

Avoid Double Trouble



Two common problems that make technical literature hard to read are 1) changing a forceful verb to a noun and having to use a drab verb, and 2) using the passive rather than the active voice when the performer is expressed. Readability suffers doubly when both problems appear together.

The following examples demonstrate such double trouble and how the problem can be partially and completely corrected. The original sentences contain 67% to 150% more words than the revised versions.

Example I.

As written (6 words): Barnyardgrass control was provided by EPTC.

Improved (5 words): Barnyardgrass was controlled by EPTC.

(Noun "control" changed to verb "controlled", and drab verb "provided" eliminated, but still uses passive voice.)

Improved (4 words): EPTC provided barnyardgrass control.

(Active voice, but still uses drab verb "provided", and "control" is still used as a noun.)

Best (3 words): EPTC controlled barnyardgrass.

(Both problems eliminated.)

Example II.

As written (10 words): Significant inhibition of alfalfa was produced by the toxic fraction.

Improved (8 words): Alfalfa was inhibited significantly by the toxic fraction.

(Noun "inhibition" changed to verb "inhibited" and drab verb "produced" eliminated, but still uses passive voice.)

Improved (8 words): The toxic fraction produced significant inhibition of alfalfa.

(Active voice, but still uses drab verb "produced", and verb "inhibit" still used as noun "inhibition".)

Best (6 words): The toxic fraction inhibited alfalfa significantly.

(Both problems eliminated.)

Example III.

As written (10 words): A reduction in yield was caused by competition from velvetleaf.

Improved (7 words): Yield was reduced by competition from velvetleaf.

(Noun "reduction" changed to verb "reduced" and drab verb "caused" eliminated, but still uses passive voice.)

Improved (8 words): Competition from velvetleaf caused a reduction in yield.

(Active voice, but still uses drab verb "caused", and verb "reduce" still uses as noun "reduction".)

Best (5 words): Competition from velvetleaf reduced yield.

or (4 words): Velvetleaf competition reduced yield.

(Both problems eliminated.)

Remember: Passive voice and noun from verb
Can give an author trouble;
But when one sentence has them both,
The difficulties double.

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