Creating a uniform impression in your writing is important, especially at the sentence level, because readers need consistency to understand fully your ideas. Unnecessary shifts in point of view, tense, mood, and voice are distracting and may be confusing.

### 4a Use a consistent point of view.

**Point of view** is the standpoint from which you present information. If you select the *first-person* point of view, then your subject (*I, we*) is the speaker. If you select the *second person*, then your subject (*you*) is being spoken to. If you select the *third person*, then your subject (*he, she, it, they*) is being spoken about. Selecting the appropriate point of view and maintaining it are important for clarity.

Swimming instructors must be patient if they work with children. You must acknowledge that some children have never swum before, and you must acclimate children to the water. Instructors must be willing to work slowly and teach skills gradually.

[Elimination of shift from third person *(swimming instructors)* to second person *(you)*.]

### 4b Use verb tenses consistently.

Verb tenses signal chronological relationships among ideas. Unnecessary shifts in tense will confuse your readers.

After filling out a tentative class schedule, the student goes to see his or her advisor for approval. The advisor examined the schedule to see that requirements were met, and the student submits the signed computer form.

[The shifts from present tense *(goes)* to the past tense *(examined)* to the present tense *(submits)* make these sentences confusing. It is unclear whether they]
describe a typically repeated sequence, for which present tense would be appropriate, or a completed sequence, for which past tense would be suitable.

4c Use a consistent mood.

Three moods indicate how you view the actions or conditions you are describing in your sentences. The indicative mood is used to make statements of fact or opinion and ask questions. The imperative mood is used to express commands. The subjunctive mood is used to indicate doubt, conditional situations, statements contrary to fact, and wishes. In most writing, mood should remain consistent.

Betting on a horse race, Mr. McMillan explained, can be risky. Bet only money that you can afford to lose.

[Elimination of confusing shift from the indicative to the imperative. The first sentence described; the second advised.]

4d Use a consistent voice.

Active voice and passive voice create different kinds of emphasis in sentences. They should not be mixed in successive sentences that describe the same subject. (See Section 5, “Active and Passive Sentences.”)

The research assistants carefully compile the results of the questionnaire. First, they record the sex, age, race, and religion of each respondent. Then, profession, income, and education were recorded. Next, the assistants note responses to individual interpretive questions. [Elimination of shift into the passive voice.]

Exercise

Revise each set of sentences so that it constitutes a paragraph that is consistent in mood, point of view, voice, and tense.

1. Department of Energy spokespersons have suggested that Americans save energy in small but important ways. They suggest walking rather than driving, coordinating short trips, and driving at slower speeds. Turn off lights when you are not in a room. Wash only full loads. Lower your thermostats.
2. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service now restricts waterfowl hunting in most areas. Hunters can no longer use lead shot, since it poisons birds that are wounded but not killed. You must also restrict hunting to specified seasons, and hunters must limit the number of birds they kill. Penalties are also severe if you are caught violating these protective laws.

3. The National Forest Service has made timberlands available to private logging companies. New logging roads are built, destroying the forest floor. Trees are removed, and fish and wildlife are threatened. Irreparable damage is being done.

4. In the last few years, industrial pollution of water has declined. The Clean Water Act has given government agencies the right to assign stiff fines to plants and foundries in violation of existing pollution standards. These companies then had to correct the problem or risk further fines. Most industries adapted to these procedures.

5. Spokespeople for these agencies and services address important issues at arranged press conferences. Facts are given, and violators are identified. The American people are given information by these spokespeople to help them understand these national concerns.

ACTIVE AND PASSIVE SENTENCES

*Active* sentences emphasize the people or things responsible for actions and conditions. *Passive* sentences focus on people or things that are acted upon. What would be the object in an active sentence is used as the subject in a passive sentence, and a form of the verb *to be* is used with the main verb. As a result, passive sentences are always slightly longer than active sentences. Although most readers and writers prefer active sentences, you should select the sentence pattern that most effectively conveys your purpose.

*Active:* Congress approved a multibillion-dollar highway improvement bill. [Congress is emphasized.]
Passive: The multibillion-dollar highway improvement bill was approved by Congress. [The highway improvement bill is emphasized.]

5a Use Active Sentences Most of the Time

Use active sentences to indicate who takes responsibility for actions and events.

Dr. Taylor misdiagnosed and mistreated Jeremy’s respiratory problem.

Use active sentences to create emphasis.

A tornado in Texas destroyed property worth over $50 million.

Use active sentences for economy of expression.

Active: Lionel Richie sang the national anthem at the opening game of the season. [13 words]
Passive: The national anthem was sung by Lionel Richie at the opening game of the season. [15 words.]

5b Use Passive Sentences Selectively

Use passive sentences when the people who are responsible for actions are not known.

The superintendent’s window was broken sometime over the weekend.

Use passive sentences to emphasize the receiver of the action instead of those responsible.

Van Gogh’s Sunflowers was sold for $39.9 million.

Use passive sentences to emphasize actions that are more important than specific people who might be responsible.

Lasers are currently being used to treat medical problems as diverse as cancer, cataracts, and varicose veins.

Exercise

The following sentences are written in the passive voice. Rewrite those that would be more effective in the active voice.

1. Twenty people were killed when a car bomb exploded in Teheran.

2. Over $800 million had been deposited in personal Swiss bank accounts by Ferdinand Marcos, the ousted president of the Philippines.

3. Favorable trade conditions with China were supported by President Bush, despite controversy over the action.
4. Details of the nuclear accident at Chernobyl were withheld by Soviet officials for several days.

5. Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected to four terms as president.

6 MAINTAIN PARALLELISM AMONG SENTENCE ELEMENTS

*Parallelism* in a sentence requires that similar ideas be presented in similar form and that elements that are similar in function appear in similar grammatical form. Parallelism is an important principle of both grammar and style.

Grammatically, sentence elements linked by coordinating or correlative conjunctions should be similar in form: A clause should be followed by a clause, a phrase by a phrase, a noun by a noun, a verb by a verb of the same tense (see Section 4b), and so on.

Stylistically, parallelism creates balance and emphasis. It can, therefore, be used to create desired effects.

6a Maintain parallelism with coordinating conjunctions.

The evangelist ended the service with a hymn and calling on sinners to repent.

[Two prepositional phrases separated by a coordinating conjunction.]

6b Maintain parallelism with correlative conjunctions.

The owners of VCRs can either tape films from network broadcasts or rent films from video clubs.

[Correlative conjunctions followed by two verbs without auxiliaries.]

6c Repeat key words to clarify a parallel construction.

The commission has the power to investigate, conciliate, hold hearings, subpoena witnesses, issue cease-and-desist commands, order reinstatements, and direct hiring. [Parallelism emphasized by repeating to.]

**Exercise**

Revise the following sentences to eliminate faulty parallelism.

1. The narrator of *Invisible Man* was idealistic, intelligent, and tried to advance the cause of black people.
2. Holden Caufield, the main character of *Catcher in the Rye*, rejected hypocrisy in other people but was ignoring his own hypocrisy.

3. Thornton Wilder won Pulitzer Prizes not only for his plays *Our Town* and *The Skin of Our Teeth* but also he won for his novel *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*.

4. The stories of Flannery O’Connor allow readers to examine unusual characters, to explore psychological motivations, and consider macabre situations.

5. Willy Loman could neither understand his own problems nor could he accept the help of friends.

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### 7

#### WORD ORDER

**Inversions**

The common order of words in sentences can be briefly summarized as follows:

- Subjects precede verbs.
- Verbs precede objects or complements.
- Indirect objects precede direct objects.
- Adjectives precede the words they modify.
- Adverbs usually follow verbs they modify, but they precede adjectives or other adverbs.
- Prepositional phrases follow the words they modify.
- Independent clauses often precede subordinate clauses, although three variations are common: (1) clauses used as adjectives follow the words they modify, (2) clauses used as adverbs often precede the independent clause, and (3) clauses used as nouns occupy the subject or object positions.
- Closely related material is best kept as close together as possible.

Although these principles usually govern word order in sentences, any element of a sentence may be moved to create emphasis or interest. Variations of common word order, however, should produce neither awkward nor unidiomatic writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Common Order</strong></th>
<th><strong>Inverted Order</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The chancellor quickly and superficially responded to the interviewer’s questions.</td>
<td>Quickly and superficially, the chancellor responded to the interviewer’s questions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Emphatic Order

To achieve a desired effect in a sentence, writers can vary the location of key information. In a typical sentence, information placed near the beginning or end will be emphasized. Placing important information in an independent clause, instead of in a subordinate clause or phrase, strengthens emphasis.

Place important information first or last; do not bury it in the middle.

Unemphatic: On April 14, 1865, Abraham Lincoln was shot at Ford’s Theatre.
Emphatic: Abraham Lincoln was shot at Ford’s Theatre on April 14, 1865.
Emphatic: At Ford’s Theatre on April 14, 1865, Abraham Lincoln was shot.
Unemphatic: That novel, as far as I know, was my biggest commercial failure.
Emphatic: As far as I know, that novel was my biggest commercial failure.
Unemphatic: She is innocent, in my opinion.
Emphatic: In my opinion, she is innocent.

Place key information in independent clauses, not in subordinate clauses or phrases.

Unemphatic: He fell from the roof, thus breaking his neck.
Emphatic: He fell from the roof and broke his neck.

Exercise

Revise the following sentences to improve awkward or unemphatic word order.

1. The Supreme Court refused to consider the appeal, according to the late news last night.

2. The major evidence had been acquired during a search without a proper warrant, thus resulting in a dismissal of the case.
3. The evidence shows, the prosecuting attorney suggested, that Marshall Tireman is guilty of stealing industrial secrets.

4. The judge agreed to admit the videotape as evidence after the defense attorney made a special appeal.

5. The lawyers, even, had not expected such a large settlement in the case.

8e

POSITION MODIFIERS CAREFULLY

A *modifier* must clearly relate to a word in a sentence and explain, describe, define, or limit the word to which it relates. When a modifier is not positioned properly, the modification can be both awkward and confusing.

8a

**Long modifiers should not separate a subject and verb or a verb and its complement.**

Although modifiers may be placed between a subject and verb or between a verb and its complement, such positioning often makes a sentence difficult to read and interpret. Reposition the modifiers so that they do not break the flow of the sentence.

The renovation, because of fund-raising activities and because of competitive bidding by major contracting firms, was delayed.

The final bid was, even though it was thousands lower than the initial bids, still too high.

8b

**Avoid dangling modifiers.**

Opening modifiers that do not modify the subject of a sentence are said to dangle—hence, the name *dangling modifier*. To correct such an error, either revise the independent clause so that the introductory phrase can logically modify the subject, or revise the introductory phrase to make it a subordinate clause.

To qualify for the award, the committee requires that candidates have sixty class hours and a 3.50 GPA.

While waiting for my date in the lobby, two men in tuxedos got into a violent argument.
Avoid squinting modifiers.

A squinting modifier seems to modify the word before it and the word after it. Reposition the modifier to clarify the meaning, or use that to eliminate confusion.

The reporter said before noon she would finish the article.

Avoid split infinitives.

A split infinitive occurs when a modifier falls between to and the primary verb. Writers and readers disagree about whether split infinitives are grammatically or stylistically acceptable. To be on the safe side, reposition the modifier.

Darren began to furiously pack his luggage to try to make the nine o’clock flight.

Exercise

Eliminate ambiguities in the following sentences by changing the position of misleading modifiers.

1. At one time his parents said he had been an engineering student.
2. The stage set, based on original paintings and engravings from the eighteenth century, was breathtaking.
3. The car was in the garage that he wrecked.
4. Marc promised on his way home to pick me up.
5. They talked about going on a second honeymoon but never did.
6. My brother hung the painting in the hallway that I gave him for his birthday.
7. The short story was, because of its convoluted sentences and obscure imagery, almost incomprehensible.
8. There is a panel discussion tonight about drug addiction in the student lounge.
9. I thought of writing often but never did.
10. Reading the personal letters of famous people is a way to usefully and completely understand their reactions to public situations.

**COMPARISONS**

When you include *comparisons* in your sentences, consider your diction carefully to ensure that the ideas are clear and complete.

**9a Include all the words needed to make a comparison clear and complete.**

Flying to Chicago is more convenient than a train.
Levi’s are more popular than any jeans.

**9b Do not write an implied comparison.**

An implied comparison presents only part of the necessary context. The words *better, less, more,* and *worse* and words formed with the suffix *-er* signal the need for fully stated comparisons; use *than* and explain the comparison completely.

The house on Elm Street is better suited to our needs.
The orchestra’s performance of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony was much worse than expected.

**Exercise**

Revise the following sentences to make their comparisons logical and complete.

1. Once Carla began taking her medication regularly, she felt much better.
2. Having had a two-hour practice session, the students were no longer as confused.
3. Taking a taxi or riding the subway is certainly more convenient than a car.
4. Reeboks are more popular than any tennis shoe.
5. Revising a paper is much easier using a word processor.
10 CONCISENESS

Writing that is concise expresses ideas in as few words as possible; it is free of needless repetition and useless words. To make your writing concise, eliminate words, phrases, and clauses that do not further your purpose.

10a Do not repeat words needlessly.

The car we were looking for was a car for highway travel. [12 words reduced to 9.]

10b Do not repeat ideas that are already understood.

The frown on Todd’s face suggested that he was depressingly saddened by his interview. [14 words reduced to 10.]

10c Eliminate expletive constructions whenever possible.

Expletives, such as it is, there is, there are, here is, here are, and so on, add words to sentences without clarifying meaning.

There were three cars involved in the accident. [8 words reduced to 7.]

10d Write active sentences whenever possible. (See “Active and Passive Sentences,” Section 5.)

The prize-winning quilt was made by my Aunt Ruth. [9 words reduced to 7.]

10e Replace wordy phrases with brief expressions.

I am of the opinion that we should resubmit the insurance claim. [12 words reduced to 9.]

10f Replace forms of the verb to be with stronger verbs.

Counselors are responsible for completing the transcript portion of the applications. [11 words reduced to 9.]
When possible, replace nonrestrictive clauses with appositives.

Nonrestrictive clauses, clauses that provide useful or interesting but inessential information, can often be replaced with appositives, simple words or phrases that provide definitions for other words or phrases in a sentence. (See also Section 20h.) To save words and tighten and clarify your writing, consider using appositives in place of nonrestrictive clauses.

Sandra Day O’Connor, who was the first woman appointed to the Supreme Court, assumed her duties in August 1981.

[19 words reduced to 17 through substitution of an appositive for a nonrestrictive clause.]

Exercise

Make the following wordy sentences concise. Note the number of words saved through revision.

1. There should be two waiters to serve every ten people at the banquet, or there will be unnecessary delays occurring. [20 words reduced to ______.]
2. After the violent eruption of Nevada de Ruiz, relief agencies joined together in their efforts to help the unfortunate victims. [20 words reduced to ______.]
3. Wynton Marsalis, who plays both classical and jazz trumpet, scorns pop music. [12 words reduced to ______.]
4. At this point in time, we should prepare for spring floods, in the event that the Wabash River will crest as it did last year. [25 words reduced to ______.]
5. Finalists in the oratory competition will be evaluated by seven judges. [11 words reduced to ______.]
6. The original prototype for the Ford Mustang is on display at the Ford Museum in Detroit, Michigan. [17 words reduced to ______.]
7. A house made of brick is more costly but more maintenance free than a house made of wood. [18 words reduced to ______.]
8. Secret Service agents are responsible for protecting the current president, past presidents, and their families. [16 words reduced to ______.] 

9. In the humble opinion of this writer, Academy Awards present indications of popularity rather than quality. [16 words reduced to ______.] 

10. The real truth is that there is no money available to support and maintain the scholarship. [16 words reduced to ______.]

Exercise

Revise the following paragraph to make it concise. Try a number of strategies and notice how much the paragraph improves when you eliminate unnecessary words and bloated phrases.

Prior to beginning the search for gainful employment, gather together necessary and essential information and materials. Assemble a list of your experiences in educational institutions and in the work place and be sure to include the months or years involved in each situation. Prepare a résumé that includes facts and information about yourself, personally, and about yourself, academically and professionally. Make sure that there are clear sections in the résumé to cover each of these important and crucial topics. Proofread the final copy of the résumé in order to be aware of and correct any errors or mistakes. Then photocopy the résumé so that you still have at your disposal a copy of the résumé for future reference.

Writing Logical and Effective Sentences: Review Exercises

Revise the following sets of sentences to create logical and effective sentences. Identify the kinds of problems that require correction.

1. Human figures were elongated and were rendered in sallow yellows and greens by the Spanish artist El Greco.

2. Cubism is, with its emphasis on presenting the surfaces of all objects—both living and inanimate—in abstract geometric forms, alien to many people’s artistic sensibilities.
3. Although his work was not popular during his lifetime, van Gogh paints with bold colors and exaggerated forms. Modern collectors have valued his work since his death.

4. It is clear that there are only a few major pop art paintings of lasting aesthetic value. There are many others that are simply cultural curiosities.

5. When one sees the work of Rembrandt in a well-lighted gallery, you will be impressed by the rich texture of his work and the subtle variations in his gold and brown tones.

6. Neoclassical artists of the eighteenth century objected to the visual excesses of Baroque and Rococo art and imitate the symmetry and simple forms of Greek and Roman art.

7. Picasso’s versatility as a sculptor is evident in his ability to skillfully and ingeniously use “junk” in his welded works.

8. Da Vinci, Raphael, David, Rembrandt, van Gogh, Monet, and Picasso would surely be included if one was to make a list of major European painters.

9. New York’s Chrysler Building—with its use of zigzag forms, angular metal ornamentation, and strong vertical lines—is an exemplary model of Art Deco architecture.

10. Up until the middle of our current century, most prominent and important painters and sculptors from the United States of America trained and went to school in the countries of Europe.

11. Once, painters worked almost exclusively on wood panels or plaster walls. Then stretched canvas was used. Today, wood is being used again by many artists.

12. The Louvre in Paris houses more major works of art than any museum.
13. Prior to viewing a major exhibition, I would offer encouragement to inexperienced and untrained viewers to peruse or skim the catalogue prepared to accompany the exhibition.

14. To create what he described as an unconscious interpretation of reality, paint was splattered on canvas by Jackson Pollock.

15. Stressing the dreamlike, the unusual, and the bizarre, we found Surrealistic art unsettling.