



# 8 TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE SENTENCES

(Adapted from materials at the University of Wisconsin Writing Lab.)

Use the following eight tips for organizing your sentences for greater clarity, grace, and effectiveness.

## 1. Unless you have a reason not to, use the active (vs. passive) voice.

*Passive:* It is believed by the candidate that a ceiling must be placed on the budget by Congress.

*Active:* The candidate believes that Congress must place a ceiling on the budget.

*Passive:* It was earlier demonstrated that heart attacks can be caused by high stress.

*Active:* Brown earlier showed that high stress can cause heart attacks.

### Use the passive voice only if you have a good reason.

- To emphasize the action rather than the actor.

After long debate, the proposal was endorsed by the long-range planning committee.

- To be tactful by not naming the actor.

The proposal was somehow misinterpreted.

- To describe a condition in which the actor is unknown or unimportant.

Thousands of people are diagnosed as having cancer every year.

- To create an authoritative tone.

Visitors are not allowed after 8:00 p.m.

## 2. Put the action of your sentence in the verb; convert nouns or adjectives created from verbs back into verbs or verbal forms.

is aware, has knowledge	⇒	knows
is taking	⇒	takes
are indications	⇒	indicate
are suggestive of; make a suggestion	⇒	suggest
the recruitment of staff	⇒	recruiting staff

Watch out especially for nominalizations (verbs that have been made into nouns by the addition of *-tion, -sion, -ment, -mence, -ance, -em, -ure*).

Original: An evaluation of the procedures needs to be done.

Revised: The procedures need to be evaluated.  
We need to evaluate the procedures.

Original: The stability and quality of our financial performance will be developed through the profitable  
execution of our existing business, as well as the acquisition or development of new business.

Revised: We will improve our financial performance not only by executing our existing business more  
profitably but by acquiring or developing new business.

**3. Use expletive constructions (it is, there is, there are) sparingly.**

Original: It was their last argument that finally persuaded me.  
Revised: Her last argument finally persuaded me.

Original: There are likely to be many parents asking questions about the new billing procedures.  
Revised: Many parents are likely to ask questions about the new billing procedures.

**4. Reduce clauses beginning with “who,” “which,” and “that” to simpler noun phrases when possible.**

Original: The errors that were made by the accountant have been corrected.  
Revised: The accountant’s errors have been corrected.

Original: We must notify those staff members who are absent.  
Revised: We must notify absent staff members.

**5. Try to avoid writing long strings of nouns unless your readers are likely to be familiar with your terminology.**

Original: MHS has a hospital employee relations improvement program.  
Revised: MHS has a program to improve employee relations.  
MHS has a program to improve relations among employees.

**6. Try to avoid using unnecessarily inflated words.**

ascertain	⇒	find out
endeavor	⇒	try
cognizant of	⇒	know
facilitate	⇒	help
impact on	⇒	affect
implement	⇒	start
initiate	⇒	begin
optimum	⇒	best
subsequent to	⇒	after
terminate	⇒	end
utilize	⇒	use

**7. Put wordy phrases on a diet.**

the reason for  
for the reason that

due to the fact that considering the fact that on the grounds that	⇒	because; since
despite the fact that even though it's true that regardless of the fact that	⇒	although
in the event that if it should transpire/happen that under circumstances in which	⇒	if
on the occasion of in a situation in which under circumstances in which	⇒	when
as regards in reference to with regards to	⇒	about
it is crucial that it is necessary that there is a need to it is important that it is incumbent upon	⇒	must, should
is able to has the opportunity to is in a position to has the capacity for has the ability to	⇒	can
it is possible that there is a chance that it could happen that	⇒	may, might, can, could
prior to in anticipation of subsequent to following on at the same time as	⇒	before, after, as

**8. Try to avoid using vague, all-purpose nouns (e.g., factor, aspect, area, situation), which often lead to wordiness.**

Original: Consumer demand is rising in the area of services.  
Revised: Consumers are demanding more services.