

## Topic: Sentence Structure

**Definition:** Syntax, diction, and grammar create sentence style. They work together to create effective writing.

**Explanation:** Good writing is clear and easily understood by readers. That means the following elements of writing must be used effectively:

- **Syntax** (sentence structure) should be as *concise* as possible.
  - **Diction** (word choice) should be as *precise* as possible.
  - **Grammar** (spelling and punctuation) should be *accurate*.
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### Examples of rules in style to remember

- Use *simple* present tense consistently when describing someone's written statement.
  - **Example:** "In another article she *is saying...*" or "she *said...*"
  - **Better:** "In another article she *says...*"
  - Note on verb tense: Research papers are typically written in past tense, and papers about literature and film are written in present tense.
- To maintain formal style, avoid contractions even though they are appropriate in conversation.
  - **Example:** "*I've* noticed that she's written a novel that many people *haven't* read."
  - **Better:** "I have noticed that she has written a novel that many people have not read."
- To maintain formal style, avoid writing in second person (you, your).
  - **Example:** "When *you* read Lincoln's words, *you* will understand his wisdom."
  - **Better:** "Reading Lincoln's words reveals his wisdom."
- Avoid qualifiers, such as, *pretty, little, rather, somewhat, very, kind of*. They sound uncertain and hesitant. Go easy on the use of *very*.
  - **Example:** "I am *pretty* certain that with *a little* effort, you can be *somewhat* sure of the *kind of* success that *most* people *usually* hope for."
  - **Better:** "With effort, she can reach the success others hope for."

- Go easy on superlatives.
  - **Example:** "They sell the cheapest and most delicious sandwich in the world."
  - **Better:** "They sell an inexpensive and delicious sandwich."
  
- Avoid the “-ly” in “lastly,” “firstly,” “secondly,” “overly,” “thusly,” etc.
  
- Refer to people with “who” or “whom” instead of “that.”
  - **Example:** “The man *that* you saw...”
  - **Better:** “The man whom you saw...”
  - **Example:** "The woman *that* wrote the novel...."
  - **Better:** "The woman who wrote the novel..."
  
- Avoid wordy phrases.
  - **Examples:** "Due to the fact that..." "The fact that they left..." "The truth of the matter is the play failed."
  - **Better:** Because..." "They left..." "The play failed."
  
- Avoid clichés (“self-completing phrases”).
  - **Examples:** "They fight like cats and dogs." "at the end of the day...," "at this point in time..."
  - **Better:** "They fight viciously." "in conclusion," "now"
  
- Avoid “hopefully.” It is almost always used incorrectly.
  
- Avoid "very unique, "most unique." Unique is, by definition, without comparison.
  
- State ideas in *positive* form.
  - **Examples:** "He will *not* be on time." "She does *not* pay attention to the directions."
  - **Better:** "He will be late." "She ignores the directions.”
  
- Avoid hyperbole (exaggeration): in formal style.
  - **Examples:** "Her speech was amazing." "He is the most outstanding speaker that we have ever invited."
  - **Better:** "Her speech was outstanding." "He is an excellent speaker."
  
- To have a single subject possess something, add an ‘s. Do this even when the word ends with an “s,” unless the word is an ancient name such as Moses or Zeus.

- **Correct examples:** "the dog's collar," "the class's activity," "Zeus' daughter," "Sally Jones's house."
- Whenever possible, avoid beginning a sentence with "*There is, That is, This is, or It is.*" These are weak subject/verb combinations, although they are correct and may be used judiciously.
  - **Example:** "There is one famous poet who wrote many sonnets in the sixteenth century."
  - **Better:** "One famous poet wrote many sonnets in the sixteenth century."

**EDITING:** For college students like you, remember to OMIT NEEDLESS WORDS. Review your text; cross through unnecessary words. Make every word tell something, and include concrete details to support your ideas.