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Academic Writing for Journal Articles, Theses, and Dissertations: Part 1 Publishing and Clarity of Ideas in English

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Getting published

General advice on publishing: “dos and don’ts”

There are basically two things that you need to do to get published:

1. Write a paper about something that is **original**.
2. Write it **clearly**.

Only you know what is original since it is your field. This means that the “angle” of the presentation of the ideas is original, for example, an aspect of a topic that has not been done before. This can be a summary or literature review that pulls the ideas of a field or an aspect of a field together that has not been done before. Publishers want variety in their publications, so write them an inquiry letter and see if they are interested in your idea.

Regarding clarity, there are several approaches you can take as a writer of English as a second language.

- 1) You can struggle with English and send your paper off. **There is a good chance that you will fail.**
- 2) You can have it translated into English by a translator that you trust and then send your paper off. If it is original, and clear, **there is a good chance of success.**
- 3) Do the best job you can (make it as clear as possible), hire a good editor, and then send your paper off. **There is again a good chance of success.**

One more piece of advice: make your paper fit the journal. Read the journal and copy the style to the best of your ability without sacrificing the originality of your topic or your style.

Specific advice on creating documents that possess “clarity”

We are going to talk about the most important aspect of writing now: *clarity*. What is it, and how do you achieve it?



Clarity on the sentence level¹

We are going to include a discussion of 3 main points this morning regarding clarity:

1. Align subjects and characters, verbs and actions for strong writing.
2. Avoid nominalizations (what’s that?!); they can weaken your prose.
3. Use academic or institutional passive when appropriate.



Academic writing is typically thought of as being complex, as the ideas that it expresses are often complex or complicated. But because the ideas in an article or essay are complex it does not mean that they can’t be clear.

3 points about complex writing, two negative and one positive

- Complex writing can **gratuitously complicate complex ideas**.
- Complex writing can **gratuitously complicate simple ideas**.
- Complex writing can **precisely express complex ideas** (this is what you want!).

Here is an example of the first kind of **complexity**.

Similarities may develop in the social organization of societies at similar levels of economic development because there are “imperatives” built into the socio-technical system they adopt which drive them to similar responses to common problems. This model, therefore, places great emphasis on the level of economic development of nations to account for movement towards common forms of social organization. Alternatively, convergence may result from simple borrowing, so that a model of the diffusion of innovation becomes appropriate. Where such borrowing occurs, levels of development may be less relevant than integration in networks of influence through which ideas and social forms are diffused. Economic development may, of course, set limits on the capacity of a nation to institute systems available to be copied, and the propensities to copy may enable nations to install convergent patterns more rapidly than one would have predicted from knowledge of their level of economic development.

This means,

Societies at similar levels of economic development may converge because “imperatives” in their sociotechnical system cause them to respond to similar problems in similar ways. To explain this, the model emphasizes economic development. But societies may also converge because they borrow, so a model would have to explain how ideas and social forms diffuse through networks of influence. Of course, a society at a low level of development may

¹ The following material relies heavily on the work of University of Chicago Professor Joseph Williams. Persons interested in exploring these ideas further are recommended to read his book, Style, published by The University of Chicago Press, 1990.

Comment [Editor1]: Note: I printed out nearly all of the talk today because the detailed nature of the points being made require looking carefully at example texts. Please bear with me, and read along. 😊

be unable to copy features of some systems. But a society with a strong propensity to copy may do so more rapidly than predicted.

Here is an example of the second kind of complexity,

The absence from this dictionary of a handful of old, well-known vulgate terms for sexual and excretory organs and functions is not due to a lack of citations for these words from current literature. On the contrary, the profusion of such citations in recent years would suggest that the terms in question are so well known as to require no explanation. The decision to eliminate them as part of the extensive culling process that is the inevitable task of the lexicographer was made on the practical grounds that there is still objection in many quarters to the appearance of these terms in print and that to risk keeping this dictionary out of the hands of some students by introducing several terms that require little if any elucidation would be unwise.

—From the forward, *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language*

This means,

We excluded vulgar words for sex and excretion not because we could not find them. We excluded them because many people object to seeing them. Had we included them, some teachers and school boards would have refused to let this dictionary be used by their students, who in any event already know what those words mean.

When you are trying to get published or when you writing your dissertation, for example, aim for no. 3: make your complex ideas as clear as possible. But....how do we do that? What do you mean by clarity? By studying grammar? Certainly not. Grammar and clarity are not the same thing? You can be grammatical and completely unclear. "Three figs ran up the wall in red."

Dr. Williams makes a discovery! We can make our writing clear by looking at, and understanding, the structure of writing.

How would you describe the following?

1. **Decisions** in regard to the **administration** of **medication** despite the **inability** of irrational patients voluntarily appearing in Trauma Centers to provide legal **consent** rest with a physician alone.

What happens when we **change the nouns** (decisions, administration, medication, inability, consent) **to verbs**, and **make the actors the subjects of those verbs**?

When a patient voluntarily appears at a trauma center but behaves so irrationally that he cannot legally consent to treatment, only a physician can decide whether to administer medication.

Easier to understand?! What about the following? What seems to be the problem? Are parts of the sentence kept apart that should have been kept together? Let's see.

- China, so that it could expand and widen its influence and importance among the Eastern European nations, in 1955 began in a quietly orchestrated way a diplomatic offensive directed against the Soviet Union.

Easy to understand, or as easy as it could be?

What about this?

In 1955, China began to orchestrate a quiet diplomatic offensive against the Soviet Union to expand its influence in Eastern Europe.

Sounds clearer, no? What's the difference? The sentences above are unclear for different reasons.

Number 1? It's unclear because it's **abstract and turgid**.

Number 2? It seems disjointed or does not flow.

But what do you mean by "turgid?" That doesn't help me understand why it is not clear. What we need, Williams realized, is **a language to talk about lack of clarity that goes beyond words like "turgid" or "disjointed"—one that will help us revise our own writing**. We can find this language in **storytelling**.

We begin telling stories when we are children and it never stops. There are two essential components of a story: *characters* and their *actions*. Jack climbed the beanstalk. Rapunzel let down her golden hair.

Let's look at 2 more sentences.

3a. The current estimate is of a 50% reduction in the introduction of new chemical products in the event that compliance with the Preliminary Manufacturing Notice becomes a requirement under proposed Federal legislation.

Do there seem to be any characters in the above sentence like the characters in a story? No, but **this does not mean they are not there!**

3b. If **Congress** requires that **the chemical industry** **comply** with the Preliminary Manufacturing Notice, we estimate that **the industry** will introduce 50% fewer new products.

What about concepts? Can they be characters? Compare the next two sentences.

Because the intellectual foundations of evolution are the same as so many other scientific theories, the falsification of their foundations would be necessary for the replacement of evolutionary theory with creationism.

Do you understand this sentence? It's grammatical!

What if we **make theories (concepts) play the role of competing characters?!**

In contrast to **creationism**, **the theory of evolution** shares its intellectual foundations with **many other theories**. As a result, **creationism** will displace **evolutionary theory** only when it can first prove that the foundations of **all those other theories** are false.

Comment [Editor2]: Why is this "comply" and not "complies"?

The **subjunctive** is used after the following verbs:
to advise (that)
to ask (that)
to command (that)
to demand (that)
to desire (that)
to insist (that)
to propose (that)
to recommend (that)
to request (that)
to suggest (that)
to urge (that)
Examples:

Dr. Smith **asked that** Mark **submit** his research paper before the end of the month.

Donna **requested** Frank that **come** to the party.

The teacher **insists that** her students **be** on time.

As you can see, looking at writing as story telling where **the concepts are the actors performing actions** can have a tremendous influence on how clear the writing seems to the reader.

What about this sentence? What is the story? What are the characters and their actions?

Though the **Governor knew** that the cities needed new revenues to improve schools, **he vetoed** the budget bill because **he wanted** to encourage cities to increase local taxes.

Pretty clear. Why? Because there are several actions expressed here, and they are all expressed in verbs, giving the sentence force (and clarity).

Let's be devils and rewrite the above sentence, changing the verbs to nouns.

Despite his **knowledge of the need** by cities for new revenues for the **improvement** of their schools, the Governor **executed a veto** of the budget bill **to give encouragement** to the cities for an **increase** of local taxes.

Now we see the first principles of clear writing.

- 1) **The subjects of sentences name the cast of characters.**
- 2) **The verbs that go with those subjects name the crucial actions of those characters.**

Guideline for writing: subjects and verbs = characters and actions.



Characters

Let's look at another sentence.

Our lack of knowledge about local conditions precluded determination of committee action effectiveness in fund allocation to those areas in greatest need of assistance.

What are the characters here? We? Committee?

Let's rewrite it.

Because **we** knew nothing about local conditions, **we** could not determine how effectively the committee had allocated funds to areas that most needed assistance.

Because **we** knew nothing....**we** could not determine....**the committee** had allocated

Although "areas" is still the object of a preposition (to *areas*), it is also the subject of *needed*:areas that most needed assistance.



Actions

How are the actions named in the above sentences? In the first, they are not verbs but abstract nouns: lack, knowledge, determination, action, allocation, need, assistance.

In the second sentence **actions are named in verbs**: *we knew nothing, we could not determine, the committee allocated, areas needed.*

This gives us some advice about revising: when your writing is **turgid** or abstract or too complex, do two things.

First, locate the cast of characters and the actions that those characters perform (or are the objects of). If those characters are not subjects and their actions are not verbs, revise so that they are.

Suggestion: run a line under the sentence. If 1) you have to go 6 or 7 words into the sentence to get past the subject to the verb and 2) the subject of the sentence is not one of your characters, think about revising.

Characters and actions should align. This is important. Here are a couple more examples.

The argument that failure to provide for preservation of the royalty rate upon expiration of the patent discouraged challenges to the contract does not apply here.

Who is arguing, failing, challenging? Let's invent characters as if we knew who they were and make them the subject and their actions verbs—as though we were telling a story.

Harris argues that when **Smith** gave him no way to preserve the royalty rate when **the patent expired**, **Smith** discouraged him from challenging their contract. But **that argument** does not apply here.

Better? You bet!

Remember advice from your English teacher, be specific and concrete, and you were not sure what he or she meant? Look at these examples.

There has been an affirmative **decision** for program **termination**.

Now let's **use subjects to name characters and verbs to name their actions**.

The Director **decided** to **terminate** the program.

When we do this, it automatically becomes more specific and concrete. What about the advice not to use too many prepositions?

An evaluation of the program **by** us will allow greater efficiency **in** service to clients.

Instead: We will evaluate the program so that we can serve clients better.

More advice from your English teacher: put your ideas in logical order!

Comment [Editor3]: Definition: 1. Excessively ornate or complex in style or language; grandiloquent: turgid prose.

Comment [Editor4]: What is the subject here? What is the verb?

The **closure** of the branch and the **transfer** of its business and non-unionized employees **constituted** an unfair labor practice because the purpose of **obtaining** an economic benefit by means of **discouraging** unionization motivated the **closure** and **transfer**.

Now let's **name subjects as characters and verbs as actions**.

The partners **committed** an unfair labor practice when they **closed** the branch and **transferred** its business and non-unionized employees in order to **discourage** unionization and thereby **obtain** an economic benefit.

Summary: When you align subjects and characters, verbs and actions, you turn abstract, impersonal, apparently expository prose into a form that feels much more like a narrative, into something closer to a story.



What we have said above does NOT mean that all sentences have to be simple to be clear. The important thing is not how many words we use, but **how easy it is for the reader to get from the beginning of the sentence to the end—and understand everything in between!**

Let's look at an American undergraduate, writing for a professor and trying to make his writing sound sophisticated.

After Czar Alexander II's emancipation of the Russian serfs in 1861, many now-free peasants chose to live on a commune for purposes of cooperation in agricultural production as well as for social stability. Despite some communes' attempts at economic and social equalization through the strategy of imposing a low economic status on the peasants, which resulted in their reduction to near-poverty, a centuries-long history of important social distinctions even among serfs prevented social equalization.

What do you think? Sound abstract? The student was told to re-write his paragraph, aligning subjects and characters, and verbs and actions. He wrote this:

In 1861, Czar Alexander II emancipated the Russian serfs. Many of them chose to live on agricultural communes. There they thought they could cooperate with one another in agricultural production. They could also create a stable social structure. The leaders of some of these communes tried to equalize the peasants economically and socially. As one strategy, they tried to impose on all a low economic status that reduced them to near-poverty. However, the communes failed to equalize them socially because even serfs had made important social distinctions among themselves for centuries.

Now how does it sound? Later in our talk, we will look at ways of creating longer, more complex sentences that are still readable. For now, let's look at what the student wrote when following the principles we talked about earlier.

After the Russian serfs were emancipated by Czar Alexander II in 1861, many chose to live on agricultural communes, hoping they could cooperate in working the land and establish a stable social structure. At first, those that led

Comment [Editor5]: Take a moment and see if you can understand what the author is saying here. Read it two or three times.

Comment [Editor6]: This is clear. Perhaps only after reading this sentence can you understand what the author meant in the sentence above. This is the power of naming subjects as characters and verbs as actions. Simple!

Comment [Editor7]: It has an oversimplified, choppy sound to it, as though the student were told to create as many short sentences as possible. But, short sentences do not necessarily mean clarity.

some of the communes tried to equalize the new peasants socially and economically by imposing on them all low economic status, a strategy that reduced them to near-poverty. But the communes failed to equalize them socially because for centuries the serfs had observed among themselves important social distinctions.

We can create a graph then that show that there are essentially two levels to a sentence, a fixed level of the subject and verb, and the more flexible level where the characters and actions can be changed and has no fixed order.

FIXED	SUBJECT	VERB	COMPLEMENT
VARIABLE	CHARACTERS	ACTION	-----

We can conclude from what we have said thus far then the following: **we judge a sentence clear, generally speaking, if both of those levels are aligned; that is, if the writer expresses crucial actions in verbs and central characters (real or abstract) in subjects.**



Subjects and Characters

Let's talk a little bit more about subjects and characters: first characters. There are many kinds of characters. The most important are **agents**, the direct source of an action or condition.

They can be collective:

Faculties of national eminence do not always teach well.

They can be secondary or remote:

Mayor Daley built Chicago into a giant among cities.

Figurative agents that stand for real agents:

The White House announced today the President's schedule.

The business sector is cooperating.

Many instances of malignant tumors fail to seek attention.

In some cases, we name subjects that are really the **means** by which some unstated agent performs an action, making the **instrument** seem like the agent of that action, as in the following:

Studies of coal production reveal these figures.

These new data establish the need for more detailed analysis.

This evidence proves my theory.

That is,

When **we study** coal production, **we find** these figures.

I have established through these new data that **we must analyze** the problem in more detail.

With this evidence **I prove** my theory.

In these sentences, the instruments act so much like agents that there is little point in revising them.

Some characters do not appear in a sentence at all, so that when we revise we have to supply them.

In the last sentence of the Gettysburg Address there is a rallying cry for the continuation of the struggle.

In the last sentence of the Gettysburg Address, **he rallied his audience to continue the struggle against the South.**

In other sentences, the writer may imply a character in an adjective.

Determination of policy occurs at the **presidential** level.

The President determines policy.

Medieval **theological** debates often addressed what to **modern** thought seems to be metaphysical triviality.

Medieval **theologians** often debated issues that **we** might think were metaphysically trivial.

In some sentences, the characters and actions are so far removed from the surface of the sentence, we have to rewrite the sentence completely.

There seems to be no obvious reason that would account for the apparent unavailability of evidence relevant to the failure of this problem to yield to standard solutions.

I do not know why **my staff** cannot find evidence to explain why **we** haven't been able to solve this problem in the ways we have before.

Most often in academic writing characters modify an abstract noun or are objects of prepositions such as by, of, on the part of.

The Federalists' belief that the instability *of* **government** was a consequence *of* **popular democracy** was based on **their** belief in the tendency *on the part of* **factions** to further their self-interest at the expense of the common good.

Comment [Editor8]: Here the sentence above was not "incorrect" but it appears much weaker when compared with the second sentence where a subject/verb combination replaces "there is a rallying cry."

Comment [Editor9]: Subject implied from "presidential level."

Comment [Editor10]: Subject implied from "theological debates."

Comment [Editor11]: Read this two or three times before reading the next sentence.

Comment [Editor12]: Now read the sentence above again.

Comment [Editor13]: A completely grammatical sentence! How many times do you have to read it to get the point?

The Federalists believed that **popular democracy** destabilized **government** because **they** believed that **factions** tended to further their self-interest at the expense of the common good.

Often in academic writing we have to supply **indefinite subjects** because the sentence expresses a general statement.

Such multivariate strategies may be of more use in understanding the genetic factors which contribute to vulnerability to psychiatric disorders than strategies based on the assumption that the presence or absence of psychopathology is dependent on a major gene or than strategies in which a single biological variable is studied.

If **we/one/researchers** are to understand the genetic factors that make some patients vulnerable to psychiatric disorders, **we/one/researchers** should use multivariate strategies rather than strategies in which **we/one/researchers** study only a single biological variable.

Writing is strengthened with the creation of clear subjects/characters and the verbs/actions that go with them, as you can see from the example above.

Is lack of a good indefinite pronoun a weakness in English? **We** can sound pretentious and can refer to too many people. Hence, the passive voice, as we shall see later. Here is a preview.

If the generic factors that make some patients vulnerable to psychiatric disorders **are to be understood**, multivariate strategies **should be used** rather than strategies in which **it is assumed** that a major gene causes psychopathology or strategies in which only a single biological variable **is studied**.



Verbs and Actions

Action as we mean it here includes not only physical movement but also mental processes, feelings, and literal and figurative relationships. Look at the next four sentences. What happens to the meaning as you read them?

There **has been** effective staff information dissemination control on the part of the Secretary.

The Secretary **has exercised** effective staff information dissemination control.

The Secretary **has effectively controlled** staff information dissemination.

The Secretary **has effectively controlled** how **his staff disseminates** information.

What are the crucial actions above? **Be? Exercise?** No, they are **control** and **disseminate**.

Many academic writers use a verb, **not to express action** but to **state that an action exists**.

Comment [Editor14]: Also grammatical, but it has what the other sentence does not: clarity. How many times do you have to read this sentence to get the point?

Comment [Editor15]: Read this to yourself. Take a moment.

Comment [Editor16]: Now read it with the creation of an indefinite subject.

Comment [Editor17]: ? Who did what? There does not seem to be anything to "sink your teeth into" here.

Comment [Editor18]: Better subject/verb relationship, no?

Comment [Editor19]: ? Controlled what?

Comment [Editor20]: OK, clear now with better use of verbs?

A *need* **exists** for greater candidate selection **efficiency**. = We must select candidates more efficiently.

There is the *possibility* of prior *approval* of it. = He *may* **approve** of it ahead of time (or, it may be approved ahead of time, if you use the passive voice).

We **conducted** an *investigation* of it. = We **investigated** it.

The *review* **was done** of the regulations. = They **reviewed** the regulations.

When you take a verb (or an adjective) and make a noun out of it, it is called a nominalization—even the word nominalization comes from a verb: *nominalize*.

Here are some examples:

Verb	→	Nominalization	Adjective	→	Nominalization
discover		discovery	careless		carelessness
move		movement	difficult		difficulty
resist		resistance	different		difference
react		reaction	elegant		elegance
fail		failure	applicable		applicability
refuse		refusal	intense		intensity

Sometimes the nominalization and the verb are the same:

hope → hope

answer answer

return return

Our **request** is that on your **return**, you conduct a **review** of the data and provide an immediate **report**.

We **request** that when you return, you **review** the data and **report** immediately.

So, when do you replace a nominalization with a verb? You can do it when, for example:

1. the nominalization follows a verb with little specific meaning,

The police *conducted* an **investigation** into the matter.

Comment [Editor21]: Overuse of nouns and noun phrases!

Comment [Editor22]: How much clearer with the changes of the nouns to verbs! Not “conduct a review” but just “review”!

Comment [Editor23]: Here the use of “conducted” does not add much, if anything, to “investigation.” So we change investigation to a verb.

The police **investigated** the matter.

The committee *has* no **expectation** that it will meet the deadline.

The committee does not **expect** to meet the deadline.

2. or when the nominalization follows *there is* or *there are*.

There is a **need** for further **study** of this program.

The engineering staff **must study** this program further.

There was considerable **erosion** of the land from the floods.

The floods considerably **eroded** the land.

3. When the nominalization is the subject of an empty verb.

The **intention** of the IRS is to audit the records of the program.

The **IRS intends** to audit the records of the program.

Our **discussion** concerned a tax cut.

We **discussed** a tax cut.

4. When you have 2 or more nominalizations in a row, make the first one (at least) a verb.

There was first a **review** of the **evolution** of the dorsal fin.

First, she **reviewed** the **evolution** of the dorsal fin.

First, she **reviewed** *how* the dorsal fin **evolved**.

5. When a nominalization in the subject is linked (logically) to a nominalization in the predicate.

Subject: Their **cessation** of hostilities

Logical connection: was because of

Object: their personnel **losses**.

When you want to make this clearer

- a. change the abstraction to a verb
- b. find a new subject
- c. link the new clause with a word that expresses the logical relationship

To express simple causes: *because, since, when*

To express conditional cause: *if, provided that, so long as*

To contradict expected cause: *though, although, unless*

So in this case we have

Their cessation of hostilities	—————>	They ceased hostilities
was because of		because
their personnel loss		they lost personnel.

Here are some more examples.

The **discovery** of a method for the **manufacture** of artificial skin *will have the result* of an **increase** in the **survival** of patients with radical burns.

— Researchers **discover** how to **manufacture** artificial skin

— More patients **will survive** radical burns

If researchers **can discover** how to **manufacture** artificial skin, more patients **will survive** radical burns.

Once again you can see how the sentence is strengthened with the creation of a strong subject/character and verb/action relationship.

One more example.

The presence of extensive rust **damage** to exterior surfaces *prevented* immediate repairs to the hull.

— Rust had extensively **damaged** the exterior surfaces

— We could not **repair** the hull immediately

Because rust had extensively **damaged** the exterior surfaces we could not **repair** the hull immediately.

Sometimes nominalizations can be useful, however, when...

1. The nominalization is referring to a previous sentence
These arguments all depend on a single unproven claim.

This decision can lead to costly consequences.

2. The nominalization names what would be the object of its verb.

I do not understand either **her meaning** or **his intention**.

This is easier to understand than, “I do not understand either **what she means** or **what he intends**.”

3. A succinct nominalization can replace an awkward “The fact that”:

The fact that I denied what he accused me of impressed the jury.

My denial of his accusations impressed the jury.

But, why not just say

When I denied his accusations, I impressed the jury.

Comment [Editor24]: With this sentence we can see steady progress in making the idea more concrete and readable with the creation of a more succinct subject/character, verb/action relationship.

4. Some nominalizations refer to an often repeated concept.

Few issues have so divided Americans as **abortion on demand**.

Taxation without representation was not the central concern of the American Revolution.

Many phrases like this in English are so common that they often become virtual actors. Additionally, many nominalizations express concepts that can only be expressed in that way: freedom, death, love, hope, life, wisdom. Nominalizations then are extremely useful; **you simply have to decide when to use them**.

Summary: you can achieve clarity in your writing, sometimes, by avoiding abstract nominalizations. When you can, use a verb and not a nominalization.

Clarity and the passive voice

You can also be more clear in your writing if you avoid unnecessary passive constructions. In active sentences, the subject typically expresses the agent of the action, and the object expresses the goal or the thing changed by the action.

<i>subject</i>				<i>object</i>
Active: The partners	→	broke	→	the agreement.
agent				goal

In passive sentences, the subject expresses the goal of an action; a form of *be* precedes a past participle form of the verb; and the agent of the action may or may not be expressed in a *by*-phrase.

<i>subject</i>		be (past participle)		<i>prepositional phrase</i>
Passive: The agreement	→	was broken	→	by the partners.
goal				agent

Compare the following sentences in terms of the use of the passive voice.

A new approach to toxic waste management detailed in a chemical industry plan **will be submitted**. A method of decomposing toxic by-products of refinery processes **has been discovered** by Genco Chemical.

Comment [Editor25]: By whom?

The chemical industry **will submit** a plan that details a new way to manage toxic waste. Genco Chemical **has discovered** a way to decompose toxic by-products of refinery processes.

Active sentences allow us to avoid a few extra words and to name the specific agent of an action. Let's look at two examples, with the passive phrases in bold.

It **was found** that data concerning energy resources allocated to the states **were not obtained**. This action **is needed** so that a determination of redirection **is permitted** on a timely basis when weather conditions change. A system **must be established** so that data on weather conditions and fuel consumption **may be gathered** on a regular basis.

Comment [Editor26]: Why is this plural? Can anybody answer? ☺

We **found** that the Department of Energy **did not obtain** data about energy resources that Federal offices **were allocating** to the states. The Department **needs** these data so that it **can determine** how to **redirect** these resources when conditions **change**. The Secretary of the Department **must establish** a system so that his office **can gather** data on weather conditions and fuel consumption on a regular basis.

The second passage is a little longer, but more specific and more straightforward. We know who is supposed to be doing what. When we combine passive with nominalizations, we create prose we call legalese, sociologicalese, educationese, and bureaucratese.

Patient movement to less restrictive methods of care **may be followed by** increased probability of recovery.

Comment [Editor27]: What?!

If we treat patients less restrictively, they may recover more quickly.

Is the passive never useful? Never the better choice? How do we choose between the active and the passive?

Three questions can help us answer the questions above:

1. Must our audience know who is performing the action?
2. Are we maintaining a logically consistent string of subjects?
3. If the string of subjects is consistent, is it the right string of subjects?

In the following sentence, we don't care who is responsible for the action.

Those who **are found** guilty of murder **can be executed**.

Valuable records **should always be kept** in a fireproof safe.

What about this next sentence and the issue of responsibility?

Because the final safety inspection **was** neither **performed** nor **monitored**, the brake plate assembly mechanism **was left** incorrectly aligned, a fact that **was known** several months before it **was decided to** publicly reveal that information.

Now, concerning number 2 above, maintaining a logically consistent string of subjects, let's look at the subjects in the paragraphs we looked at previously.

It **was found** that data concerning energy resources allocated to the states **were not obtained**. This action **is needed** so that a determination of redirection **is permitted** on a timely basis when weather conditions change. A

system **must be established** so that data on weather conditions and fuel consumption **may be gathered** on a regular basis.

We **found** that the Department of Energy **did not obtain** data about energy resources that Federal offices **were allocating** to the states. The Department **needs** these data so that it **can determine** how to **redirect** these resources when conditions **change**. The Secretary of the Department **must establish** a system so that his office **can gather** data on weather conditions and fuel consumption on a regular basis.

In the first paragraph, the subjects of the passive sentences seem to be chosen almost at random: itinformation....This action.....a determination.....A system....information

In the second paragraph, the reader gets a **consistent point of view from the string of subjects: the agents of the action:** We.....Department of Energy.....Federal offices.....the Department....it.....the Secretary.....his office

Now each agent-subject anchors the reader in something familiar **at the beginning of the sentence**—the cast of characters—before the reader moves on to something new.

We can therefore offer the following rule: **use the beginning of a sentence to orient your reader.**

Let's look at two paragraphs about the end of WWII. The first one is from the point of view of Germany and Japan, and is written in the passive.

By March of 1945, **the Axis nations** had been essentially defeated; all that remained was a final, but bloody, climax. The **borders of Germany** had been breached, and **both Germany and Japan** were being bombed around the clock. **Neither country**, though, had been so devastated that it could not resist.

The next one is from the point of view of the Allied nations, and is constructed using the active voice.

By March of 1945, the Allies had essentially defeated the Axis nations; all that remained was a final, but bloody, climax. American, French and British forces had breached the borders of Germany and were bombing both Germany and Japan around the clock. But they had not so thoroughly devastated either country as to destroy its ability to resist.

As you can see from these paragraphs, **there is nothing wrong with using the passive** if the reader is able, through the sequence of consistent subjects, to follow what you are saying.

In a future workshop, we can discuss the issue of clarity on the paragraph level; that is, how to help your reader follow your ideas as you proceed from paragraph to paragraph in your writing. Not to leave you hanging, however, you accomplish this essentially with “strings” of words or concepts that serve to keep your reader connected to the main topic or topics you are discussing. Interested readers can consult Professor William’s book “Style” for further information.

Appendix A: Clarity when referring to time in your dissertation: What tense should I use? Should I use only the past tense? Is it OK to mix tenses?

The answer to the last two questions is no and yes. The answer to the first question is a little more involved. Let's talk about it for a moment.

A general guideline for using tense in a dissertation would be this: use the tense according to how you want the reader to *interpret* the event or information. This could include the use of the past tense if you want the reader to think of the event or information as having been completed in the past; the *present perfect tense* if you want the reader to think of the event or information to have begun in the past and to continue through the present; the *past perfect* if you are referring to something in the past in relation to another item in the past; the present tense if you want the reader to think of the event or the information as an ongoing reality or a general truth; and the future tense for references to the future. Here as with all writing, the writer creates the reality for the reader—at least the reality that the writer wants the reader to experience through his or her writing. The writer's job is to guide the reader in his or her interpretation of the text. Here we are talking about tense and how the writer wants the reader to interpret the time in which something was done. Here are some examples [comments are in brackets, like this].

Past tense: Generally speaking, this tense is used in the dissertation when you are talking about the methodology or findings, but look at the exceptions.

In this study, qualitative analysis was employed in order to ascertain the reliability of the data.

Smith's study revealed [although it would be possible to use the present tense here so that the reader thinks of the information revealed in the study as a present reality—his study reveals—since it still does] that the subjects failed to pass the test [here using the past tense to express an action that was completed in the past].

Halburton studied the effect of chromosome manipulation on hormone growth [here you cannot say “Halburton studies...” since the act of the study took place in the past. However, you might want to say “Halburton studies endocrinology at the University of Alabama” if you want the reader to understand that this work on the part of Halburton continues to exist. You could also say “Halburton has studied...” if you want the reality of the study to come more into the present in the reader's mind—this is still a reference to the past however.

The findings [in or from *your* study] revealed [present tense also possible, particularly if you want the reader to feel that the revelation of information is not something that is contained only in the past but pertains to present reality] that the data were consistently unreliable.

The findings revealed [or “reveal” if you want the reader to think of the revelation of the findings as a present reality] that Thai people are generally speaking worried about their futures [here present tense is used so that the reader understands that the writer feels that Thai people have been and continue to be worried about their futures].

Galileo asserted that the earth revolved around the sun. [Often in a dissertation you are encouraged to make both verbs in a sentence, for example, in the past tense in order to create a parallel construction, even when the second verb might represent a reality that still exists. Here the past tense is used for both verbs. *However*, you could also say “Galileo asserted that the earth

revolves around the sun.” The revolution of the earth as a continuing reality is how you want the reader to interpret it. But what about this?] “Galileo asserts [present tense!] in his book that the earth revolves around the sun [here you are lending a stronger reality to Galileo’s assertion by casting it in the present tense for the reader; the reader knows that the book and the assertion took place in the past. Use of the present tense like this is often referred to as the literary use of the present to refer to the past as in the following] “The man enters the room [the reader knows that he actually entered the room in the past], picks up the gun, and kills the criminal.”

As you can see, the use of tense is more complicated than might first be apparent. Beware following “rules” that say “Use the past tense for findings and methodology.” It is not that simple because ideas and their communication are not that simple. Again, what you say depends upon how you want the reader to think about or interpret what you are saying. Consequently, you can use, as shown above, all past tense in a sentence [or throughout a paragraph) or you can use a combination of past and present tenses if that is how you want the reader to view the information you are conveying.

In the experiment, the response varied [the variation of the response happened in the past]. However: “In the experiment, the reader can see that the response varies” [here the writer is using the present tense in order to emphasize the variation of the response for the reader and to encourage the reader to participate in this present-reality interpretation].

Here is an example of using the **present tense** with reference to findings:

The findings that are [or just say “presented” here without “that are”] presented [present passive] in the figure above reveal [present tense—they still reveal and you want the reader to read it in this way] that the data are/were unreliable [here you can use either the present tense—if you want the reader to think of the unreliability of the data as an continuing reality—or the past tense—if you want the reader to think of the data being unreliable as a past reality].

As you can see, the use of the tense form depends upon how you, the writer, want the reader to think of or interpret the information.

Present perfect tense: You use this tense, generally speaking, when you want the reader to think of the information as a reality that existed in the past and continues to exist in the present.

The people have played a strong role in the creation of a democratic society [they did in the past and they still do today].

The data have revealed [here you are referring to the data in your paper but you want the reader to have in his or her mind the revelation of the data from earlier in the paper to the present point in the writing] that Thai people are happiest when they are close to nature [here present tense to express what the writer wants the reader to interpret as a general truth].

Present tense: This tense form is often used in the dissertation to express a reality that is valid in the present or to express a general truth.

The literature demonstrates [still, now] that many people in Thailand experience [still, now] a great deal of stress concerning income. Or you could say “The literature has demonstrated” if you want the reader to focus on the

literature that you discussed/have discussed/had discussed [three possibilities here] earlier in your essay.

The data in the figure above show that males are more likely than females to commit murder [the data in the figure are a present reality].

The information presented above suggests [passive followed by present tense since you want the reader to view the information as a present reality] that the world's coastlines will decrease in size drastically over the next decade.

However, Eugene Bardach (1980:30) views [notice the use of the present tense despite the 1980 date; it was stated in 1980 but the author is suggesting that the author still has this view] policy implementation as part of the business of the political process.

Jones (2010) insists that the teacher's salary and teacher's performance appraisal system are urgent issues to work on. [If the writer said "insisted" here it might call too much attention to the past tense and lead the reader to feel that the writer wanted him or her to think that Jones no longer feels that way. This isolation of the action or information in the past using the simple past tense could be "softened" by using the present perfect: "Jones has insisted that ... [this would bring Jones' insisting into the present and give the action or the thought more emphasis or more of a present reality].

This kind of construction is often used in a comparative sense:

While Smith views [even if Smith stated his view in the past] the economy in a growth mode, Evans views it in a decline mode [the use of the present tense lends a sense of current import to both views].

Use of the past tense here, though perfectly acceptable, might suggest to the reader that the authors' views are contained in the past—there is a different "feel" in the use of either tense form. You could say that more depth is given to the reality of the statement with the use of the present tense since it is suggested to be a reality that is still valid.

Future tense: This tense form refers to the future or to something that you hope will come about in the future.

It is hoped [passive construction to keep the reference to the writer out of the dissertation with the use of a personal pronoun] that this study will assist researchers [in the future obviously] in the construction of stronger models regarding the acquisition and distribution of wealth in Thailand.

These data will perhaps encourage local governments to play a more active role in ensuring that we will have trees for our children.

You do not always have to use the future tense however to refer to the future. The present tense is often used for this purpose.

Hospitals can [sometime in the future] use this data in their clinical research into healthcare among infants.

Appendix B:

A note on inadvertent plagiarism: Please be aware that any time you are not using your own words, *even if a reference is made*, you have to use quotation marks; otherwise it is considered plagiarism and can have severe consequences, such as loss of a degree or legal

action against you or the journal in which you are publishing. **Paraphrases must also be documented.** Even if you rephrase the original idea, the idea still is the other person's and failure to give credit constitutes misrepresentation of your actual work and plagiarism of another person's ideas.

"Taiwan's defense minister, Andrew Yang, has resigned six days after taking office amid plagiarism allegations. Mr. Yang faces claims that an article published under his name in 2007 copied content from another magazine. Mr. Yang said that the article about mainland China's People's Liberation Army, said to contain plagiarized material, had been written by a friend, although it was published under his name. 'This is my personal mistake and I apologize for it,' he told reporters at a press conference late on Tuesday."—from BBC report, Aug. 2013

Here is more information on the types of plagiarism from Harvard University in the U.S.:
<http://isites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k70847&pageid=icb.page342054>

Appendix C:

Examples of use of the word *respectively*:

Use the word "respectively" in a sentence when items at the end of the sentence refer to items earlier in the sentence. If there is no such correspondence, that is if you are just making a list, then don't use the word "respectively." See the following examples:

Public spending on welfare services is pro-poor. Thirty-two point six five percent and 34.43 percent of the benefit from welfare services accrues to the poorest and poor group, respectively, compared with 3.42 percent to the highest income class.

In this example, "poorest" refers to 32.65 percent (notice that the percentage is written out at the beginning of a sentence) and the "poor group" refers to the figure 34.43 percent.

Here is another example: Across the fifty countries, the average was 2.60 and 2.62 for coins and notes, respectively.

In this example, coins refers to 2.60 and notes refers to 2.62.

Here is an example of what NOT to do.

Public spending on welfare services is pro-poor. Thirty-two point six five percent of the benefit from welfare services accrues to the poorest group, respectively.

Here you can't say "respectively" since there is no comparison being made.

Here is another example of what you CAN'T do.

Last year I made \$300 and \$400, respectively.

Again, there is no comparison being made so the use of "respectively" makes no sense.

Notes