Writing Effectively; Academic English and Computer Science I

Effective Subjects and Verbs:
- *The choice of verbs and nouns can greatly influence the way we perceive the effectiveness of a sentence.*
- *Do not mistaken academic language for needless complexity!*

Passive Voice vs. Active Voice
- *While the passive voice helps to focus on the object and not the "doer" of the verb, active voice is sometimes the better solution, as it creates simpler and direct sentences.*

Padding and overuse of words
- *Be efficient with your use of words. Avoid the use of empty phrases such as "due to the fact that" or "of course." Some of the most empty phrases and their more effective substitutions are the following:*

Empty	Substitute
at all times	always
at the present time	now
at this point in time	now
in today's society	now
in the nature of	like
for the purpose of	for
in order to	to
until such time as	until
for the reason that	because
due to/because of the fact that	because
despite the fact that	although
in the event that	if
by means of	by
in the final analysis	finally

Be direct
- *Avoid using unnecessary words (for example, the verbs "performed" or "utilized" are among these overused words/phrases in academic writing).*

Wordy (87 words)
The highly pressured nature of critical-care nursing is due to the fact that the patients have life-threatening illnesses. Critical-care nurses must have possession of steady nerves to care for patients who are critically ill and very sick. The nurses must also have possession of interpersonal skills. It is considered by most health-care professionals that these nurses are essential if there is to be improvement of patients who are now in a critical care from that status to the status of intermediate care.

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Concise (37 words)

Critical-care nursing is highly pressured because the patients have life-threatening illnesses. Critical-care nurses must possess steady nerves and interpersonal and medical skills. Most health-care professionals consider these nurses essential if patients are to improve to intermediate care.

Exercise 1) Effective Subjects and Verbs:

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.

Exercise 2) Empty Words and Phrases:

Revise the following sentences to achieve conciseness by focusing on subjects and verbs and by cutting or reducing empty words and phrases.

Example:
I made college my destination because of many factors, but most of all because of the fact that I want a career in medicine. ->
*I **came** to college **mainly because** I want a career in medicine.*

1) *Gerrymandering* refers to a situation in which the lines of a voting district are redrawn so that a particular party or ethnic group has benefits.

2) The name is a reference to the fact that Elbridge Gerry, the governor of Massachusetts in 1812, redrew voting districts in Essex County.

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3) On the map one new district was seen to resemble something in the nature of a salamander.

4) Upon seeing the map, a man who was for all intents and purposes a critic of Governor Gerry's administration cried out, "Gerrymander!"

5) At the present time, changes may be made in the character of a district's voting pattern by a political group by gerrymandering to achieve the exclusion of rival groups' supporters.

Exercise 3) Indirect Sentences Additional Practice:
The following sentences are too indirect. Rewrite them so that you avoid unnecessary words. The problematic parts are highlighted in the first three sentences.

Example (notice the second sentence is clearer and more direct, because the subject and the verb are next to each other):
*The **reason** why most of the country shifts to daylight savings time **is** that winter days are much shorter than summer days. ->*
*Most of the **country shifts** to daylight savings time because winter days are much shorter than summer days.*

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

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

3) 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.

4) Lincoln's claim that the Civil War was God's punishment of both North and South for slavery appears in the last part of the speech.

5) The Federalists' argument in regard to the destabilization of government by popular democracy was based on their belief in the tendency of factions to further their self-interest at the expense of the common good.

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6) The fear of the CIA was that a recommendation from the president to Congress would be for a reduction in its budget.

Exercise 4) Revising Computer Science Writing:

Revise the following sentences found in comp-sci writing.

Example:
*Tree structures **can be utilized** for dynamic **storage** of terms.* ->
-> Terms can be stored in dynamic tree structures.

1) Local packet transmission was performed as a way to test error rates.

2) Duplication of data leads to reduction in network traffic.

3) The status of the system is such that a number of components are now able to be operated.

4) In respect to the relative costs, the features of memory mean that with regard to systems today disk has greater associated expense for the elapsed time requirements of tasks involving access to stored data.

Semicolons – additional practice

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.

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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.

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