

PARAMEDIC PROOFREADING

The Paramedic Method is a simple, step-by-step way to proofread. It overcomes our tendencies to “see what we meant to say” when we proofread our own work. The approach was developed by Professor Richard Lanham and is widely used in colleges and professional organizations.

Proofreading is an important part of the writing process. It is the step in the writing process which focuses on final improvements before a work is released to readers. The Paramedic Method focuses attention on sentence structure, including the order of words and phrases and the elimination of unnecessary words. In the Paramedic Method, words or phrases may be modified, reordered or deleted. It is best used on a completed essay draft to improve clarity and impact. Key steps are listed below.

1. CIRCLE the prepositions.

Prepositions play a vital role in showing the relationship between nouns and pronouns and other words in sentences, but using too many of them can distract from meaning. Here is a common list of prepositions:

Common Prepositions / Prepositional Phrases

about	among	at	along	around
above	across	after	against	by
beyond	below	beneath	behind	concerning
down	during	except	for	from
in	inside	into	like	near
of	on	off	over	past
since	through	to	till	toward
up	under	with	<i>*See “Prepositions” handout for a more complete list.</i>	

Review your own essay, paying attention to all prepositions. Circle and identify any which are unnecessary to the meaning of the sentence. Delete the unnecessary prepositions; in some cases, this will require a slight restructuring of the sentence. Consider the difference in length and clarity between the original and the revised version below.

Original Sentence:

It is essential to note that the author tends to use the literary device of symbolism both to describe the personality of the protagonist and when he wants to make references to her family. **(34 words)**

Revised Sentence:

The author frequently uses symbolism both to describe the protagonist’s personality and to describe her family. **(16 words)**

2. DRAW a box around “to be” verb forms (am, is, are, was, were, be, been, being).

These verb forms are certainly necessary to the English language, but they should not be overused. Your sentences will be more effective if you use stronger, more direct verbs. The “to be” form is also used in passive voice. While passive voice is sometimes acceptable, active voice is more often preferred. Avoid use of “to be” plus strings of prepositional phrases. Consider eliminating these expressions to improve sentence clarity.

3. ASK, “Where’s the action?”

Avoid *nominalization* in sentences, the use of nouns which describe actions; instead, use simple, direct (not compound) verbs to describe actions. This makes sentences more concise and follows the more typical “actor/action/object” sentence format. For example, saying “managers direct the team” is clearer and more direct than saying “the team is under the direction of the manager.”

4. MOVE the actor into the subject.

The actor is the person or thing doing the action identified by the sentence verb. By placing the actor in the subject position, we can delete unnecessary prepositions and help the reader get the meaning faster. Since readers typically expect to see the subject first, placing the actor in the subject position also facilitates reader understanding.

Original Sentence:

The manifestation of arthritis symptoms is more likely to be evident in our older citizens. (15 words)

Revised Sentence:

Our older citizens are more likely to suffer from arthritis. (10 words)

5. START fast, and eliminate any unnecessary slow “wind-ups.”

Clear and direct is better than slow and complicated. It is typically better to put the “actor” and the “action” up front. Remember, phrases and clauses are moveable parts of sentences. Often, sentences can be improved by reversing the order of clauses to emphasize the most significant ideas.

Original Sentence:

Since the grant requires participant education, presentations on organic gardening will prepare participants with the necessary skills; they will also ensure enthusiasm for the projects. (25 words)

Revised Sentence:

Organic gardening workshops will be exciting and educational for participants and help us meet grant requirements. (16 words)

6. ELIMINATE redundancies.

Avoid unnecessary repetition of words or ideas. While use of well-selected synonyms or phrases which help to reinforce a point is encouraged, repetition which does not serve a purpose is discouraged.

7. READ the paper aloud.

Ensure that the flow of words is smooth, logical and easy to follow. Vary the length of sentences to prevent monotony, and use repetition of words and ideas *carefully* to reinforce key points.