

# *DukeWrites* Enrichment Suite

## Sentence structure, part two

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A similar way to improve conciseness is to cut out unnecessary words, particularly qualifiers. So here's a list of some examples: really, very, generally, actually, basically, somewhat, and extremely.

These words are not needed to express your meaning usually, as your meaning will come across fine without them. You can cut them out of your sentences for greater conciseness.

Here's an example: Studying the annual mud festival in light of music basically enabled me to extend Sterns' claim: architecture is an extremely crucial musical element.

In this example, the word basically doesn't add meaning, so it's easy to cut that out. In addition, the word crucial is a pretty strong word, it's got a strong meaning in and of itself. So adding extremely is unnecessary ~ it's really kind of redundant, and you can cut that out.

So our revision is: Studying the annual mud festival in light of music enabled me to extend Sterns' claim: architecture is a crucial musical element.

And as you can see, it's more direct and concise than the original sentence.

Another way to improve clarity in sentences is to have clear referents for pronouns, so it's clear what or who the pronoun is referring to. A pronoun replaces a noun that has already been used in a sentence or paragraph.

Two common kinds of pronouns are personal pronouns such as: I, you, she, they, and so on ~ and also demonstrative pronouns such as this and that. When a pronoun is used, it should be clear to the reader which noun it's replacing.

This noun is called the referent. And a reader should easily be able to tell what the pronoun's referent is. Problems arise when it's not clear.

Ok, so here's an example: The caterer prepared the main course and the dessert. It was delicious. In this situation, it's not clear what "it" refers to. It could be the main course or it could be the dessert. Or possibly it could be both. As readers, we can't tell.

Here are some possible revisions:

The caterer prepared the main course and a delicious dessert.

The caterer prepared the main course and the dessert. They were delicious.

And then if you want to say the same idea in one sentence, you could say something like: The caterer prepared the main course and the dessert, both of which were delicious.

Also in terms of pronouns and referents, a common problem occurs when a pronoun is used to refer to a general idea that has not been directly expressed. In this kind of situation, the reader can't understand what the pronoun refers to.

So to make it clear to the reader, the writer needs to be more specific ~ and clarify that idea.

Here's an example: Hybrid trucks have been an innovative step to reducing gas emissions. We can take it even further and have it produce close to no emissions.

This passage uses the word **it** twice to refer to two different things, so that's confusing. In the first instance, we can take **it** even further, "it" is vague and could refer to a number of different things, such as innovative technology or pollution reduction, none of which is directly expressed.

So the writer needs to express a specific idea instead of just relying on the word "it." In the second instance, we can have it produce close to no emissions, "it" refers to hybrid cars or hybrid engines and that's not expressed directly either.

So again, for clarity the writer should use a specific term like hybrid cars or engines instead of just using the word **it**. Making this change will make the idea clearer to the reader and it'll probably also make it clearer to the writer.

There're lots of ways to revise this passage, but here's one possible revision:

The current hybrid engine has been a technological innovation in reducing gas emissions in cars. We are capable, however, of designing a hybrid engine that has close to no emissions, which would have a much more significant impact on reducing pollution from vehicles.

As you can see, this revised passage is quite different from the original. Once the writer thought through the ideas and was able to be more specific about them, that greater specificity in thinking led him or her to revise the whole passage to make it more specific. That sometimes is what needs to be done in this kind of situation.

On the other hand, sometimes all that's needed to explain a pronoun is a summary word to accompany the pronoun. For example, instead of using the word "this" by itself, like "this can be used" or "this indicates," add a summary word, a noun which will improve the clarity, like: this model can be used, this idea arises from, this debate indicates.

Whatever word would be most appropriate in your particular context to summarize the general idea in the previous sentence or few sentences.

Now let's stop so you can take the quiz.