

Five ways to fix **bad** sentences

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The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.

George Bernard Shaw

Easy reading is damned hard writing.

Nathaniel Hawthorne

Don't make every sentence short.

But try to make every word count.

The wall

It is recognised that Beaconsfield Substation is a critical point of supply to the Sydney inner metropolitan area. As such the layout of services along each bus bar was allocated such that no group of adjacent three services supply the same load area within the network. In line with this, functional requirements for the GIS switchgear were developed that ensured that no credible contingency or maintenance activity could occur which would affect any more than three adjacent services. The design of cable routes throughout the GIS building was then aligned to this philosophy such that the cabling for no more than three adjacent switch bays is located in one cable route. Via the above measures, the likelihood of any one failure affecting more than one supply to a load area is significantly minimised.

131 words

Bricks that aren't needed

It is recognised that Beaconsfield Substation is a critical point of supply to the Sydney inner metropolitan area. As such the layout of services along each bus bar was allocated such that no group of adjacent three services supply the same load area within the network. In line with this, functional requirements for the GIS switchgear were developed that ensured that no credible contingency or maintenance activity could occur which would affect any more than three adjacent services. The design of cable routes throughout the GIS building was then aligned to this philosophy such that the cabling for no more than three adjacent switch bays is located in one cable route. Via the above measures, the likelihood of any one failure affecting more than one supply to a load area is significantly minimised.

Rebuilt

Beaconsfield substation is a critical point of supply to Sydney. The following measures markedly reduce the chance of a failure affecting more than one supply to a load area:

- The layout along each bus bar prevents any three adjacent services from supplying the same area.
- The GIS switchgear design ensures that no credible contingency or maintenance work will affect more than three adjacent services.
- In the GIS building no more than three adjacent switch bays are in one cable route.

82 words

Spot the techniques, brick by brick

Acknowledgements to George Grow

Start with a plain statement

We cancelled two unprofitable bus routes.

Add an empty starter (passive)

It was decided to cancel two unprofitable bus routes.

Add a long word

It was decided to **terminate** two unprofitable bus routes.

Replace an adjective with an intimidating phrase

It was decided to terminate two bus routes **as a result of their non-alignment with performance indicators.**

Replace specific nouns with generic ones

It was decided to terminate two **transport service schedules** as a result of their non-alignment with performance indicators.

Be vague

It was decided to terminate **certain** transport service schedules as a result of their non-alignment with performance indicators.

Repeat a word

It was decided to terminate certain transport service schedules as a result of their non-alignment with **service** performance indicators.

Add a loose connecting phrase

With issues around financial outcomes a key focus, it was decided to terminate certain transport operation schedules as a result of their non-alignment with service performance indicators.

Split up linked words

With financial outcomes a key focus, it was decided to terminate **pending future review** certain transport operation schedules as a result of their non-alignment with service performance indicators.

Add a pointless word

With issues around financial outcomes a key focus, it was decided to terminate pending future review certain **existing** transport operation schedules as a result of their non-alignment with service performance indicators.

Voilà!

We cancelled two unprofitable bus routes.

6 words

✓ Readability level: 8

With issues around financial outcomes a key focus, it was decided to terminate pending future review certain existing transport operation schedules as a result of their non-alignment with service performance indicators.

31 words

✗ Readability level: 23

Now let's look at how to fix some of these problems.

1. Replace false subjects with meaningful words.

Examples of false subjects

There are/were ... three cats sleeping in the shed.

It was ... at 2am that the first earthquake struck.

It is worth noting that ... their mother was a heavy smoker.

Replace with the true subject

There are several websites with information about volunteering in Peru. (10)



Several websites have information about volunteering in Peru. (8)

Fewer words and easier reading.

Web content: write for the F-shape (fast and fickle)



Readers scan down the left, seeking keywords.
False subjects slow them down.

Web writing

✘ **It is also intended that** additional material will be added subsequently – with particular focus on postgraduate students.

✔ **Postgraduate students:** more information coming soon.

Practice

It is advised that people with heart conditions should not try this form of yoga.

There are a number of options for hotel accommodation that our consultants can discuss with you.

2. Favour active over passive

Passive: The ball was picked up by Cruden.

Active: Cruden picked up the ball.

Passive: Mistakes were made.

Active: The director made mistakes.

Educational opportunities **are optimised** by quality teaching.

In the event of a referral off-campus **being needed**, students may **be referred** to counsellors and other professionals.

An apology **was sent** by the Council to Mr Markham in April, and in June he **was given** \$1000 in compensation.

Accurate word reading skills **can be effectively ameliorated** with phonically-based reading instruction.*

Supporting statements **were not provided** to the committee before the hearing.

* Why would you want to 'ameliorate' 'accurate word reading skills'?

Readers **are encouraged** to rate local eating establishments. Repeat ratings on venues already listed **are welcomed.** (16)

➔ Rate your local cafe or restaurant.
We welcome repeat ratings. (10)

Identify the action ...

An update on this project will be published in our next issue.

... and the missing agent

will be published by ... ?

We will publish an update on this project in our next issue.

or

The researchers will publish an update on this project in our next issue.

Don't be too active

It's not always possible to use an active construction, and it isn't always the most readable form – use your judgement.

The news of the rescue was greeted with cheers, applause and tears of relief.

Friends and family greeted the news of the rescue with cheers, applause and tears of relief.

Practice

1. Candidates are advised that a digital copy of the thesis must be sent with the acceptance form.
2. A policy of secrecy and misinformation had been pursued by the President and his close advisers.

3. Turn nouns back into verbs

Using nouns turns actions into concepts

Observations of the seed removal process confirmed that ants were the only agents of seed removal.

→ We observed that only ants were removing seeds.

Mortuary Hostess:

‘Normal disposal is by inhumement, entombment, inurnment, or immurement, but many people just lately prefer insarcophagusment.’

‘Before we part, may I interest you in our Before Need Provision Arrangements?’

Evelyn Waugh, *The Loved One* (1944)

Notice-writers use nouns to sound more important

Persons gaining **access** without **security clearance** will be subject to **bag inspection**.

12 words, 6 nouns, 1 verb
Readability: 13

If you enter without going through security, we will search your bags.

12 words, 2 nouns, 3 verb forms
Readability: 6

Some organisations are switching to verbs

We're working hard to make this section of the road safer. Please bear with us if there are any delays.

Nouns slow you down online

Thesis submission → Submitting your thesis

Store locator → Find a store

Credit card donations → Donate by credit card

ANZ

KIWIBANK

Pay Anyone - Lodgement Receipt

Payments and Transfers made within the last 120 days can be viewed via ANZ In
replacement statements. Fees and charges apply.



Success! Your payment has been processed

Receipt

Nouns (and noun phrases) set you up for passives ...

The use of skateboards is prohibited

→ No skateboarding

Delivery and installation of the transformer was successfully completed.

→ The company delivered and installed the transformer.

Practice

1. A reduction in frost frequency has been noted in South Canterbury this winter.
2. The responsibilities of the personal assistant include the maintenance of equipment and the documentation of client calls.

4. Avoid 'with' as a loose connector

Try two sentences, or a joining word

With

Dental tourism is now a global phenomenon, **with** Germans seeking treatment in Hungary and New Zealanders going to Singapore and Thailand.

Dorsal and anal fins are bright red **with** a yellow and green patch on the tail.

With few suitable habitats available for this species, they are likely to become endangered.

Without ...

Dental tourism is now a global phenomenon. Germans are seeking treatment in Hungary and New Zealanders are going to Singapore and Thailand.

Dorsal and anal fins are bright red. The tail has a yellow and green patch.

Few suitable habitats for this species remain, and they are likely to become endangered.

Practice

1. With many years' experience in the sector, we can advise you on all aspects of marketing and sales.
2. There were plenty of lineouts, with 13 thrown by New Zealand and 17 by Australia.

5. Spot the pointless word

Regular partners ...

colour palette

could potentially

current trend

first introduced

continue on

extra bonus

former graduate

future plans

hollow tube

local residents

major feat

mutual co-operation

natural instinct

new invention

penetrate into

renowned as being

the reason is because

still remains

soft to the touch

unintentional mistake

... and random add-ons

We now have an ordering service
online.

Toilets upstairs.

Extra nouns

We are seeking someone who enjoys
working in a team and is a self-
starter.

More effective management
would help reduce costs.

Since the mid-19th century various
freshwater fish have been introduced for
sport-fishing .

Sneaky passives

Compared to the two summer promotions ,
the July campaign was very successful.

The need for a bigger library comes from the
additional population.

Repairs are underway on the substation at
Wallerawang.

The illustrations are sometimes of poor quality.

Practice

1. The service uses special voice-recognition software to recreate a real-time conversation.
2. The signs displayed at the reception desk and the restrooms were in Japanese.
3. The budget for maintenance and construction activities covered health and safety.
4. This year we donated to five schools to support their respective Prize Nights.

Go forth and subtract!