

THE PARAMEDIC METHOD OF REVISING SENTENCES

Apply the Paramedic Method to sentences that are passive, wordy, unclear, or excessively long.

1. Underline the prepositional phrases (to, at, in, by, from, etc.).
2. Circle all the “to be” verbs (am, is, are, was, were, were, etc.).
3. Find the “action” in the sentence. (Look for nominalizations, e.g. “description” rather than “describe.”)
4. Put this action in a simple (not compound) active verb.
5. Determine the agent of the action, then compose the base clause.
6. Start fast –avoid long introductory phrases.
7. Try to keep the subject/agent of the sentence closer to the action.
8. Vary the length of your sentences: go for rhythm and balance.
9. Read the passage aloud with emphasis and feeling. Revise sentences to put stress on key ideas and improve rhythm. (Information that comes last in a sentence is remembered more clearly.)

Cautions:

This method of improving the clarity and readability of your prose should be used judiciously, depending upon your rhetorical situation. Certain purposes require more “linking” verbs than others (e.g. description, defining a “state of being”). Also, in certain instances you may need to disguise what you mean (big companies do this to maintain their image yet avoid law suits; people who want to sound like they know more than they really do also find obscurity helpful). You may find that a passive construction helps you preserve coherence. If you find that you have to spend a lot of time reworking a sentence, you should either delete it entirely or rewrite it from scratch.

Borrowed from Dr. David Blakesley

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