

Sentence Construction

Introduction

- As with words, your construction of sentences will also depend on the kind of audience you are writing for.
- You have to be sensitive to the educational background of your readers, their expectations, their intelligence level, and so on, and then construct sentences which will communicate effectively to them.
- Make a conscious effort to write simple sentences so as to reach maximum number of people.
- Always keep in mind the person with the lowest communication competence and those who are less knowledgeable about the subject.

Introduction

- Example 1
 - Communication Situation: A doctor—patient interaction. When the doctor diagnoses the disease, he/she says
 - To the layman patient: ‘You have some fault in your blood’.
 - To a knowledgeable patient: ‘You have your WBC counting low’.
 - To another doctor: ‘Your T-lymphocyte count is low’.

Introduction

- Example 2

- Communication Situation: A car dealer and customer interaction. The car dealer says:
 - To a technical person: ‘INDIGO is 1405CC, MPH petrol engine which delivers 85 bhp at the torque of 11 kgm @ 3000 rpm.’
 - To a non-technical but well-educated person: ‘INDIGO has a powerful 85 bhp petrol engine with computer-controlled fuel injection system.’
 - To a layman: ‘INDIGO has a very good modern petrol engine.’

Guidelines for Effectiveness

● Prefer Short Sentences

- Simplicity in writing can be achieved mainly by writing short sentences.
- Shorter sentences convey meaning better than longer ones.
- If too many ideas are suffocated in a sentence through words, the meaning is lost, the reader is left in a confused state
- Therefore, you should attempt to put less information into a sentence at a time.
- Preferring shorter sentences does not mean that you cannot use long sentences at all.
- You can use them if required, but construct them meticulously so that clarity is achieved.

Guidelines for Effectiveness

● Prefer Short Sentences

- While giving a speech, you can use long sentences to good effect by using appropriate pauses, modulation, and body language.
- But as these non-verbal and paralinguistic features are missing in writing, you should be careful in framing sentences.
- The best sentence is that which a reader can understand in the very first reading.

Guidelines for Effectiveness

● Prefer Short Sentences

- It is appropriate to use medium-length sentences (about 20 words) for linking ideas.
- Though there is no rule about the length of a sentence, most effective business writing has an average length of 20 words per sentence or fewer.

Guidelines for Effectiveness

● Break the Sentence

- When a sentence is loaded with a lot of information, it becomes very difficult to decipher the meaning.
- It is difficult to break a sentence only when the ideas are too closely knit.
- Otherwise you can break it into two or three sentences to bring in more clarity
- You can see the advantage of short sentences over long sentences from the following examples:

Long and breathless sentences	Short and clear sentences
<p>1. We might further mention that we would be glad to furnish any of these whistles on a trial basis to the extent that if the smaller size is not adequate enough, it could be returned in lieu of the purchase of a large size depending upon actual operation and suitability of requirement for signal distance and audibility.</p>	<p>We would gladly provide any of these whistles for trial. In addition, we would replace the smaller size whistles with the larger ones, if you feel that they may help you hear your signals more clearly at a specific distance.</p>
<p>2. We can see from the above list that though the average number of customers per day is small, the turnover is maximum because at other restaurants the main items of sale are tea, coffee, and snacks, whereas at this restaurant meals are also available.</p>	<p>The above list shows that this restaurant has the maximum turnover though the average number of customers per day is small. This is because besides tea, coffee, and snacks, it sells meals also.</p>
<p>3. Due to the fact that the production of reports involves considerable cost to our organization, it can easily be seen that the reduction of the time spent in writing and reading them, a shortening of the reports themselves, would represent an appreciable gain in reducing our general operating expenses, although the matter of the length of the report should naturally be considered in relation to the complexity of the material and its adequate coverage keeping in mind the requirements of the specific situation.</p>	<p>The production of reports involves a large sum to our organization. If we shorten the reports keeping in mind the complexity, adequate coverage relevant to specification and contents, we can reduce the time spent on reading and writing them. By doing so, we can reduce the operating expenses.</p>

Guidelines for Effectiveness

Prefer Short Sentences

● **Fog Index:** The Fog Index was devised by the American, Robert Gunning to assess the readability of any text. In his view, the more a writer uses long sentences and words, the more the clarity of the text is ‘fogged.’ This simple method is calculated as follows:

- Choose a sample text containing about 100 words.
- Count the number of sentences and the number of words. Divide the number of words by the number of sentences to arrive at the average sentence length (ASL).
- Now count the number of long words (NLW—those with three or more syllables). You can’t count proper names, combination words like chairperson or firefighter or three-syllable verbs created by adding “es”, “ed” like united or arranges.
- Perform this calculation

$$\text{Fog Index} = (\text{ASL} + \text{NLW}) \times 0.4$$

The figure you arrive at scores thus on a scale of readability:

5 to 10—easy

11 to 15—difficult

16 to 20—very difficult

Popular magazines score in the range of 8—12 while the average level for university students is 14-16.

Guidelines for Effectiveness

● Break the Sentence

- However, do not be tempted to write too many short sentences, as your writing will sound jerky and irritating.
- It will also give an impression of elementary writing (such as writing for children).
- Look at following sentences:
 - *Original*: The tinder must be some soft, inflammable material. This may be dry grass, leaves, or wood shavings.
 - *Revised*: The tinder must be some soft, inflammable material, such as dry grass, leaves, or wood shavings.

Guidelines for Effectiveness

- *Original:* The experiment was over. I completed the report. I shut down the power supply. I submitted the report to the instructor. I left the laboratory.
- *Revised:* I completed the report as soon as the experiment was over. After shutting down the power supply, I submitted the report to my instructor and left.
- *Original:* The logs are fastened to a chain running up an incline. When they reach the floor of the mill they are rolled onto the carriage. The carriage is about forty feet long by fifteen wide. It moves the logs toward the saw after each is cut by means of an automatic feeding device.
- *Revised:* The logs are fastened to a chain and hauled up an incline to the floor of the mill, where they are rolled onto the carriage. The latter, which is about forty feet long by fifteen feet wide, is provided with an automatic feeding device by means of which the logs are moved towards the saw after each cut.
- The original versions sound choppy and disjointed whereas in the long sentences, the sequence of thoughts is smoothly linked.

Guidelines for Effectiveness

● Be Stringent with Words

- You can also shorten sentences by being careful with words.
- One idea can be expressed in a number of ways; one way can be shorter than the other.
- Usually the briefly worded sentence saves the time of the reader apart from being clear and more interesting.
- If you are vigilant with your use of words, you will find a way to say the sentence in a shorter way.
- Once you have learnt to economize, you will notice that your earlier writing was wasteful and uneconomical.

Guidelines for Effectiveness

- Avoid Cluttering Phrases

- Sentences often become long because of cluttering phrases.
- You can replace these phrases with shorter wording, without loss of meaning. Let us look at the examples:
 - *In the event of procrastination and dilatory action the operations will be shunned.*
 - The phrase ‘in the event of’ is uneconomical and can be substituted by ‘if’ without loss of meaning. Similarly ‘procrastination’ and ‘dilatory action’ can be replaced by ‘delay in action’.
 - *If there is delay in action, the operations will be cancelled.*

Guidelines for Effectiveness

● Avoid Cluttering Phrases

Some commonly used cluttering phrases which you should avoid

Cluttering phrases

Owing to the fact
Under the circumstances in which
For the reason that
In the light of fact
On the occasion of
Under circumstances in which
It is necessary that
Has the opportunity to
There is a chance that
It is important that
It is necessary that
In the meantime
In very few cases
With a view to

Better substitute

Because
When
Since
Because
When
When
Should
Can
May
Must
Should
Meanwhile
Seldom
To

Guidelines for Effectiveness

- Avoid Pleonasm or Redundant Phrases
 - To write with simplicity and clarity avoid using excess words which do not contribute any meaning to the sentence.
 - Sometimes you need to reconstruct the sentence while eliminating these extra phrases, while at other times you can just delete them.
 - Look at some of the examples of pleonasm taken from technical writing:
 - *It has been glaringly noticed from the records of the accounts that the company faced great loss in this fiscal year.*
 - The initial words in the sentence do not add anything substantial to the meaning of the sentence. Therefore they can be dispensed with, and the sentence can be reconstructed thus:
 - *The records of the account indicate that the company faced great loss in this fiscal year.*

Avoid Pleonasm or Redundant Phrases

- Original: I am of the opinion that the company managers should be admonished for their misconduct.
 - Revised: The company managers should be admonished for their misconduct.
- Original: In the light of the fact the Mr. Ali has worked with effort to build his website, we must give him the contract.
 - Revised: Since Mr. Ali has worked with effort to build his website, we should give him the contract.

Avoid Pleonasm or Redundant Phrases

- Original: It is essential that there be no construction of houses in the area designated as the sanctuary for wildlife.
 - Revised: There should be no construction of houses in the area designated as the wildlife sanctuary.
- Original: The antique dealer who is on the IJP road has a pair of silver candlesticks which were designed by Adam.
 - Revised: The antique dealer on the IJP road has a pair of silver candlesticks which were designed by Adam.

Avoid Pleonasm or Redundant Phrases

- Original: Many of the riders were boys with skinny frames and bold spirits.
 - Revised: Many of the riders were skinny framed bold spirited boys.
- Original: In the period between October and December, the business did well.
 - Revised: Between October and December, the business did well.

Guidelines for Effectiveness

- Avoid Roundabout Expressions
 - While it is possible to write a sentence in innumerable ways, some ways are more direct than others.
 - Let us observe this sentence:
 - *If there are any points on which you require explanation or further details, we shall be glad to furnish such additional details as may be required by telephone.*
 - The better substitute is:
 - *If you have any questions, please contact us over telephone.*

Avoid Roundabout Expressions

- Original: It is important that you shall read the notes, advice, and information detailed opposite, then complete the form overleaf prior to this immediate return to the council by way of the envelope provided.
- Revised: Please read the notes given opposite before you fill the form. Then send it back as soon as possible in the envelope provided.

Avoid Roundabout Expressions

- Original: The table is intended to assist investors in understanding the costs and expenses that a shareholder in the fund will bear directly or indirectly.
- Revised: This table describes the fees and expenses you may pay in connection with an investment in our fund.

Avoid Roundabout Expressions

- Original: The following summary is intended only to highlight certain information contained elsewhere in the prospectus:
 - This summary highlights some information already included in the prospectus.
- Original: Persons other than the primary beneficiary may not receive these dividends.
 - Revised: Only the primary beneficiary may receive these dividends.

Guidelines for Effectiveness

- Avoid Roundabout Expressions

- Phrases like the ones given here are needlessly roundabout. Avoid them in your writing and practice using more direct substitutes to achieve a more crisp, business-like effect.

Phrases

is aware of

has knowledge of

is taking

are indications

are suggestive

considering the fact

Substitute

knows

knows

takes

indicate

suggest

consider

Guidelines for Effectiveness

● Avoid Needless Repetition

- Repetition of a word or idea unnecessarily lengthens the sentence, without in any way adding to the meaning.
- Most of the time, it serves no purpose at all as you can observe in this sentence:
 - *I was born in summer, the month of July.*
 - A more direct version, *I was born in July conveys the same meaning.*
 - Another example:
 - He remarked that he believes that I am a consummate speaker.
 - By not repeating the word that, the sentence reads much more crisp:
 - *He remarked that he believes I am a consummate speaker.*

Avoid Needless Repetition

- Redundant words also add up to the sentence length.
- For example expressions such as past memories, various differences, true facts, future plans, past history, sudden crisis, and free gift are illogical and cannot be justified.
- Look at the following sentence.
 - *Before I finalize the schedule, please let me know your future plans.*
- This can be better written as:
 - *Before I finalize the schedule, please let me know your plans.*
- You may have heard this expression often:
 - *Please return back my book tomorrow.*
- The sentence can be rewritten without loss of meaning like this:
 - *Please return my book tomorrow.*

Avoid Needless Repetition

- Original: We will all assemble together for the condolence meeting.
 - Revised: We all will assemble for condolence.
- Original: This stick is limited in length.
 - Revised: This stick is short.
- Original: My basic fundamentals of Physics are not clear.
 - Revised: My fundamentals of Physics are not clear.

Guidelines for Effectiveness

- Prefer Right Ordering and Proper Emphasis
 - In order to convey the exact meaning of what you wish to say, you must put words in the right order.
 - A lot of information goes into a sentence but all of it is not necessarily of equal importance.
 - As in technical reports, the introduction and conclusion are more important than the rest of the elements.
 - You already know that the sentence length affects the emphasis.
 - It is the short sentence which carries more emphasis than the longer ones.
 - It stands out of the rest of the sentences and calls attention to its contents, giving a single uninterrupted message.

Guidelines for Effectiveness

● Prefer Right Ordering and Proper Emphasis

- Longer sentences which contain many ideas are a little confusing as the emphasis gets diluted across the contents.
- To highlight varying emphasis, let us take this example:
 - *The report was completed in time. The completion took place in spite of difficulties.*
 - Here equal emphasis is given on both ‘report completed in time’ and ‘difficult’.
 - In the second option, where these two sentences can be combined, the emphasis changes.
 - *Although we faced difficulties, the report was completed in time.*

Guidelines for Effectiveness

● Prefer Right Ordering and Proper Emphasis

Less emphatic	More emphatic
1. Two of our members heard you speak in Delhi and praised you highly for your dynamic presentation when they returned.	Two of our members heard you speak in Delhi and when they returned, praised you highly for your dynamic presentation.
2. We feel we are missing some patients, and therefore losing revenue, by using this system.	By using this system, we are missing some patients and therefore losing revenue.
3. The primary force behind most stress relief and exercise programmes is the executives who are prone to stress and heart attacks, as shown by medical reports.	The medical reports show that the primary force behind most stress relief and exercise programmes is the executives who are prone to stress and heart attacks.

Guidelines for Effectiveness

● Prefer Active to Passive Voice

- Economy of words is one of the hallmarks of good writing, and using the active, rather than passive voice, is one way to achieve economy.
- Passive constructions often result in vagueness. They also make passive sentences longer since they need helping verbs (like has been).
- You can use passive voice occasionally, wherever you want to avoid the use of personal pronouns; otherwise it is preferable to use active voice.

● Prefer Active to Passive Voice

Passive	Active
1. The concentration by the Training Division of its time, money, and other resources into a new programme is not advisable from our point of view.	We do not advise the Training Division to concentrate its time, money and other resources into a new programme.
2. Our implementation of this new procedure is required by the board of directors.	The board of directors requires us to implement this new procedure.
3. My first visit to your organization will always be remembered.	I will always remember my first visit to your organization.
4. In completing the tasks, the planned Rs 70,000 budget for June and July was exceeded.	In June and July we had to exceed the planned budget of Rs 70,000 in order to complete the task.
5. A weekly meeting is recommended as a way to reduce problems generated within the Training Division.	We recommend a weekly meeting as a way to reduce problems generated within the Training Division.
6. There are many positive aspects of cheque collection that are not brought out in this report.	This report does not bring out many positive aspects of cheque collection.
7. From these findings it is indicated that none of you has yet notified me.	These findings indicate that none of you has yet notified me.

Guidelines for Effectiveness

- Avoid Ambiguous Sentences

- Ambiguity is a hindrance to clarity which in turn results in our communication going awry.
- The faulty construction of sentences gives rise to ambiguity.
- Ambiguity arises mainly because of misplaced modifiers in sentences. (A modifier is a word/phrase/clause which tells us something more about a verb, noun, or adjective in the sentence.)
- The position of a modifier in a sentence is important.
- Whether it is a word, phrase, or clause, it should be placed as near as possible to the word it modifies.

Guidelines for Effectiveness

- Avoid Ambiguous Sentences

- **Example 1** (a word as modifier)

- Original: The delay in transit nearly drove the manager frantic.
- Revised: The delay in transit drove the manager near frantic,

- **Example 2** (a phrase as modifier)

- Original: UET has bought new computer chairs for the programmers with more comfortable seats.
- Revised: UET has bought new computer chairs with more comfortable seats for the programmers.

- **Example 3** (an elliptical clause as modifier)

- Original: After proofreading every word, the memo was ready to be signed.
- Revised: After proofreading every word, we got the memo signed.

Guidelines for Effectiveness

- Avoid Ambiguous Sentences

- He noticed a large stain in the rug that was right in the centre
 - He notices a large stain in the centre of the rug
- The seniors were told to stop demonstration on campus
 - The seniors on campus were told to stop demonstration



THE END