

Steve Whitmore
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Style Cribsheet

This file can be used as a handy reference to help you identify patterns of stylistic problems in your writing.

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Weak Endings

- Look for sentences that trail off rather lamely.
- Also look for lengthy qualifiers tagged on at the end of the sentence and move them to the front of the sentence.
- Avoid small phrases introducing a list when a colon will suffice.

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Embedded Phrases

- The occasional embedded phrase is OK for stylistic variety, but avoid separating the verb from its subject.
- Place the embedded phrase at the beginning or end of the sentence.
- Split long sentences into shorter ones.
- Avoid placing references in the middle of sentences and never place figures in the middle of sentences.

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Weak Endings

Subject/Verb/Object

Weak Ending

The information provided in the report suggesting the cause of the crash was due to mechanical failure is not persuasive for the most part.

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Embedded Phrases

Subject

Embedded Phrase

Verb/Object

This practice, while satisfying the client on whose project we are working, leads to several of our other clients' needs not being met.

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Empty Sentence Openers

There is/are ...

(that/which)

It is ...

(that)

There are many aspects of the problem that have not yet been considered.

It is probable that we should measure the wind characteristics at the site.

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Empty Sentence Openers

- Avoid replacing the empty opener with the word **exists**:
There is an obvious way to handle the problem.
NOT: An obvious way exists to handle the problem.
- Don't change **it is** when it refers back to a known thing:

Bob spent six hours writing the program, so it is his property.



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Passive Voice

To Be + Verb-ed

An explanation of atmospheric stability and a detailed evaluation of its application to this air quality evaluation is contained in Appendix A.

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Unnecessary Repetition

S/V/Word#1 | Word#1 . . . Word#2 | Word#2 . . . Word#3

To my knowledge, no Mission Statement exists. This being said, either there is no Mission Statement, or the one that exists is not being made readily available to all employees.

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Empty Sentence Openers

- Remember to remove **that** or **which** if used:
There are ten activities that are affected by the change.
NOT: Ten activities that are affected by the change
- Empty sentence openers can appear in the middle of sentences as well as the beginnings.
- Avoid trying to find or eliminate empty openers while drafting. Wait until revising (unless you enjoy writer's block ;-)

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Passive Voice

Uses of Passive Voice	Abuses of Passive Voice
Communicating objectivity	Creating false objectivity
Changing sentence emphasis	Using habitually
Avoiding blaming someone	Avoiding responsibility
Omitting unknown agents	Obscuring meaning

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Unnecessary Repetition

- Avoid "chaining" sentences together by repeating the last words of a sentence as the 1st words of the next sentence.
- Ensure you edit "stream-of-consciousness" writing.
- Avoid starting strings of sentences with phrases such as "I think" or "I believe." We assume you think it if you wrote it.

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Vague "This" Subjects

This (???)	Verb/Object
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The next recommendation is to clarify the rewards structure. This is required to maintain motivation on projects where many extra hours are required and no overtime policy exists. This can be critical for commitment from employees.

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Parallel Structure

Phrase	and/or/but/etc.	Phrase
--------	-----------------	--------

Balance	^	Balance
---------	---	---------

This discussion prompted me to contact PTE for further information and the support package that PTE can offer for PC/FOCUS.

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Parallel Structure

Verb	Noun
Verb	Noun
Verb	Noun

In order to improve our facilities, we must do the following:

- repair our existing PCs
- purchase 11 more hard drives
- security is insufficient
- expand our operating hours

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Vague "This" Subjects

- Place a word or phrase immediately after the word "this" when it starts a sentence.
- Avoid strings of vague "this" subjects.

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Parallel Structure

- Use the same verb form when linking ideas together using a coordinating conjunction.
- Split excessively long sentences in two to avoid parallelism problems.
- Repeat prepositions in lengthy prepositional phrases.
- Try to balance length as well as structure.

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Parallel Structure

- Ensure lists are parallel by starting all items with nouns or verbs.
- Avoid mixing complete sentences and sentence fragments in lists.
- Beware of Microsoft's automated features!

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Short Sentences

Short Sentence Short Sentence Short Sentence

The culture of the organization is inconsistent with the rest of the world. The company values long-term employees. Provides generous remuneration, benefits, pensions, etc. The organization is too steep. It needs some flattening. The current organization encourages CYA and non-communication. This needs to be addressed. Failures rewarded, fence-sitters punished. (Average sentence length = 6 words.)

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Short Sentences

- When writing for popular magazines, user manuals or procedural instructions, shorten sentence length to 15-18 words.
- The occasional short sentence is a powerful technique to create emphasis.

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Comma Omissions

Introduction Subject/Verb/Object



By participating more in scheduling release dates can be planned so that projects dovetail.

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Short Sentences

- Avoid strings of short, unclearly related sentences – especially in introductory paragraphs.
- Recognize that a style heavily dependent upon empty sentence openers and vague “this” subjects is often lacking in transitions.
- Sentences can easily be combined by using simple connections such as *and*, *that*, or *which* or by embedding parts of one sentence in another.
- Be cautious when using “as” or “since.”
- The average sentence length in academic journals is 21-23 words.

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Comma Omissions

Subject/Verb/Object and Subject/Verb/Object



A precision full-wave rectifier is constructed using precision diodes and a square-wave generator is assembled using a schmitt trigger.

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Comma Omissions

- Always place a comma after introductory prepositional phrases.
- Always place a comma between two complete sentences joined by a coordinating conjunction (*and*, *but*, *yet*, *so*, and *yet*).
- See a handbook on punctuation for other rules of punctuation.

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Noun Strings

Noun	Noun	Noun	Noun	Noun	Noun
------	------	------	------	------	------

The wind pattern was further illustrated following a recovery boiler electrostatic precipitator fire at the site in 1988.

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Prepositional Phrases

in ...	on ...	of ...	of ...	of ...	at ...
--------	--------	--------	--------	--------	--------

Another component needed for the completion of the project is the reassignment of project team members to the next project and the rewarding of team members for their role in the project.

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General Language

Aspect	Partly
Basically	Perfectly
Big/Little	Situation
Clear/Unclear	Somewhat
Good/Bad	Thing
Important	This
Interesting	To a certain extent
Kind of/Sort of	To some degree
Large/Small	Type
More or less	Very much/Very little
Number of /Lots of	Way

Approximately 60% of our work is of a repeat nature with only minor variations. This repeat work is specifically of the inspection and quality control type and does not require higher education.

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Noun Strings

- Break up noun strings with prepositions.
- If possible, turn some nouns into verbs.
- Use hyphens to indicate closely related words.
- Use acronyms when feasible.
- Eliminate words that are not needed in the noun string.
- 4 nouns in a string is hard to understand; 5 or more nouns in a string is excessive.

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Prepositional Phrases

- Avoid idioms that contain prepositions (e.g., *goes on = further*).
- Change noun forms to verb forms (e.g., *analysis of = analysing*).
- Make short noun strings (3 to 4 nouns).
- Break long sentences into shorter ones.
- 2 *ofs* in a row is awkward; 3 or more is nearly impossible to understand.

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General Language

- Avoid general language whenever possible by eliminating or by finding alternatives in a thesaurus.
- Alternatives can be found in a good thesaurus such as the following:

Urdang, L. & LaRoche, N. (Eds). (1978). *The Synonym Finder*. Emmaus, PA: Rodale Press.

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Nominalizations

Verb Form	Noun Form
require	require <u>ment</u> of
impose	imposi <u>tion</u> of
discuss	discuss <u>ion</u> of
resemble	resembl <u>ance</u> to
remove	removal of
fear	fear of

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

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Talkie Verbs

(Be)	Drive	Go	Look	Seem
Bring	Face	Grow	Make	Show
Carry	Feel	Have	Place	Take
Come	Find	Hold	Put	Think
Deal	Get	Keep	Say	Try
Do	Give	Know	See	Turn

Because of the team's ignorance, no one could know at the beginning what the product was going to look like or how long it was going to take them to make it.

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Wordy Expressions

Wordy Expressions	Concise Substitutions
are indicative of	indicate
at a rapid rate	rapidly
at that point in time	then
at the present time	now, today
aware of the fact that	know
bring the matter to a conclusion	conclude
due to the fact that	given that, because
have to	must
in a great number of cases	often
in close proximity	near
the majority of	most
the reason why is that	because

It is necessary that someone make a decision on a personal basis due to the fact that the preponderance of us cannot form a consensus of opinion about how to bring the matter to a conclusion.

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Nominalizations

- Look for the articles and prepositions that accompany nouns (especially *of*).
- Transform nouns to verbs wherever possible.
- Avoid combining a noun-based style, heavy use of prepositions, and the passive voice. **This combination is extremely difficult for readers!**

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Talkie Verbs

- Learn to recognize the verbs you most commonly use in speech and edit for them.
- Look for the "real" verb hidden in a nominalization following the talkie verb.
- Use a good thesaurus to suggest alternatives.
- If you use a dictation program, you **must** learn to edit for this pattern!

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Wordy Expressions

- We all use wordy phrases that we pick up in conversation or from TV.
- Learn to recognize your favorite wordy phrases and edit for them.
- Ask a friend or colleague to look for them in your writing if you have difficulty recognizing them.

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