

Writing Effectively

Effective Subjects and Verbs:

The choice of verbs and nouns can greatly influence the way we perceive the effectiveness of a sentence.

The intention of the company was to expand its workforce. A proposal was also made to diversify the backgrounds and abilities of employees.

VS

The company intended to expand its workforce. It also proposed to diversify the backgrounds and abilities of employees.

After the company made a decision to hire more disabled workers, its next step was the construction of wheelchair ramps and other facilities.

VS

After the company decided to hire more disabled workers, it next constructed wheelchair ramps and other facilities.

The company is now the leader among businesses in complying with the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act. Its officers make speeches on the act to business groups.

VS

The company now leads other businesses in complying with the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act. Its officers speak on the act to business groups.

Exercise:

Rewrite the following sentences so that their subjects and verbs identify their key actors and actions.

Example: *The issue of students making a competition over grades is a reason why their focus on learning may be lost.*

-> *Students who compete over grades may lose their focus on learning.*

1. The work of many heroes was crucial in helping to emancipate the slaves.
2. The contribution of Harriet Tubman, an escaped slave herself, included the guidance of hundreds of other slaves to freedom on the Underground Railroad.
3. A return to slavery was risked by Tubman or possibly death.
4. During the Civil War she was also a carrier of information from the South to the North.
5. After the war needy former slaves were helped by Tubman's raising of money for refugees.

Making arguments:

- Good argument is something that you can argue about, not something related to personal taste or general understanding.

Exercise: Identify the good and bad subjects for an argument; change the bad subjects into an argument.

1. Granting of athletic scholarships
2. Care of automobile tires
3. Censoring the Web sites of hate groups
4. History of the town center
5. Housing for the homeless
6. Billboards in urban residential areas or in rural areas.
7. Animal testing for cosmetic research
8. Cats versus dogs as pets
9. Ten steps in recycling wastepaper
10. Benefits of being a parent

Improving thesis statements:

- Look at the following thesis statements and paragraphs and identify the problems; if possible, change them so that they become more effective. The problems in these sentences are various – think about the logic of argumentation, about unimportant details or the phrasing of the sentences. You may have to add whole phrases or even additional sentences in your corrections.
1. The design of Perlička toothpaste tube had remained roughly the same for decades: it used the same font, coloring and letter size. It was better that it stopped using its mascot, a beaver, even though it was quite popular.
 2. There are many objections to current horror movies; therefore, they should be banned.
 3. The Great Depression was an important time in our nation’s history. Unemployment, urban decay, and a sense of hopelessness filled almost every part of human life. Yet, even in the midst of great misery, people needed to entertain themselves. People tried many different ways to relieve their tensions, from religious revivals, to Jazz music, to membership in the Communist party. But a whole lot of average people who were suffering in their daily lives often sought escapist entertainment in the form of movies. One such movie was Charlie Chaplin’s *Modern Times*. In *Modern Times*, “The Little Tramp” symbolizes the simple human values that are threatened by industrialism.
 4. The current use of emoticons is problematic: each device uses a different formatting of emoticons, thus displaying them differently across devices; more and more

emoticons are added to the existing “library”; sticking to the original few emoticons is then the best solution.

Identifying appeals:

- There are two basic appeals: rational and emotional. Identify the kind of argument in the following five excerpts.
1. Web surfing may contribute to the global tendency toward breadth rather than depth of knowledge. Using those most essential of skills—pointing and clicking—our brightest minds may now never encounter, much less read, the works of Plato, Shakespeare, and Darwin.
 2. Thus the data collected by these researchers indicate that a mandatory sentence for illegal possession of handguns may lead to reduction in handgun purchases.
 3. Most broadcasters worry that further government regulation of television programming could breed censorship—certainly, an undesirable outcome. Yet most broadcasters also accept that children’s television is a fair target for regulation.
 4. Anyone who cherishes life in all its diversity could not help being appalled by the mistreatment of laboratory animals. The so-called scientists who run the labs are misguided.
 5. Many experts in constitutional law have warned that the rule violates the right to free speech. Yet other experts have viewed the rule, however regretfully, as necessary for the good of the community as a whole.

Semicolons

- Connecting closely related ideas
- Stronger than a comma

1. Two independent clauses

Some people write with a word processor; others write with a pen or pencil.

2. Clauses connected by conjunctive adverbs or linking expressions

But however they choose to write, people are allowed to make their own decisions; as a result, many people swear by their writing methods.

3. Avoiding confusion in a list with commas

There are basically two ways to write: with a pen or pencil, which is inexpensive and easily accessible; or by computer and printer, which is more expensive but quick and neat.

4. Avoiding confusion between clauses

Some people write with a word processor, typewriter, or a computer; but others, for different reasons, choose to write with a pen or pencil.

Exercise: Decide whether the following sentences need a semicolon or not. Make corrections where necessary.

- a) Cows, though their bovine majesty has been on the wane in recent millenia, are still one of the great species of this planet; domesticated, yet proud, they ruminate silently as we humans pass tumultuously by.
- b) Because cows smell; they offend me.
- c) I like cows, however, I hate the way they smell.
- d) The cow is brown, it is also old.
- e) However people choose to write, they are allowed to make their own decisions, as a result, many people swear by their writing methods.
- f) Some institutions require a lot of financial support from parents some require only a little.
- g) There are basically two ways to write: with a pen or pencil, which is inexpensive and easily accessible, or by computer and printer, which is more expensive but quick and neat.

Exercise: Add linking phrases to make the following sentences work.

- a) His followers did not respond to his change of heart as he hoped they would; _____, a substantial amount still remained loyal to his group.
- b) _____, travel information is very important for route planning.
- c) We suspect they are trying to hide something, _____ the need for an independent inquiry.
- d) He _____ became the chairman of the party.
- e) There is a serious problem in the district, _____ unemployment
- f) This poses a threat to agriculture and the food chains, and _____ to human health.
- g) Some of the studies show positive results, _____ others do not.
- h) There is little chance that we will succeed in changing the law. _____, it is important that we try.