Use the Paramedic Method to Improve Writing

You have received feedback that your writing is verbose, inflated, or convoluted. Sometimes we write like this when we are trying to sound official or are trying to increase the word count. You have been told that your ideas and the organization are satisfactory, but the sentences need editing. You can start by using the first four steps of restructuring, known as the Paramedic Method (These steps are like a paramedic performing triage on a patient to isolate problems).

First steps, isolate a weak sentence.

- Circle the prepositions (of, in, about, for, onto, into).
- Draw a box around the "is" verb forms.
- Ask, "Where is the action?"
- Change the "action" into a simple verb.

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

Action in sentence; eliminate slow wind-ups

The next three steps complete the process:

2. Move the doer into the subject (Who is doing what to whom).
3. Eliminate any unnecessary descriptions.
4. Eliminate any redundancies.

Revision

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

The doer is in the subject

Example of Restructuring Method

Apply the paramedic method to the open sentences of a fairly good undergraduate psychology essay.

The history of western psychological thought has long been dominated by philosophical considerations as to the nature of man. These notions have dictated corresponding considerations of the nature of the child within society, the practices by which children were to be raised, and the purposes of studying the child.

The history
of Western psychological thought
has long *been dominated*
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These notions have dictated corresponding considerations
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of the child *within* society, the practices
by which children were *to be* raised, and the purposes *of* studying the child.

The action in the first sentence, "dominate," is in the passive voice. The action in the second

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sentence, "dictate," is in the active voice, but drowns in prepositional phrases.

Here is a rewrite:

> A single question has dominated Western psychological thought: What is the nature of man? This basic question leads to three others. What are children like? How should they be raised? Why should we study them? (p. 13).

Activity: Restructure Sentences

Use the Paramedic Method in the sentences below to practice making your sentences more concise. After you use the Paramedic Method on these sentences, check your results against the sentences at the bottom of this handout.

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.

Adapted from: Lanham, R.A. (2007) *The economics of attention: style and substance in the age of information*. Chicago, IL: U of C Press.