



The Paramedic Method

Adapted from Richard Lanham's Revising Prose and the Purdue OWL

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Lanham writes, “We all sometimes feel, whatever setting we write in, that we will be penalized for writing in plain English.”

Boy meets girl.

OR:

A romantic relationship is ongoing between Boy and Girl.

OR BETTER:

Boy and Girl are currently implementing an interactive romantic relationship.

OR EVEN BETTER:

It can easily be seen that an interactive romantic relationship is currently being implemented between Boy and Girl.

Contrived examples? How about...

A teacher does not say, “If you use a calculator in class, you will never learn to add and subtract,” but instead, “The fact is that the use of the calculator in the classroom is negative for the learning process.”

An undergraduate wants to say, “Lungsick Inc. and other companies have spent years trying to find a substitute for asbestos.” But it comes out, “Identification of an acceptable substitute for asbestos in asphalt mastics has been the subject of research by Lungsick Inc. and other manufacturers for several years.”

A business writing teacher tells us not that “People entering business today must learn to speak effectively,” but “One of these factors is the seemingly increasing awareness of the idea that to succeed in business, it is imperative that the young person entering a business career possess definite skill in oral communication.”

“Official Style”

“The Official Style comes in many dialects—government, military, social scientific, lab scientific, MBA flapdoodle—but all exhibit the same basic attributes. They all build on the same **central imbalance, a dominance of nouns and an atrophy of verbs**. They enshrine the triumph, worshipped in every bureaucracy, of stasis over action.”

We can use the Paramedic Method to cure this imbalance.

Specifically, the Paramedic Method targets:

PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE STRINGS

This sentence is in need of an active verb.

In strict contrast to Watson's ability to control his mental stability through this type of internal gesture, is Rosalind Franklin's inability to even conceive of such “playing.”

“BLAH BLAH *IS THAT*” OPENINGS

What I want to make clear is that...

My point is that...

The Paramedic Method

1. Circle the prepositions (of, in, about, for, onto, into).
2. Put a box around the "is" forms.
3. Ask, "Where's the action?" "Who's kicking who?"
4. Put this "kicking" action in a simple (not compound) active verb
5. Start fast—no slow windups.

Ⓜ this paragraph is a demonstration Ⓜ of the use Ⓜ of good style Ⓜ in the writing Ⓜ of a report.

↖ Action in sentence; eliminate slow wind-ups

Revision

This paragraph demonstrates good style in reports (or) ...good style in report writing.

↖ The doer is in the subject

Use the Paramedic Method in the sentences below to practice making your sentences more concise.

1. The point I wish to make is that the employees working at this company are in need of a much better manager of their money.
2. It is widely known that the engineers at Sandia Labs have become active participants in the Search and Rescue operations in most years.
3. After reviewing the results of your previous research, and in light of the relevant information found within the context of the study, there is ample evidence for making important, significant changes to our operating procedures.

Example Concise Solutions:

1. Employees at this company need a better money manager.
(Original word count: 26. New word count: 10).
2. In recent years, engineers at Sandia Labs have participated in the Search and Rescue operations.
(Original word count: 24. New word count: 16).
3. After reviewing the results of your research, and within the context of the study, we find evidence supporting significant changes in our operating procedures.
(Original word count: 36. New word count: 25).

Lanham comedically proposes that we calculate a “Lard Factor”: Divide the difference between the number of words in the original and the revision by the number of words in the original.

Lard Factor for example #1 above: $26 - 10 = 16 / 26 = 62\%$

