The "Paramedic Method"

Modified from Lanham, R (2007). <u>Revising Prose</u>, 5th ed

The Paramedic Method "**is emergency therapy, a first aid kit, a quick, self-teaching method for translating "Official Style" English into "plain" English**." Lanham provides clear steps to correct common writing problems. These are tools, not hard-and-fast rules, for writing clear, concise easier to read sentences. The goal is attention economy, obtained by removing the lard so that your reader spends their scarce time efficiently. Easily read, clear, and concise sentences are "user friendly" and thus persuasive. Making your reader translate, transform or interpret flabby sentences distracts them from your point.

Apply the paramedic method **after** composing your thoughts. Applying the method while writing requires more time than completing your rough draft first and then editing. Focus on single sentences. **Read your work aloud**!

Paramedic Editing Steps:

Example modified from http://owl.english.purdue.edu/media/pdf/20080306044511_727.pdf

"An evaluation of the effect of Class C fly ash and ground granulated blast furnace slag (GGBFS) on the properties of ternary mixtures for use in concrete pavements was undertaken and is presented in this paper." (36 words)

1. **Underline or highlight the prepositional phrases.** (e.g. phrases starting with of, to, in, for, on, with, as, by, at, from, per, about, back, except, following, into, beside, among, between, over, off, onto, under, through, around)

   Prepositions are glue, attaching nouns and pronouns to verbs or another pronoun, but because connecting is all they do, every proposition means more dead weight in the sentence.

   An evaluation of the effect of Class C fly ash and ground granulated blast furnace slag (GGBFS) on the properties of ternary mixtures for use in concrete pavements was undertaken and is presented in this paper.

2. **Circle the "is" and "to be" verb forms.** (e.g. is, are, has been, have been, was, were, will be, will have been, is being, are being, am)

   Variations of the passive verb "to be" reverse sentence action with the subject being acted on rather than the subject acting upon the object through an active verb. These encourage long strings of prepositional phrases, further pacifying and deactivating your writing. Microsoft Word identifies passive voice if you turn on this grammar checking feature, which you do by opening the Grammar and Spelling checker, clicking "Options", changing "Writing Style" to "Grammar and Style" and under "Settings" checking "Passive sentences."

   An evaluation of the effect of Class C fly ash and ground granulated blast furnace slag (GGBFS) on the properties of ternary mixtures for use in concrete pavements was undertaken and is presented in this paper.

3. **Put a box around nominalizations to identify the primary action.**

   Nominalizations are adjectives or verbs that have been changed into nouns, usually by adding "-ion".

   An evaluation of the effect of Class C fly ash and ground granulated blast furnace slag (GGBFS) on the properties of ternary mixtures for use in concrete pavements was undertaken and is presented in this paper.

4. **Otherwise, identify the sentence's central action - "Who's doing what whom?"**

   "He was physically aided in his exodus from the property via the actions of security personnel," really means, "Security kicked him out."

5. **Put this action into a simple (not compound) active verb and place the doer as the subject.**

    Subject – verb – object; Actor > Actor's action > Object of action. "Who is kicking whom?"

6. **Keep the base clause near the beginning of the sentence when possible**

7. **Start fast with no meaningless introductory phrases**

    Get to the point quickly by laying down your actor and their action as early as you can. "Blah blah is that" is the worst offender because deleting anything before "blah blah is that" doesn't change sentence meaning. Find by searching for "is that."

8. **Eliminate unnecessary words and phrases**

    "This paper reports the effect of Class C fly ash and ground granulated blast furnace slag (GGBFS) on the properties of ternary mixtures in concrete pavements." (26 words – 28% LF)

    The Lanham Lard Factor (LF) = (number of words removed) **/** (number of words in original sentence)

9. **Mark off sentence lengths with a "\" between sentences**

    If the sentences all look about the same length, or more specifically, only a few short ones, the passage will tend to drone and sound monotonous.

10. **Write out each sentence and mark off its basic rhythmic units with a "/."**

11. <mark>**Finally, read the passage aloud with emphasis and feeling**</mark>

    Reading your writing aloud identifies rough spots more effectively than silent reading. To see what your sentences actually state rather than what you intended them to state, start with the last sentence and work backwards toward the first sentence.

Five Characteristics of Academic and Bureaucratic Prose

Adapted from **Technical Editing for Scientists**, Bruce Jaffee http://jaffeerevises.com/index.htm

Academic writing is an inflated, static style that is less effective than a vigorous, **direct and lean (*D and L*)** style. Effectiveness is the ratio of what the reader gains vs. how hard the reader works to read the material

Four characteristics of academic / scholarly prose:

1. Nouns emphasized rather than verbs

    Academic: A fumigation occurred.
    D and L: The farmer fumigated his field.

2. Static verbs used rather than action verbs

    Academic: The field was fumigated by the farmer.
    D and L: The farmer fumigated his field.

3. Inflated and embellished words

    Academic: small faunal species, agricultural laborers, residential facilities
    D and L: rats, farm workers, house

4. Long and complex sentences

    Academic: In so far as manifestations of infestation by a small faunal species were evident in the residential facilities provided for the agricultural laborers, an unwillingness to occupy, utilize, or in any manner inhabit the facilities was therefore demonstrated by the aforementioned laborers.
    D and L: Because rats infested the house, the farm workers refused to enter.

Guidelines for Revising Scientific and Technical Prose

(modified from materials at The Center for Communication Practices at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Phil Druker's University of Idaho class and IY Hashimoto's Whitman College Writing Center)

Write in the active voice: (< 1/3 passive voice sentences)

Faulty: In each picture, the responses are shown.
Better: Each picture shows the responses.   LF = (7 – 5) / 7 = 28%

Avoid "be" verbs (am, is, are, was, were, been, being, be; < 1/3 of sentences contain "be" verbs).

Passive voice requires three things: (1) Be (is / are / was / were / been / be) + (2) verb + (3) past form (typically '-ed')

- Was shock<u>ed</u>
- Will be found
- Has been determin<u>ed</u>
- Is request<u>ed</u>

Use personal pronouns (I, we, our) when they are appropriate and clarify your text:

Faulty: It has been found experimentally that genetically altered strawberries are frost-resistant.
Better: In this experiment, we found that genetically altered strawberries are frost-resistant. LF = 8%

Write sentences that have "things doing something to things:

Faulty: It was decided that company policy be changed to allow employee selection of personal leave.
Better: The personnel committee decided to change company policy and allow employees to select their own personal leave.

Avoid nominalizing (changing verbs and adjectives into noun forms). Use verbs (action words) instead of nouns (things) or adjectives (descriptive words):

Nouns that end in:

-ance (tolerance, avoidance, importance, cognizance);
-ence (competence, coherence);
-ment (agreement, acknowledgement, assignment, accomplishment);
-tion (rejection, reflection, calculation, formulation, fornication, hospitalization);
-sion (admission, decision, secession, remission, emission, transmission);
-ity (conformity, deformity, capability, respectability);
-ness (happiness, homeliness, resourcefulness, blessedness);
-ing (the awarding, the recognizing, the discovering, his thinking);

Convert to a verb:

Creation > create	Running > run
Investigation > investigate	Editing > edit
Evaluation > evaluate	Movement > move
Reaction > react	Progressing > progress
Explanation > explain	Excludes > exclude
Addition > add	

Prepositional phrases often contain nominalized verbs that can be replaced:

. . . in acceptance of . . .	. . . for fulfillment . . .
. . . in avoidance of . . .	. . . of interest . . .
. . . in the knowledge of . . .	. . . of responsibility . . .
. . . in response to . . .	. . . for implementation . . .
. . . after consideration . . .	. . . under consideration . . .
. . . with this characterization	. . . with the exploration . .
. . . under this obligation . . .	

Faulty: We conducted an investigation of the accident.
Better: We investigated the accident.   LF = 43%

Faulty: Indirect predator control is the exclusion of predators through means such as…. (12 words)
Better: Indirect predator control excludes predators through means such as.... (9 words)

Faulty: The increasing electrical output requires the addition of extra modules. (10 words)
Better: The increasing electrical output requires adding extra modules. (8 words)

Avoid stringing nouns together, which creates what Peter Medawar described as "one huge noun-like monster in constant danger of falling apart."

Faulty: Early childhood thought disorders misdiagnosis often occurs as a result of unfamiliarity with recent research literature describing such conditions.
Better: Physicians unfamiliar with the literature on recent research often misdiagnose disordered thought in young children.

Avoid "there is/are/was/were" phrases. Many times you can delete "there is . . . + that *or* which . . "

Faulty: There are several advantages to genetic screening. (7 words)
Better: Genetic screening presents several advantages. (5 words)

Faulty: There has been a lot of research done to determine its causes. (12 words)
Better: Much research has been done to determine its causes. (9 words)

Faulty: There were many factors that affected this situation. (8 words)
Better: Many factors affected this situation. (5 words)

Avoid "it is/was" at the beginning of sentences:

Faulty: It is recommended that we complete more research. (8 words)
Better: We should complete more research. (5 words)

Faulty: It is our goal to serve the university community. (9 words)
Better: Our goal is to serve the university community. (8 words)

Maintain parallelism:

Faulty: The new regulations could cause problems for both the winners and for those who lose.
Better: The new regulations could cause problems for both winners and losers.

Emphasize important words by placing them either at the beginning or, for greatest impact, at the end:

Faulty: Rather than being a judge who pronounces the verdict, the teacher becomes an editor who guides students' writing with this method.
Better: With this method, the teacher becomes an editor who guides students' writing, rather than a judge who pronounces the verdict.

Place subordinate ideas in subordinate constructions:

Faulty: The value is 50 watts and is best determined by actual test.
Better: The value, which is best determined by actual test, is 50 watts.

Substitute descriptive verbs for vague verbs:

Faulty: He went to the island.
Better: He sailed to the island.

Substitute lean words for ponderous expressions:

Faulty: Align the tubes in such a manner that they all heat at the same time.
Better: Align the tubes so they all heat at the same time.

Substitute familiar for unfamiliar words:

Faulty: Everyone should be cognizant of the danger of explosion.
Better: Everyone should be aware of the danger of explosion.

Avoid overused expressions:

Faulty: Utilization of crystal clear goals and objectives will optimize our capacity to prioritize our concerns so that we will impact upon the major thrust of our company's future plans and prospects.
Better: If we clarify our goals and objectives, we will be better able to concentrate on what is most important for our company's future.

Cut unnecessary words:

Faulty: After a time interval of one to two minutes, the tone usually stops.
Better: After one to two minutes, the tone usually stops.

Faulty: Another activity that I would use my computer for is the wordprocessing software package.
Better: I would also use my computer for wordprocessing.   LF = 57%

Be precise:

Faulty: The cost must not be prohibitive.
Better: The cost should not exceed $100 per thousand gallons.

Avoid confusing pronouns:

Faulty: As the temperature falls, a compressive stress is exerted by the bezel on the glass because of its greater temperature coefficient.
Better: As the temperature falls, the bezel, because of its greater temperature coefficient, exerts a compressive stress on the glass.

Keep sentence elements in their proper order:

Faulty: The sample to be analyzed first must be put into solution.
Better: The sample to be analyzed must first be put into solution.

Avoid dangling modifiers:

Faulty: Walking up the hill, my umbrella was blown away by the wind.
Better: While I was walking up the hill, the wind blew away my umbrella.

Reduce strings of prepositional phrases:

Faulty: The October 31 deadline ***for*** submission *of* proposals ***in*** response ***to*** an invitation ***from*** the National Science Foundation also applies ***to*** unsolicited proposals.
Better: The deadline *for* both solicited and unsolicited proposals *to* the National Science Foundation is October 31.

Remove useless modifiers, filler words and phrases that do not add content: (e.g., really, actually, usually, deeply, very, quite, too, little, rather, thing, problem, aspect, situation, process, concerned with, there is, it is)

Faulty: As far as my professor is concerned, the problem of wordiness is the thing she'd really like to see us involved with actually eliminating.
Better: My professor wants us to focus on eliminating wordiness.

Interrogate each word

Does each word provide something important and unique to the sentence?

Make each sentence a consequence of the preceding sentence

Connect the first part of a sentence to the preceding sentence

Place the familiar before the new information in a sentence

Provide your reader familiar information for context before providing the unfamiliar information

Present one point or main idea per sentence

Multiple ideas or points may confuse readers, distracting them from your point

Combine sentences when both are short and closely related

Watch for sentences that:

- End with words that begin the next sentence
- Start with "This . ."
- Start with the same words as the previous sentence

<u>**Self-editing Resource Examples:**</u>
(Google finds many – try 'self editing strategies', 'self editing -fiction', 'self editing law')

CUNY School of Law – [Grammar & Style](#) - [editing](#)

Purdue OWL (On-line Writing Lab) http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/

Conciseness: Methods of Eliminating Wordiness
http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/owlprint/572/

Technical Editing for Scientists (Bruce Jaffee, UC Davis) http://jaffeerevises.com/index.htm

WSU GPWC (Graduate & Professional Writing Center) http://gpwc-wsu.wix.com/gpwc