

Improving Sentence Style

In proofreading your paper, consider the following changes and make those appropriate to your task.

1. What styles of sentences can you find? List the number of loose, balanced, parallel, and periodic sentences. If you have to sentences of one of these types in your paper, recast some sentences in that style.
2. How long are your sentences? Count the words in the paper; count the sentences; divide to determine average length.
3. Find your longest sentence. What is the length of the sentence before it? After it? If that long sentence is not either preceded or followed by a short sentence, change one of them into two short sentences.
4. What forms are your sentences? Count the number of simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences.
5. Count the number of to be verbs. Find three that can better be expressed as action verbs and recast the sentences that way.
6. Count parallel constructions. If fewer than three in the paper, recast three sentences so that they contain parallel elements.
7. How do your sentences begin? List subject, adverb, prepositional phrase, gerund, subordinate clause, verb, infinitive, conjunction absolute. If more than half of your sentences begin with the subject, recast ten sentences in a way that varies the beginnings.
8. Check your comma use by applying these four rules:
 - a. Use a comma before and, but, for, or, nor, so, yet, and still when these words join independent clauses.
 - b. Use a comma between all terms in a series.
 - c. Use a comma to set off parenthetical openers and afterthoughts.
 - d. Use two commas to enclose parenthetical insertions.
9. Have you used any semicolons? If not, find a sentence or a pair of sentences that would be better punctuated with a semicolon and recast.
10. Have you used any dashes? If not, find a sentence that would improve with a dash and recast.
11. Have you inverted any sentence? If not, recast one.
12. Find all which clauses and recast half of them to eliminate the which.
13. Underline of, in, to, by, and who wherever they occur. Recast to eliminate as many as possible.
14. Find any nouns used as adjectives and eliminate any not conventionally used this way.
15. Find all instances of there is or there are and eliminate as many as possible.