security] gaps" is an important part of security. Since the other two items (that is, *compliance* and *functionality*) are high-level generalities, it seems to me we can also use the high-level term *security*.

REVISION

Before

You need to review and update these applications periodically to ensure compliance, functionality, and closing of security gaps.

After

You need to review and update these applications periodically to ensure compliance, functionality, and security.

Example 6

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

This allows the client to change colors, logos, and general feel of the site.

PROBLEM

From *Sesame Street*:

> *One of these things is not like the others,*
> *One of these things just doesn't belong,*
> *Can you tell which thing is not like the others*
> *By the time I finish my song?*

The client can change three things:

- Colors [of the site]
- Logos [of the site]
- General feel [of the site]

The third change is not parallel grammatically to the first two changes. Why not? Because it has a modifier (the adjective, *general*), while the first two changes are simply nouns with no modifiers. Either add modifiers to the first two (I don't recommend this solution), or find a way to make the third noun, that is, *feel*, to stand alone.

DISCUSSION

How can we make the three changes parallel?

My recommendation is two-fold. First, for clarity, add the article *the* before the series. Second, remove the modifier *general*. I believe the word *feel* is sufficient by itself.

REVISION

Before

This allows the client to change colors, logos, and general feel of the site.

After

This allows the client to change the colors, logos, and feel of the site.

Example 7

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

New functionality gives users the opportunity to customize returned data and how it is displayed.

PROBLEM

The "New functionality gives users the opportunity" to do what? This is what the example sentence says:

- to customize returned data
- [to customize] how it is displayed

The problem is the lack of parallelism of the two opportunities.

DISCUSSION

Why are the two opportunities not parallel? Well, let's look at what we have:

- returned data
- how it is displayed

Grammatically, they are both objects, as in subject-verb-object. But their structure is different. This study about rewriting, and that is what we are going to do: Rewrite.

Starting with the first opportunity, *returned data*, how do you customize to get the returned data you want to see on the screen? You do that by setting parameters. Right? Logically, you do not customize the returned data. You customize the parameters to get the returned data. Do you see how that works?

The second opportunity, *how it is displayed*, needs clarification because it is not immediately obvious what the word *it* refers to. The reader might have to slow down to figure it out. My recommendation is to be more explicit. Instead of using the pronoun *it*, use *returned data*.

If you want to write an absolutely parallel sentence, say this:

New functionality gives users the opportunity to customize the parameters for the returned data and the appearance of the returned data.

That is a long, awkward sentence. How about this bullet list instead?

New functionality gives users the opportunity to customize the following:

- Parameters for the returned data
- Appearance of the returned data

Or this:

New functionality gives users the opportunity to customize the following:

- Parameters for the returned data
- Display of the returned data

REVISION

Before

New functionality gives users the opportunity to customize returned data and how it is displayed.

After

New functionality gives users the opportunity to customize the following:

- Parameters for the returned data
- Appearance of the returned data

Or this:

New functionality gives users the opportunity to customize the following:

- Parameters for the returned data
- Display of the returned data

Parenthetical Expressions

IMPORTANT: This topic is about **parenthetical expressions**. However, all of the following examples contain discussions of multiple subjects—not just parenthetical expressions. Therefore, in addition to parenthetical expressions, you are going to learn a lot of different things about good writing and rewriting.

Example 1

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

A suppression (also known as opt-out) request by the recipient of a promotional mail (which falls under the governance of the CAN SPAM law) is a request that no further email from that line of business (LOB) be sent to them.

PROBLEM

This author is having a love affair with the parenthetical expression. Too many parentheses in documentation is an annoying mannerism. It is annoying because there is an implication the material in parentheses is less important than the material in the regular text. As you can plainly see, however, the information in the parenthetical expressions in our example sentence is not trivial. It deserves to be placed on the same rhetorical plain.

We have three parenthetical expressions, but only one is OK in the example. Which one?

DISCUSSION

Here are the first two parenthetical expressions:

- also known as opt-out
- which falls under the governance of the CAN SPAM law

By using parentheses, the author treats these nuggets of information as *asides*. What exactly is an aside? Here is a definition:

A remark that is not directly related to the main topic of discussion.

Remark number 1—*also known as opt-out*—is important because it is a commonly-accepted synonym for suppression. That's not trivial.

Remark number 2—*which falls under the governance of the CAN SPAM law*—is critical to the official definition of promotional mail. That's not trivial either.

Neither of these strings of words should be in parentheses. They do not fit the definition of an aside. Both are directly related to the main topic of discussion.

The parenthetical expression (LOB) is acceptable because the author is calling out an acronym. This is acceptable provided this is the first time the term *line of business* appears in the narrative.

REVISION

Before

> A suppression (also known as opt-out) request by the recipient of a promotional mail (which falls under the governance of the CAN SPAM law) is a request that no further email from that line of business (LOB) be sent to them.

After

> Promotional mail falls under the governance of the CAN SPAM law. A suppression request, which is also called an opt-out, is the recipient's request to the line of business (LOB) to stop sending promotional mail to the recipient.

Example 2

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> A fake_token (different from the fake_token in the previous pairing API section) is required for authentication.

PROBLEM

Let's talk about using parentheses in a way that does not impair readability. Here is the rule for parentheses: *Use parentheses to enclose information that clarifies or is used as an aside.*

What's wrong with the problem sentence? The information enclosed in parentheses is meant to clarify the information in the main sentence. We are making an important distinction between two types of fake_tokens. Grammatically, it is an aside, as defined by the previous rule.

The problem is word order. Sloppy word order puts the spotlight on the aside at the expense of the main point of the sentence.

DISCUSSION

This is a difficult sentence to read because we have a lengthy piece of information enclosed in parentheses inserted into the middle of the main sentence, between subject and verb. This is the main sentence:

> A fake_token is required for authentication.

The subject of the sentence is *fake_token*. The verb in the sentence is *is required*. Unfortunately, the subject and verb are divided by this very long parenthetical phrase:

> different from the fake_token in the previous pairing API section

This forces the reader to hold the subject, *fake_token*, in suspension, while tip-toeing through the 10-word minefield about a different type of *fake_token*. Because of its size and strategic placement in the sentence, the so-called aside grabs the reader's attention. This is not the outcome the author intended.

REVISION

Because the information within parentheses blows a huge hole in the main sentence, this sentence cannot be saved as written. My suggestion is to abandon the parentheses construction altogether. It is not going to work in this situation.

Before

> A fake_token (different from the fake_token in the previous pairing API section) is required for authentication.

After

> For authentication, you need to use a fake_token different from the fake_token used in the previous pairing API section.

Or better:

> A fake_token is required for authentication. This fake token is different from the fake_token in the previous pairing API section.

Example 3

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> Guests must be logged in, and activity there must be current activity in the activity database (discuss this with your solution engineer first).

PROBLEM

Before you write a sentence with a parenthetical expression, ask yourself: If I completely remove the parenthetical expression from the main sentence, does its removal change the meaning of the main sentence in a way that you do not intend? Is the user experience diminished because important information is left out?

If removing the parenthetical expression does damage to the user experience, either rewrite the sentence without the parentheses, or create a new, second sentence to include the important supplementary information.

DISCUSSION

The example sentence makes two points.

- Guests must be logged in, and activity there must be current activity in the activity database.
- Discuss this with your solution engineer first.

Structurally, the parenthetical expression—*discuss this with your solution engineer first*—in the example sentence is like an *aside*. An aside typically is presented as an off-hand remark, some supplementary information. However, this particular parenthetical expression appears to be an important piece of information. You wouldn't talk to the engineer first if it was not important, would you?

So why is it in parentheses?

Bottom line—if the information is important enough to include in your document in the first place, make an effort to put all the essential information on the same footing. When you want to incorporate truly less important information as a way to illustrate one of your main points, go ahead and use a parenthetical expression.

REVISION

Before

Guests must be logged in, and activity there must be current activity in the activity database (discuss this with your solution engineer first).

After

Guests must be logged in, and activity there must be current activity in the activity database. Discuss this with your solution engineer first.

Example 4

REWRITE THESE SENTENCES

> However, if you know you are going to perform a long-waiting, third-party callback operation (such as a DMA link to iTunes) and you want to reduce the chance that the token expires before the user gets back, call `fakecorpid.forceTokenRefresh()` before doing so.
>
> Drag FakeCorpID.framework and FakeCorpID.Bundle into your project's Frameworks section of the Project Navigator (typically, you can find it in the builds folder).

PROBLEM

Each sentence contains a parenthetical expression. In each case, there might be a better way to go than using a parenthetical.

DISCUSSION

When is it a good idea to use a parenthetical expression? When it comes to writing style, it is best to reserve the use of a parenthetical when you want to add incidental information not crucial to the central meaning of a sentence. It is incidental information used to illustrate a point. The technical term for this is *aside*.

What is an aside? Literally, it means "to the side." It is a remark that is not directly related to the main topic of discussion.

First Sentence

The parenthetical expression *(such as a DMA link to iTunes)* looks like an aside. Take the aside out and the meaning does not suffer. You could leave the example sentence as-is. Another way to punctuate the aside is to enclose it in commas.

Second Sentence

On the contrary, the parenthetical expression *(typically, you can find it in the builds folder)* appears to be a crucial directive for the user. This is not incidental, nice-to-know information.

Make this a complete sentence following the example sentence.

REVISION

Before

> However, if you know you are going to perform a long-waiting, third-party callback operation (such as a DMA link to iTunes) and you want to reduce the chance that the token expires before the user gets back, you can call `fakecorpid.forceTokenRefresh()` before doing so.

> Drag FakeCorpID.framework and FakeCorpID.Bundle into your project's Frameworks section of the Project Navigator (usually in the builds folder).

After

With parentheses (no change)

> However, if you know you are going to perform a long-waiting, third-party callback operation (such as a DMA link to iTunes) and you want to reduce the chance that the token expires before the user gets back, call `fakecorpid.forceTokenRefresh()` before doing so.

Or with commas

> However, if you know you are going to perform a long-waiting, third-party callback operation, such as a DMA link to iTunes, and you want to reduce the chance that the token expires before the user gets back, call `fakecorpid.forceTokenRefresh()` before doing so.

And sentence 2

> Drag FakeCorpID.framework and FakeCorpID.Bundle into your project's Frameworks section of the Project Navigator. Typically, you can find it in the builds folder.

Example 5

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> This means that for subsequent calls to the same data (or is it same type of data—implying that the underlying data might change) a business unit's query is returning cached data which is faster since the query is not hitting the SOLR core but it is returning cached results.

PROBLEM

This sentence is poorly written for these reasons:

- It is way too long—51 words
- The 14-word parenthetical expression in the middle of the sentence should be a separate sentence
- The remaining 37-word sentence should be broken up into two or more simple sentences
- The sentence lacks adequate punctuation
- The word *which* should be replaced by the word *that*

DISCUSSION

Here is your process for deconstructing a long sentence:

- Capture the entire sentence and paste it into a worksheet
- Strip out the component parts and arrange them in a bullet list
- Reconstruct each component part as a simple sentence
- Reassemble the content into a sequence of simple sentences

Here are the component parts for the example sentence:

- This means that for subsequent calls to the same data, or the same type of data, a business unit's query returns cached data that is faster.
- It is faster since the query does not hit the SOLR core, but returns cached results.
- When we say the same type of data, we imply the data might change. (This sentence is a **Note** in the rewrite.)

NOTE: We work around the **Which vs. That** problem simply by starting a new sentence.

REVISION

Before

> This means that for subsequent calls to the same data (or is it same type of data—implying that the underlying data might change) a business unit's query is returning cached data which is faster since the query is not hitting the SOLR core but it is returning cached results.

After

> This means that for subsequent calls to the same data, or the same type of data, a business unit's query returns cached data that is faster. It is faster since the query does not hit the SOLR core, but returns cached results.

NOTE: When we say the same type of data, we imply the data might change.

Example 6

> In addition, the profile service (which stores the creation and management of guest profiles) performs the following additional validation during registration or profile update.

PROBLEM

First, we have a problem with wordiness (see the bold type):

> In **addition**, the profile service (which stores the creation and management of guest profiles) performs the following **additional** validation during registration or profile update.

Second, I would prefer to not enclose information in parentheses any more than I must. Some authors like parentheses a lot more than I do. I believe too many items in parentheses can be an annoying mannerism. Let's see if there is a better way to go.

DISCUSSION

Wordiness

The sentence begins with *In Addition*. Later, we see this phrase, *performs the following additional validation*. We need to do some subtraction.

I will show you your two options in the **Revision** section.

The Problem with Information Enclosed in Parentheses

From the website **GrammarBook**:

> Use parentheses to enclose information that clarifies or is used as an aside.

The implication is that information in parentheses is nice to know, but it is not essential to the basic meaning of the sentence. In other words, you could cut it out entirely and not lose the essence of the sentence. Grammatically, it does even belong to the sentence! So if you are undecided whether to put information in parentheses or set the information between commas as a parenthetical expression, decide whether the information truly belongs in the sentence at all.

Does the information enclosed in parentheses in the example sentence even belong in the sentence—Yes or No? You decide.

My opinion? It belongs in the sentence. Therefore, enclose the information in commas. See the **Revision** section for the results.

REVISION

Before

> In addition, the profile service (which stores the creation and management of guest profiles) performs the following additional validation during registration or profile update.

After

> In addition, the profile service, which stores the creation and management of guest profiles, performs the following validation during registration or profile update.

Or

> The profile service, which stores the creation and management of guest profiles, performs the following additional validation during registration or profile update.

Past vs. Present Tense

IMPORTANT: This topic is about **past vs. present tense**. However, all of the following examples contain discussions of multiple subjects—not just past vs. present tense. Therefore, in addition to past vs. present tense, you are going to learn a lot of different things about good writing and rewriting.

Example 1

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> Uptime reports have been removed.

PROBLEM

The verb form *have been removed* is called the past perfect. The past perfect expresses the idea that something occurred before another action in the past. It can also show that something happened before a specific time in the past.

The preferred usage of the past perfect tense is to explain a sequence of events, as in the following examples:

- We have driven 100 miles before lunch.
- I had run three other marathons before entering the Boston Marathon.

Notice each sentence describes the sequence of two events.

DISCUSSION

In our problem sentence, the author describes just one event only. Also, since the author does not indicate the removed uptime events are now *restored*, we assume they are still *removed*.

Since the uptime reports were removed and they continue to be removed, let's simply use the present tense. Why? Because use of the present tense is the most direct way to communicate with your reader. Make your message as uncomplicated as possible

REVISION

Before

Uptime reports have been removed.

After

Uptime reports are removed.

Example 2

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> The `client_secret` string verifies that the request has been provisioned appropriately.

PROBLEM

The verb form in the sentence's object (after the word *that*) is *has been provisioned*. That is called the past perfect tense.

When is it appropriate to use the past perfect tense? Here is a quote from the website **Englishpage**:

> The Past Perfect expresses the idea that something occurred before another action in the past. It can also show that something happened before a specific time in the past.

Englishpage gives some good examples of things that occurred before other actions in the past:

- I had never seen such a beautiful beach before I went to Kauai.
- I did not have any money because I had lost my wallet.
- Tony knew Istanbul so well because he had visited the city several times.
- Kristine had never been to an opera before last night.
- We were not able to get a hotel room because we had not booked in advance.

DISCUSSION

Given the rule of expressing the idea that something occurred before another action in the past or showing that something happened before a specific time in the past, it would be OK to use the past perfect tense if the sentence looked like this:

> The `client_secret` string **verified** that the request has been provisioned appropriately.

But it does not.

Therefore, change *has been provisioned* to *is provisioned*.

REVISION

Before

> The `client_secret` string verifies that the request has been provisioned appropriately.

After

> The `client_secret` string verifies that the request is provisioned appropriately.

Example 3

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> For example, if you wanted to send out a message in an email channel, the delivery profile would be the email address for the client.

PROBLEM

Take this conditional statement out of the past tense and put it into the present tense.

DISCUSSION

The sentence reads (problem areas in boldface):

> For example, if **you wanted to send out** a message … the **delivery profile would be** the email address for the client

Are we talking about something that happened 10 years ago? Two months ago? Last week? No, we are talking about something that takes place right now. Use the present tense.

REVISION

Before

> For example, if you wanted to send out a message in an email channel, the delivery profile would be the email address for the client.

After

> For example, if you want to send out a message in an email channel, the delivery profile is the email address for the client.

Example 4

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

A non-registered transactor (NRT) is a visitor to a FakeCorp site that has chosen not to create a guest account, but wants to get marketing newsletters.

PROBLEM

- Perfect tenses
- Present vs. past
- Pronoun reference

DISCUSSION

Pronoun Reference

A visitor is a person, not a thing. Therefore, when referring to a person, use the word *who* instead of *that*.

Perfect Tenses and Present vs. Past

Instead of saying this:

a visitor … who has chosen

Say this:

a visitor … who chooses

REVISION

Before

A non-registered transactor (NRT) is a visitor to a FakeCorp site that has chosen not to create a guest account, but wants to get marketing newsletters.

After

A non-registered transactor (NRT) is a visitor to a FakeCorp site who chooses not to create a guest account, but wants to get marketing newsletters.

Example 5

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> If you have created customized email templates, these need to be defined in your client configuration.

PROBLEM

These issues:

- Passive voice
- Perfect tenses and past vs. present

DISCUSSION

Perfect Tenses and Past vs. Present

Don't say this:

> If you have created customized email templates

Say this:

> If you create customized email templates

Passive Voice

Don't say this:

> …these need to be defined in your client configuration.

Say this:

> …define them in your client configuration

REVISION

Before

> If you have created customized email templates, these need to be defined in your client configuration.

After

> If you create customized email templates, define them in your client configuration.

Example 6

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> After you have installed the required FakeCorp ID files, there are two additional tasks you must complete.

PROBLEM

Fix these problems:

- Avoid the past perfect—*you have installed*. Use the present tense.
- Correct the awkward word order.
- Use simpler language—instead of *additional*, use *more*.

DISCUSSION

Don't say this:

After you have installed the required FakeCorp ID files

Say this:

After you install the required FakeCorp ID files

Don't say this:

there are two additional tasks you must complete

Say this:

you must complete two more tasks

REVISION

Before

After you have installed the required FakeCorp ID files, there are two additional tasks you must complete.

After

After you install the required FakeCorp ID files, you must complete two more tasks.

Example 7

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> The CMS will commit the re-indexed data only after all data has been sent to Solr.

PROBLEM

This sentence is an odd mixture of future tense:

> The CMS will commit the re-indexed data

And past perfect:

> all data has been sent to Solr.

We need to put everything into the present tense.

DISCUSSION

Future Tense

Don't say this:

> The CMS will commit the re-indexed data

Say this:

> The CMS commits the re-indexed data

Past Perfect

Don't say this:

> all data has been sent to Solr

Say this:

> you send all the data to Solr

Also, notice we changed the passive voice to active voice.

REVISION

Before

The CMS will commit the re-indexed data only after all data has been sent to Solr.

After

The CMS commits the re-indexed data only after you send all the data to Solr.

Procedures

IMPORTANT: This topic is about **procedures**. However, all of the following examples contain discussions of multiple subjects—not just procedures. Therefore, in addition to procedures, you are going to learn a lot of different things about good writing and rewriting.

Example 1

REWRITE THESE PROCEDURES

Accessing the IRF Fabric to Verify the Configuration

To verify the basic functionality of the IRF fabric after you finish configuring basic IRF settings and connecting IRF ports:

1. Log in to the IRF fabric through the console port of any member switch.
2. Create a Layer 3 interface, assign it an IP address, and make sure that the IRF fabric and the remote network management station can reach each other.
3. Use Telnet, web, or SNMP to access the IRF fabric from the network management station.
4. Check that you can manage all member switches as if they were one node.
5. Show the running status of the IRF fabric by using the commands in Table 5.

PROBLEM

- Word order—steps 1, 3, and 5.
- Multiple actions in one step—Step 2.

DISCUSSION

Unless the company I work for is using a different style guide, I rely on the Microsoft Manual of Style (MSTP). MSTP makes recommendations about word order, but it does not make specific recommendations about multiple actions in a single step. However, for multiple actions, there might be a better way to communicate multiple actions in a single step by having a second level of steps.

This is what MSTP says about word order in procedures:

> As a general rule, tell the user where the action should take place before describing the action to take.

This does not happen in steps 1, 3, and 5.

Step 1

Here is step 1:

> Log in to the IRF fabric through the console port of any member switch.

First, we need to tell the user where the action takes place. The action begins at *the console port of any member switch*. Therefore, rewrite the step this way:

> Through the console port of any member switch, log in to the IRF fabric.

Step 3

Here is step 3:

> Use Telnet, web, or SNMP to access the IRF fabric from the network management station.

Rewrite:

> From the network management station, use Telnet, web, or SNMP to access the IRF fabric.

Step 5

Here is step 5:

> Show the running status of the IRF fabric by using the commands in Table 5.

Rewrite:

> Using the commands in Table 5, show the running status of the IRF fabric.

Multiple Actions in a Single Step

Step 2 is OK as it is now. You don't need to change it.

But instead of having multiple actions in a single step—making the sentence long and complicated—why not break out the multiple actions into a set of subordinate steps? The additional white space may make it easier for the user to follow instructions.

1. Log in to the IRF fabric through the console port of any member switch.
2. Do the following:
    a. Create a Layer 3 interface.
    b. Assign the interface an IP address.
    c. Make sure that the IRF fabric and the remote network management station can reach each other.
3. Use Telnet, web, or SNMP to access the IRF fabric from the network management station.
4. Check that you can manage all member switches as if they were one node.
5. Show the running status of the IRF fabric by using the commands in Table 5.

REVISION

Before

Accessing the IRF Fabric to Verify the Configuration

To verify the basic functionality of the IRF fabric after you finish configuring basic IRF settings and connecting IRF ports:

1. Log in to the IRF fabric through the console port of any member switch.
2. Create a Layer 3 interface, assign it an IP address, and make sure that the IRF fabric and the remote network management station can reach each other.
3. Use Telnet, web, or SNMP to access the IRF fabric from the network management station.
4. Check that you can manage all member switches as if they were one node.
5. Show the running status of the IRF fabric by using the commands in Table 5.

After

Accessing the IRF Fabric to Verify the Configuration

To verify the basic functionality of the IRF fabric after you finish configuring basic IRF settings and connecting IRF ports:

1. Through the console port of any member switch, log in to the IRF fabric.
2. Do the following:
   a. Create a Layer 3 interface.
   b. Assign the interface an IP address.
   c. Make sure that the IRF fabric and the remote network management station can reach each other.
3. From the network management station, use Telnet, web, or SNMP to access the IRF fabric.
4. Check that you can manage all member switches as if they were one node.
5. Using the commands in Table 5, show the running status of the IRF fabric.

Example 2

REWRITE THIS SET OF PROCEDURES

Required Configurations

The following list describes what you need to add to your Bogus project manifest file before you work with the Special-Bogus 5.0.1 Library. Refer to Bogus's App documentation for the correct placement of these tags.

1. The library requires you add the following permissions to the manifest file:
2. Add a new activity to the app with the name, com.fakecorp.id.bogus.webclient.FakeCorpIDWebActivity.
3. Add a new service to the app with the name, com. fakecorp.id.bogus.webclient.FakeCorpWebService.
4. These are the required metadata declarations (see the onboarding process to get more information about these values):
   a. Define Horizon environment as fake_horizon_env.
   b. We recommend putting the environment variable in the strings resource file.
   c. Define core services environment as fake_core_services_env.
   d. Define your ClientId as fake_client_id.
5. Optional metadata declarations:
   a. For Horizon CSS overrides, use fake_css_override.
   b. Conveniently switch your Horizon CSS based on fake-horizon_env by adding definitions in the form of fake_css_override_<env>.
   c. You can also set language and country preferences in metadata.

PROBLEM

A step is an imperative sentence—that is, a command. Descriptive text is a declarative sentence—that is, *not* a command or a step. Description and commands are two different things. Therefore, the format for a command is different from the format for descriptive text.

DISCUSSION

In the previous set of procedures, everything is formatted as a sequence of steps. We need to take the descriptive text out of its current format, and format the descriptive text as ordinary text amongst the steps.

These sentences are descriptive text:

- The library requires you add the following permissions to the manifest file.
- These are the required metadata declarations (see the onboarding process to get more information on obtaining about these values).
- We recommend putting the environment variable in the strings resource file.
- You can also set language and country preferences in metadata.

REVISION

Before

Required Configurations

The following list describes what you need to add to your Bogus project manifest file before you work with the Special-Bogus 5.0.1 Library. Refer to Bogus's App documentation for the correct placement of these tags.

1. The library requires you add the following permissions to the manifest file:
2. Add a new activity to the app with the name, com.fakecorp.id.bogus.webclient.FakeCorpIDWebActivity.
3. Add a new service to the app with the name, com. fakecorp.id.bogus.webclient.FakeCorpWebService.
4. These are the required metadata declarations (see the onboarding process to get more information about these values):
    a. Define Horizon environment as fake_horizon_env.
    b. We recommend putting the environment variable in the strings resource file.
    c. Define core services environment as fake_core_services_env.
    d. Define your ClientId as fake_client_id.
5. Optional metadata declarations:
    a. For Horizon CSS overrides, use fake_css_override.
    b. Conveniently switch your Horizon CSS based on fake-horizon_env by adding definitions in the form of fake_css_override_<env>.
    c. You can also set language and country preferences in metadata.

After

Required Configurations

The following list describes what you need to add to your Bogus project manifest file before you work with the Special-Bogus 5.0.1 Library. Refer to Bogus's App documentation for the correct placement of these tags.

The library requires you add the following permissions to the manifest file:

1. Add a new activity to the app with the name, com.fakecorp.id.bogus.webclient.FakeCorpIDWebActivity.
2. Add a new service to the app with the name, com. fakecorp.id.bogus.webclient.FakeCorpWebService.

These are the required metadata declarations (see the onboarding process to get more information on obtaining about these values):

- Define Horizon environment as fake_horizon_env.

NOTE: We recommend putting the environment variable in the strings resource file.

- Define core services environment as fake_core_services_env.
- Define your ClientId as fake_client_id.

These are the optional metadata declarations:

1. For Horizon CSS overrides, use fake_css_override.
2. Conveniently switch your Horizon CSS based on fake-horizon_env by adding definitions in the form of fake_css_override_<env>

You can also set language and country preferences in metadata.

Example 3

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> Configure a SUNRISE server to act as the CIRCLE server, add an account with the username hello@bbb on the CIRCLE server, and configure the CIRCLE server to assign the privilege level of 3 after the user passes authentication.

PROBLEM

The example sentence is describing the three phases of configuring a switch. The sentence is too long.

DISCUSSION

You can rearrange it as a series of steps or you can write three short sentences with suitable transition words.

Let's look at both solutions.

REVISION

Before

      Configure a SUNRISE server to act as the CIRCLE server, add an account with the username hello@bbb on the CIRCLE server, and configure the CIRCLE server to assign the privilege level of 3 after the user passes authentication.

After

[three steps]

      Configure the switch as follows:

1. Configure a SUNRISE server to act as the CIRCLE server.
2. Add an account with the username hello@bbb on the CIRCLE server.
3. Configure the CIRCLE server to assign the privilege level of 3 after the user passes authentication.

Or

[short sentences]

      Configure a SUNRISE server to act as the CIRCLE server. Add an account with the username hello@bbb on the CIRCLE server. Then configure the CIRCLE server to assign the privilege level of 3 after the user passes authentication.

Example 4

REWRITE STEP 2

---

1. Make a backup of the CMS database.
2. Run the ConvertDBStructure.bat conversion script on the database server to convert the CMS database. Run the script on the machine that hosts the CMS. The script is located in the DoubleByte folder in the CMSDatabase.zip file. Execute the script without arguments to see the usage instructions for the conversion script. The script should be run alongside all the files and folders contained in the zip file. You cannot run it in isolation.

PROBLEM

Step 2 has a mixture of procedural sentences and descriptive sentences. Know the difference. They are not the same thing.

Format the steps as steps. Format the descriptive sentences as ordinary sentences amid the steps.

DISCUSSION

These sentences are steps:

- Make a backup of the CMS database.
- Run the **ConvertDBStructure.bat** conversion script on the database server to convert the CMS database.
- Run the script on the machine that hosts the CMS.
- Execute the script without arguments to see the usage instructions for the conversion script.

These sentences are description:

- The script is located in the `DoubleByte` folder in the CMSDatabase.zip file.
- The script should be run alongside all the files and folders contained in the zip file.
- You cannot run it in isolation.

See the revised Step 2.

REVISION

Before

1. Make a backup of the CMS database.
2. Run the **ConvertDBStructure.bat** conversion script on the database server to convert the CMS database. Run the script on the machine that hosts the CMS. The script is located in the `DoubleByte` folder in the CMSDatabase.zip file. Execute the script without arguments to see the usage instructions for the conversion script. The script should be run alongside all the files and folders contained in the zip file. You cannot run it in isolation.

After

1. Make a backup of the CMS database.
2. Run the **ConvertDBStructure.bat** conversion script on the database server to convert the CMS database.
3. Run the script on the machine that hosts the CMS.
   The script is located in the `DoubleByte` folder in the CMSDatabase.zip file.
4. Run the script without arguments to see the usage instructions for the conversion script.
   The script should be run alongside all the files and folders contained in the zip file. You cannot run it in isolation.

Example 5

REWRITE THESE PROCEDURES

Creating the role and assigning permissions:

1. Log into your FakeCorp account with administrative privileges. Go the FakeAccount Roles screen and click Create New Role.
2. Name the role fakecorp_audit_role. Click Next Step.
3. Choose Role for Cross-account Access and select Provide access between accounts you own. Click Next Step.
4. Enter 12345678910 for Account ID. Ensure that Require MFA is NOT checked. Click Next Step.
5. Choose Select Policy Template and select the Security Audit role, which appears near the end of the list. Click Next Step.
6. Click Create Role.

PROBLEM

These are the problems:

- Use the infinitive verb form to lead into the procedures.
- Do one of the following:
  - o Put only one step per line.
  - o If you want to put more than one step per line, make it all one sentence using correct punctuation and connector words.
- Don't use all caps for emphasis.

DISCUSSION

The main problem with the example six steps is the presence of more than one complete step for a separate line. This occurs in steps 1 through 5.

There are two acceptable ways to correct this problem. See the **Revision** section, and decide for yourself which revision looks best to you.

REVISION

Before

Creating the role and assigning permissions:

1. Log into your FakeCorp account with administrative privileges. Go the FakeAccount Roles screen and click Create New Role.
2. Name the role fakecorp_audit_role. Click Next Step.
3. Choose Role for Cross-account Access and select Provide access between accounts you own. Click Next Step.
4. Enter 12345678910 for Account ID. Ensure that Require MFA is NOT checked. Click Next Step.
5. Choose Select Policy Template and select the Security Audit role, which appears near the end of the list. Click Next Step.
6. Click Create Role.

After

To create the role and assign permissions:

1. Log into your FakeCorp account with administrative privileges.
2. Go the FakeAccount Roles screen, and click **Create New Role**.
3. Name the role **fakecorp_audit_role**.
4. Click **Next Step**.
5. Choose **Role for Cross-account Access**, and select **Provide access between accounts you own**.
6. Click **Next Step**.
7. Enter 12345678910 for **Account ID**.
8. Ensure that **Require MFA** *is not* checked.
9. Click **Next Step**.
10. Choose **Select Policy Template**, and select the **Security Audit** role, which appears near the end of the list.
11. Click **Next Step**.
12. Click **Create Role**.

Or

To create the role and assign permissions:

1. Log into your FakeCorp account with administrative privileges.
2. Go the FakeAccount Roles screen, and click **Create New Role**.
3. Name the role **fakecorp_audit_role**, and then click **Next Step**.
4. Choose **Role for Cross-account Access**, select **Provide access between accounts you own**, and then click **Next Step**.
5. Enter 12345678910 for **Account ID**.
6. Ensure that **Require MFA** *is not* checked, and then click **Next Step**.
7. Choose **Select Policy Template**, select the **Security Audit** role, which appears near the end of the list, and then click **Next Step**.
8. Click **Create Role**.

Example 6

REWRITE THIS STEP

<div style="border: 1px solid black;">

1. On the main page in FancyApp (click the FancyApp logo to get there), there is a 'new repository' button on the right side of the screen within the 'Your repositories' pane.

</div>

PROBLEM

Problems:

- Fonts
- Parentheses
- Procedures
- Punctuation
- Usage
- Word Order

DISCUSSION

Fonts

FancyApp is a user interface (UI) feature. UI features are bold. Do not use quotation marks. However, in our rewritten step, we wrote the UI feature out of the sentence. That's why the boldface FancyApp is not there.

Also note, when you refer to the FancyApp logo, the characters in FancyApp are not bold because we are talking about the logo itself, not a word on the UI.

Make **Your Repositories** bold. It is a button on the UI.

Parentheses

Never put a step in parentheses. Steps are too important to treat as an aside. Remember, text in parentheses is considered not as essential as the main sentence. That is not the case here.

Procedures

Rewrite,

>   Click the FancyApp logo to get there

as a standalone step.

Punctuation

Problems:

- Parentheses
- Single quotation marks

Usage

The word *within* is misused. The word *in* is correct in this context.

Word Order

See the revised sentence.

REVISION

Before

1. On the main page in FancyApp (click the FancyApp logo to get there), there is a 'new repository' button on the right side of the screen within the 'Your repositories' pane.

After

1. Click the FancyApp logo.
2. On the main page in FancyApp, on the right side of the screen, click **Your Repositories**.

Example 7

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> To view results in reverse-chronilogical order (that is, to return the newest results), select a time-based field (for example, the `datecreated` field), and append the `sortDirection` descriptor (desc) to your query.

PROBLEM

This is a procedure formatted as descriptive text. We might consider formatting the information as steps.

If we leave it as descriptive text, my preference is to break it out into simple sentences to improve readability. However, it is probably OK to revise it as a long single sentence.

There is a spelling mistake. Did you notice it?

DISCUSSION

See the revision section.

REVISION

Before

> To view results in reverse-chronilogical order (that is, to return the newest results), select a time-based field (for example, the `datecreated` field), and append the `sortDirection` descriptor (desc) to your query.

After

> To view results in reverse-chronological order (that is, to return the newest results), select a time-based field (for example, the `datecreated` field), and then append the `sortDirection` descriptor (desc) to your query.

Or

> To view results in reverse-chronological order (that is, to return the newest results), select a time-based field (for example, the `datecreated` field). Then append the `sortDirection` descriptor (desc) to your query.

Or rewrite the sentence as steps

> To view results in reverse-chronological order (that is, to return the newest results):
>
> 1. Select a time-based field (for example, the `datecreated` field).
> 2. Append the `sortDirection` descriptor (desc) to your query.

Example 8

REWRITE THESE PROCEDURES

> To add a domain user or group to a group on the server:
>
> 1. Open Computer Management
> 2. In the tree, navigate to System Tools\Local Users and Groups\Groups.
> 3. Double click the desired group and click Add.
> 4. Click Locations and then choose I want to complete this action by entering my credentials on the authentic Windows sign-in screen. Send ctrl-alt-delete to the server as asked, then authenticate with an account in the same domain as the user or group you want to add.
>   NOTE: enter your username in the format DOMAIN\USERNAME.
> 5. Select your target domain in the Locations box and click OK.
> 6. Enter the user or group name in the box, then click Check Names. If you entered a name that matches a domain user or group, it is underlined. Click OK.
> 7. You should see your new user or group in the group members list. Click OK.

PROBLEM

This set of procedures has many problems:

- Capitalization
- Code in text
- Fonts
- Procedures
- Punctuation
- Usage

DISCUSSION

We are going to take it one line at a time.

Line 1

      To add a domain user or group to a group on the server:

I am OK with this.

However, to be more formal, you could add this verbiage:

      To add a domain user or group to a group on the server, do the following:

Line 2

      Open Computer Management.

Computer Management is a user interface (UI) feature. It should be bold.

      Open **Computer Management**.

Line 3

      In the tree, navigate to **System Tools\Local Users and Groups\Groups**.

Change *navigate* to *go*.

      In the tree, go to **System Tools\Local Users and Groups\Groups**.

Line 4

      Double click the desired group and click Add.

Put a hyphen between *double* and *click*. Add a comma after the word *group*. Make the word *Add* bold because it is a UI feature.

      Double-click the desired group, and click **Add**.

Line 5

Click Locations and then choose **I want to complete this action by entering my credentials** on the authentic Windows sign-in screen**.** Send ctrl-alt-delete to the server as asked, then authenticate with an account in the same domain as the user or group you want to add.

Do the following:

- Make *Locations* bold.
- Add a comma after the word *Locations*.
- Make the second sentence a separate step.
- Make *ctrl-alt-delete* Courier font and non-italic.
- Add the word *and* after the comma.

Click **Locations**, and then choose **I want to complete this action by entering my credentials** on the authentic Windows sign-in screen**.**

5. Send `ctrl-alt-delete` to the server as asked, and then authenticate with an account in the same domain as the user or group you want to add.

Line 6

NOTE: enter your username in the format DOMAIN\USERNAME.

Capitalize the word Enter.

NOTE: Enter your username in the format DOMAIN\USERNAME.

Line 7

Select your target domain in the Locations box and click **OK**.

The word *Locations* is a UI feature; make it bold. Add a comma after the word *box*.

Select your target domain in the **Locations** box, and click **OK**.

Line 8

> Enter the user or group name in the box, then click **Check Names**. If you entered a name that matches a domain user or group, it is underlined. Click **OK**.

The sentence, "If you entered a name that matches a domain user or group, it is underlined" is not a step. Separate it from the previous sentence, which is a step.

The sentence, "Click **OK**" is a step. Make it a separate step in the set of procedures.

> Enter the user or group name in the box, then click **Check Names**.

> If you entered a name that matches a domain user or group, it is underlined.

> 8. Click **OK**.

Line 9

> You should see your new user or group in the group members list. Click **OK**.

The first sentence is not a step. Make it descriptive text.

The second sentence is a step. Format it as a step.

> You should see your new user or group in the group members list.

> 9. Click **OK**.

REVISION

Before

To add a domain user or group to a group on the server:

1. Open Computer Management
2. In the tree, navigate to System Tools\Local Users and Groups\Groups.
3. Double click the desired group and click Add.
4. Click Locations and then choose I want to complete this action by entering my credentials on the authentic Windows sign-in screen. Send `ctrl-alt-delete` to the server as asked, then authenticate with an account in the same domain as the user or group you want to add. NOTE: enter your username in the format DOMAIN\USERNAME.
5. Select your target domain in the Locations box and click OK.
6. Enter the user or group name in the box, then click Check Names. If you entered a name that matches a domain user or group, it is underlined. Click OK.
7. You should see your new user or group in the group members list. Click OK.

After

To add a domain user or group to a group on the server:

1. Open **Computer Management**.
2. In the tree, go to **System Tools\Local Users and Groups\Groups.**
3. Double-click the desired group, and click **Add**.
4. Click **Locations**, and then choose **I want to complete this action by entering my credentials** on the authentic Windows sign-in screen**.**
5. Send `ctrl-alt-delete` to the server as asked, and then authenticate with an account in the same domain as the user or group you want to add. NOTE: Enter your username in the format DOMAIN\USERNAME.
6. Select your target domain in the **Locations** box, and click **OK**.
7. Enter the user or group name in the box, and then click **Check Names**. If you entered a name that matches a domain user or group, it is underlined.
8. Click **OK**. You should see your new user or group in the group members list.
9. Click **OK**.

Example 9

REWRITE THIS STEP

---

1. Add the following script to your index.html page, making the appropriate edits to variable declaration (var didConfig), and specifying your clientID and the paths to your responder page and your customized .css file, if it is implemented.

PROBLEM

The example procedure actually contains three steps:

- Add the following script to your index.html page
- [make] the appropriate edits to variable declaration (var didConfig)
- [specify] your clientID and the paths to your responder page and your customized .css file, if it is implemented

DISCUSSION

Try to confine your steps to one action. Avoid individual procedures with multiple instructions.

REVISION

Before

1. Add the following script to your index.html page, making the appropriate edits to variable declaration (var didConfig), and specifying your clientID and the paths to your responder page and your customized .css file, if it is implemented.

After

1. Add the following script to your index.html page.
2. Make the appropriate edits to variable declaration (var didConfig).
3. Specify your clientID and the paths to your responder page and your customized .css file, if it is implemented.

Example 10

You will need to extract all of the files located in the ZIP file.

PROBLEM

These issues:

- Present vs. future
- Procedures
- Wordiness

DISCUSSION

Present vs. Future

Don't say this:

You will need to extract….

Say this:

Make sure you extract….

Or

Extract….

Procedures

When you say, *You will need to extract*, it sounds like you are giving nice-to-know information. However, when you give a procedure—which is what the author is doing here—phrase it as a command. See the **Revision** section for the rewritten version.

Say this:

Make sure you extract….

Or this:

Extract….

Wordiness

Don't say this:

> … all of the files located in the ZIP file

Say this:

> … all the files in the ZIP file

REVISION

Before

> You will need to extract all of the files located in that ZIP file.

After

> Make sure you extract all the files in the ZIP file.

Or

> Extract all the files in the ZIP file.

Example 11

REWRITE THIS STEP

> Install the most recent Apache Tomcat 7 distribution on the computer that hosts the CMS, following instructions provided by Apache for your operating system.

PROBLEM

This is a run-on procedural step.

DISCUSSION

In my opinion, you have the flexibility to either make it two steps or make the second part of the example sentence a descriptive sentence that give more details about the step. I'll show you both ways in the **Revision** section.

REVISION

Before

1. Install the most recent Apache Tomcat 7 distribution on the computer that hosts the CMS, following instructions provided by Apache for your operating system.

After

[two steps]

1. Install the most recent Apache Tomcat 7 distribution on the computer that hosts the CMS.
2. Follow the instructions provided by Apache for your operating system.

Or

[One step and one descriptive sentence}

1. Install the most recent Apache Tomcat 7 distribution on the computer that hosts the CMS.

Follow the instructions provided by Apache for your operating system.

Pronoun References

IMPORTANT: This topic is about **pronoun references**. However, all of the following examples contain discussions of multiple subjects—not just pronoun references. Therefore, in addition to pronoun references, you are going to learn a lot of different things about good writing and rewriting.

Example 1

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> When you add an existing adult FakeCorp user as a family member, all you need is either their FakeCorp username or their email address.

PROBLEM

Using the plural word *their* (twice) as a pronoun for the singular noun *user*.

DISCUSSION

Because a pronoun refers to a noun or takes the place of that noun, you have to use the correct singular or plural version of the pronoun. If the pronoun takes the place of a singular noun, you have to use a singular pronoun. If the pronoun takes the place of a plural noun, use a plural pronoun.

REVISION

Before

> When you add an existing adult FakeCorp user as a family member, all you need is either their FakeCorp username or their email address.

After

> When you add an existing adult FakeCorp user as a family member, all you need is the FakeCorp user's username or email address.

Or

> When you add an existing adult FakeCorp user as a family member, all you need is his or her FakeCorp username or email address.

REMARKS

The phenomenon of incorrect pronoun reference in writing gets worse every year. I really don't know why. Being correct about pronoun reference was stressed when I was a student back in the day. Do English teachers teach it anymore? I will say that when I break out my work week into specific tasks, the task of fixing incorrect pronoun references is probably at the very top of the list of hours billed to my employer.

I'll close with this quote by Casey Stengel about his hapless 1962 Mets team: "You look up and down the bench and you have to say to yourself, 'Can't anybody here play this game?'" I could say the same thing about my engineers who don't get it about incorrect pronoun reference because they keep doing the same thing over and over again.

Example 2

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

A business unit (BU) that wants to enable support for the local ban feature must work with their service representative to add a BU-specific local ban entry into their client configuration.

PROBLEM

Incorrect pronoun reference.

DISCUSSION

Business unit is singular. The pronoun *their* is plural. Therefore, in the two places where *their* appears, replace *their* with the singular pronoun *its*.

REVISION

Before

A business unit (BU) that wants to enable support for the local ban feature must work with their service representative to add a BU-specific local ban entry into their client configuration.

After

A business unit (BU) that wants to enable support for the local ban feature must work with its service representative to add a BU-specific local ban entry into its client configuration.

Example 3

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> You would call this to refresh the UI for any member that wants to update any of their information.

PROBLEM

- The pronoun *their* refers back to the subject *member*. The word *member* is singular, but the word *their* is plural.
- The word *that* should be changed to *who* because it refers to the member. Member is a human person, not a non-human thing.

DISCUSSION

Because a pronoun refers to a noun or takes the place of that noun, you have to use the correct singular or plural version of the pronoun in technical writing. If the pronoun takes the place of a singular noun, you have to use a singular pronoun. On the other hand, if the pronoun takes the place of a plural noun, use a plural pronoun. Also, use the word *who* when referring to a person, such as a member. Non-human things take the word *that*.

REVISION

Before

You would call this to refresh the UI for any member that wants to update any of their information.

After

You would call this to refresh the UI for any member who wants to update any of his or her information.

Or

You would call this to refresh the UI for any member who wants to update any personal information

Example 4

REWRITE THESE SENTENCES

> If they choose to create a new account in that time interval, the user's email is pre-populated automatically in the new profile form.
>
> The user then enters more information about themselves before clicking the blue Create Account button.
>
> When a user forgets their password or member name, they can request that their password or the list of member names be sent to them.

PROBLEM

More examples of faulty pronoun reference.

DISCUSSION

His or Her

The pronoun phrase *his or her* is a hat-tip to political correctness. Of course, we strive to be gender neutral. But I think the phrase *his or her* is ham-handed writing. It sounds like the company's Legal and HR departments got together to solve the gender reference problem once and for all. I urge you to write around it. Do not use the phrase any more than you must.

REVISIONS

Before

> If they choose to create a new account in that time interval, the user's email is pre-populated automatically in the new profile form.
>
> The user then enters more information about themselves before clicking the blue **Create Account** button.
>
> When a user forgets their password or member name, they can request that their password or the list of member names be sent to them.

After

> If the user chooses to create a new account in that time interval, the user's email is pre-populated automatically in the new profile form.
>
> The user then enters more personal information before clicking the blue **Create Account** button.
>
> When a user forgets his or her password or member name, the user can ask to be sent the password or the list of member names.

Example 5

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> The FakeCorp ID iOS Library allows their users to log in to their existing FakeCorp ID accounts or create a new FakeCorp ID account from their iOS devices (for example, iPhone, iPad, or iPod touch).

PROBLEM

This sentence has an incorrect pronoun reference. Can you spot it?

DISCUSSION

The word *their* appears three times in the sentence. The first instance is incorrect (emphasis added):

> The FakeCorp ID iOS Library allows **their** users to log in to their existing FakeCorp ID accounts or create a new FakeCorp ID account from their iOS devices (for example, iPhone, iPad, or iPod touch).

The subject of the sentence is the word *Library*. Library is a singular noun. Therefore, the correct pronoun is *its*.

The second and third instances of the word *their* are correct because *their* refers back to the word *users*. *Users* is plural; therefore, *their* is OK.

REVISION

Before

> The FakeCorp ID iOS Library allows their users to log in to their existing FakeCorp ID accounts or create a new FakeCorp ID account from their iOS devices (for example, iPhone, iPad, or iPod touch).

After

> The FakeCorp ID iOS Library allows its users to log in to their existing FakeCorp ID accounts or create a new FakeCorp ID account from their iOS devices (for example, iPhone, iPad, or iPod touch).

Or

> The FakeCorp ID iOS Library allows a user to log in to his or her existing FakeCorp ID account or create a new FakeCorp ID account from the iOS devices (for example, iPhone, iPad, or iPod touch).

Example 6

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> The coloring of the first piece of the address bar shows that the site's owner has gone a step further and offered themselves up for extensive organization vetting and authentication procedures, to prove the organization behind the site is who they say they are.

PROBLEM

Incorrect pronoun reference, in several places, is the main problem. The pronoun reference problem is two-fold: singular vs. plural and human vs. non-human.

Also, to improve readability, we can (a) divide the sentence into two sentences and (b) clean up some wordiness.

DISCUSSION

Incorrect Pronoun Reference

- Singular vs. plural—The pronoun references are to *site owner* (in blue—see below), which is singular. There are three plural incorrect pronoun references (in red) to the singular subject.
- Human vs. non-human—Furthermore, the words *themselves*, *they*, and *they*, are incorrect because they make it look like the author is referring to an actual person. Remember, we are referring to a corporate website, which is a non-human entity. Therefore, use the word *it* and its variants. Also, the author uses the word *who* (in hot pink), which erroneously refers to a person. Use the word *what*.

Here is the example sentence again:

> The coloring of the first piece of the address bar shows that the site's owner has gone a step further and offered themselves up for extensive organization vetting and authentication procedures, to prove the organization behind the site is who they say they are.

Simple Sentences

Put a period after the word *authentication*. Then start a new sentence.

Along with the wordiness cleanup (see the next discussion), this improves the fog index from 17 years of education to 10 years.

Wordiness

Here is the example sentence with the wordy passages in brackets:

> The coloring of the first piece of the address bar shows [that] the site's owner has gone a step further and offered themselves up for [extensive] organization vetting and authentication [procedures], to prove the organization behind the site is who they say they are.

REVISION

Before

> The coloring of the first piece of the address bar shows that the site's owner has gone a step further and offered themselves up for extensive organization vetting and authentication procedures, to prove the organization behind the site is who they say they are.

After

> The coloring of the first piece of the address bar shows the site's owner is offering itself up for organizational vetting and authentication. This proves the organization behind the site is what it says it is.

Example 7

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> If you do choose to customize emails for users of your site, the custom emails must be approved by the customer information management (CIM) group before they are available in production.

PROBLEM

The pronoun *they*.

DISCUSSION

In the first part of the sentence, we have two different plural nouns: *emails* and *users*. Near the end of the sentence, we have the plural pronoun *they*. Does *they* refer to *emails* or *users*?

Once you read (or re-read) the sentence carefully, it is clear *they* refers to *emails*. The clue is the phrase *available in production*. It is emails that are available in production, not users.

What we want to avoid, however, is confusing the reader in any way or forcing the reader to re-read the sentence.

Instead of using the word *they*, be specific. Specify *emails*.

REVISION

Before

> If you do choose to customize emails for users of your site, the custom emails must be approved by the customer information management (CIM) group before they are available in production.

After

> If you do choose to customize emails for users of your site, the custom emails must be approved by the customer information management (CIM) group before the emails are available in production.

Example 8

A business unit (BU) that wants to enable support for the local ban feature must work with its support engineer to add a BU-specific local ban entry into their client configuration during onboarding.

PROBLEM

The word *their*.

DISCUSSION

The word *their* is plural. The reference is to *business unit*, which is singular. A business unit is a non-human entity; it is not a person. Therefore, use the word *its*. *Its* is singular for a non-human reference.

REVISION

Before

A business unit (BU) that wants to enable support for the local ban feature must work with its support engineer to add a BU-specific local ban entry into their client configuration during onboarding.

After

A business unit (BU) that wants to enable support for the local ban feature must work with its support engineer to add a BU-specific local ban entry into its client configuration during onboarding.

Example 9

> You can send a user back into a high trust state by asking them to type
> their password again using the function `reAuth`.

PROBLEM

The subject *user* is singular. The pronoun references *them* and *their* are plural. Everything must be either singular or plural.

DISCUSSION

See the **Revision** section.

REVISION

Before

> You can send a user back into a high trust state by asking them to type their
> password again using the function `reAuth`.

After

> You can send a user back into a high trust state by asking the user to type his or
> her password again using the function `reAuth`.

Or

> You can send users back into a high trust state by asking them to type their
> passwords again using the function `reAuth`.

Example 10

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> The account recovery page is designed to help users retrieve their username or reset their password.

PROBLEM

We need to work on these problems:

- Pronoun reference
- Wordiness
- Usage

DISCUSSION

Pronoun Reference

Users (plural) don't get a username (singular) or reset a password (singular). A user has a username and password. Users have separate usernames and passwords.

The sentence is written in such a way as to imply all these many users have the same username and password. They don't.

Incorrect pronoun reference appears to be a chronic problem with my developer-authors at the mighty FakeCorp Company. No matter how many times I make the necessary changes, my authors never seem to learn. They keep making incorrect references over and over again.

On the other hand, the mighty FakeCorp Company pays me a nice hourly rate to make these trivial fixes. I guess I should be grateful.

Wordiness

The wordiness is in brackets:

> The account recovery page [is designed to help] users….

See the **Revision** section for a more direct way to say the same thing.

Usage

Don't say *retrieve*. Say *get*.

REVISION

Before

The account recovery page is designed to help users retrieve their username or reset their password.

After

The account recovery page helps users get their usernames or reset their passwords.

Example 11

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

Once the user successfully fills out the form, they are signed in.

PROBLEM

Once again, incorrect pronoun reference. The word *user* is singular and the word *they* is plural.

DISCUSSION

A few years ago, I watched an NFL football game on TV. The team on offense, the Dallas Cowboys, ran the tailback off right tackle for seven straight plays. Over and over again it was BAM—another five yards! Another six yards! Another four yards! I don't remember which team was playing defense. Whoever it was, they simply could not stop this one play. The offensive coordinator for the Cowboys obviously saw no reason to change plays if the other team was incapable of stopping it.

Similarly, my developer-authors keep making these pronoun reference errors. It's a daily occurrence. As long as this continues, I am going to keep adding these incorrect pronoun references to my Hall of Shame.

People, this is not complicated. All of my developer-authors are intelligent. Everyone has the capacity to learn. So, here is my plea: Learn how to do it right—starting today—and keep doing it right from now on.

Thank you for listening.

REVISION

Before

Once the user successfully fills out the form, they are signed in.

After

Once the user successfully fills out the form, the user is signed in.

Or

Once the user successfully fills out the form, he or she is signed in.

Punctuation

IMPORTANT: This topic is about **punctuation**. However, all of the following examples contain discussions of multiple subjects—not just Punctuation. Therefore, whether you like it or not (!), you are going to learn a lot of different things about good writing and rewriting, in addition to Punctuation.

Example 1

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> Visibility with respect to a resource has the same meaning as it does when applied to an API, see previous discussion on visibility for further details.

PROBLEM

- Punctuation (comma fault)
- Wordiness

DISCUSSION

Replace the comma fault with a period, and then start a new sentence.

Clean up the verbose language. Reduce the sentence to its bare essentials.

REVISION

Before

> Visibility with respect to a resource has the same meaning as it does when applied to an API, see previous discussion on visibility for further details.

After

> Visibility of a resource is the same as when you apply it to an API. See the previous discussion about visibility.

Example 2

> The refresh_expires_in property in validation responses causes refresh tokens to expire. The absence of this property indicates refresh tokens do not expire.
>
> Some mailbox providers do not accept attachments. Others do not accept attachments over a certain size.
>
> We use quotation marks for a specific string of characters to be entered somewhere on the UI, such as a text box, for a command line entry, and for an actual quotation.

PROBLEM

Of our three example sentences, only the third sentence has incorrect punctuation.

The first and second example sentences each contain two short sentences apiece.

IMPORTANT: There is nothing wrong with having two sentences. This post intends to show you there is perhaps a more effective way to make your point by using a semicolon rather than having two complete sentences. It has to do with the close rhetorical relationship between sentence 1 and sentence 2.

DISCUSSION

When the first and second short sentences have a close rhetorical relationship*,* feel free to use a semicolon.

You may use a semicolon when you have these conditions:

- The second *short* sentence is a contradiction of the first *short* sentence.
- The second *short* sentence follows up the first *short* sentence with additional information.

NOTE: I cannot emphasize enough that these must be *short* independent clause linked by a semicolon. Do not do this with longer independent clauses. I'll explain why in my next example.

Rule 1 – Use a semicolon to replace a period if you want to narrow the gap between two closely linked sentences.

Two complete sentences:

> The refresh_expires_in property in validation responses causes refresh tokens to expire. The absence of this property indicates refresh tokens do not expire.

One sentence with a semicolon:

> Refresh tokens expire if the validation response contains the refresh_expires_in property; they do not expire if the response does not contain the property.

Rule 2 – Use a semicolon before such words and terms as *namely*, *however*, *therefore*, *that is*, *i.e.*, *for example*, *e.g.*, *for instance*, *etc.*, when they introduce a complete sentence.

Two complete sentences:

> Some mailbox providers do not accept attachments. Others do not accept attachments over a certain size.

One sentence with a semicolon:

> Some mailbox providers do not accept attachments; however, others do not accept attachments over a certain size.

Rule 3 – Use a semicolon to separate units of a series when one or more of the units contain commas.

Commas only:

> We use quotation marks for a specific string of characters to be entered somewhere on the UI, such as a text box, for a command line entry, and for an actual quotation.

Semicolons separate the three units in the sentence:

> We use quotation marks for a specific string of characters to be entered somewhere on the UI, such as a text box; for a command line entry; and for an actual quotation.

REVISION

Before

> The refresh_expires_in property in validation responses causes refresh tokens to expire. The absence of this property indicates refresh tokens do not expire.

> Some mailbox providers do not accept attachments. Others do not accept attachments over a certain size.

> We use quotation marks for a specific string of characters to be entered somewhere on the UI, such as a text box, for a command line entry, and for an actual quotation.

After

> The refresh_expires_in property in validation responses causes refresh tokens to expire; the absence of this property indicates refresh tokens do not expire.

> Some mailbox providers do not accept attachments; however, others do not accept attachments over a certain size.

> We use quotation marks for a specific string of characters to be entered somewhere on the UI, such as a text box; for a command line entry; and for an actual quotation.

Example 3

REWRITE THESE SENTENCES

> Most of the information you need for the service your business unit (BU) uses is in the following section for that service; however, this document also has a general discussion about Ways to Validate.
>
> It's important to understand that the security model for Operational VM is different from that of traditional FakeCorp hosting, and is more like that of Awesome Web Services; although the Operational VM Infrastructure team manages the security of the underlying environment, the zone creator or owner is responsible for managing security for all systems within their respective zones.
>
> Using one solution, administrators can catalog, replicate, and duplicate backups; plus, they can streamline restores in a broad range of recovery scenarios.
>
> You can enter interface range view to bulk configure multiple interfaces with the same feature instead of configuring them one by one; for example, you can perform the shutdown command in interface range view to shut down a range of interfaces.
>
> For example, in order to call adduser, the service needs to be granted the ADD_USER scope; to call listusers, the service needs to be granted the LIST_USERS scope; and to call deleteuser, the service needs to be granted the DELETE_USERS scope.

PROBLEM

Too many semicolons.

DISCUSSION

Each example sentence shows you what I consider to be ill-advised usage of the semicolon. Readability is not a problem when you link *short* independent clauses with semicolons. However, in these examples, the *long* independent clauses make it difficult for the reader to track everything. Don't put your reader to the test. The reader has enough challenges with the technology without wrestling with a series of long independent clause held together by semicolons.

When it comes to readability, some writing style experts say it makes no difference whether you end the sentence with a semicolon or a period. In fact, the Gunning Fog Index formula makes no distinction between sentences ending with periods and sentences ending with semicolons.

I disagree. In online documentation, it is much easier to see a period than it is to distinguish a semicolon from a colon. A period never gives the reader pause; a semicolon may cause the reader to pause if the type on the screen is not very large. Any unnecessary pause at all affects readability.

REVISIONS

Before

> Most of the information you need for the service your business unit (BU) uses is in the following section for that service; however, this document also has a general discussion about Ways to Validate.
>
> It's important to understand that the security model for Operational VM is different from that of traditional FakeCorp hosting, and is more like that of Awesome Web Services; although the Operational VM Infrastructure team manages the security of the underlying environment, the zone creator or owner is responsible for managing security for all systems within their respective zones.
>
> Using one solution, administrators can catalog, replicate, and duplicate backups; plus, they can streamline restores in a broad range of recovery scenarios.
>
> You can enter interface range view to bulk configure multiple interfaces with the same feature instead of configuring them one by one; for example, you can perform the shutdown command in interface range view to shut down a range of interfaces.
>
> For example, in order to call *adduser*, the service needs to be granted the ADD_USER scope; to call *listusers*, the service needs to be granted the LIST_USERS scope; and to call *deleteuser*, the service needs to be granted the DELETE_USERS scope.

After

> Most of the information you need for the service your business unit (BU) uses is in the following section for that service. However, this document also has a general discussion about Ways to Validate.
>
> It's important to understand that the security model for Operational VM is different from that of traditional FakeCorp hosting, and is more like that of Awesome Web Services. Although the Operational VM Infrastructure team manages the security of the underlying environment, the zone creator or owner is responsible for managing security for all systems within their respective zones.
>
> [rewrite 1] Using one solution, administrators can catalog, replicate, and duplicate backups. Also, they can streamline restores in a broad range of recovery scenarios.

Or

> [rewrite 2] Using one solution, administrators can catalog, replicate, and duplicate backups. In addition, they can streamline restores in a broad range of recovery scenarios.

> You can enter interface range view to bulk configure multiple interfaces with the same feature instead of configuring them one by one. For example, you can perform the shutdown command in interface range view to shut down a range of interfaces.

> For example, in order to call *adduser*, the service needs to be granted the ADD_USER scope. To call *listusers*, the service needs to be granted the LIST_USERS scope. To call *delete user*, the service needs to be granted the DELETE_USERS scope.

REMARKS

There are some authors who love to use semicolons to string together long independent clauses. While this practice may be grammatically correct, it is my view these authors sometimes are more interested in creating long, complicated sentences than in communicating basic information to the reader.

Long sentences—even the grammatically-correct ones—hurt readability. It's that simple. Of course, there are always occasions when you need to write a long, complex sentence to communicate difficult conceptual information. But don't go out of your way to write long sentences—just because you can.

Getting back to the semicolon: Use it sparingly if you must. Follow these rules:

- Use a semicolon to replace a period if you want to narrow the gap between two closely linked short sentences.
- Use a semicolon before such words and terms as *namely*, *however*, *therefore*, *that is*, *i.e.*, *for example*, *e.g.*, *for instance*, *etc.*, when they introduce a complete short sentence.
- Use a semicolon to separate units of a series when one or more of the units contain commas.

Example 4

There are three policies: auto, enforce and none.

PROBLEM

In a series consisting of three or more elements, we separate the elements with commas. When a conjunction joins the last two elements in a series, use a comma before the coordinating conjunction (for example, *and* and *or*). This is called the series comma rule or serial comma rule.

Our problem sentence does not have the serial comma.

DISCUSSION

The serial comma is the commonly accepted practice in technical writing. Technical writing differs from journalism. Journalism generally follows AP style, which does not add a comma before the coordinating conjunction.

We need to add a comma after the word *enforce* to conform to the serial comma rule.

REVISION

Before

There are three policies: auto, enforce and none.

After

There are three policies: auto, enforce, and none.

Example 5

REWRITE THESE SENTENCES

Under "Database Name," enter "ics."

To use the reports, pick your tenant from the drop-down menu, and click "Apply" in the lower right hand corner.

See Chapter 2, Content Formatting and Layout.

Enter "123456."

He said, "We are ready to go".

For Linux, run: dmesg | grep –I unknown partition.

PROBLEM

Each sentence has a misuse of quotation marks or an omission of quotation marks. Can you spot the discrepancies?

DISCUSSION

See the following "Revisions" section for the style explanations. The authority is the *Microsoft Manual of Style*.

REVISIONS

1

Before

Under "Database Name," enter "ics."

After

Under **Database Name**, enter **ics**.

Comment

Database Name is a user interface feature. Put UI features in bold type. Do not use quotation marks. For elements that the user must type exactly as the elements appear in the text, use bold. Therefore, **ics** is bold.

2

Before

To use the reports, pick your tenant from the drop-down menu, and click "Apply" in the lower right hand corner.

After

To use the reports, pick your tenant from the drop-down menu and click **Apply** in the lower right hand corner.

Comment

Apply is a UI feature. Put UI features in bold type. Do not use quotation marks.

3

Before

See Chapter 2, *Content Formatting and Layout*.

After

See Chapter 2, "Content Formatting and Layout."

Comment

Chapter titles are title caps, in quotation marks. Don't use italics.

4

Before

Enter "123456."

After

Enter "123456".

Comment

With a string, the quotation marks enclose the characters of the string. Therefore, in this example, the period falls outside the end quotation mark.

5

Before

He said, "We are ready to go".

After

He said, "We are ready to go."

Comment

For all other quotations (that is, quotations not involving characters in a string), the end quotation mark comes after the period.

6

Before

For Linux, run: dmesg | grep –I unknown partition

After

For Linux, run: dmesg | grep –I "unknown partition"

Comment

In a command line, put the selected command in quotation marks.

Example 6

> Versions of the dependent SDK's can cause many headaches.
>
> The SDK allows the client app to call our API's directly to attempt a fake token refresh manually.

PROBLEM

Do not use an apostrophe to form a plural.

DISCUSSION

Use the apostrophe to form a contraction (*it is* becomes *it's*; *do not* becomes *don't*), or to indicate possession (my father's car).

REVISIONS

Before

Versions of the dependent SDK's can cause many headaches.

The SDK allows the client app to call our API's directly to attempt a fake token refresh manually.

After

Versions of the dependent SDKs can cause many headaches.

The SDK allows the client app to call our APIs directly to attempt a fake token refresh manually.

Example 7

REWRITE THESE SENTENCES

You would call this to paint the UI for any member who wants to update any of his/her information.

Identify the file/s at issue.

At grant time, the caller can request any/all/none of the client scopes.

This ensures we can trace back any messages prepared and/or sent to the exact sender and email list used to prepare/send them, no matter what future changes are made to those components.

PROBLEM

In formal documentation, never use the forward slash mark as punctuation. Follow the standard rules for punctuation.

DISCUSSION

Slash marks are sometimes allowed in the software development environment. The problem with this is sometimes unfiltered text from developer documentation eventually makes its way into documentation for the general public.

Therefore, it is best to avoid any use of the slash mark for punctuation. Don't do it.

REVISIONS

Before

> You would call this to paint the UI for any member who wants to update any of his/her information.
>
> Identify the file/s at issue.
>
> At grant time, the caller can request any/all/none of the client scopes.
>
> This ensures we can trace back any messages prepared and/or sent to the exact sender and email list used to prepare/send them, no matter what future changes are made to those components.

After

> You would call this to paint the UI for any member who wants to update any of his or her information.
>
> Identify the file or files at issue.
>
> At grant time, the caller can request any, all, or none of the client scopes.
>
> This ensures we can trace back any messages we prepared and sent to the exact sender and email list used to prepare and send them, no matter what future changes are made to those components.

Example 8

We use quotation marks for a specific string of characters to be entered somewhere on the UI, such as a text box, for a command line entry, and for an actual quotation.

I have one goal; to make the team.

Call me tomorrow. You can give me an answer then.

My mother has shiny black hair. She loves to wash and comb it.

The dash represents a pause in the sentence, which continues after the dash. However, capitalize the first word if the word is a proper name.

PROBLEM

Today, we are going to talk about the semicolon.

The first two example sentences contain errors. The last three are correct, but there are other correct ways to punctuate the sentences.

DISCUSSION

Here is our first example sentence:

We use quotation marks for a specific string of characters to be entered somewhere on the UI, such as a text box, for a command line entry, and for an actual quotation.

The sentence itemizes three ways to use quotation marks:

- For a specific string of characters to be entered somewhere on the UI, such as a text box
- For a command line entry
- For an actual quotation

The first bullet point contains the dependent clause *such as a text box* enclosed by commas. If it were not for that clause, you could separate the three items with commas. However, the clause enclosed by commas forces you to separate the three independent items with semicolons.

This is the correct punctuation:

>We use quotation marks for a specific string of characters to be entered somewhere on the UI, such as a text box; for a command line entry; and for an actual quotation.

Here is the second incorrect sentence:

>I have one goal; to make the team.

A semicolon may be used between independent clauses. In our example, the text before the semicolon is an independent clause, but the text after the semicolon is a dependent clause. Therefore, you must use either a colon or a dash to separate the two clauses.

The final three example sentences are correct.

The third and fourth sentences have similar structures.

>Call me tomorrow. You can give me an answer then.

>My mother has shiny black hair. She loves to wash and comb it.

Both contain two independent clauses separated by periods. In each case, the information in the second sentence is closely linked to the information in the previous sentence. When that happens, it is perfectly OK to use a semicolon instead of a period.

Here is the final sentence:

>The dash represents a pause in the sentence, which continues after the dash. However, capitalize the first word if the word is a proper name.

Whenever you see the words or abbreviations *namely, however, therefore, that is, i.e., for example, e.g., for instance, etc.*, that is an indicator the information in the second sentence is closely related to the information in the previous sentence. Go ahead and use the semicolon. It's OK.

REVISIONS

Before

> We use quotation marks for a specific string of characters to be entered somewhere on the UI, such as a text box, for a command line entry, and for an actual quotation.
>
> I have one goal; to make the team.
>
> Call me tomorrow. You can give me an answer then.
>
> My mother has shiny black hair. She loves to wash and comb it.
>
> The dash represents a pause in the sentence, which continues after the dash. However, capitalize the first word if the word is a proper name.

After

> We use quotation marks for a specific string of characters to be entered somewhere on the UI, such as a text box; for a command line entry; and for an actual quotation.
>
> I have one goal: to make the team.

Or

> I have one goal—to make the team.
>
> Call me tomorrow; you can give me an answer then.
>
> My mother has shiny black hair; she loves to wash and comb it.
>
> The dash represents a pause in the sentence, which continues after the dash; however, capitalize the first word if the word is a proper name.

Example 9

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> The environment can be used to signify for what use the data services; typically this is something like DEV, QA, STAGE, PROD; these help the application id owner know what environment the data is intended for; development, testing, production etc.

PROBLEM

We have four clauses separated by semicolons. The first three clauses are independent clauses, but the last clause is not an independent clause—it is a fragment.

DISCUSSION

The simplest and best solution is to take the original sentence and divide it into four simple sentences.

The first sentence seems to be incoherent:

> The environment can be used to signify for what use the data services.

NOTE: See my rewrite for the first sentence. I think I am guessing correctly. After my technical writer review, the author reviews my changes. If I guess wrong, he or she gets to fix my mistake. I don't have the last word on technical accuracy of the content.

In the second sentence, put a comma after *typically*.

> Typically, this is something like DEV, QA, STAGE, PROD.

In the third sentence, the proper abbreviation for identification is *ID*, not *id*.

> These help the application ID owner [to] know what environment the data is intended for.

The last sentence is a fragment:

> Development, testing, production etc.

In the last sentence, there needs to be a comma between the word *production* and *etc.* Also, delete *For example*, and change *etc.* to *and so on*.

REVISION

Before

The environment can be used to signify for what use the data services; typically this is something like DEV, QA, STAGE, PROD; these help the application id owner know what environment the data is intended for; development, testing, production etc.

After

You can use the environment to signify how to use the data services. Typically, this is something like DEV, QA, STAGE, PROD. These help the application ID owner to know for which environment the data is intended. It might be for development, testing, production, and so on.

Example 10

> In this case you should programmatically call the `UpgradeNRT` endpoint to initiate the NRT upgrade flow.
>
> To start the onboarding process see the Onboarding documentation.
>
> This ensures we can trace back any messages prepared or sent to the exact sender and email list used to prepare or send them no matter what future changes we make to those components.

PROBLEM

Let's talk about the comma.

All three sentences are what we call *complex sentences*. A complex sentence has an independent clause and at least one dependent clause. Each example sentence needs a comma to separate the independent clause from the dependent clause.

DISCUSSION

Sentence 1

These are the two clauses:

- Dependent (that is, a fragment)—*In this case*
- Independent (that is, a complete sentence with a subject and verb)—*you should programmatically call the* `UpgradeNRT` *endpoint to initiate the NRT upgrade flow*

Sentence 2

These are the two clauses:

- Dependent—*To start the onboarding process*
- Independent—*see the Onboarding documentation*

Sentence 3

These are the two clauses:

- Independent—*This ensures we can trace back any messages prepared or sent to the exact sender and email list used to prepare or send them*
- Dependent—*no matter what future changes we make to those components*

Rule

In a sentence containing both an independent clause and one or more dependent clauses, always separate the clauses with a comma. There is an exception to this rule, however. When you have a dependent clause that contains one or more commas already, use a semicolon to separate the respective clauses. We'll cover that situation in a later example. Today, let's focus our attention on using the comma as the separator.

REVISIONS

Before

In this case you should programmatically call the `UpgradeNRT` endpoint to initiate the NRT upgrade flow.

To start the onboarding process see the Onboarding documentation.

This ensures we can trace back any messages prepared or sent to the exact sender and email list used to prepare or send them no matter what future changes we make to those components.

After

In this case, you should programmatically call the `UpgradeNRT` endpoint to initiate the NRT upgrade flow.

To start the onboarding process, see the Onboarding documentation.

This ensures we can trace back any messages prepared or sent to the exact sender and email list used to prepare or send them, no matter what future changes we make to those components.

Example 11

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

It was a beautiful day there was not a cloud in the sky.

PROBLEM

This is a run-on sentence.

DISCUSSION

Divide this into two sentences:

- It was a beautiful day.
- There was not a cloud in the sky.

REVISION

Before

It was a beautiful day there was not a cloud in the sky.

After

It was a beautiful day. There was not a cloud in the sky.

Example 12

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

Periodic reviews of cookbooks, roles and environments provide a clean and efficient automated deployment system.

PROBLEM

Add the serial comma.

DISCUSSION

In a series consisting of three or more elements, we separate the elements with commas. When a conjunction joins the last two elements in a series, use a comma before the coordinating conjunction (for example, *and* and *or*). This is called the series comma rule or serial comma rule.

The serial comma rule in technical writing is different from the rule in the AP Style Guide, which is used in journalism. AP rules do not require a comma after the penultimate item in a series.

REVISION

Before

Periodic reviews of cookbooks, roles and environments provide a clean and efficient automated deployment system.

After

Periodic reviews of cookbooks, roles, and environments provide a clean and efficient automated deployment system.

Example 13

COLON OR DASH?

Each one of the following sentences needs either a colon or a dash. Add the punctuation you think is correct:

Apathy

The reaction of the crowd signified only one thing [ ] apathy.

The crowd clearly indicated their indifference to the provocative speech [ ] an apathy that later came back to haunt them.

College Courses

The courses I am taking this semester are as follows [ ] English, sociology, economics, political science, and psychology.

English, psychology, history, and philosophy [ ] these were the classes I took last quarter.

What's Your Name?

Remind me [ ] what's your name again?

Cookies

As part of the FakeCorpID login process, the following types of cookies are used:

- BLUE [ ] A replacement for the GREEN cookie.
- RED [ ] A RED cookie provides proof of authentication for an account in the EarthReg System.
- GREEN [ ] A session-based cookie assigned to users that contains information such as the user's e-mail address and tokens owned by the user.

PROBLEM

See the **Discussion** section for an explanation of the differences between colons and dashes.

DISCUSSION

When To Use a Colon

From **Grammar Girl**:

> A colon informs readers that something more is coming along. The words after a colon define or clarify what came before the colon.

From the University of Puget Sound:

> A colon must follow a grammatically complete lead-in sentence or independent clause. What falls before the colon must make grammatical sense on its own.

From the website **GrammarAbout**:

> Use a colon to set off a summary or a series *after* a complete main clause.

When To Use a Dash

From Penn State:

> The dash … functions almost as a colon does in that it adds to the preceding material, but with extra emphasis.

From the University of Illinois:

> Words enclosed by a pair of dashes often provide an explanation or give parenthetical information. Using a pair of dashes instead of parentheses tends to emphasize (rather than de-emphasize) those words.

Comment

As a rule, the dash is more common and acceptable in less formal writing than it is in technical writing. I recommend using the dash in a bullet list of features, with the specifics of the bulleted feature following the dash. See the following **Cookies** section for a good example. Otherwise, avoid using the dash. Find a way to write around it.

CORRECT PUNCTUATION

Apathy

The reaction of the crowd signified only one thing: apathy.

The crowd clearly indicated their indifference to the provocative speech—an apathy that later came back to haunt them.

College Courses

The courses I am taking this semester are as follows: English, sociology, economics, political science, and psychology.

English, psychology, history, and philosophy—these were the classes I took last quarter.

What's Your Name?

Remind me—what's your name again?

Cookies

As part of the FakeCorpID login process, the following types of cookies are used:

- BLUE—A replacement for the GREEN cookie.
- RED—A RED cookie provides proof of authentication for an account in the EarthReg System.
- GREEN—A session-based cookie assigned to users that contains information such as the user's e-mail address and tokens owned by the user.

Example 14

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> At a minimum in the JavaScript file you must change the client ID and pointers to your responder page.

PROBLEM

The sentence has two clauses. The first clause is a dependent clause (that is, a sentence fragment):

> At a minimum in the JavaScript file

The second clause is an independent clause (that is, a complete sentence):

> you must change the client ID and pointers to your responder page.

You must separate the two clauses with suitable punctuation. In this case, insert a comma after the word *file*.

DISCUSSION

See the **Revision** section for the rewrite.

REVISION

Before

> At a minimum in the JavaScript file you must change the client ID and pointers to your responder page.

After

> At a minimum in the JavaScript file, you must change the client ID and pointers to your responder page.

Example 15

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> The ID's of the content objects to be published are provided in a text file in the format of comma-separated values or with one value per line.

PROBLEM

Fix these problems:

- Passive voice
- Punctuation
- Divide the sentence into two sentences

DISCUSSION

Passive Voice

Don't say this:

> The IDs of the content objects to be published are provided in a text file….

Say this:

> A text file provides the IDs of the content objects to be published.

Punctuation

Do not use an apostrophe for a plural form. ID's is incorrect.

When do you use an apostrophe? You use an apostrophe for a contraction (for example, *don't* for *do not*). You use an apostrophe to indicate possession (for example, *my father's car*).

Simple Sentences

Once you convert the sentence from passive voice to active voice, you can easily divide the example sentence into two simple sentences. There is no logical reason why the two independent clause must be connected by a conjunction. See the **Revision** section for the rewrite.

REVISION

Before

The ID's of the content objects to be published are provided in a text file in the format of comma-separated values or with one value per line.

After

A text file provides the IDs of the content objects to be published. These IDs are formatted as comma-separated values or they have one value per line.

Example 16

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

The access_token is valid for only a certain amount of time depending on the configuration of the clientID for your application, typically this is 24 hours.

PROBLEM

This is run-on sentence. The comma after the word *application* is incorrect punctuation. This is called a comma splice.

DISCUSSION

See the **Revision** section for two different ways to rewrite the example sentence.

REVISION

Before

The *access_token* is valid for only a certain amount of time depending on the configuration of the clientID for your application, typically this is 24 hours.

After

The *access_token* is valid for only a certain amount of time, depending on the configuration of the clientID for your application. Typically, this is 24 hours.

Or

Depending on the configuration of the clientID for your application, the *access_token* is valid for only a certain amount of time. Typically, this is 24 hours.

Example 17

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

This specifies a unique digital asset by it's digital asset source name.

PROBLEM

The apostrophe in the word *its*.

DISCUSSION

We use an apostrophe for two reasons:

- To form a contraction. For example, the subject *it* and the verb *is* are contracted to form the word *it's*.
- To indicate possession. For example, my *father's* car.

Neither situation applies with our example sentence. Therefore, remove the apostrophe.

REVISION

Before

Specifies a unique digital asset by it's digital asset source name.

After

Specifies a unique digital asset by its digital asset source name.

Example 18

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

Under "Database Name," enter "ics."

PROBLEM

These words are in quotation marks:

- Database Name
- ics

The author is using quotation marks incorrectly.

DISCUSSION

User Interface Features

When you talk about features on the user interface (UI), such as the label Database Name in the example sentence, do not enclose the label in quotation marks. Use boldface type.

Command Line and Text Box Entries

When you instruct the user to enter something in a text box or on a command line, do not use quotation marks. Use boldface type.

REVISION

Before

Under "Database Name," enter "ics."

After

Under **Database Name**, enter **ics**.

Example 19

No the shipment has not yet arrived.

Worried by the complaints we began an investigation.

PROBLEM

Each example sentence begins with a dependent clause and concludes with an independent clause. These are the two dependent clauses:

No

Worried by the complaints

A dependent clause is a fragment, meaning it does not have a subject and verb.

DISCUSSION

You need to add commas to separate the dependent clauses from the independent clauses. See the **Revision** section.

REVISION

Before

No the shipment has not yet arrived.

Worried by the complaints we began an investigation.

After

No, the shipment has not yet arrived.

Worried by the complaints, we began an investigation.

Example 20

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

Nexus is a third-party software solution that manages "artifacts" required for development.

PROBLEM

You should not use quotation marks for emphasis.

DISCUSSION

When you want to emphasize a word or phrase, use italics, not quotation marks.

REVISION

Before

Nexus is a third-party software solution that manages "artifacts" required for development.

After

Nexus is a third-party software solution that manages *artifacts* required for development.

Readability

IMPORTANT: This topic is about **readability**. However, all of the following examples contain discussions of multiple subjects—not just readability. Therefore, in addition to readability, you are going to learn a lot of different things about good writing and rewriting.

Example 1

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> By using multicast technology, a network operator can easily provide new value-added services, such as live webcasting, web TV, distance learning, telemedicine, web radio, real-time video conferencing, and other bandwidth-critical and time-critical information services.

PROBLEM

Today's sentence presents a big readability problem. Need data? Here is the breakout by the Gunning Fog Index:

We have one sentence with 34 words. That is twice as long as the optimal average number of words in a sentence, which is 17.

Total word count is only one of two major problems. The other problem is the number of 3+ syllable words:

- multicast
- technology
- operator
- easily
- value-added
  NOTE: For the purposes of readability, hyphenated words count as a single word.
- telemedicine
- radio
- video
- conferencing
- bandwidth-critical
- time-critical
- information

DISCUSSION

The most obvious solution is to break the sentence in half. At the very least, do that. It might be necessary to keep the 3+ syllable words, but it is very easy to divide it into two sentences.

The first sentence stops at *value-added services*. As for the second sentence, you have the option of creating a list or leaving the word order the same as it is now. The revision shows you both options.

Just dividing the sentence into two parts reduces the reading level to 20 years. That is the main point of today's exercise.

REVISION

Before

By using multicast technology, a network operator can easily provide new value-added services, such as live webcasting, web TV, distance learning, telemedicine, web radio, real-time video conferencing, and other bandwidth-critical and time-critical information services.

After

By using multicast technology, a network operator easily provides new value-added services. Services include live webcasting, web TV, distance learning, telemedicine, web radio, real-time video conferencing, and other bandwidth-critical and time-critical information services.

Or

By using multicast technology, a network operator easily provides new value-added services. Services include:

- Live webcasting
- Web TV
- Distance learning
- Telemedicine
- Web radio
- Real-time video conferencing
- Other bandwidth-critical and time-critical information services

FINAL COMMENT

An abundance of 3+ syllable words may not be a problem if your audience is familiar with the terminology. However, there is no excuse for run-on sentences. None. Keep your sentences as simple as possible. Engineering technology is hard enough without forcing the reader to negotiate gratuitously long sentences.

Example 2

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> Inter-business traffic analysis tasks provide additional grouping capabilities because this task type combines host and application grouping into tasks that are business-service oriented.

PROBLEM

The example sentence has three major problems:

- Noun stacking—stacking is the piling up of modifiers before a noun (the noun is in bold type)
- Readability—we need to divide this sentence into two sentences
  - inter-business traffic analysis **tasks**
  - additional grouping **capabilities**
- Usage (big words)—seven of the 21 words in the sentence have three or more syllables
  - inter-business
  - **analysis**
  - **additional**
  - capabilities
  - application
  - business-service
  - oriented

DISCUSSION

In our rewrite, we do the following:
- Reduce the readability level from 21 years to 11.
- Break the sentence into two parts.
- Reduce the number of 3-syllable words from 7 to 4.
- Drop the word *business* before the word *services*.

NOTE: We don't need to modify *services* with the word *business* because we already know the context is business. Therefore, it is redundant to use *business* as a modifier.

REVISION

Before

Inter-business traffic analysis tasks provide additional grouping capabilities because this task type combines host and application grouping into tasks that are business-service oriented.

After

Traffic analysis tasks among related businesses enable you to gather similar data into groups. This task type combines host and application grouping into tasks for services.

Example 3

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> The value is derived at publish time, and it is the same as the fullURL
> property of published objects.

PROBLEM

The sentence has two independent clauses connected by *and*:

- The value is derived at publish time
- it is the same as the *fullURL* property of published objects.

Why is it necessary to put both independent clauses into one sentence?

DISCUSSION

Divide the sentence into two sentences. When you do that, you improve
sentence readability by five years of education.

REVISION

Before

> The value is derived at publish time, and it is the same as the *fullURL* property of
> published objects.

After

> The value is derived at publish time. It is the same as the *fullURL* property of
> published objects.

Or

> The value is derived at publish time. This value is the same as the *fullURL* property
> of published objects.

REMARKS

You might be thinking, "Why is this guy so insistent on short, simple sentences? The example sentence is OK because both clauses are fairly short as written."

You are right. The example sentence really is not that long. The reading level is not that high either.

Here's the deal. In software documentation, there are going to be *many* sentences that are long and complicated. No matter how hard you try, you simply can't break them up. Therefore, to improve the reading experience, you need to have some variety in sentence length.

You can't just have one long sentence after another. If you do that, your reader might stop reading.

Leave the long, unbreakable sentences alone, and go after the low hanging fruit like this example sentence. To improve the reading experience, make the change.

Example 4

REWRITE THE BOLDFACE SENTENCE IN THIS WHITE PAPER OVERVIEW SECTION

It's impossible to check your favorite technical news feeds or attend a conference these days without being exposed to several definitions of "big data" and opinions as to why it's important. Many of these exhortations are tied to Hadoop and its cute little yellow elephant logo.

In this paper, we will avoid the hype surrounding big data and spare you yet another definition—just bear in mind that we view big data as representing all data that could be used to achieve better business outcomes, as well as the technologies leveraged to manage and analyze it. Our goal is to take a critical look at Hadoop from the mainframe perspective, and examine how new technology—available today from Veristorm—can help you solve problems that you may be struggling with. There is, indeed, a place for the elephant on the mainframe.

PROBLEM

This is the problem sentence:

In this paper, we will avoid the hype surrounding big data and spare you yet another definition—just bear in mind that we view big data as representing all data that could be used to achieve better business outcomes, as well as the technologies leveraged to manage and analyze it.

As you can see, it is a loose, unstructured run-on sentence. Also, it has an extraordinarily high fog index score:

Gunning Fog Index

THE GUNNING FOG INDEX IS 26.13

- The number of major punctuation marks, eg. [ ], was 1
- The number of words was 49
- The number of 3+ syllable words, highlighted in blue, was 8

You can edit the numbers above and recalculate.

Recalculate

EDITED TEXT

In this paper we will avoid the hype surrounding big data and spare you yet another definition—just bear in mind that we view big data as representing all data that could be used to achieve better business outcomes, as well as the technologies leveraged to manage and analyze it.[ ]

Twenty-six years of education is not going to cut it!

DISCUSSION

The first thing we do is look for ways to break up this 49-word sentence into more readable simple sentences. The author is saying three things:

- In this paper we will avoid the hype surrounding big data and spare you yet another definition
- we view big data as representing all data that could be used to achieve better business outcomes
- [we view big data as representing all] the technologies leveraged to manage and analyze it.

Therefore, rewrite the example sentence as three smaller sentences.

REVISION

Before

In this paper, we will avoid the hype surrounding big data and spare you yet another definition—just bear in mind that we view big data as representing all data that could be used to achieve better business outcomes, as well as the technologies leveraged to manage and analyze it.

After

In this paper, we will avoid the hype surrounding big data and spare you yet another definition. Bear in mind that we view big data as representing all data that could be used to achieve better business outcomes. We also view big data as all the technologies leveraged to manage and analyze it.

We cut the years of education in half! Now the reading level is 13 years:

With these improvements, the beginning of the white paper is now far more readable:

It's impossible to check your favorite technical news feeds or attend a conference these days without being exposed to several definitions of "big data" and opinions as to why it's important. Many of these exhortations are tied to Hadoop and its cute little yellow elephant logo.

In this paper, we will avoid the hype surrounding big data and spare you yet another definition. Bear in mind that we view big data as representing all data that could be used to achieve better business outcomes. We also view big data as all the technologies leveraged to manage and analyze it. Our goal is to take a critical look at Hadoop from the mainframe perspective, and examine how new technology— available today from Veristorm—can help you solve problems that you may be struggling with. There is, indeed, a place for the elephant on the mainframe.

Example 5

> It's impossible to check your favorite technical news feeds or attend a conference these days without being exposed to several definitions of "big data" and opinions as to why it's important. Many of these exhortations are tied to Hadoop and its cute little yellow elephant logo.
>
> In this paper, we will avoid the hype surrounding big data and spare you yet another definition. Bear in mind that we view big data as representing all data that could be used to achieve better business outcomes. We also view big data as all the technologies leveraged to manage and analyze it. **Our goal is to take a critical look at Hadoop from the mainframe perspective, and examine how new technology—available today from Veristorm—can help you solve problems that you may be struggling with.** There is, indeed, a place for the elephant on the mainframe.

PROBLEM

In yesterday's exercise, we changed this long sentence:

> In this paper, we will avoid the hype surrounding big data and spare you yet another definition—just bear in mind that we view big data as representing all data that could be used to achieve better business outcomes, as well as the technologies leveraged to manage and analyze it.

To these three shorter sentences:

> In this paper, we will avoid the hype surrounding big data and spare you yet another definition. Bear in mind that we view big data as representing all data that could be used to achieve better business outcomes. We also view big data as all the technologies leveraged to manage and analyze it.

Did you notice the following sentence in the Overview is no thing of beauty either? Here it is:

> Our goal is to take a critical look at Hadoop from the mainframe perspective, and examine how new technology—available today from Veristorm—can help you solve problems that you may be struggling with.

Let's get to work.

DISCUSSION

The example sentence is also saying three things:

- Our goal is to take a critical look at Hadoop from the mainframe perspective
- [Our goal is to] examine how new technology can help you solve problems that you may be struggling with.
- [This new technology} is available today from Veristorm

Convert the long, sloppy example sentence to three shorter sentences.

REVISION

Before

> Our goal is to take a critical look at Hadoop from the mainframe perspective, and examine how new technology—available today from Veristorm—can help you solve problems that you may be struggling with.

After

> Our goal is to take a critical look at Hadoop from the mainframe perspective. We examine how new technology can help you solve problems that you may be struggling with. Help is on the way—this technology is available today from Veristorm.

Now, combining our work from yesterday and today, here is the new and improved Overview section:

> It's impossible to check your favorite technical news feeds or attend a conference these days without being exposed to several definitions of "big data" and opinions as to why it's important. Many of these exhortations are tied to Hadoop and its cute little yellow elephant logo.

> In this paper, we will avoid the hype surrounding big data and spare you yet another definition. Bear in mind that we view big data as representing all data that could be used to achieve better business outcomes. We also view big data as all the technologies leveraged to manage and analyze it. Our goal is to take a critical look at Hadoop from the mainframe perspective. We examine how new technology can help you solve problems that you may be struggling with.

Help is on the way—this technology is available today from Veristorm. There is, indeed, a place for the elephant on the mainframe.

REMARKS

We can do more with this Overview section. For example, it has 26 words with three syllables or more:

- impossible
- favorite
- technical
- conference
- several
- definitions
- opinions
- important
- exhortations
- elephant
- surrounding
- another
- definition
- representing
- business
- technologies
- leveraged
- analyze
- critical
- perspective
- examine
- technology
- technology
- available
- Veristorm
- elephant

Can you simplify the language in this Overview? Try it!

Simple Sentences

IMPORTANT: This topic is about **simple sentences**. However, all of the following examples contain discussions of multiple subjects—not just simple sentences. Therefore, in addition to simple sentences, you are going to learn a lot of different things about good writing and rewriting.

Example 1

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

On a periodic online user re-authentication enabled port, if a user has been online before you enable the MAC-based VLAN function, the access device does not create a MAC-to-VLAN mapping for the user unless the user passes re-authentication and the VLAN for the user has changed.

PROBLEM

This is a difficult sentence. Our job here is to take something difficult, break it down into understandable component parts, and then reassemble the content either as a long but clear single sentence or as a series of shorter sentences, each making a solitary technical point.

DISCUSSION

This is a difficult sentence largely because the author is trying to pack a lot of technical information into a concise package. The author's writing is complicated by the insertion of a conditional statement into the heart of the sentence. Also, readability is seriously impaired by an over-the-top modifier at the beginning of the sentence.

Conditional Statements

This is the conditional statement:

> if a user has been online before you enable the MAC-based VLAN function

In my opinion, it is usually best to put a conditional statement at the beginning of a sentence. It is similar to telling a user where to go on the user interface before you direct the user to select a menu item or click a button. If the sentence is too long already—which it may be in this case—it might be wise to write the conditional statement as its own sentence, and place it before the central piece of information.

Speaking of the central piece of information, here it is:

> On a periodic online user re-authentication enabled port … the access device does not create a MAC-to-VLAN mapping for the user unless the user passes re-authentication and the VLAN for the user has changed.

This information is relevant *only* when the conditional statement applies.

Monster Modifier

An unpunctuated string of words (in bold) form a modifier:

> On a **periodic online user re-authentication enabled** port

The noun being modified is *port*. it is an **online-user-re-authorization-enabled** port that is used **periodically**. Yes, all those words connected by hyphens are one unified modifier. Obviously, we need to fix that.

The monster modifier is also a good example of noun stacking. These nouns are turned into modifiers:

- period
- online
- user
- re-authentication

We will take a close look at noun stacking in a post coming soon. Stay tuned.

Sequence of Events

Here is the sequence of events in our sentence:

1. The user must be online before you enable the MAC-based VLAN function.
2. The user must pass re-authentication and the VLAN for the user must be changed.
3. The access device creates a MAC-to-VLAN mapping for the user.

Got all that?

The author makes a valiant effort to cram a ton of information into a tight space. The author gets an A for effort, an A for conciseness, and a D for readability.

The following is my best effort for a rewrite. Can you do better?

REVISION

Before

> On a periodic online user re-authentication enabled port, if a user has been online before you enable the MAC-based VLAN function, the access device does not create a MAC-to-VLAN mapping for the user unless the user passes re-authentication and the VLAN for the user has changed.

After

> The access device can create a MAC-to-VLAN function in those situations where the user has been online before you enable the MAC-based VLAN function and the port is one that is enabled for periodic online user re-authentication.

FINAL COMMENTS

As you can see, I did not take my own advice and put the conditional statement at the beginning of the sentence. I chose to begin the sentence with the subject (access device) and verb (can create). Though it is a long sentence, the sentence structure is still very simple, with the subject and verb leading into a two-part object.

Despite my fondness for short direct sentences, I chose to keep a one-sentence format. There are occasions when the information is so complicated and when events in a sequence are so closely interrelated that you simply cannot break up the content into smaller sections.

Finally, when you run the original statement and the rewritten version through the Gunning Fog Index, you reduce the years of education required from 22 to 19 years. That's still a lot of years. You don't see many PH.D. graduates messing around with switches and routers. The fog index is a nice tool, but it does not take improved word order into account. My rewrite has 37 words, but the simple sentence structure of subject-verb-object makes it easier to read.

Example 2

REWRITE THESE SENTENCES

NOTE: I got a letter today from my auto insurance company. The letter contained the following two sentences.

> Please note the medical authorization forms must be renewed every 90 days, therefore, we will be requesting this form from you again as necessary.
>
> As part of our medical review process, we will submit your statement for services and the report(s) provided describing your treatment to an independent medical consulting firm, which uses computer analysis to compare the charges with prevailing medical costs in the specific geographical location in which treatment was rendered.

PROBLEM

- Comma fault
- Bad shortcut
- Present vs. future
- Passive voice
- Parentheses
- Simple sentences

DISCUSSION

First Sentence

We have two independent clauses:

- Note the medical authorization forms must be renewed every 90 days.
- Therefore, we may request this form from you again, as necessary.

They are separated by a comma (before *therefore*). This is a comma fault.

You have two good options. You can make the example sentence two complete sentences, using a period after the first independent clause, or conclude the first independent clause with a semicolon followed by *therefore* and a comma.

Second Sentence

This sentence has multiple problems. Start with its length: 49 words. Break it into two sentences. Begin the second sentence after *independent medical consulting firm*. That improves readability.

Take the sentence out of the future tense. Rewrite it in the present tense.

Eliminate (a) wordiness and (b) misuse of parentheses (a.k.a. bad shortcut) by changing:

> and the report(s) provided describing your treatment to an independent medical consulting firm

To this:

> and any reports about your treatment to an independent medical consulting firm

After *independent medical consulting firm*, begin a new sentence with:

> This firm uses….

Change the following independent clause that has active voice at the beginning, but passive voice at the end:

> [This firm] uses computer analysis to compare the charges with prevailing medical costs in the specific geographical location in which treatment was rendered.

To this all-active-voice independent clause:

> This firm uses computer analysis to compare your charges with prevailing medical costs for treatment in your geographical area.

Note that the awkward phrase:

> with prevailing medical costs in the specific geographical location in which treatment was rendered.

Is replaced by this more straightforward revision:

> with prevailing medical costs for treatment in your geographical area.

REVISION

Before

> Please note the medical authorization forms must be renewed every 90 days, therefore, we will be requesting this form from you again as necessary.
>
> As part of our medical review process, we will submit your statement for services and the report(s) provided describing your treatment to an independent medical consulting firm, which uses computer analysis to compare the charges with prevailing medical costs in the specific geographical location in which treatment was rendered.

After

1

> Note the medical authorization forms must be renewed every 90 days. Therefore, we may request this form from you again, as necessary.

Or

> Note the medical authorization forms must be renewed every 90 days; therefore, we may request this form from you again, as necessary.

2

> As part of our medical review process, we submit your statement for services and any reports about your treatment to an independent medical consulting firm. This firm uses computer analysis to compare your charges with prevailing medical costs for treatment in your geographical area.

Example 3

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> Platform and firmware security facilitates secure firmware rollback which prevents unauthorized firmware updates to previous authentic versions unless they are performed by a secure mechanism or by an authorized user so as to avoid opening previously closed vulnerabilities.

PROBLEM

This galloping sentence begs to be rewritten as several shorter sentences.
Also, *which* should be replaced by *that*, but that particular problem goes away with the rewrite.

DISCUSSION

Let's reduce our example sentence to its simple sentence component parts:

- Platform and firmware security facilitates secure firmware rollback.
- Platform and firmware security prevents unauthorized firmware updates to previous authentic versions.
- However, you must make sure a secure mechanism or an authorized user performs the update.
- This ensures you can avoid opening previously closed vulnerabilities.

REVISION

Before

> Platform and firmware security facilitates secure firmware rollback which prevents unauthorized firmware updates to previous authentic versions unless they are performed by a secure mechanism or by an authorized user so as to avoid opening previously closed vulnerabilities.

After

> Platform and firmware security facilitates secure firmware rollback. This prevents unauthorized firmware updates to previous authentic versions. However, make sure a secure mechanism or an authorized user performs the update. If you fail to do this, the update process might open previously closed vulnerabilities.

Example 4

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> This functionality and service has not been implemented as of this writing, but the purpose is to document "how" the REST API's as well as what the API's will provide to FakeApp users so that if a business unit needs to implement use the functionality prior to the "FakeApp as a Web Service" project being completed, information pertaining to the RESTful API's is documented below.

PROBLEM

This sentence has multiple problems.

- This is a run-on sentence—it is difficult to follow. We need to break it down into shorter, more readable sentences.
- The author is using scare quotes for emphasis or highlighting—it is not entirely clear why the author is doing this.
- The plural form of the acronym API does not take an apostrophe.
- Tense: Replace the past perfect tense (*has not been implemented*) with the present tense (*are not implemented*).
- Tense: Replace the future tense (*will provide*) with the present tense (*can get access*).
- Usage: Replace *prior to* with *before*.

DISCUSSION

Readability

The problem sentence has 65 words. It is much too long. When you break the sentence into its component parts, you can logically show four separate ideas:

- The functionality and service are not implemented yet.
- This document describes how users get access to the REST APIs.
- This document outlines the benefits the REST APIs provide to users before the service project is completed.
- The information that follows is about the RESTful APIs.

You can write at least four simple sentences to replace one long, complicated sentence.

This part of the sentence is extremely unclear:

> the purpose is to document "how" the REST APIs as well as what the APIs will provide to FakeApp users

The author appears to be making two distinct points:

- The purpose is to document how the REST APIs are provided to FakeApp users.
- The purpose is to document what kind of benefits the REST APIs provide to FakeApp users.

Unfortunately for the reader, the author yoked the two quite-different points into one independent clause. This forces the reader to re-read this independent clause several times just to get a basic understanding.

Emphasis/Highlighting

The word *how* and the name of the technology *FakeApp as a Web Service* are in quotation marks. It appears the author is using quotation marks as scare quotes for emphasis or highlighting. We need to get rid of the quotation marks. Why? First, the author is not quoting anything. Second, if we want to give special attention to a word or phrase, we should use italics, not quotation marks. In the context of this particular problem sentence, however, it is questionable whether we need to emphasize or highlight anything. In the rewritten sentence, it seems to read OK without drawing special attention to any of the words.

Apostrophe as a Plural Form

Use an apostrophe to form a contraction (for example, *it is* becomes *it's*, and *do not* becomes *don't*) or to indicate possession (my father's car). Never use an apostrophe to make a singular word, term, or acronym plural.

Tense

We don't live in the past or the future. We live in the present. Always write in the present tense if you can.

Usage

Use *before*, not *prior to*. The phrase *prior to* is acceptable usage, but it connotes a stuffy, bureaucratic tone. Let's try to avoid that tone.

REVISION

Before

[One sentence, 65 words]

> This functionality and service has not been implemented as of this writing, but the purpose is to document "how" the REST API's as well as what the API's will provide to FakeApp users so that if a business unit needs to implement use the functionality prior to the "FakeApp as a Web Service" project being completed, information pertaining to the RESTful API's is documented below.

After

[Five sentences, 62 words]

> This document describes the RESTful APIs for the FakeApp Device Database Service. Functionality and service are not implemented yet. This document describes what benefits the REST APIs provide to FakeApp users. It explains how users can get access to these APIs. Finally, it shows a business unit how to implement RESTful API functionality before FakeApp is completed as a Web Service project.

Example 5

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> For example, in order to call adduser, the service needs to be granted the ADD_USER scope; to call listusers, the service needs to be granted the LIST_USERS scope; and to call deleteuser, the service needs to be granted the DELETE_USERS scope.

PROBLEM

The author took three parallel statements, and strapped them together with semicolons. Grammatically, it all holds together. It is a beautiful thing—if you don't care about readability. Unfortunately for the poor reader, it requires great effort to fight through this 41-word briar patch.

DISCUSSION

The problem sentence is very easy to break apart. It has three separate ideas:

- To call adduser, the service needs to be granted the ADD_USER scope.
- To call listusers, the service needs to be granted the LIST_USERS scope.
- To call deleteuser, the service needs to be granted the DELETE_USERS scope.

The best solution would be to put these three items into a small, compact table. Because this website is about rewriting, we'll do some wordsmithing.

I admire engineers. They love to build things. The bigger, the better. However, many engineers are fond of building long, complicated sentences. Often they cannot resist combining two or more separate thoughts into one sentence. They tie the knots; I untie the knots.

Bottom line: If there is no good reason to yoke two or more thoughts into one long sentence, don't do it! Keep your sentences simple and, if possible, short. Your readers will thank you.

REVISION

Before

[One sentence, 41 words]

> For example, in order to call adduser, the service needs to be granted the
> ADD_USER scope; to call listusers, the service needs to be granted the LIST_USERS
> scope; and to call deleteuser, the service needs to be granted the DELETE_USERS
> scope.

After

[Three sentences, 35 words]

> For example, in order to call adduser, the service needs to be granted the
> ADD_USER scope. To call listusers, the service needs the LIST_USERS scope. Finally,
> to call deleteuser, the service needs the DELETE_USERS scope.

Example 6

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

The fakeMessage cookie writing function happens before a login or redirection flow occurs, however it's not guaranteed the data will be completely written, so if the client uses redirection in their website's "on" events or by other means, then we recommend using a polling method.

PROBLEM

I love this sentence!

Here is the list of errors:

- It is a run-on sentence. We need a complete rewrite with multiple sentences.
- The sentence begins with the passive voice. With a little effort, we can make this active voice.
- There is a comma fault before the word *however*.
- It has a mixture of present tense and future tense. The entire sentence should be in the present tense. When you break it up into shorter sentences, all sentences should be in the present tense.
- The verb form *will be written* is split by the word *completely*.
- For the dependent clause that begins with *if the client*, the word *then* at the beginning of the following independent clause is not necessary. Take it out.
- The pronoun *their* (plural) refers back to *client* (singular).
- Remove the quotation marks from the word *on*. Use italics to indicate emphasis.

DISCUSSION

Error 1

The sentence is divisible into three parts:

- The fakeMessage cookie writing function happens before a login or redirection flow occurs
- It is not guaranteed that the data will be completely written
- If the client uses redirection in their website's "on" events or by other means, then we recommend using a polling method

Therefore, convert this to a three-sentence paragraph.

Error 2

Change this:

> The fakeMessage cookie writing function happens before a login or redirection flow occurs.

To this:

> The fakeMessage cookie writing function occurs before you get a login or redirection flow.

Error 3

There is a comma fault before *however*. Use a semicolon or a period to separate the independent clauses. My preference is for a new sentence.

Also, add a comma after *however*.

Error 4

Change this:

> it's not guaranteed the data will be completely written.

To this:

> it is not guaranteed the data is completely written.

Error 5

Change this:

> will be completely written

To this:

> is written completely

Error 6

Remove *then* at the beginning of the independent clause.

NOTE: You see this a lot in developer documentation. Programmers use the parallel construction **if ... then** all the time when they write code. It is no surprise this same construction shows up in software documentation. Grammatically speaking, it is OK to use the word *then*. I take it out because the word *then* is what grammarians refer to as an *understood* word.

Error 7

For the phrase *if the client uses redirection in their website's "on" events*, the pronoun *their* is incorrect. Say this instead:

> if the client uses redirection in the client website's "on" events

Error 8

The word *on* appears to be in quotation marks because the author wants to emphasize it. Use italics.

REVISION

Before

> The fakeMessage cookie writing function happens before a login or redirection flow occurs, however it's not guaranteed the data will be completely written, so if the client uses redirection in their website's "on" events or by other means, then we recommend using a polling method.

After

> The fakeMessage cookie writing function occurs before you get a login or redirection flow. However, it is not guaranteed the data is written completely. If the client uses redirection in the client website's *on* events or by other means, we recommend you use a polling method.

Example 7

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

There is a reference ValToken filter that allows a client to validate the token through AuthenticationPlus by using a plug-in for the client's web application.

PROBLEM

You can easily divide this into two sentences. See if you can do it.

DISCUSSION

This sentence makes two points:

- The filter allows a client to validate the token through AuthenticationPlus.
- To do this, it uses a plug-in for the client's web application.

For some authors, it is never enough to just write a simple declarative sentence. Clearly, our example sentence makes two points. There is no logical reason why the two points need to be linked together in a single sentence.

Write the first sentence to make a point. Stop. Write the second sentence to make another point. Stop.

Trust me: Your readers appreciate simple declarative sentences. The reader's life is complicated enough without fighting through unnecessarily long sentences.

REVISION

Before

There is a reference ValToken filter that allows a client to validate the token through AuthenticationPlus by using a plug-in for the client's web application.

After

The reference ValToken filter allows a client to use a plug-in for the client's web application. The client can then perform token validation through AuthenticationPlus.

Example 8

> API owners can define assertion rules that enable testing the AuthenticationPlus token to determine if it was password authenticated and reject a request unless the token is an active token, while enabling other resources on the same API to accept the request when the token becomes inactive but is still valid.

PROBLEM

This sentence takes us on quite a journey! Fasten your seat belts.

DISCUSSION

The first thing we do is break up this 51-word sentence into its component parts. We analyze each component part separately. Once we know what each component part is saying, we can put the whole shebang back together again.

Here are your component parts:

- API owners can define assertion rules.
- Assertion rules enable testing of the AuthenticationPlus token.
- The testing process determines if the AuthenticationPlus token is password protected.
- The testing process rejects a request unless the token is active.
- The testing process enables other resources on the same API to accept the request when the token becomes inactive, but is still valid.

The long example sentence breaks out into five distinct statements. Once you lay it out like this, it starts to make more sense, doesn't it?

This is how I would reassemble the example sentence.

The first two bullet points seem to go together. Start out with, *API owners define assertion rules*, and then add the restrictive clause, *that enable testing of the AuthenticationPlus token*. Your first sentence in the rewrite is the following:

> API owners define assertion rules that enable testing of the AuthenticationPlus token.

Turn the third bullet point into a simple declarative sentence:

> The testing process determines if the AuthenticationPlus token is password protected.

Turn the fourth bullet point into a simple declarative sentence:

> The testing process also rejects a request unless the token is active.

Finally, conclude the rewrite as follows:

> The testing process enables other resources on the same API to accept the request when the token becomes inactive, but is still valid.

REVISION

Before

[one sentence]

> API owners can define assertion rules that enable testing the AuthenticationPlus token to determine if it was password authenticated and reject a request unless the token is an active token, while enabling other resources on the same API to accept the request when the token becomes inactive but is still valid.

After

[four sentences]

> API owners define assertion rules that enable testing of the AuthenticationPlus token. The testing process determines if the AuthenticationPlus token is password protected. The testing process also rejects a request unless the token is active. The testing process enables other resources on the same API to accept the request when the token becomes inactive, but is still valid.

Example 9

REWRITE THE FOLLOWING SENTENCES SET IN BOLD TYPE

Private clouds have become a major catalyst for business growth and differentiation while supporting organizations' need to manage highly sensitive information. **Along with public clouds, they are leading the way to a far more agile, open environment for development and innovation, providing developers with unbridled access to the resources they need to design, build, and deploy differentiating products and services faster than ever before. They are also leveraging automation more extensively than ever before to solve problems and improve operational efficiencies, and they are churning out substantial cost savings in the process.** And these benefits are just the beginning. As cloud computing moves into the hybrid era, the business impact is expected to broaden exponentially in ways that have yet to be fully understood.

PROBLEM

To improve readability, we need to cut the second sentence in half. Make it two short sentences.

We have the same problem and the same solution for the third sentence.

DISCUSSION

Second Sentence

Here is the unedited second sentence:

Along with public clouds, they are leading the way to a far more agile, open environment for development and innovation, providing developers with unbridled access to the resources they need to design, build, and deploy differentiating products and services faster than ever before.

Let's go to the Gunning Fog Index calculator. Copy the sentence and paste it into the calculator. Click **Calculate**. This is what we see:

Gunning Fog Index

THE GUNNING FOG INDEX IS 21.85

- The number of major punctuation marks, eg. [.], was 1
- The number of words was 43
- The number of 3+ syllable words, highlighted in blue, was 5

You can edit the numbers above and recalculate

Recalculate

The sentence is 43 words long. According to the index, it requires about 22 years of education to read and comprehend on the first reading. The length of the sentence and the reading level are unacceptable.

The sentence begins with an independent clause (*Along with public clouds, they are leading the way to a far more agile, open environment for development and innovation*) and ends with a dependent clause (*providing developers with unbridled access to the resources they need to design, build, and deploy differentiating products and services faster than ever before*).

The obvious solution is to leave the independent clause intact. Add a period after *innovation*. Then rewrite the dependent clause. Here is one way you can do it:

> This provides developers with unbridled access to the resources they need to design, build, and deploy differentiating products and services faster than ever before.

See, that wasn't so hard!

Now take the two rewritten sentences and put them into the fog index calculator. The new and improved version has 13 years of required education. That is a drop of nine years.

Third Sentence

Here is the unedited third sentence:

> They are also leveraging automation more extensively than ever before to solve problems and improve operational efficiencies, and they are churning out substantial cost savings in the process.

Once again, copy the sentence and paste it into the fog index calculator. Here is the result:

Gunning Fog Index

THE GUNNING FOG INDEX IS 19.77

- The number of major punctuation marks, eg. [.], was 1
- The number of words was 28
- The number of 3+ syllable words, highlighted in blue, was 6

You can edit the numbers above and recalculate

Recalculate

The reading level is 20 years. We can do better by dividing the sentence into two parts. Put a period after *operational efficiencies*. Drop the conjunction *and*. Start a new sentence with *They.*

The new reading level is 14 years. That's a drop of six years.

To summarize, by changing the original five-sentence paragraph to seven sentences, we reduce the overall reading level from 17 to 14 years. Technology is hard enough without forcing the reader to re-read long, complicated sentences. Make it easy for your reader by keeping your sentences short and simple.

REVISION

Before

Private clouds have become a major catalyst for business growth and differentiation while supporting organizations' need to manage highly sensitive information. **Along with public clouds, they are leading the way to a far more agile, open environment for development and innovation, providing developers with unbridled access to the resources they need to design, build, and deploy differentiating products and services faster than ever before. They are also leveraging automation more extensively than ever before to solve problems and improve operational efficiencies, and they are churning out substantial cost savings in the process.** And these benefits are just the beginning. As cloud computing moves into the hybrid era, the business impact is expected to broaden exponentially in ways that have yet to be fully understood.

After

Private clouds have become a major catalyst for business growth and differentiation while supporting organizations' need to manage highly sensitive information. **Along with public clouds, they are leading the way to a far more agile, open environment for development and innovation. This provides developers with unbridled access to the resources they need to design, build, and deploy differentiating products and services faster than ever before. They are also leveraging automation more extensively than ever before to solve problems and improve operational efficiencies. They are churning out substantial cost savings in the process.** And these benefits are just the beginning. As cloud computing moves into the hybrid era, the business impact is expected to broaden exponentially in ways that have yet to be fully understood.

Example 10

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> If a reupload must be fixed because there is more than one CMS and the other one needs to be fixed, the way to fix it is to either create a new request and manually fix the old content objects or to edit the request in the database and remove the CMS not needed.

PROBLEM

This 54-word, run-on sentence needs a drastic make-over. As written, it requires a Ph.D. plus several years of post-doctoral education to comprehend the sentence on the first reading.

Gunning Fog Index

THE GUNNING FOG INDEX IS 23.08

- The number of major punctuation marks, eg. [.], was 1
- The number of words was 54
- The number of 3+ syllable words, highlighted in blue, was 2

You can edit the numbers above and recalculate

Recalculate

DISCUSSION

When you break the sentence into its component parts, you see three distinct ideas. Here they are:

- If a reupload must be fixed because there is more than one CMS and the other one needs to be fixed, you have two options.
- You can fix it by creating a new request and manually fixing the old content objects.
- Otherwise, you can edit the request in the database and remove the CMS you don't need.

REVISION

Before

> If a reupload must be fixed because there is more than one CMS and the other one needs to be fixed, the way to fix it is to either create a new request and manually fix the old content objects or to edit the request in the database and remove the CMS not needed.

After

> If a reupload must be fixed because there is more than one CMS and the other one needs to be fixed, you have two options. You can fix it by creating a new request and manually fixing the old content objects. Otherwise, you can edit the request in the database and remove the CMS you don't need.

Comment: By making these changes, you reduce the readability level from 23 years to 10 years of education.

Example 11

REWRITE THIS PARAGRAPH

As a best practice, enterprises should stay away from anything proprietary that might lock the development team into a single vendor's tools or framework, as a break in that relationship might require a complete re-write and can be costly over time. Enterprises should gravitate to mobile app development environments that feature cross-platform tools and have the flexibility to support native, web, and hybrid app development efforts.

PROBLEM

The example paragraph from a white paper has two long sentences. The reading level is 21 years of education to understand everything in only one pass.

Both sentences are compound sentences. That means each sentence contains two or more simple sentences joined by connector words (for example, *and*, *but*, or *or*).

Remember, every compound sentence has the potential to be divided into shorter simple sentences. Let's do that—to improve readability.

DISCUSSION

Sentence 1

Here is the first sentence (41 words):

> As a best practice, enterprises should stay away from anything proprietary that might lock the development team into a single vendor's tools or framework, as a break in that relationship might require a complete re-write and can be costly over time.

These are the four simple sentences:

- As a best practice, enterprises should stay away from anything proprietary
- [a proprietary tool] might lock the development team into a single vendor's tools or framework
- a break in the vendor relationship might require a complete re-write
- [this relationship] can be costly over time

Sentence 2

Here is the second sentence (25 words):

> Enterprises should gravitate to mobile app development environments that feature cross-platform tools and have the flexibility to support native, web, and hybrid app development efforts.

It has two simple sentences:

- Enterprises should gravitate to mobile app development environments that feature cross-platform tools
- [environments] have the flexibility to support native, web, and hybrid app development efforts

REVISION

Before

[two sentences, 66 words]

> As a best practice, enterprises should stay away from anything proprietary that might lock the development team into a single vendor's tools or framework, as a break in that relationship might require a complete re-write and can be costly over time. Enterprises should gravitate to mobile app development environments that feature cross-platform tools and have the flexibility to support native, web and hybrid app development efforts.

After

[six sentences, 70 words]

> As a best practice, enterprises should stay away from anything proprietary. A proprietary tool might lock the development team into a single vendor's tools or framework. A break in the vendor relationship might require a complete re-write. Further, it can be costly over time. Enterprises should move to mobile app development environments that feature cross-platform tools. These environments have the flexibility to support native, web, and hybrid app development efforts.

REMARKS

Now we are down to 12.67 years of education. Much better!

People, to improve readability, always strive to convert long complicated sentences into short simple sentences.

Example 12

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

The photo service has many properties configured in a client document so both the client and server can access it, and you can edit it easily without rebuilding the client.

PROBLEM

There is no reason why this should be one long sentence. Make it three sentences.

DISCUSSION

The example sentence is saying three things:

- The photo service has many properties configured in a client document.
- Both the client and server can access it.
- You can edit it easily without rebuilding the client.

If you put the original sentence into the fog index calculator, you get this result:

Gunning Fog Index

THE GUNNING FOG INDEX IS 18.67

- The number of major punctuation marks, eg. [.], was 1
- The number of words was 30
- The number of 3+ syllable words, highlighted in blue, was 5

You can edit the numbers above and recalculate

Recalculate

When you break it into three sentences, you get this result:

THE GUNNING FOG INDEX IS 10.76

- The number of major punctuation marks, eg. [.], was 3
- The number of words was 29
- The number of 3+ syllable words, highlighted in blue, was 5

You can edit the numbers above and recalculate

Recalculate

That is a readability improvement of eight years of education. Do you see why I keep harping on this?

REVISION

Before

> The photo service has many properties configured in a client document so both the client and server can access it, and you can edit it easily without rebuilding the client.

After

> The photo service has many properties configured in a client document. Both the client and server can access it. Also, you can edit it easily without rebuilding the client.

Example 13

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> When this completes, which will take 5-30 minutes depending on how big the project is, you will have a ProjectName directory, which is your FancyApp repository of that branch.

PROBLEM

Fix these issues:

- Numbers
- Punctuation
- Simple Sentences
- Word Order

DISCUSSION

Simple Sentences

The sentence makes three statements:

- This step takes five to 30 minutes, depending on the size of the project
- When you are done, you set up a ProjectName directory
- [the ProjectName directory] is your Git repository of that branch.

Numbers

From the Microsoft Style Guide:

> Use numerals for 10 and greater. Spell out zero through nine if the number does not precede a unit of measure or is not used as input.

Punctuation

Do not describe a range as

> 5-30 minutes

Say this instead:

> five to 30 minutes

Word Order

The word order of the example is awkward, especially with the use of the word *which* in two places. See the rewritten sentence.

REVISION

Before

> When this completes, which will take 5-30 minutes depending on how big the project is, you will have a ProjectName directory, which is your FancyApp repository of that branch.

After

[two sentence version]

> This step takes five to 30 minutes, depending on the size of the project. When you are done, set up a ProjectName directory, which is your Git repository of that branch.

Or

[three sentence version]

> This step takes five to 30 minutes, depending on the size of the project. When you are done, set up a ProjectName directory. The ProjectName directory is your Git repository of that branch.

Example 14

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> The FancyApp team's mission is to provide an easy to use build and delivery platform that seamlessly introduces low risk build and deployment automation with the goal of promoting change to the development process and drive software delivery best practices.

PROBLEM

This is an interesting sentence. It is a good example of trying too hard to do too much.

The author is trying to write an all-inclusive mission statement for the FancyApp team. Sometimes with corporate mission statements, there is an irresistible compulsion to cram a lot of high-level thoughts and goals into a single sentence.

Where is it written that you are required to do that? You don't get a Boy Scout merit badge for creating a 40-word sausage that says everything.

DISCUSSION

Rewriting

As I look at today's example sentence, my recommendation is to make a general thesis statement, and then follow up with sentences that provide support to the thesis sentence. Instead of one long sentence, I would rewrite it as three or four shorter sentences. I would make it look like a well-written opening paragraph of an executive summary to a white paper or a proposal.

These are the key points:

- The FancyApp team's mission is to provide a state-of-the-art build and delivery system
- [This build and delivery system] promotes change to the development process
- [This build and delivery system] drives best practices for software delivery
- FancyApp is an easy-to-use system
- It seamlessly introduces low-risk build and deployment automation

Here is your thesis statement:

> The FancyApp team's mission is to provide an effective, state-of-the-art build and delivery system.

For the sentences that support the thesis statement, see the rewrite.

Punctuation

The example sentence has a punctuation problem. It begins with these words:

> The FancyApp team's mission is to provide an easy to use build and delivery platform….

The three words, *easy to use*, modify *building and delivery platform*. You need to connect the three words with hyphens.

In our rewrite, however, we change the word order in such a way the hyphens are no longer required.

> Finally, it is incredibly easy to use.

REVISION

Before

> The FancyApp team's mission is to provide an easy to use build and delivery platform that seamlessly introduces low risk build and deployment automation with the goal of promoting change to the development process and drive software delivery best practices.

After

> The FancyApp team's mission is to provide an effective, state-of-the-art build and delivery system. Our system promotes change to the development process because it drives best practices for software delivery. FancyApp seamlessly introduces low-risk build and deployment automation. Finally, it is incredibly easy to use.

Example 15

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

A message is a single communication sent to a specific guest, referred to as a recipient, via the channel method determined by their delivery profile (such as email, SMS, or a push to an iPhone app).

PROBLEM

Here is another needlessly complex sentence. Let's take it apart.

DISCUSSION

The sentence makes four points:

- A message is a single communication sent to a specific guest
- [the guest] is referred to as a recipient
- The recipient's delivery profile determines which channel method is used
- Channel methods can be email, SMS, or a push to an iPhone app

People, there is nothing wrong with confining a single idea or observation or command to a single sentence.

REVISION

Before

A message is a single communication sent to a specific guest, referred to as a recipient, via the channel method determined by their delivery profile (such as email, SMS, or a push to an iPhone app).

After

A message is a single communication sent to a specific guest. The guest is referred to as a recipient. The recipient's delivery profile determines which channel method is used. Channel methods can be email, SMS, or a push to an iPhone app.

Example 16

REWRITE THIS PARAGRAPH

Person involved in maintenance will need some familiarity with Chef and the applications supported. With enough knowledge to evaluate good version changes and questionable ones. Also the time to walk this through a testing cycle, to ensure a proper updates, before implementing in production.

PROBLEM

We need to fix these things:

- Begin the first sentence with an article (that is, *the* or *a*).
- Change future tense to the present tense.
- Make the second and third sentences complete sentences—they are fragments now.
- Improve the word order in some places.
- Add missing punctuation.

DISCUSSION

Sentence 1

Change this:

Person involved in maintenance will need some familiarity with Chef and the applications supported.

To this:

The person involved in maintenance needs to be familiar with Chef and the supported applications.

Sentence 2

Change this:

With enough knowledge to evaluate good version changes and questionable ones.

To this:

This person should have enough knowledge to evaluate good version changes and questionable ones.

Sentence 3

Change this:

> Also the time to walk this through a testing cycle, to ensure a proper updates, before implementing in production.

To this:

> Also, he or she should know how long it takes to walk this through a testing cycle. This ensures proper updates before implementing it in production.

REVISION

Before

> The person involved in maintenance will need some familiarity with Chef and the applications supported. With enough knowledge to evaluate good version changes and questionable ones. Also the time to walk this through a testing cycle, to ensure a proper updates, before implementing in production.

After

> The person involved in maintenance needs to be familiar with Chef and the supported applications. This person should have enough knowledge to evaluate good version changes and questionable ones. Also, he or she should know how long it takes to walk this through a testing cycle. This ensures proper updates before implementing it in production.

Example 17

> Versions should always roll forward and never changed or updated after the fact.

PROBLEM

First of all, we are missing an important verb (see in brackets):

> Versions should always roll forward and never [be] changed or updated after the fact.

Now the sentence makes more sense.

Also, we have some punctuation errors to fix.

Finally, this is a procedure. We need to word the sentence so it reads like a command.

DISCUSSION

Part of the sentence is information:

> Versions should always roll forward

And part of the sentence is a procedure or command:

> Versions should … never [be] changed or updated after the fact.

Let's make it two simple sentences, with the second sentence in the active voice—as a command:

- Versions should always roll forward.
- Don't ever change or update versions after the fact.

REVISION

Before

Versions should always roll forward and never changed or updated after the fact.

After

Versions should always roll forward. Don't ever change or update versions after the fact.

Example 18

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> A business unit may also decide to change the look of the FakeCorp ID UI by overriding the CSS scheme of the FakeCorp ID UI by specifying a CSS-override parameter or by using an external .css override file.

PROBLEM

The sentence is too long (39 words). Break it into two sentences.

DISCUSSION

Remember the formula for rewriting a long sentence?

Break the sentence into its component parts, and rebuild everything as a sequence of simple sentences. Here are your two component parts:

- A business unit may also decide to change the look of the FakeCorp ID UI by overriding the CSS scheme of the FakeCorp ID UI
- [It does this] by specifying a CSS-override parameter or by using an external .css override file

REVISION

Before

> A business unit may also decide to change the look of the FakeCorp ID UI by overriding the CSS scheme of the FakeCorp ID UI uses by specifying a CSS-override parameter or by using an external .css override file.

After

> A business unit may also decide to change the look of the FakeCorp ID UI by overriding the CSS scheme of the FakeCorp ID UI. It does this by specifying a CSS-override parameter or by using an external .css override file.

Example 19

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> The immediate mitigation was a massive data clean up of address and phone tables for those duplicates entries in the Aquarius DB which resolved the problem but there were no identified valid reasons why a user would need these large array counts of addresses.

PROBLEM

We have three problems:
- Break up this long sentence into two or three sentences
- Change *massive data clean up* to *massive data cleanup*
- Avoid the conditional voice when the present tense works just as well

DISCUSSION

Simple Sentences

The example sentence makes three statements:

- The immediate mitigation was a massive data clean up of address and phone tables for those duplicates entries in the Aquarius DB
- [the migration] resolved the problem
- there were no identified valid reasons why a user would need these large array counts of addresses.

By breaking up the long example sentence into three shorter sentences, you reduce the reading level from 21 to 10 years of education required to understand the sentence upon the first reading.

Spelling

From the website **Grammarist**:

Cleanup vs. clean up

When you need a term meaning (1) *to make clean or orderly,* or (2) *to make oneself clean*, use **clean up**—two words. In American and Canadian English, the one-word **cleanup** is a noun referring to (1) a thorough cleaning or (2) the act or process of cleaning. It may also function as an adjective in phrases like *cleanup crew* and *cleanup hitter*. British writers typically use the hyphenated form—*clean-up*—instead. Australian and New Zealand publications are inconsistent on the matter.

Conditional Statements

Don't say this:

>…why a user would need these large array counts of addresses

Say this:

>…why a user needs these large array counts of addresses

REVISION

Before

>The immediate mitigation was a massive data clean up of address and phone tables for those duplicates entries in Aquarius DB which resolved the problem but there were no identified valid reasons why a user would need these large array counts of addresses.

After

>The immediate mitigation was a massive data cleanup of address and phone tables for those duplicates entries in Aquarius DB. The migration resolved the problem. However, there were no valid reasons why a user needs these large array counts of addresses.

Example 20

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> If client site A requires FAKECORP-TOU and ppV2, and a user creates an account and accepts these two legally required documents, and the user goes to log into client site B with that same account and client site B requires DI-COOKIEPOLICY-NL and ppV2, the system prompts the user to accept DI-COOKIEPOLICY-NL on that login to comply with the legal requirements for logging in to client site B.

PROBLEM

The example sentence is 66 words long! It has a reading level of 31 years of education! **Break it up into shorter sentences.**

DISCUSSION

Here is how you deconstruct a long sentence:

- Capture the entire sentence and paste it into a worksheet
- Strip out the component parts
- Reconstruct each component part as a simple sentence
- Reassemble the content into a sequence of simple sentences

So, here we go.

The author lays out an elaborate set of circumstances before getting to the action in the sentence. Here is the setup:

- If client site A requires FAKECORP-TOU and ppV2
- [if] a user creates an account and accepts these two legally required documents
- [if] the user goes to log into client site B with that same account
- [if] client site B requires DI-COOKIEPOLICY-NL and ppV2

The example sentence takes 43 words just to lay out all the conditions! Obviously, that is a lot of information to process.

Using the previous deconstruction formula, I suggest our example sentence logically contains three major component parts. The first two components lay out all the conditions. The third component explains the action:

- [suppose] the client site A requires FAKECORP-TOU and ppV2, and a user creates an account and accepts these two legally required documents
- the user then goes to log into client site B with that same account and client site B responds by requiring DI-COOKIEPOLICY-NL and ppV2
- the system prompts the user to accept DI-COOKIEPOLICY-NL on that login to comply with the legal requirements for logging in to client site B

Also, for clarity, add a brief introductory sentence before you write the three component parts. Say something like this:

Here is an example scenario.

REVISION

Before

> If client site A requires FAKECORP-TOU, and ppV2, and a user creates an account, and accepts these two legally required documents, and the user goes to log into client site B with that same account and client site B requires DI-COOKIEPOLICY-NL and ppV2, the system prompts the user to accept DI-COOKIEPOLICY-NL on that login to comply with the legal requirements for logging in to client site B.

After

> Here is an example scenario. Suppose the client site A requires FAKECORP-TOU and ppV2, and a user creates an account and accepts these two legally required documents. The user then goes to log into client site B with that same account and client site B responds by requiring DI-COOKIEPOLICY-NL and ppV2. In that situation, the system prompts the user to accept DI-COOKIEPOLICY-NL on that login to comply with the legal requirements for logging in to client site B.

Or

> Here is an example scenario. Suppose you have this chain of events:
>
> - Client site A requires FAKECORP-TOU and ppV2
> - A user creates an account and accepts these two legally required documents
> - The user then goes to log into client site B with that same account
> - Client site B responds by requiring DI-COOKIEPOLICY-NL and ppV2
>
> In that situation, the system prompts the user to accept DI-COOKIEPOLICY-NL on that login to comply with the legal requirements for logging in to client site B.

COMMENT

The reading level now is 13 years of education as sentences or 11 years as a combination of sentences and a list.

Example 21

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> If the NRT account includes some personal data, the endpoint will send an email to the email address associated with this account which contains a clickback link to a page where the guest chooses a password and potentially a new username.

PROBLEM

Issues:

- Simple sentences
- Which vs. that
- Punctuation
- Present vs. future tense

DISCUSSION

The example sentence is too long. You can easily break it up into two sentences. Also, the example has punctuation errors, but those errors go away when you rewrite as two sentences.

If you leave it as one long sentence, you need to replace *which* with *that*. However, since we are starting a new sentence, that problem also goes away.

This is optional, but, for clarity, you might put commas before and after the word *potentially*.

Finally, if you are describing something that happens both now and in the future, I recommend using the present tense instead of the future tense.

REVISION

Before

> If the NRT account includes some personal data, the endpoint will send an email to the email address associated with this account which contains a clickback link to a page where the guest chooses a password and potentially a new username.

After

> If the NRT account includes some personal data, the endpoint sends an email to the email address associated with this account. The email contains a clickback link to a page where the guest chooses a password and, potentially, a new username.

Example 22

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> To keep the user in a logged-in state, the FakeCorpID SDK internally stores a refresh_token that it uses periodically to get a new unexpired access_token from the FakeCorpID server.

PROBLEM

The example sentence contains two basic thoughts. There is no good reason why you should not divide this long sentence into two shorter sentences.

DISCUSSION

The sentence says two things:

- To keep the user in a logged-in state, the FakeCorpID SDK internally stores a *refresh_token*.
- It uses this token periodically to get a new unexpired *access_token* from the FakeCorpID server.

By dividing the sentence into two parts, you reduce the fog index readability score from 23 years of education to 17 years of education. Six years of education is not trivial.

REVISION

Before

> To keep the user in a logged-in state, the FakeCorpID SDK internally stores a *refresh_token* that it uses periodically to get a new unexpired *access_token* from the FakeCorpID server.

After

> To keep the user in a logged-in state, the FakeCorpID SDK internally stores a *refresh_token*. It uses this token periodically to get a new unexpired *access_token* from the FakeCorpID server.

Example 23

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> The command returns the status of the entitlement, which now has an expiration date of the current time, indicating that the right to access a specific digital asset is revoked.

PROBLEM

This sentence is OK, but we can make it better by dividing it into two short sentences. We can make it more readable than it is now.

DISCUSSION

The example sentence expresses two thoughts:

- The command returns the status of the entitlement, which now has an expiration date of the current time.
- This indicates the right to access a specific digital asset is revoked.

See, that wasn't so hard.

Such a simple change reduces the fog index by six years of education. You should always, Always, ALWAYS look for ways to improve the reading experience for the user.

REVISION

Before

The command returns the status of the entitlement, which now has an expiration date of the current time, indicating that the right to access a specific digital asset is revoked.

After

The command returns the status of the entitlement, which now has an expiration date of the current time. This indicates the right to access a specific digital asset is revoked.

Example 24

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> The intent of the compliance section is to provide the UI with all the information it needs to know, and what fields are required on user forms as well as what fields can be edited once during an action or not at all.

PROBLEM

This meandering passive-voice sentence can be divided into three shorter sentences.

DISCUSSION

Here is how you deconstruct a long sentence:

- Capture the entire sentence and paste it into a worksheet.
- Strip out the component parts.
- Reconstruct each component part as a simple sentence.
- Reassemble the content into a sequence of simple sentences.

OK, let's do that.

Here are your three component parts:

- The intent of the compliance section is to provide the UI with all the required information.
- For example, it indicates what fields are required on user forms.
- Also, it tells you what fields you can or cannot edit during an action.

Word Order

Don't say this:

…what fields can be edited once during an action or not at all.

Say this:

…what fields you can or cannot edit during an action.

Anthropomorphisms

The author is attributing human qualities to (a) the compliance section and (b) the user interface (UI) by saying this:

> The intent of the compliance section is to provide the UI with all the information it needs to know….

This figure of speech is called an *anthropomorphism*. These are the anthropomorphic characteristics:

- The compliance section has an intent to provide
- The UI has all the information it needs to know

We are talking about computer operations here, not people. Avoid anthropomorphic usage in your technical writing.

Don't say this:

> The intent of the compliance section is to provide the UI with all the information it needs to know.

Say this:

> Use the compliance section to provide the UI with all the required information.

REVISION

Before

> The intent of the compliance section is to provide the UI with all the information it needs to know, and what fields are required on user forms as well as what fields can be edited once during an action or not at all.

After

> Use the compliance section to provide the UI with all the required information. For example, the compliance section indicates what fields are required on user forms. Also, it tells you what fields you can or cannot edit during an action.

Example 25

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

It will take a little time to download the base OS and install all required components, should be around 5-10 minutes depending on the speed of your network connection.

PROBLEM

Divide this run-on sentence into two sentences. Spell out numbers from one to nine in instances where the number is not used in a measurement.

DISCUSSION

Start a new sentence after the words *required components*. See the **Revision** section for the rewrite.

Don't say this:

…should be around 5-10 minutes….

Say this:

…should be five to 10 minutes….

REVISION

Before

It will take a little time to download the base OS and install all required components, should be around 5-10 minutes depending on the speed of your network connection.

After

It will take a little time to download the base OS and install all required components. Download should be five to 10 minutes, depending on the speed of your network connection.

Example 26

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

Filter strategies in network traffic analysis (NTA) enable you to decide whether the network flow records that NTA receives are processed or discarded by NTA, which means you can choose to process and analyze or discard packets based on their source or destination IP address or by source or destination Layer 4 port number.

PROBLEM

This sentence has 54 words. It is way too long. Your mission is to break up this long sentence into shorter component parts.

DISCUSSION

Do you remember my formula for breaking up a long sentence into shorter sentences? OK, here it is—one more time:

1. Capture the entire sentence and paste it into a worksheet.
2. Strip out the component parts.
3. Reconstruct each component part as a simple sentence.
4. Reassemble the content into a sequence of simple sentences.

As I see it, there are two component parts:

- Filter strategies in network traffic analysis (NTA) let you decide whether network flow records routed to NTA are processed and analyzed or discarded.
- The packets fall into two groups: Source or destination IP address and source or destination layer 4 port number.

You can easily turn the second bullet point into a short list. See the **Revision** section for the results.

REVISION

Before

Filter strategies in network traffic analysis (NTA) enable you to decide whether the network flow records that NTA receives are processed or discarded by NTA, which means you can choose to process and analyze or discard packets based on their source or destination IP address or by source or destination Layer 4 port number.

After

Filter strategies in network traffic analysis (NTA) let you decide whether network flow records routed to NTA are processed and analyzed or discarded. The packets fall into two groups:

- Source or destination IP address
- Source or destination layer 4 port number

Example 27

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> FakeCorp ID is an initiative to create an enterprise-wide account creation and identity management experience and will institute practices that embed the identity concept in the minds of consumers to use their identity everywhere, every time they engage with FakeCorp, both online and offline.

PROBLEM

We need to divide the sentence into at least two parts. We need to convert the future tense to the present tense.

DISCUSSION

Simple Sentences

The FakeCorp ID does two things:

- FakeCorp ID is an initiative to create an enterprise-wide account creation and identity management experience
- [FakeCorp ID] institutes practices that embed the identity concept in the minds of consumers to use their identity everywhere, every time they engage with FakeCorp, both online and offline.

Now we have our two shorter sentences.

Present vs. Future Tense

Don't say this:

> [FakeCorp ID] will institute practices….

Say this:

> [FakeCorp ID] institutes practices….

REVISION

Before

> FakeCorp ID is an initiative to create an enterprise-wide account creation and identity management experience and will institute practices that embed the identity concept in the minds of consumers to use their identity everywhere, every time they engage with FakeCorp, both online and offline.

After

> FakeCorp ID is an initiative to create an enterprise-wide account creation and identity management experience. It institutes practices that embed the identity concept in the minds of consumers to use their identity everywhere, every time they engage with FakeCorp, both online and offline.

Usage

IMPORTANT: This topic is about **usage**. However, all of the following examples contain discussions of multiple subjects—not just usage. Therefore, in addition to usage, you are going to learn a lot of different things about good writing and rewriting.

Example 1

REWRITE THESE SENTENCES

Contact Customer Service to kickoff your upgrade plan.

When is the kick off?

When is the kick off meeting?

Make a back up of the CMS database.

Make sure you backup your files.

Now that you have everything setup and provisioned, let's run through a quick sample to get you started.

Now that you're done with the set up, what's next?

Check the FAQ page to see if others have had the same issues, or set up quirks.

If the user is not logged in, this prompts the user to login.

You can launch account recovery from the main FakeApp Log In UI.

A guest can choose to logout by clicking the Logout button on the FakeCorp website.

PROBLEM

- kick off or kickoff?
- back up or backup?
- set up or setup?
- log in or login?
- log out or logout?

All of the example sentences are incorrect.

DISCUSSION

Verb

When used as a verb, it is always two words:

- to kick off
- to back up
- to set up
- to log in
- to log out

Noun

When used as a noun, it is always one word:

- The kickoff for the Seahawks game is Sunday at 1:25 PM.
- I saved a backup of the file.
- What is the setup for the conference call?
- What is the password for the wi-fi login?
- Click **Logout**.

Modifier

When used as a modifier, or adjective, it is always one word.

- We have a kickoff meeting at 9:00 AM.
- The backup file is in this folder.
- For the setup instructions, click **Start**.
- Make sure you have a strong login password.
- Are you ready to review the logout procedure?

REVISION

1 (verb)

Before

      Contact Customer Service to kickoff your upgrade plan.

After

      Contact Customer Service to kick off your upgrade plan.

2 (noun)

Before

      When is the kick off?

After

      When is the kickoff?

3 (modifier)

Before

      When is the kick off meeting?

After

      When is the kickoff meeting?

4 (noun)

Before

      Make a back up of the CMS database.

After

      Make a backup of the CMS database.

5 (verb)

Before

Make sure you backup your files.

After

Make sure you back up your files.

6 (verb)

Before

Now that you have everything setup and provisioned, let's run through a quick sample to get you started.

After

Now that you have everything set up and provisioned, let's run through a quick sample to get you started.

7 (noun)

Before

Now that you're done with the set up, what's next?

After

Now that you're done with the setup, what's next?

8 (modifier)

Before

Check the FAQ page to see if others have had the same issues, or set up quirks.

After

Check the FAQ page to see if others have had the same issues, or setup quirks.

9 (verb)

Before

If the user is not logged in, this prompts the user to login.

After

If the user is not logged in, this prompts the user to log in.

10 (noun)

Before

You can launch account recovery from the main FakeApp Log In UI.

After

You can launch account recovery from the main FakeApp Login UI.

11 (verb)

Before

A guest can choose to logout by clicking the **Logout** button on the FakeCorp website.

After

A guest can choose to log out by clicking the **Logout** button on the FakeCorp website.

Example 2

REWRITE THESE SENTENCES

Utilize a database for distribution lists.

It utilizes the FakeApp lists and user data to fine tune marketing lists used by AnotherFakeApp.

This list or portions of it are utilized for filter of targeted mails to ensure exclusion of guests and users who previously submitted a suppression request.

Defining the correct metrics enables us and the BU to measure and track utilization of the service according to the taxonomy, which in turn supports the ongoing management of the service.

PROBLEM

Today's lesson in readability: Don't *utilize* big words.

DISCUSSION

The verb form *to utilize* and the verb form *to use* mean the same thing. In most cases, the monosyllabic word *use* is an acceptable substitute for the verb *utilize*.

Years ago when I was working at the Boeing Company, I suggested to an engineer that he use *use* instead of *utilize*. I asked him why use a 50 cent word when a nickel word worked just as well. He agreed the meaning was the same, but he said he felt like he was working harder when he utilized something. That is the best defense I ever heard for *utilize* and its pretentious cousin *utilization*.

Caution: Engineers of all stripes love the word *utilization*. It often appears in formal software nomenclature. Don't ever change the word if it is part of an official name of a product or process.

REVISIONS

1

Before

Utilize a database for distribution lists.

After

Use a database for distribution lists.

2

Before

It utilizes the FakeApp lists and user data to fine tune marketing lists used by AnotherFakeApp.

After

It uses the FakeApp lists and user data to fine tune marketing lists used by AnotherFakeApp.

3

Before

This list or portions of it are utilized for filter of targeted mails to ensure exclusion of guests and users who previously submitted a suppression request.

After

This list or portions of it are used for filter of targeted mails to ensure exclusion of guests and users who previously submitted a suppression request.

Example 3

REWRITE THESE SENTENCES USING ENGLISH WORDS

> This resource defines the feature type (i.e., Boolean, String, Int, and enumerated types).
>
> This enables the guest to update his or her information via the UI.
>
> If the validation filter throws an exception (e.g., the user gave an invalid token or an expired token), the system returns a 401 Unauthorized message.
>
> For ISP blocks (WarmMail, FutureOfAwesome, etc.), typically the incidents trigger an alert.

PROBLEM

Each sentence contains a Latin phrase. In each case, the Latin phrase is used correctly. The problem is some authors use Latin phrases, but they don't know the exact meaning of the phrases they use.

DISCUSSION

Here are the definitions:

- e.g. comes from the Latin phrase *exempli gratia*, which means **for the sake of example**. Use **for example**.
- *i.e.* comes from *id est*. It means **that is**. Use **that is**.
- *etc.* or *et cetera*, means **and other things**, **and so forth**, and **the rest**. Use **and so on**.
- *via* literally means **by way of**. Use **by using** or **through**.

Check your organization's style sheet to see if it is OK to use Latin phrases. If it is not OK, use the English phrases on this page.

If Latin phrases are OK, make sure you use them correctly. For example, never use e.g. at the beginning of a phrase and etc. at the end of the phrase. Either begin with **for example** or end with **and so on**. Don't do both.

I don't encourage the use of Latin phrases. My preference is to not use them at all. I give your three reasons. First, we live in America and American English is our language. Second, Latin phrases convey the self-important tone of legal documentation. Finally, Latin phrases may cause localization problems as your documentation is translated into other languages.

On this last point: It is a problem *especially* when the author uses the Latin phrase incorrectly and the technical editor does not catch it!

REVISIONS

Before

1

This resource defines the feature type (i.e., Boolean, String, Int, and enumerated types).

2

This enables the guest to update his or her information via the UI.

3

If the validation filter throws an exception (e.g., the user gave an invalid token or an expired token), the system returns a 401 Unauthorized message.

4

For ISP blocks (WarmMail, FutureOfAwesome, etc.), typically the incidents trigger an alert.

After

1

This resource defines the feature type (that is, Boolean, String, Int, and enumerated types).

2

This enables the guest to update his or her information through the UI.

Or

This enables the guest to update his or her information by using the UI.

3

If the validation filter throws an exception (for example, the user gave an invalid token or an expired token), the system returns a 401 Unauthorized message.

4

For ISP blocks (WarmMail, FutureOfAwesome, and so on), typically the incidents trigger an alert.

Example 4

REWRITE THESE SENTENCES

Please see the app controller documentation for more information.

If you use the Apache HTTP client (Java) to call AuthenticationPlus, please note that Apache HTTP client connection pooling is not always reliable when you make that call.

If your requirements are not satisfied by the reference implementation, please use the following code.

To connect to services running in the WXYZ managed hosting environment, please become familiar with this policy and its implications on connectivity.

PROBLEM

The word *please*.

DISCUSSION

Use this word sparingly. Never use it in a procedural sentence where the specified action is mandatory. *Please* can be interpreted to mean that a required action is optional. Also, if you use it too often, you strike an obsequious tone.

REVISIONS

Before

Please see the app controller documentation for more information.

If you use the Apache HTTP client (Java) to call AuthenticationPlus, please note that Apache HTTP client connection pooling is not always reliable when you make that call.

If your requirements are not satisfied by the reference implementation, please use the following code.

To connect to services running in the WXYZ managed hosting environment, please become familiar with this policy and its implications on connectivity.

After

See the app controller documentation for more information.

If you use the Apache HTTP client (Java) to call AuthenticationPlus, note that Apache HTTP client connection pooling is not always reliable when you make that call.

If your requirements are not satisfied by the reference implementation, use the following code.

To connect to services running in the WXYZ managed hosting environment, become familiar with this policy and its implications on connectivity.

Example 5

As an option, you can choose a background image at runtime.

In computer science, run time, or execution time is the time during which a program is running (executing), in contrast to other phases of a program's life cycle such as compile time, link time, load time, and so on.

PROBLEM

The words *runtime* and *run time*.

DISCUSSION

Run time is the time during which an application is running, as in *at run time*. Think chronological time for *run time*.

A *runtime* is an environment that is required to run programs that are not compiled to machine language. Think a specified software environment for *runtime*.

REVISIONS

Before

As an option, you can choose a background image at runtime.

In computer science, run time, or execution time is the time during which a program is running (executing), in contrast to other phases of a program's life cycle such as compile time, link time, load time, and so on.

After

As an option, you can choose a background image at run time.

In computer science, runtime, or execution time is the time during which a program is running (executing), in contrast to other phases of a program's life cycle such as compile time, link time, load time, and so on.

Example 6

> Track individual links within the message body.
>
> The user must create the full account in the specified time-to-live after becoming a new prospect.
>
> To learn how to launch the login screen within your application, see the User Login page.

PROBLEM

There is a subtle difference between the preposition *in* and the preposition *within*. Here are the definitions:

- In—*In* is a preposition that denotes inclusion or location. It can also mean "into."
- Within—*Within* has a meaning of "inside the boundaries or limits." Most often, usage of *within* in software documentation has to do with time restrictions.

DISCUSSION

Let's look at our example sentences one by one.

> Track individual links within the message body.

This takes the word *in* because it speaks to a location, in the message body.

> The user must create the full account in the specified time to live after becoming a new prospect.

The word *within* is defined as "inside the boundaries or limits." The sentence mentions a specific time to live, or TTL. The user must create a full account within the boundaries of the TTL. Therefore, *within* is correct.

> To learn how to launch the login screen within your application, see the User Login page.

There are no boundaries or limits here. That is, there are no restrictions from beginning to end. We are talking about a specific location on the user interface. The **User Login** page is included as part of the UI. The word *in* is correct.

REVISIONS

Before

Track individual links within the message body.

The user must create the full account in the specified time-to-live after becoming a new prospect.

To learn how to launch the login screen within your application, see the **User Login** page.

After

Track individual links in the message body.

The user must create the full account within the specified time-to-live after becoming a new prospect.

To learn how to launch the login screen in your application, see the **User Login** page.

Example 7

REWRITE THESE SENTENCES

<div style="border:1px solid black; padding:1em;">

Click OK to close the dialog.

Double-click on the appropriate connection to open the Properties d-box.

</div>

PROBLEM

The words *dialog* and *d-box*.

DISCUSSION

In software documentation, never use *dialog* or *dialogs* for dialog box or dialog boxes. Never use the abbreviation *d-box*.

REVISIONS

Before

Click **OK** to close the dialog.

Double-click on the appropriate connection to open the **Properties** d-box.

After

Click **OK** to close the dialog box.

Double-click on the appropriate connection to open the **Properties** dialog box.

Example 8

CONVERT THE FOLLOWING LATIN PHRASES TO ENGLISH WORDS

I went to my least favorite place (i.e., the dentist).

The buffet provided excellent variety, e.g., vegetarian and non-vegetarian soups, Italian and French breads, and numerous sweets.

Green vegetables (broccoli, spinach, etc.) can be good for your health.

Send the message via our own SMTP server.

PROBLEM

These four Latin phrases are used all the time in technical writing:

- e.g.
- i.e.
- etc.
- via

If your organization's style guide allows you to use these Latin phrases, you should—at the very least—know what they mean. If your style guide *does not* allow you to use Latin phrases, you need to replace the Latin phrases with the correct English words.

DISCUSSION

Here are the definitions:

- e.g. comes from the Latin phrase *exempli gratia*, which means for the sake of example. Use *for example*.
- *i.e.* comes from *id est*. It means that is. Use *that is*.
- *etc.* or *et cetera*, means and other things, and so forth, and the rest. Use *and so on*.
- *via* literally means by way of. Use *by using* or *through*.

This is what I said in one of my blog postings back in November of 2014:

Check your organization's style sheet to see if it is OK to use Latin phrases. If it is not OK, use the English phrases on this page.

If Latin phrases are OK, make sure you use them correctly. For example, never use e.g. at the beginning of a phrase and etc. at the end of the phrase. Either begin with *for example* or end with *and so on*. Don't do both.

I don't encourage the use of Latin phrases. My preference is to not use them at all. I give your three reasons. First, we live in America and American English is our language. Second, Latin phrases convey the self-important tone of legal documentation. Finally, Latin phrases may cause localization problems as your documentation is translated into other languages.

On this last point: It is a problem *especially* when the author uses the Latin phrase incorrectly and the technical editor does not catch it!

REVISION

Before

I went to my least favorite place (**i.e.**, the dentist).

The buffet provided excellent variety, **e.g.**, vegetarian and non-vegetarian soups, Italian and French breads, and numerous sweets.

Green vegetables (broccoli, spinach, **etc.**) can be good for your health.

Send the message **via** our own SMTP server.

After

I went to my least favorite place (that is, the dentist).

The buffet provided excellent variety, for example, vegetarian and non-vegetarian soups, Italian and French breads, and numerous sweets.

Green vegetables (broccoli, spinach, and so on) can be good for your health.

Send the message through our own SMTP server.

Or

Send the message by using our own SMTP server.

Example 9

WHICH SENTENCE IS CORRECT?

This message and/or attachments is confidential.

Or

This message and/or attachments are confidential.

If you don't think either sentence is correct, what is a good rewrite?

PROBLEM

I am opening up the **and/or** can of worms.

Let's assume you think it is OK to use *and/or* in a sentence. Which sentence is correct?

On the other hand, if you do not think *and/or* is OK:

- Why is it not OK?
- What is your preferred revision?

DISCUSSION

If you think *and/or* is OK, this is the correct answer:

> The subject of a sentence generally is defined as the noun or pronoun engaging in the activity of the verb. When a sentence has two or more subjects, we call it a *compound subject.*

RULE: When the subjects are joined by *and, or*, *and/or*, or *neither/nor*, the verb agrees with the subject that is closest to the verb.

The verb *are* is closest to the subject *attachments*. Therefore, use the plural form *are*.

My Opinion

I do not like *and/or* for several reasons. The main reason is readability. It makes the reader pause because, initially, it is not clear what the author is talking about. Of course, after the reader takes the extra time to re-read the sentence two or three times, it might make sense. But because of the author's cute grammatical construction, the author has unnecessarily wasted some of the reader's valuable time.

In addition, *and/or* lacks precision. Technical writing is supposed to be precise and accurate. Here is an example of a confusing *and/or* construction:

> x and/or y

contrasting to this better rewrite:

> x or y or both

You run into major problems when you use *and/or* for three or more items. For example, take this sentence:

> He will eat either cake, pie, and/or brownies.

The *and/or* construction introduces a gratuitously confusing picture for the reader. The *and/or brownies* part of the sentence is the problem.

Does it mean this?

> He will eat either cake, pie, or brownies. (one of the three—although it reads better when you remove the word *either* in this sentence and in all of the following sentences)

Or this:

> He will eat either cake, pie, and brownies. (all of them—also, the word *either* is misused because it does not go with *and*)

Or this:

> He will eat either cake and brownies. (exclude pie—also, the word *either* is misused because it does not go with *and*)

Or this:

> He will eat either pie and brownies. (exclude cake—also, the word *either* is misused because it does not go with *and*)

IMPORTANT: Never use the *and/or* construction for three or more items. If you must use *and/or*, make sure it is a choice between just two items.

REVISIONS

Before

This message and/or attachments is confidential.

Or

This message or attachments are confidential.

After

This message or its attachments or both are confidential.

Example 10

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> You have the option whether or not to use the external URI base in the rewritten URIs.

PROBLEM

The phrase *whether or not*.

DISCUSSION

If you take the words *or not* out of the phrase *whether or not*, the meaning of the sentence is exactly the same, and you make the sentence more concise.

REVISION

Before

> You have the option whether or not to use the external URI base in the rewritten URIs.

After

> You have the option whether to use the external URI base in the rewritten URIs.

Example 11

FakeCorp is committed to resolving issues that effect the performance and availability of the service.

What is the affect on resolution time?

PROBLEM

Ah, the age-old question whether to use the word *affect* or *effect*. Does that ever puzzle you?

DISCUSSION

Let's keep this simple.

The website **Vocabulary** has a memorable explanation. Whenever you can't decide between *affect* and *effect*, I want you to think of this poet:

And this dirty old bird:

Your mental gimmick is **RAVEN**. RAVEN stands for this:

R – Remember

A – Affect

V – Verb

E – Effect

N – Noun

Sentence 1

> FakeCorp is committed to resolving issues that **effect** the performance and availability of the service.

The word should be *affect* because it is a verb (that is, *to affect*).

Sentence 2

> What is the **affect** on resolution time?

The word should be *effect* because it is a noun.

Exceptions to the RAVEN Rule

Sometimes *effect* is used as a verb. From **Vocabulary**:

> Adding to the confusion, *effect* can also be used as a verb to mean to produce or to cause to come into being. Here's an example that uses it correctly: "A government unable to *effect* any change is a government that will produce no surprises." Put another way, a government that can't produce change won't be able to produce surprises; it will be predictable.

Got it? Good.

REVISIONS

Before

> FakeCorp is committed to resolving issues that effect the performance and availability of the service.
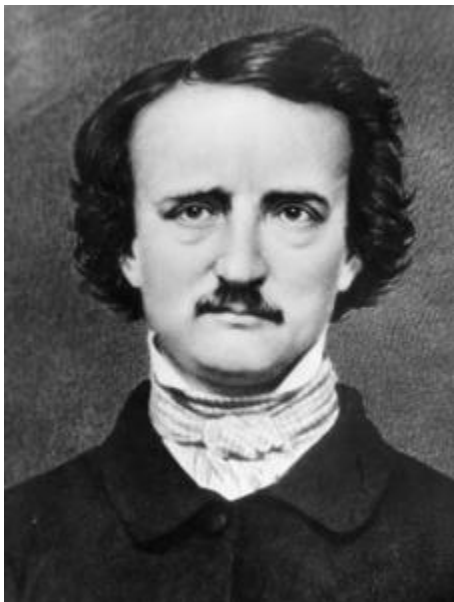
> What is the affect on resolution time?

After

> FakeCorp is committed to resolving issues that affect the performance and availability of the service.

> What is the effect on resolution time?

Example 12

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> An error occurred within the admin controller service.

PROBLEM

The word *within* is misused. Use the word *in*.

DISCUSSION

The word *in* is a preposition that indicates inclusion or location. It also means *into*.

The word *within* is also a preposition that means *inside the boundaries or limits*. In other words, it means the space—either physically or metaphorically—between point *a* and point *b*.

In our example sentence, there is no indication the error occurred inside any boundaries or limits. The error is found in the admin controller service—a specific location. Therefore, *in* is the correct usage.

REVISION

Before

An error occurred within the admin controller service.

After

An error occurred in the admin controller service.

Example 13

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> You saw us win it all, and you saw us go all the way to the last moment and not get what you want.
>
> (A quote from Seattle Seahawks head football coach, Pete Carroll, at the NFL Combine, February 20, 2015.)

PROBLEM

The phrase

> and not get what **you** want

Refers back to

> you saw **us** go all the way

The second-person singular *you* refers back to the third-person plural *us*.

DISCUSSION

This verbal error happens all too frequently, especially in speech. When it comes to pronoun reference, you *must* be consistent from beginning to end.

REVISION

Before

> You saw us win it all, and you saw us go all the way to the last moment and not get what you want.

After

> You saw us win it all, and you saw us go all the way to the last moment and not get what we want.

Example 14

FIX THE PROBLEMS IN THIS LIST

Recipient lists can be created via many different mechanisms and for different purposes such as:

- Recipents that wish to recieve a message every time the Seahawks score a touchdown
- Recipents that are targets of a marketing campaign assembled in Unica or some other tool.
- Reciptents that wish to recieve results of running a query against a database

---

PROBLEM

This brief list has many problems. Here is a summary:

- Latin Phrases
    - via
- Passive Voice
- Punctuation
    - Consistency of end punctuation
- Spelling
    - Recipents
    - receive
    - Reciptents
- Usage
    - wish vs. want
    - that vs. who
    - receive vs. get

DISCUSSION

Latin Phrases

Instead of *via*, say *by using* or *through*.

Passive Voice

Instead of saying:

> Recipient lists can be created

Say this:

> You can create recipient lists

Punctuation

One of the three bullet items (that is, the second bullet item) has end punctuation. In a bullet list, punctuate all the bullet items or none of the bullet items. You must be consistent.

Spelling

Make these changes:

- Change *Recipents* to *Recipients*
- Change *recieve* to *receive*
- Change *Reciptents* to *Recipients*

Usage

Use the word *want* instead of *wish*. Wishing for something is like hoping you will get it; *want* is more direct. Also, *want* is better for localization.

The phrase *Recipients that* is incorrect. Recipients are persons. Therefore, use the word *who* instead of *that*.

While the word *receive* is acceptable usage, you might consider using the one-syllable verb *get*. It means the same thing.

REVISION

Before

Recipient lists can be created via many different mechanisms and for different purposes such as:

- Recipents that wish to recieve a message every time the Seahawks score a touchdown
- Recipents that are targets of a marketing campaign assembled in Unica or some other tool.
- Reciptents that wish to recieve results of running a query against a database

After

You can create recipient lists by using many different mechanisms and for different purposes such as:

- Recipients who want to get a message every time the Seahawks score a touchdown
- Recipients who are targets of a marketing campaign assembled in Unica or some other tool
- Recipients who want to get results of running a query against a database

Example 15

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

Each custom button must register its own information, such as details about it's name, its icon, and what happens when it's clicked.

PROBLEM

The combination of letters *i-t-s* appears four times in the sentence. Does each have correct punctuation?

DISCUSSION

Let's take these in order:

i-t-s 1

Each custom button must register its own information

This is correct. It indicates the possessive form.

i-t-s 2

such as details about it's name

This incorrect. This is a possessive like the first one. By adding the apostrophe, the author indicates this is a contraction of two words, *it* and *is*, and that is not what the author intends.

i-t-s 3

its icon

This is correct. It indicates the possessive.

i-t-s 4

and what happens when it's clicked

This is correct. The author indicates the contraction of *it* and *is*. You could also say:

…when it is clicked.

REVISION

Before

> Each custom button must register its own information, such as details about it's name, its icon, and what happens when it's clicked.

After

> Each custom button must register its own information, such as details about its name, its icon, and what happens when it's clicked.

Or

> Each custom button must register its own information, such as details about its name, its icon, and what happens when it is clicked.

Example 16

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

Navigate to the Instances & Volumes tab, and then select the correct project from the project drop-down list.

PROBLEM

The word *navigate*.

DISCUSSION

The word *navigate* is an acceptable word when you are talking to an American developer audience, but it gets mixed results in localization studies. I recommend you use the word *go*. It means the same thing in the context of the example sentence, and it is easier to read.

REVISION

Before

Navigate to the **Instances & Volumes** tab, and then select the correct project from the project drop-down list.

After

Go to the **Instances & Volumes** tab, and then select the correct project from the project drop-down list.

Example 17

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> Based on the feature group to which the compliance gated activity belongs, combined with the user's age band and legal country, one of 3 parental involvement levels (PIL) is identified.

PROBLEM

The number 3.

DISCUSSION

In technical writing, most style guides stipulate that you spell out the numbers one through nine, and use numerals for 10 and higher. The exception to this rule is when the number is a measurement of some sort.

REVISION

Before

> Based on the feature group to which the compliance gated activity belongs, combined with the user's age band and legal country, one of 3 parental involvement levels (PIL) is identified.

After

> Based on the feature group to which the compliance gated activity belongs, combined with the user's age band and legal country, one of three parental involvement levels (PIL) is identified.

Example 18

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> If you run Solr as a standalone mode, please do not include SOLR_MODE
> and ZK_HOST.

PROBLEM

Don't use the word *please* for a mandatory step.

DISCUSSION

Never use the word *please* for a mandatory command. A command is just that—a command. When you give a command, the reader does not have an option.

This rule is especially important if your writing is headed toward a global audience where localization is involved. Some cultures may interpret the word *please* as an optional situation. It is your job to avoid this kind of ambiguity.

REVISION

Before

> If you run Solr as a standalone mode, please do not include SOLR_MODE and ZK_HOST.

After

> If you run Solr as a standalone mode, do not include SOLR_MODE and ZK_HOST.

Which vs. That

IMPORTANT: This topic is about **which vs. that**. However, all of the following examples contain discussions of multiple subjects—not just Which vs. That. Therefore, whether you like it or not (!), you are going to learn a lot of different things about good writing and rewriting, in addition to Which vs. That.

Example 1

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> There are some client configuration options which control how the user data is displayed during account creation or profile updates.

PROBLEM

Two problems:

- The word *which* is for a non-restrictive clause. The word *that* is for a restrictive clause. The example sentence has a restrictive clause. We need to change *which* to *that*.
- The sentence would sound better if we change the passive voice to active voice.

As a usage preference, I prefer to use the verb form *to show* rather than *to display*. The language is simpler and it says the same thing.

DISCUSSION

Which vs. That

The sentence has two clauses:

- Main clause—*There are some client configuration options*
- Restrictive clause—*which control how the user data is displayed during account creation or profile updates*

If you remove the restrictive clause—*which control how the user data is displayed during account creation or profile updates*—do you change the meaning of the sentence? Compare:

- There are some client configuration options which control how the user data is displayed during account creation or profile updates
- There are some client configuration options

The two sentences are much different. Don't you agree? The second sentence is just a bald statement that there are some options. What does that tell you that you did not know already? The first sentence actually has some useful and interesting content.

A restrictive clause points to a part of a sentence that you cannot remove from the sentence because it restricts some other part of the sentence. Specifically, you cannot take it out of the sentence without changing the meaning of the sentence.

So, what is a good example of a non-restrictive clause? Which of the following sentences sounds right to you?

My sister lives in Cambria that is five miles from the Hearst Castle.

Or this:

My sister lives in Cambria, which is five miles from the Hearst Castle.

Active Voice

Who or what is the actor that controls the display of user data during account creation of profile updates? You could say the *system* does that. You could also say the *user interface* does that. Either one would work as the subject. We'll show both in the revised version.

REVISION

Before

> There are some client configuration options which control how the user data is displayed during account creation or profile updates.

After

> There are some client configuration options that control how the system shows user data during account creation or profile updates.

Or

> There are some client configuration options that control how the user interface shows user data during account creation or profile updates.

Example 2

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> An affiliate is a FakeCorp-affiliated organization which can sell products through the FakeCorp network.

PROBLEM

In technical documentation, the word *which* is frequently used incorrectly in place of the word *that*. Our problem sentence is a good example of this incorrect usage.

Copy editors spend a lot of time replacing *which* with *that*. This activity is called *which hunting*.

DISCUSSION

Let's take a look at the sentence. The sentence has two clauses:

- Main clause—An affiliate is a FakeCorp-affiliated organization
- Restrictive clause—which can sell products through the FakeCorp network

If you remove the restrictive clause—*which can sell products through the FakeCorp network*—do you change the meaning of the sentence? Compare:

- An affiliate is a FakeCorp-affiliated organization which can sell products through the FakeCorp network.
- An affiliate is a FakeCorp-affiliated organization.

Do you see the difference?

A restrictive clause points to a part of a sentence that you cannot remove from the sentence because it restricts some other part of the sentence. Specifically, you cannot take it out of the sentence without changing the meaning of the sentence.

When is it OK to use the word *which* in a sentence? The following is an example of how we can make the restrictive clause into a non-restrictive clause:

- A FakeCorp-affiliated organization, which can sell products through the FakeCorp network, must comply with the terms and conditions of the contract.

See how the meaning of the main clause—*A FakeCorp-affiliated organization must comply with the terms and conditions of the contract*—remains intact when you remove the non-restrictive clause—*which can sell products through the FakeCorp network*.

REVISION

Before

An affiliate is a FakeCorp-affiliated organization which can sell products through the FakeCorp network.

After

An affiliate is a FakeCorp-affiliated organization that can sell products through the FakeCorp network.

Example 3

REWRITE THESE SENTENCES

The fastest way is to port from a project which uses the validation filter already.

This is the descriptive name which identifies attributes for a specific database attributes.

Others may return a token object which represents an access token.

PROBLEM

The authors use the word *which* incorrectly in place of the word *that*.

DISCUSSION

Sentence 1

Let's take a look at the sentence. The sentence has two clauses:

- Main clause—The fastest way is to port from a project
- Restrictive clause—which uses the validation filter already

If you remove the restrictive clause—*which uses the validation filter already*—do you change the meaning of the sentence? Compare:

- The fastest way is to port from a project which uses the validation filter already.
- The fastest way is to port from a project.

As you can see, the two sentences are completely different in meaning. The set of words *which uses the validation filter already* is a restrictive clause. A restrictive clause points to a part of a sentence that you cannot remove from the sentence because it restricts some other part of the sentence.

Sentences 2 and 3

Apply the same logic to the second and third sentences. Take the restrictive clause out and see what you have left.

Nonrestrictive vs. Restrictive Clauses Explained

See the **Remarks** section at the end of this post for a detailed explanation of the difference between nonrestrictive and restrictive clauses.

Rule

Whenever you have restrictive clauses, use the word *that* or some other word or phrase—without punctuation—instead of *which*.

REVISIONS

Before

> The fastest way is to port from a project which uses the validation filter already.

> This is the descriptive name which identifies attributes for a specific database attributes.

> Others may return a token object which represents an access token.

After

> The fastest way is to port from a project that uses the validation filter already.

> This is the descriptive name that identifies attributes for a specific database attributes.

> Others may return a token object that represents an access token.

REMARKS

Cal State Long Beach Department of English has a website called the Writer's Resource Lab. The website has a good explanation of the difference between nonrestrictive and restrictive clauses. Here is the full quotation:

Nonrestrictive vs. Restrictive

Nonrestrictive (also called "nonessential") elements of a sentence are *not* necessary to the meaning of the sentence. If you were to remove the nonrestrictive word, phrase or clause, the sentence would still have the same meaning. Nonrestrictive words, phrases and clauses serve to add extra detail to a sentence without changing its meaning, and are marked by commas.

You may have guessed, then, that **restrictive** (also called "essential") elements of a sentence *are* necessary to the meaning of the sentence; as the name suggests, they *restrict* the sentence to a particular meaning. If you were to remove the restrictive word, phrase or clause, the sentence would have a different meaning. Restrictive words, phrases and clauses do *not* require commas.

The following examples show the **nonrestrictive** *word*, *phrase* or *clause* is in *italics*:

Francesca's husband, *Nathan*, accompanied her to the poetry reading.

Here, *Nathan* is nonrestrictive because, while it offers an extra detail about Francesca's husband, it is not necessary to the meaning of the sentence. If you were to remove *Nathan*, the sentence would still be about Francesca's husband. Because Francesca can only have one husband, it is not essential to know his name for the sentence to make sense.

Reusable shopping bags, *relatively unknown two years ago*, have exploded in popularity since the "green" movement became fashionable.

In this sentence, *relatively unknown two years ago* is a nonrestrictive phrase. While it adds a detail about reusable shopping bags, if it were removed it would still be clear that reusable bags have become more popular with the rise of the "green" movement. The sentence would have the same meaning if the phrase were removed, so the phrase is nonrestrictive.

The beach picnic was a success on that beautiful day, *which was the first sunny day of the summer*.

In this case, *which was the first sunny day of the summer* is a nonrestrictive clause because, while it adds detail about the beautiful day, it does not affect the meaning of the sentence. The sentence would still have the same meaning—that the beach picnic was a success—without that clause.

Consider the following examples where the **restrictive** *word***,** *phrase* or *clause* is in *italics*:

My cousin *Allison* just graduated from high school.

Allison is a restrictive word because it makes the sentence about that one particular cousin; it indicates that the author has several cousins and/or several cousins who just graduated from high school. If *Allison* were removed, the sentence would imply that the writer has only one cousin and that cousin just graduated from high school. Because removing the word *Allison* would change the meaning of the sentence, it is restrictive.

The dog *with the white spot on his nose* belongs to my neighbor.

Here, *with the white spot on his nose* is a restrictive phrase because it makes the sentence about that one particular dog. Without the phrase, the sentence would no longer be referring to that specific dog, so the meaning of the sentence would change; therefore; *with the white spot* is a restrictive phrase.

The man *who delivers the mail* is always very friendly.

In this case, *who delivers the mail* is a restrictive clause that specifies one particular man. If the clause were removed, the sentence would be too general and it would be unclear who, exactly, is very friendly. Because removing the clause would alter the meaning of the sentence, the clause is restrictive.

Example 4

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> The draft subarea plan includes policies which encourage integration of development with natural systems and the use of LID techniques to manage storm water.

PROBLEM

The main problem with this sentence is its use of the word *which* instead of *that*.

The sentence has some readability issues because seven of the 24 words have three or more syllables. Take a look at the vocabulary and see if you can find some short but accurate replacement words.

Finally, you could rewrite the sentence as two shorter sentences and, thus, improve the readability even more.

DISCUSSION

Which vs. That

After all these years, I still have a problem with the distinction between a restrictive clause and a nonrestrictive clause. It always gives me pause. Usually, I make the right decision, but not always.

If you find it confusing, you are not alone!

Usage

These words have three or more syllables:

- subarea
- policies
- encourage
- integration
- development
- natural
- techniques

Can you identify more readable—but accurate—synonyms?

Simple Sentences

The draft subarea plan includes two things:

- Policies that encourage integration of development with natural systems
- The use of LID techniques to manage storm water

See the **Revision** section for a two-sentence suggestion.

NOTE: By converting the example sentence to two sentences, you reduce the fog index by five years of education.

REVISION

Before

> The draft subarea plan includes policies which encourage integration of development with natural systems and the use of LID techniques to manage storm water.

After

> The draft subarea plan includes policies that encourage integration of development with natural systems and the use of LID techniques to manage storm water.

Or

> The draft subarea plan includes policies that encourage integration of development with natural systems. Also, it describes the use of LID techniques to manage storm water.

Wordiness

IMPORTANT: This topic is about **wordiness**. However, all of the following examples contain discussions of multiple subjects—not just wordiness. Therefore, in addition to wordiness, you are going to learn a lot of different things about good writing and rewriting.

Example 1

REWRITE THIS PARAGRAPH

> More and more, many enterprises are using the public Internet and cloud-based services like web hosting and content delivery networks (CDNs) to deliver both the front-end customer experience and the back-end processing and functions. Having seen the value created with public-facing apps, many enterprises are now migrating their internal data center infrastructure and business applications to both public and private clouds, emphasizing the importance of private connections to cloud services. Read this executive brief to learn the advantages of utilizing private connections to the cloud.

PROBLEM

- Clean up the wordiness.
- Use the present tense instead of the perfect tenses.
- The acronym CDN in parentheses does not take a plural form.
- To improve readability, start a new sentence after the phrase *private clouds*.
- Replace *utilizing* with *use*.

DISCUSSION

Wordiness

I am not sure what *more and more* adds to the meaning of the sentence. More and more compared to what? The author never offers any comparison. Therefore, take out this empty expression.

Perfect Tenses

1

Don't say this:

> Many enterprises are using….

Say this:

> Enterprises use….

2

Don't say this:

> are now migrating

Say this:

> migrate

Acronym

Acronyms do not take a plural form. This is what it should look like:

> content delivery networks (CDN)

Simple Sentences

Break the second sentence into two sentences. This improves readability.

- Having seen the value created with public-facing apps, enterprises migrate their internal data center infrastructure and business applications to both public and private clouds.
- This enables them to highlight the importance of private connections to cloud services.

Utilizing

Use the verb *use*.

REVISION

Before

More and more, many enterprises are using the public Internet and cloud-based services like web hosting and content delivery networks (CDNs) to deliver both the front-end customer experience and the back-end processing and functions. Having seen the value created with public-facing apps, many enterprises are now migrating their internal data center infrastructure and business applications to both public and private clouds, emphasizing the importance of private connections to cloud services. Read this executive brief to learn the advantages of utilizing private connections to the cloud.

After

Many enterprises use the public Internet and cloud-based services like web hosting and content delivery networks (CDN) to deliver both the front-end customer experience and the back-end processing and functions. Having seen the value created with public-facing apps, enterprises migrate their internal data center infrastructure and business applications to both public and private clouds. This enables them to highlight the importance of private connections to cloud services. Read this executive brief to learn the advantages of using private connections to the cloud.

Example 2

> The envelope contains whatever information is needed to accomplish transmission and delivery.
>
> Several functions have been provided for invoking the CoolApp on certain pages.
>
> For your convenience, we have included some historical terms that are currently in the process of being phased out.
>
> It should be able to cover 95% of the use cases, but it was never designed or intended to be the ultimate implementation for scopes enforcement.

PROBLEM

Each sentence contains an example of wordiness.

DISCUSSION

Wordiness:

- whatever information is needed
- accomplish transmission and delivery
- have been provided for invoking
- that are currently in the process of being phased out
- be able to cover
- or intended

NOTE: While the words *designed* and *intended* are not synonyms, they are very similar. It sounds redundant to the ear. Choose one or the other. Don't use both.

REVISIONS

Before

The envelope contains whatever information is needed to accomplish transmission and delivery.

Several functions have been provided for invoking the CoolApp on certain pages.

For your convenience, we have included some historical terms that are currently in the process of being phased out.

It should be able to cover 95% of the use cases, but it was never designed or intended to be the ultimate implementation for scopes enforcement.

After

The envelope contains the information needed to transmit and deliver.

Several functions invoke the CoolApp on certain pages.

For your convenience, we include some historical terms currently being phased out.

It should cover 95% of the use cases, but it was never designed to be the ultimate implementation for scopes enforcement.

Example 3

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> The purpose of this document is to provide comprehensive instructions for configuring the recommended AllCache plug-in that is included with the dynamic content service.

PROBLEM

The sentence is a good example of wordiness.

DISCUSSION

Change the beginning of the sentence from this:

> The purpose of this document is to provide comprehensive instructions for configuring the recommended AllCache plug-in….

To this:

> This document shows you how to configure the AllCache plug-in….

Rationale

1. Every document has a purpose. Why state the obvious?
2. Stripped down to its essentials, the sentence is simply saying, *This document shows you how to configure blah blah blah.* The example sentence uses many more words to say the same thing.
3. Why is the word *recommended* in the sentence? It is superfluous. In this context, it is obvious the author recommends the plug-in. No need to belabor the point.

REVISION

Before

[24 words]

>   The purpose of this document is to provide comprehensive instructions for configuring the recommended AllCache plug-in that is included with the dynamic content service.

After

[16 words]

>   This document shows you how to configure the AllCache plug-in included with the dynamic content service.

Example 4

REWRITE THESE SENTENCES

> It is designed to be used from either an HTML client or a native mobile client.
>
> This document is prepared to explain the RESTful APIs to be implemented for the Fake Device Database Service.
>
> To do this click on the Register New API button and you will see a screen such as the one below.
>
> Before you are able to deploy your API to an environment, you must specify at least one origin base name in your API.

PROBLEM

Our problem sentences are examples of wordiness. The following identifies the verbose passages (in brackets):

> [It is designed to be used] from either an HTML client or a native mobile client.
>
> This document [is prepared to explain] the RESTful APIs to be implemented for the Fake Device Database Service.
>
> [To do this] click [on the] **Register New API [**button and you will see a screen such as the one below].
>
> Before [you are able to deploy] your API to an environment, [you must] specify at least one origin base name in your API.

DISCUSSION

Wordiness means given to the use of too many words. Wordiness is verbose language.

Wordiness means taking more words than necessary to make your point. It may take the form of redundant expressions or phrases. To be sure, longer expressions may be appropriate at times as a matter of style or to avoid ambiguity. But some writers clutter their sentences and paragraphs with words, phrases, and expressions that needlessly distract the reader.

Consistent elimination of wordiness results in a stronger, more concise writing style that is easier to read and provides fewer opportunities for misinterpretation. In contrast, a wordy style makes reading laborious. Wordiness encourages skimming and leads to inattention.

Do you want the reader to carefully consider your message? If so, reduce wordiness to the greatest extent possible.

REVISIONS

1

Before

[16 words]

It is designed to be used from either an HTML client or a native mobile client.

After

[12 words]

Use it for either an HTML client or a native mobile client.

2

Before

[18 words]

This document is prepared to explain the RESTful APIs to be implemented for the Fake Device Database Service.

After

[15 words]

This document describes the RESTful APIs to be implemented for the Fake Device Database Service.

3

Before

[21 words]

> To do this click on the **Register New API** button and you will see a screen such as the one below.

After

[4 words]

> Click **Register New API**.

NOTE: If the figure immediately follows the text, you do not need to make an announcement.

4

Before

[23 words]

> Before you are able to deploy your API to an environment, you must specify at least one origin base name in your API.

After

[18 words]

> Before you deploy your API to an environment, specify at least one origin base name in your API.

Example 5

REWRITE THESE SENTENCES

> The following diagram provides a visual representation of the guest controller function.
>
> This activity can be used to see if you want to determine whether a guest has been banned from access.

PROBLEM

The first sentence is too wordy. In addition to wordiness, the second sentence has problems with its verb forms.

The suspect part of the first sentence is in brackets.

> The following diagram [provides a visual representation of] the guest controller function.

And the second sentence:

> This activity [can be used to see if you want to determine] whether a guest [has been] banned from access.

DISCUSSION

In the first sentence, replace the five-word verb form with a single verb.

The second sentence is even more fun. Replace the 10-word mess, which includes the *can do something* construction, with a single verb. Also, at the end of the sentence, change the past tense to the present.

REVISION

1

Before

The following diagram provides a visual representation of the guest controller function.

After

The following diagram shows the guest controller function.

2

Before

This activity can be used to see if you want to determine whether a guest has been banned from access.

After

This activity determines whether a guest is banned from access.

Example 6

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> There are considerations you should be aware of in regard to how best to handle the data returned by the app controller.

PROBLEM

So many words to say so little.

DISCUSSION

This very long and awkward sentence can be boiled down to a few choice words delivered in a straightforward manner.

REVISION

Before

There are considerations you should be aware of in regard to how best to handle the data returned by the app controller.

After

When you get the app controller data, do the following.

Example 7

When you first go to the portal, you will be taken to a screen that looks like the following image.

This works in much the same way as resource matching.

The user will have the ability to order the pairs where the top pair is used to match first.

In this example, the monitor scope is intended to provide access to a monitoring client.

PROBLEM

Our problem sentences are examples of wordiness. The wordy passages are in brackets:

When you first go to the portal, you [will be taken to a screen that looks like the] following [image].

This [works in much the same way as] resource matching.

The user [will have the ability to] order the pairs where the top pair [is used to] match first.

[In this example,] the monitor scope [is intended to] provide access to a monitoring client.

DISCUSSION

Each example sentence has a roundabout way of getting to the point. The shortest distance between two points is a straight line. Make sure each sentence ends up in a straight line.

REVISIONS

Before

When you first go to the portal, you will be taken to a screen that looks like the following image.

This works in much the same way as resource matching.

The user will have the ability to order the pairs where the top pair is used to match first.

In this example, the monitor scope is intended to provide access to a monitoring client.

After

When you first go to the portal, this is your UI.

This is similar to resource matching.

The user can order the pairs where the top pair matches the first.

The monitor scope provides access to a monitoring client.

NOTE: Don't beat around the bush. Say what you have to say, and then move on.

Example 8

> This is an indicator that describes how long it took for a query to execute (in milliseconds).

PROBLEM

We need to trim the fat off this sentence.

Also, why does the author use a parenthetical expression? Is it necessary? Can we find a better, more direct way to say the same thing?

DISCUSSION

This sentence suffers from wordiness in several areas. The author uses a lot of loose language to say something quite simple.

Let's begin with the phrase

> This is an indicator that describes….

To indicate (and its variants) and *to describe* basically mean the same thing. We can condense these words.

Turning to the parenthetical expression *(in milliseconds)*, why not say this?

> how many milliseconds it takes to execute a query.

REVISION

Before

[17 words]

> This is an indicator that describes how long it took for a query to execute (in milliseconds).

After

[11 words]

> This indicates how many milliseconds it takes to execute a query.

Example 9

REWRITE THESE SENTENCES

> This would allow you to do region-specific marketing by using the returned email address to target users in a specific area.
>
> If you wanted to return the 201st. item in a collection, you would need to specify a start value of 201.
>
> This would return the following data.

PROBLEM

The word *would*.

DISCUSSION

The verb forms *would*, *should*, and *could* are auxiliary verbs. They always precede a main verb. Auxiliary verbs are also known as helping verbs.

Take the main verb *to run*. The auxiliary verbs look like this:

- It would run
- He should run
- They could run

Try to avoid auxiliary verbs in technical writing. It is more forceful and direct to just have the subject and verb. For example:

- It runs
- He runs
- They run

Most of the time, the subject and verb don't need any help.

REVISIONS

Before

This would allow you to do region-specific marketing by using the returned email address to target users in a specific area.

If you wanted to return the 201st. item in a collection, you would need to specify a start value of 201.

This would return the following data.

After

This allows you to do region-specific marketing by using the returned email address to target users in a specific area.

If you wanted to return the 201st. item in a collection, you need to specify a start value of 201.

This returns the following data.

Example 10

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> It was designed to offer a blend of the key features available in the Beacon and the wireless alerts systems.

PROBLEM

The two problems—wordiness and the use of the past perfect tense—are interconnected. Both problems appear in the first part of the sentence. We can fix both with one correction. See the **Discussion** for an explanation.

DISCUSSION

Wordiness

If a software product offers certain feature and benefits to a user, one assumes it is according to design. It is superfluous to mention that something is designed a certain way.

Do you care how something is designed to work? Do I care? Most of the time, you and I don't care whether something is *designed* to deliver something a certain way. We just want expected outcomes.

Perfect Tenses

The phrase "It was designed to offer" is in the past perfect tense. The present perfect is "It is designed to offer." Don't use either one. Why? Because it is a complicated way to make a simple point. Stick to the basic subject and verb. Use the present tense, "It offers."

REVISION

Before

> It was designed to offer a blend of the key features available in the Beacon and the wireless alerts systems.

After

> It offers a blend of the key features available in the Beacon and the wireless alerts systems.

Example 11

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

Release managers are those individuals you want to grant the right to deploy your API.

PROBLEM

Too wordy. You need to cut this message down to the bare minimum of words.

DISCUSSION

The problem area in the example sentence is in brackets:

Release managers [are those individuals you want to grant the right] to deploy your API.

Say this instead:

Release managers grant you the right to deploy your API.

REVISION

Before

[15 words]

Release managers are those individuals you want to grant the right to deploy your API.

After

[10 words]

Release managers grant you the right to deploy your API.

Example 12

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> The FakeCorp ID UI has been redesigned so that it provides the best user experience on mobile platforms.

PROBLEM

The section in brackets is too wordy:

> The FakeCorp ID UI [has been redesigned so that it provides] the best user experience on mobile platforms.

DISCUSSION

Instead of saying this:

> The FakeCorp ID UI has been redesigned so that it provides….

Say this:

> The FakeCorp ID UI redesign provides….

REVISION

Before

> The FakeCorp ID UI has been redesigned so that it provides the best user experience on mobile platforms.

After

> The FakeCorp ID UI redesign provides the best user experience on mobile platforms.

Example 13

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> This page will provide a quick tutorial for getting set up for the default FakeCorp ID UI experience.

PROBLEM

Too many words. As Emperor Joseph says to Mozart in the movie *Amadeus*:

Cut a few and it will be perfect.*

DISCUSSION

The problem area is in brackets:

This page [will provide a quick tutorial for getting set up for] the default FakeCorp ID UI experience.

REVISION

Before

[18 words]

This page will provide a quick tutorial for getting set up for the default FakeCorp ID UI experience.

After

[14 words]

This page shows you how to set up the default FakeCorp ID UI experience.

AND NOW FOR SOMETHING DIFFERENT

*This scene from *Amadeus* cracks me up:

> **EMPEROR:** Well, Herr Mozart! A good effort. Decidedly that. An excellent effort! You've shown us something quite new today.
>
> [Mozart bows frantically: he is over-excited.]
>
> **MOZART:** It is new, it is, isn't it, Sire?
>
> **EMPEROR:** Yes, indeed.
>
> **MOZART:** So then you like it? You really like it, Your Majesty?
>
> **EMPEROR:** Of course I do. It's very good. Of course now and then – just now and then – it gets a touch elaborate.
>
> **MOZART:** What do you mean, Sire?
>
> **EMPEROR:** Well, I mean occasionally it seems to have, how shall one say? [he stops in difficulty; turning to Orsini-Rosenberg] How shall one say, Director?
>
> **ORSINI-ROSENBERG**: Too many notes, Your Majesty?
>
> **EMPEROR:** Exactly. Very well put. Too many notes.
>
> **MOZART:** I don't understand. There are just as many notes, Majesty, as are required. Neither more nor less.
>
> **EMPEROR:** My dear fellow, there are in fact only so many notes the ear can hear in the course of an evening. I think I'm right in saying that, aren't I, Court Composer?
>
> **SALIERI:** Yes! yes! er, on the whole, yes, Majesty.
>
> **MOZART:** But this is absurd!
>
> **EMPEROR:** My dear, young man, don't take it too hard. Your work is ingenious. It's quality work. And there are simply too many notes, that's all. Cut a few and it will be perfect.
>
> **MOZART:** Which few did you have in mind, Majesty?

EMPEROR: Well. There it is.

Example 14

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> This response is returned if you make a call to the `did.getUser()` method and a user is not already logged in.

PROBLEM

Wordiness.

DISCUSSION

Don't say this:

> This response is returned….

Say this:

> This response returns….

Also, don't say this:

> …if you make a call to the `did.getUser()` method….

Say this:

> …if you call the `did.getUser()` method

REVISION

Before

> This response is returned if you make a call to the `did.getUser()` method and a user is not already logged in.

After

> This response returns if you call the `did.getUser()` method and a user is not already logged in.

Example 15

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> This page provides a summary of the methods and events supported by the FakeCorp ID UI API.

PROBLEM

Wordiness. The suspect words are in brackets:

> This page [provides a summary of] the methods and events supported by theFakeCorp ID UI API.

DISCUSSION

What is the difference between *provides a summary of* and *summarizes*? I'll give you 10 seconds.

REVISION

Before

This page provides a summary of the methods and events supported by the FakeCorp ID UI API.

After

This page summarizes the methods and events supported by the FakeCorp ID UI API.

Example 16

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

A consequence of this is that clients are unable to easily follow links included in responses.

PROBLEM

Wordiness.

DISCUSSION

The verbose language is in brackets:

[A consequence of this is that] clients are unable to easily follow links included in responses.

REVISION

Before

[16 words]

A consequence of this is that clients are unable to easily follow links included in responses.

After

[11 words]

Consequently, clients are unable to easily follow links included in responses.

Example 17

REWRITE THIS LIST

The validation endpoint does the following:

- Verifies that the username or email address is unique.
- Verifies that the guest's display name is unique in the business unit's namespace.
- Verifies that the guest's password meets acceptable FakeCorpID criteria.

PROBLEM

Wordiness.

DISCUSSION

Each bullet point begins with the phrase *Verifies that the*. We need to move the verb *verifies* to the introduction to the bullet points.

Don't say this:

The validation endpoint does the following

Say this:

The validation endpoint verifies the following

REVISION

Before

The validation endpoint does the following:

- Verifies that the username or email address is unique.
- Verifies that the guest's display name is unique in the business unit's namespace.
- Verifies that the guest's password meets acceptable FakeCorpID criteria.

After

[with end punctuation]

The validation endpoint verifies the following:

- Username or email address is unique.
- User's display name is unique in the business unit's namespace.
- User's password meets acceptable FakeCorpID criteria.

[without end punctuation—my preference]

The validation endpoint verifies the following:

- Username or email address is unique
- User's display name is unique in the business unit's namespace
- User's password meets acceptable FakeCorpID criteria

Example 18

> The API has functions that enable you to register a function to be called when an event fires.

PROBLEM

Wordiness. Again.

DISCUSSION

1

Don't say this:

> The API has functions that enable you to register….

Say this:

> The API enables you to register….

Or this:

> The API lets you register….

2

We know the API has functions. It is redundant to say so.

3

Don't say this:

> …to be called when an event fires.

Say this:

> …to call when an event fires.

REVISION

Before

[18 words]

> The API has functions that enable you to register a function to be called when an event fires.

After

[14 words / 13 words]

> The API enables you to register a function to call when an event fires.

Or

> The API lets you register a function to call when an event fires.

Example 19

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

This change will allow us to better leverage our talent base in an area where developmental roles are under way and strategically focuses us toward the upcoming Business System transition where Systems literacy and accuracy will be essential to maintain and to further improve service levels to our customer base going forward.

PROBLEM

Do the following:

- Break up this mission statement into two sentences.
- Change the future tense to the present tense.
- Fix the capitalization errors.
- Eliminate all wordiness.
- Make sure the word usage is correct.

DISCUSSION

Simple Sentences

The sentence starts out like this:

> This change will allow us to better leverage our talent base in an area where developmental roles are under way….

Stop at that point and start a new sentence.

For the second sentence, don't say this:

> This change strategically focuses us toward the upcoming Business System transition….

Say this (also, note *business system* is all lower case):

> Now we can focus on the upcoming business system transition….

Present vs. Future

1

Don't say this:

> This change will allow us to better leverage our talent base in an area where developmental roles are under way.

Say this:

> This change allows us to better leverage our talent base in an area where developmental roles are under way.

2

Don't say this:

> The change strategically focuses us toward the upcoming Business System transition where Systems literacy and accuracy will be essential to maintain and to further improve service levels to our customer base going forward.

Say this:

> Now we can focus on the upcoming Business System transition where Systems literacy and accuracy is essential to maintain and to further improve service levels to our customer base going forward.

Capitalization

Make these words all lower case:

- business system
- systems

In this context, they should not be capitalized because they don't represent a marketing brand or a company product. They are just ordinary words.

Wordiness and Usage

1

In the first sentence, remove the phrase *in an area*. Here is how the first sentence should read:

> This change allows us to better leverage our talent base where developmental roles are under way.

2

In the second sentence, do the following:

- Remove the word *strategically* (by definition, a mission statement is about strategy. This big fancy word is superfluous)
- Replace *toward* with *on*
- Remove the words *to further*
- Remove the words *going forward*

Instead of saying this:

> This change strategically focuses us toward the upcoming business system transition where systems literacy and accuracy is essential to maintain and to further improve service levels to our customer base going forward.

Say this:

> Now we can focus on the upcoming business system transition where systems literacy and accuracy is essential to maintain and improve service levels to our customer base.

The change DOES NOT focus us. We focus ourselves.

REVISION

Before

This change will allow us to better leverage our talent base in an area where developmental roles are under way and strategically focuses us toward the upcoming Business System transition where Systems literacy and accuracy will be essential to maintain and to further improve service levels to our customer base going forward.

After

This change allows us to better leverage our talent base where developmental roles are under way. Now we can focus on the upcoming business system transition where systems literacy and accuracy is essential to maintain and improve service levels to our customer base.

Example 20

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE THAT INTRODUCES A LIST

> You must provide the following information in order for us to be able to complete your request:

PROBLEM

Talk about beating around the bush!

You can reduce this long-winded sentence to one crisp statement.

DISCUSSION

See the **Revision** section.

REVISION

Before

[17 words]

> You must provide the following information in order for us to be able to complete your request:

After

[4 words]

> Provide the following information:

Example 21

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

This query specifies whether or not to return profile data for child accounts.

PROBLEM

Wordiness.

DISCUSSION

The best way to determine whether or not (oops!) your sentence has some wordiness is to remove the suspect word or phrase and see if the sentence still makes sense. Let's do that.

Compare these two sentences:

This query specifies whether or not to return profile data for child accounts.

This query specifies whether to return profile data for child accounts.

Do we lose any meaning if we remove the words *or not*? No, not really. The meaning is still intact.

REVISION

Before

This query specifies whether or not to return profile data for child accounts.

After

This query specifies whether to return profile data for child accounts.

Word Order

IMPORTANT: This topic is about **word order**. However, all of the following examples contain discussions of multiple subjects—not just word order. Therefore, in addition to word order, you are going to learn a lot of different things about good writing and rewriting.

Example 1

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> Several functions have been provided for invoking the FakeApp on certain pages, such as opening the login page.

PROBLEM

- Passive voice
- Awkward word order
- Usage of the word *invoke* (is this really a problem?)

DISCUSSION

Passive Voice

Who or what provides the several functions to invoke the FakeApp? Since I plucked this sentence out of its broader context, I will tell you. The new application provides the functions.

Now that you know who is doing the providing, let's rearrange the sentence as active voice with *application* as the actor.

Word Order

The word order of this sentence is awkward from beginning to end. After you make the first part of the sentence active voice, you might consider a second sentence in which you call out the login page as an example.

Invoke

The word *invoke* has a specific meaning in software documentation. From the website **Webopedia**:

> To activate. One usually speaks of *invoking* a function or routine in a program. In this sense, the term *invoke* is synonymous with the word *call*.

Invoke is seldom used in ordinary speech and writing, but is a commonly understood term in the software industry. It is OK to use it.

REVISION

Before

> Several functions have been provided for invoking the FakeApp on certain pages, such as opening the login page.

After

> The application enables you to use several different functions to invoke the FakeApp on certain pages. For example, there is more than one way to open the login page.

Or

> You can use several different functions to invoke the FakeApp on certain pages. For example, there is more than one way to open the login page.

NOTE: The second rewrite uses the *you can do something* construction. In this case, its usage is acceptable because you are describing something where you truly have several options. It is not a direct command to perform an act in one specific manner.

Example 2

> The user can optionally subscribe to some FakeCorp newsletters.
>
> The GuestCheck method determines if the guest is currently logged in.

PROBLEM

In the first sentence, the verb form *can subscribe to* is split by the adverb *optionally*.

In the second sentence, the verb form *is logged in* is split by the adverb *currently*.

DISCUSSION

Good technical writing requires two things: (a) it must be technically accurate and (b) it must be readable. While splitting the verb form is OK grammatically and is done all the time, split verb forms do not, in my opinion, enhance readability. If anything, splitting the verb form tends to slow the reader down because the reader has to put the first part of the verb form into a hold pattern as he or she processes the word doing the splitting.

Unless you have a compelling reason to split the verb form, my advice is to put the would-be splitting word either before or after the verb form.

One compelling reason to split the verb form is to make an emphatic point. For example, take this sentence:

> The results are posted automatically now.

Suppose, up to this point, the user had to post the results *manually*. With this new release, however, the user does not have to bother with that any more. Now the system posts the results *automatically*. That is a good thing, right? You can make the happy announcement this way:

> The results are *automatically* posted now.

You make the emphatic point precisely because the verb form is split. Typically, verb forms are intact. The very act of splitting the verb form grabs the reader's attention.

To summarize: Don't split the verb form unless you are looking for some shock value. If you aren't looking for shock value and you split verb forms over and over again, you are making the reader's job more difficult.

Making the Case for the Passive Voice

Did you notice our example sentence is in the passive voice? English teachers and technical editors are seldom kind to the passive voice. But sometimes the passive voice is the best way to say something.

Here is our sentence:

> The results are automatically posted now.

OK, who is the actor? It is not the user; it is the system or some other term for the system. You could say this:

> The system automatically posts the results *now*.

That sounds a little awkward. It sounds awkward because no one really cares about the system. We care most about the user's good fortune now that the results are posted automatically.

I am making this point to show you that making every sentence active voice is not always the best solution. Occasionally, the passive voice works just as well or even better.

REVISIONS

Before

> The user can optionally subscribe to some FakeCorp newsletters.

> The GuestCheck method determines if the guest is currently logged in.

After

> As an option, the user can subscribe to some FakeCorp newsletters.

> The GuestCheck method determines if the guest is logged in currently.

Example 3

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> The teen or adult user completes a registration on a site and is
> automatically logged in.

PROBLEM

The verb in this sentence is *to log in*. The word *automatically* is an adverb. Generally, the grammar rule is this: Do not insert an adverb in the middle of a verb form *unless* you want to draw special attention to the adverb. As it happens in the context of our example sentence, the sentence is simply passing along routine information to the reader. In other words, the author is not trying to stress the automatic nature of the operation.

Having said this, how should you rewrite the sentence?

DISCUSSION

Don't split the verb form unless you are looking for some shock value.

REVISION

Before

The teen or adult user completes a registration on a site and is automatically logged in.

After

The teen or adult user completes a registration on a site and is logged in automatically.

Example 4

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

When you use a POP client to connect and download your email, you do not have to be online to read and reply to your mail, as opposed to a web-based service or shell, which requires you to be on-line.

PROBLEM

The sentence begins well, but it ends with two dependent clauses, one after the other. The word order is awkward.

These are the dependent clauses:

- as opposed to a web-based service or shell
- which requires you to be on-line

DISCUSSION

You need to do two things:

- Divide the sentence into two sentences
- Find a more direct and assertive word order

REVISION

Before

When you use a POP client to connect and download your email, you do not have to be online to read and reply to your mail, as opposed to a web-based service or shell, which requires you to be on-line.

After

When you use a POP client to connect and download your email, you do not have to be online to read and reply to your mail. This is different from a web-based service or shell, which requires you to be online.

Or better

You do not have to be online to read and reply to your mail when you use a POP client to connect and download your email. This is different from a web-based service or shell, which requires you to be online.

Example 5

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> The management of permissions can be performed using this API.

PROBLEM

The example sentence has four problems:

- Can do something
- Passive voice
- Word order
- Wordiness

DISCUSSION

Can Do Something

Skip the *can do something* construction. Go directly to the action verb. The action verb is **not** *to perform*. See the following section on **Wordiness** for the true action verb.

Passive Voice

Always write in the active voice, if possible. See the revised sentence.

Word Order

Start the sentence with the action verb and the tool, *this API*.

Wordiness

The true action verb for this sentence is *to manage*.

Instead of saying:

> The management of permissions can be performed

Say this:

> manage the permissions

See the revised sentence.

REVISION

Before

The management of permissions can be performed using this API.

After

Use this API to manage the permissions.

Example 6

REWRITE THIS PARAGRAPH

> Outgoing responses from the user controller may contain errors that have been found while processing the request that need to be reported back to the caller. The following details how error handling happens by looking at an example request flow.

PROBLEM

The example sentences suffer from these defects:

- Passive voice
- Perfect tense—use the present tense instead
- Two sentences contain four distinct thoughts—rewrite as four simple sentences
- Awkward word order

DISCUSSION

Passive Voice

that have been found

Found by whom or what?

Perfect Tenses

Again, this phrase:

that have been found

Use the present tense.

Simple Sentences

See the rewrite.

Word Order

This sentence in particular has awkward word order:

> Outgoing responses from the user controller may contain errors that have been found while processing the request that need to be reported back to the caller.

See the rewrite.

REVISION

Before

> Outgoing responses from the user controller may contain errors that have been found while processing the request that need to be reported back to the caller. The following details how error handling happens by looking at an example request flow.

After

> Outgoing responses from the user controller may contain errors that occur while the system processes the request. These errors are reported back to the caller. The following information explains how error handling occurs. We will examine an example request flow.

Example 7

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> Most creatives are stored potentially in a template with other equivalent creatives.

PROBLEM

The word *potentially*.

DISCUSSION

The sentence has an awkward sound because of the placement of the word *potentially*. It is best to set *potentially* at the beginning of the sentence so there is no doubt about the meaning. Make sure you add a comma before moving on to the rest of the sentence.

REVISION

Before

Most creatives are stored potentially in a template with other equivalent creatives.

After

Potentially, most creatives are stored in a template with other equivalent creatives.

Example 8

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> For event-based emails, when using a direct HTTP call, if there are any errors or issues connecting to Blitz, the template needs to handle those cases, otherwise User Services' Titanic system handles this and will automatically retry in case there is a failure to connect.

PROBLEM

This is an awkward conditional statement. In fact, there are three conditions:

- Event-based emails
- A direct HTTP call
- Any errors or issues connecting to Blitz (Note that Blitz—not its real name—is a software tool.)

The author does a poor job of laying out the conditional scenario. At the very least, the word order needs improvement.

In addition, the example sentence also suffers from these issues:

- Comma fault, after *cases* and before *otherwise*
- Run-on sentence—we need to break the sentence into two or more sentences
- Future tense; present tense is preferred

DISCUSSION

Conditional Statements

Instead of saying this:

> For event-based emails, when using a direct HTTP call, if there are any errors or issues connecting to Blitz, the template needs to handle those cases….

Say this:

> When you use a direct HTTP call for your event-based email, and you have errors or issues connecting to Blitz, you need to use the template.

Comma Fault and Run-on Sentence

These two problems are connected. Start a new sentence after you mention the template.

Future Tense vs. Present Tense

Don't say this:

> …otherwise User Services' Titanic system handles this and will automatically retry….

Say this (new sentence):

> Otherwise, User Services' Titanic system handles this, and automatically retries….

REVISION

Before

> For event-based emails, when using a direct HTTP call, if there are any errors or issues connecting to Blitz, the template needs to handle those cases, otherwise User Services' Titanic system handles this and will automatically retry in case there is a failure to connect.

After

> When you use a direct HTTP call for your event-based email, and you have errors or issues connecting to Blitz, you need to use the template. Otherwise, User Services' Titanic system handles this, and automatically retries in case there is a failure to connect.

Example 9

REWRITE THESE SENTENCES

You can manually publish or unpublish the current default draft from any content grid or from the draft manager.

The draft publishing schedule is automatically validated.

PROBLEM

In both sentences, the author placed an adverb in the middle of a verb form. My recommendation is to avoid this practice *unless* you want to use the adverb for emphasis.

On the web page from which I found these two example sentences, clearly the author did not mean to emphasize *manual* publishing or unpublishing or the *automatic* validation of the schedule. These are simply routine outcomes of a routine process.

DISCUSSION

You enhance readability when you keep the verb form intact. Don't split the verb form unless you want to make an emphatic point.

As an example of extraordinary vs. routine, take these two sentences:

You must use the update content API to move the content manually to its new section.

You must use the update content API to manually move the content to its new section.

The first sentence describes a routine operation. The second sentence stresses this is a *manual* operation, which is not routine.

REVISION

Before

You can manually publish or unpublish the current default draft from any content grid or from the draft manager.

The draft publishing schedule is automatically validated.

After

You can publish or unpublish the current default draft manually from any content grid or from the draft manager.

The draft publishing schedule is validated automatically.

Example 10

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

For each environment in which a DCS is used, the DCS host or hosts must be specified using one of the following methods.

PROBLEM

Two problems:

- Passive voice
- Word order

DISCUSSION

The sentences begins with a dependent clause (*For each environment in which a DCS is* used), and then moves into an independent clause (*the DCS host or hosts must be specified using one of the following methods*). Both clauses are in the passive voice. Change each clause to the active voice. See the **Revision** section for the rewrite.

Also, the independent clause is a procedure. You need to rearrange the wording so it appears like a step. When you write a step, the first thing you should do is tell the user or reader where to start. Tell the user/reader to (a) go to the location on the user interface or (b) identify the tool to use. In this case, we are identifying the tool—*one of the following methods*. Start with that.

Don't say this:

the DCS host or hosts must be specified using one of the following methods

Say this:

use one of the following methods to specify the DCS host or hosts

REVISION

Before

For each environment in which a DCS is used, the DCS host or hosts must be specified using one of the following methods.

After

For each environment in which you use a DCS, use one of the following methods to specify the DCS host or hosts.

Example 11

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

The `livelisteners.disabled` property key is a manual override to turn off the live listener feature if CMS startup is impacted and the feature can't be toggled conventionally via the site editor or the CMS API.

PROBLEM

Fix these problems:

- Latin phrases (use English words)
- Passive voice
- Usage (the word *impacted*)
- Word order (rearrange the wording after the coordinating conjunction *and*)

DISCUSSION

Latin Phrases

Don't say this:

…and the feature can't be toggled conventionally via the site editor or the CMS API.

Say this:

…and you can't use the site editor or the CMS API to toggle it conventionally

Passive Voice

Don't say this:

…and the feature can't be toggled conventionally via the site editor or the CMS API.

Who or what is doing the toggling?

Say this:

…and you can't use the site editor or the CMS API to toggle it conventionally

Usage

My preference is to use the word *affected* instead of the word *impacted*. *Impact* makes me think of a large crater.

Word Order

The awkward word order of our sentence is a function of the passive voice construction. This is a good example of how passive voice sentence construction and awkward word order often are intimately connected.

When we sail into the second half of the sentence, after the conjunction *and*, start the second independent clause by calling out these two tools first:

- site editor
- CMS API

See the **Revision** section for the rewrite.

REVISION

Before

> The `livelisteners.disabled` property key is a manual override to turn off the live listener feature if CMS startup is impacted and the feature can't be toggled conventionally via the site editor or the CMS API.

After

> The `livelisteners.disabled` property key is a manual override used to turn off the live listener feature if CMS startup is affected and you can't use the site editor or the CMS API to toggle it conventionally.

Example 12

REWRITE THIS PARAGRAPH

> All APIs, including supported input and output, and lists of error codes and their meanings for each endpoint, are available through the FakeCorp API documentation. Access to this documentation requires an appropriate AuthenticationPlus token.

PROBLEM

Two problems:

- Passive voice in the first sentence
- Awkward word order in the second sentence

DISCUSSION

Passive Voice

Don't say this:

> All APIs … are available through the FakeCorp API documentation

Say this:

> The FakeCorp API documentation contains all APIs….

Word Order

These are instructions to your reader. Put your reader at the center of the action. Start the sentence with the second person singular, *You*. Say this:

> You must have an appropriate AuthenticationPlus token for access to this documentation.

REVISION

Before

All APIs, including supported input and output, and lists of error codes and their meanings for each endpoint, are available through the FakeCorp API documentation. Access to this documentation requires an appropriate AuthenticationPlus token.

After

The FakeCorp API documentation contains all APIs, including supported input and output, and lists of error codes and their meanings for each endpoint. You must have an appropriate AuthenticationPlus token for access to this documentation.

Example 13

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

These configurations are colloquially known as the client config.

PROBLEM

Word order: The author split the verb form *are known* with the word *colloquially*.

DISCUSSION

When you want to emphasize something highly unusual, it is OK to split the verb form. Verb forms naturally belong together. In this example sentence, the verb form is *to know*. Splitting the verb form draws the reader's attention to something out of the ordinary. However, in this sentence, the author is simply making a statement of fact.

Here is a different example. Take these two versions of the same sentence where the verb form is *are posted*:

> The results are automatically posted now.

> The results are posted now automatically.

The first sentence, *are automatically posted now*, indicates something new and different. The emphasis is on *automatically*. You might find this kind of statement in release notes. Perhaps the user had to post the results *manually* in the past. However, with this new release, the system now posts the results *automatically*.

The second sentence, *are posted now automatically*, is an undramatic statement about how the user gets the results.

REVISION

Before

> These configurations are colloquially known as the *client config*.

After

> These configurations are known colloquially as the *client config*.

Example 14

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE THAT INTRODUCES A LIST

> The following common fields may be requested via this API:

PROBLEM

Fix these problems:

- Latin phrases
- Passive voice
- Usage
- Word order

DISCUSSION

Latin Phrases

Don't say this:

> *via*

See the following **Word Order** section in this post for a way to avoid using a Latin phrase.

Passive Voice

Don't say this:

> …the following common fields may be requested…

Say this:

> …get the following common fields

Usage

Don't say this:

> requested

Say this:

> get

Word Order

When you give instructions to the user, specify the tool to use first. In this case, tell the user to *Use the API* [to do something].

Say this:

> Use this API to get the following common fields.

REVISION

Before

> The following common fields may be requested via this API:

After

> Use this API to get the following common fields.

Example 15

REWRITE THIS SENTENCE

> A CMS object (e.g., content, content type, template processor, etc.) which has been explicitly specified for migration will cause any referenced objects to be implicitly included for migration.

PROBLEM

Fix these issues:

- Misuse of Latin phrases
- Using the future tense when the present tense is more direct and immediate
- Using *which* instead of *that*
- Writing a sentence with awkward word order

DISCUSSION

Latin Phrases

First of all, *never* use *e.g.* and *etc.* in the same context. It's bad form. When translated to our language—American English—this is how it sounds:

…(for example, content, content type, template processor, and so on)….

Use *for example* or *and so on*, but not both together. It is a redundancy.

I prefer American English in all forms of technical writing, but I go along with Latin phrases if my authors truly know how to use them appropriately.

Present Tense vs. Future Tense

The CMS object causes referenced objects to be implicitly included for migration both in the future and right now. Since it is both, use the present tense rather than the future tense.

Which vs. That

For a good explanation when to use *which* and when to use *that*, go to Quick and Dirty Tips by Mignon Fogarty, the Grammar Girl.

Word Order

Don't say this:

> ...which has been **explicitly** specified for migration will cause any referenced objects to be **implicitly** included for migration.

Say this:

> ...that is specified **explicitly** for migration **implicitly** causes any referenced objects to be included for migration.

In our example sentence, the words *explicitly* and *implicitly* are inserted in the middle of the verb forms. Don't split verb forms unless you intend to startle your reader with some shocking news. That is not the case with the example sentence. We are simply passing along routine information here.

In my rewrite, I put *explicitly* after the verb form and the word *implicitly* before the verb form. Thus, the verb forms remain intact.

REVISION

Before

> A CMS object (e.g., content, content type, template processor, etc.) which has been explicitly specified for migration will cause any referenced objects to be implicitly included for migration.

After

> A CMS object (for example, content, content type, and template processor) that is specified explicitly for migration implicitly causes any referenced objects to be included for migration.