

Developing and Revising Business Prose: Managing your Writing Brand

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Course: BUS 302
Title: *The Gateway Experience* (3 units)

“When we see a natural style we are quite amazed and delighted, because we expected to see an author, but instead find a man.”

--Blaise Pascal (1623-1662)

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to help students improve their writing ability. Beyond writing composition lies the task of writing prose. This document discusses the process of revisiting prose—the essence of re-writing. Students should use the *paragraph* as the unit of analysis when writing, and use the *sentence* as the unit of analysis when rewriting.

What is Prose?

Prose engages the reader; the writer is writing for the reader. The writer understands the richness of semantics and the impact of balance. Conceptually, the writer places words together with purpose and focus. Logistically, the writer places words together with rhythm, tempo, and contrast. Using the techniques of prose, sentences focus on the action, strive to maintain attention, give strength to voice, and balance contrasting ideas effectively. The task of shortening sentences and improving clarity is extraordinarily difficult—worse, there are no mainstream technology tools to assist the harried writer.

From Argument to Expression

This document is unique because it uses the language of a business major, not the language of an English major. Specifically, this document structures the process of revision by using a few key concepts from each of the four major lower-division core course topics—accounting, economics, law, and statistics. In these courses, students learn to make arguments using established theory and practice from each subject domain. In this document, students learn to take the same rigor and relevance of those arguments and transfer them into clear, impactful expression.

This document is organized into four general themes: The Language of the Business Lower-Division Core, Developing Prose, Revising Prose, and Examples of Prose and Applicable Revisions. Each general themes begins on a new page.

The “Language” of the Business Lower-division Core

<i>Core Course</i>	<i>Key Question(s)</i>	<i>Language Concept</i>	<i>Key Question(s)</i>
<i>Business Accounting</i>	Are resources entrusted to you allocated to all activities proportionately? Has the cost burden been measured and managed appropriately?	<i>Sentence Accounting</i>	Are the words in the sentence used in the best way possible? Has message waste and message noise been minimized?
<i>Business Economics</i>	Do I understand which decisions are the most important? Is the utility function known and maximized?	<i>Sentence Economics</i>	Do I know what counts as value and impact for the reader? Has the writer used the reader’s time most productively?
<i>Business Law</i>	What are the relevant statutes in scope? What is the precedence in the area?	<i>Sentence Law</i>	What are the rules and patterns governing sentence structure and prose? Are the rules consistently interpreted by all stakeholders?
<i>Business Statistics</i>	Have we controlled for randomness? Have we controlled for other possible phenomenon?	<i>Sentence Statistics</i>	Is the sentence precise, logical, and clear? Has ambiguity been removed from the sentence?

Developing Prose

Professor Virginia Tufte offers a number of examples of quality prose. The material for this section was excerpted and adapted from the following book:

Tufte, V. (2006), *Artful Sentences*, Graphics Press, Connecticut.

In this book, Professor Tufte provides examples from Literature. We will use the structure and definitions of that book as our organization device, but derive the content from either student writing or my (Wayne Smith) own writing. In this section, items not in quotes are drawn from Tufte. Items in quotes with a citation were written by my students. Items in quotes without a citation were written by me.

Each example below demonstrates a particular prose technique. Where needed, italics have been added to link one or more words in the sentence or sentences with the theme of each category.

1. Short Sentences

Professional writers frequently use for particular effects short sentences, their very length making effective juxtaposition with longer more complicated sentences.

“We recommend settling with Mrs. Kim.”
--2012, Spring, BUS 302, Team 5

2. Noun Phrases

Noun phrases are structures most often headed by a noun, but they may be headed by a pronoun, or by any other word or structure that stands in for a noun. Because there are more nouns than any other part of speech in the English vocabulary, noun phrases offer a tremendous stock of meaning. Not only does the noun phrase occupy the important subject position; additional noun phrases usually appear as part of the verb phrase that fills the predicate position.

3. Verb Phrases

Most verbs are action words. A few assert a state of being rather than an action. The very essence of a sentence, something *said* about a subject, often depends on verbs; it is the verb phrase that does much of the *saying*.

4. Adjectives and Adverbs

Adjectives and adverbs are “coloring words,” but this is not to deny their importance or to suggest that their roles are somehow inferior to those of nouns and verbs. Often the noun and the verb simply state the known or given

information, and it is the adjective or adverb the carries the news of the sentence. Adjectives and adverbs offer to writers extraordinary resources and subtleties.

5. Prepositions

Although most prepositions are small words, often thought of as relatively empty of meaning, they are vital to all kinds of prose. Harold Whitehall's (1951, *Structural Essentials of English*, Harcourt Brace) division of prepositions into five groups distinguishes several possible relations: location, direction, association, and time.

6. Conjunctions and Coordination

The common conjunctions—for, and, nor, but, or, yet, and so [informally referred to as “fanboys”]—are structural words that *conjoin* the elements of a coordinate structure. Their work is to connect similar units—words, phrases, clauses, or even sentences.

7. Dependent Clauses

Judiciously and imaginatively constructed, dependent clauses serve well in formal discourse, other nonfiction, and narrative. Dependent clauses are widely used in both nonfiction and fiction.

8. Sentence Openers and Inversion

Writers create “sentence perspective” when trying to decide how to begin the next sentence on the page or screen. The opening words of a sentence glance both backward and forward, establishing a relationship with what precedes and then bringing into view the new information.

Perhaps two-thirds of English sentences open with the subject, and then move from what is known to what is unknown. About one-fourth of our sentences open with an adverbial modifier like the prepositional phrase above in “*After he ate*, he left the house,” or some other adverbial opener, such as an adverbial dependent clause.

9. Free Modifiers: Branching Sentences

Words flow in clustered, continuous, patterned segments. In speech, segments are indicated by pitch, stress, juncture. In writing, they are indicated by arrangement of words in phrase patterns and by punctuation. Rather than focusing on one word at a time, we read by making sense of segmented patterns. Segmentation is a basic resource of English syntax, often achieved by *nonrestrictive, or free, modifiers*.

A free modifier that appears *before* a base clause is referred to as a “left-branching” sentence; a free modifier that appears *after* a base clause is referred to as a “right-branching” sentence. The distinguishing feature of the right-branching, or cumulative, sentence is the accumulation of material after the base clause is grammatically complete.

10. The Appositive

[The appositive] is one of the most versatile syntactic structures, useful in almost every kind of writing to rename or add information, details, opinion, drama, texture in a natural and easy way. The most common appositive is a noun phrase that closely follows another noun phrase and renames it.

11. Interrogative, Imperative, Exclamatory

An interrogative (question) calls for an answer, an imperative calls for an action, an exclamation calls for experiencing an emotion. Interrogatives, imperatives, and exclamations can set an expressive tone, accent a point, serve as summary or transition, create a structure for a paragraph, and function in parallel to structure several paragraphs.

12. Parallelism

Parallelism is saying like things in like ways. It is accomplished by repetition of words and syntactic structures in planned symmetrical arrangements and, if not overdone, has a place in day-to-day writing.

“Hopefully, I will come to find what things I like learning about, what things I would prefer not to spend my time on, and what things I absolutely need to have in my daily life.”

--2012, Fall, UNIV 100, Stephanie Miller

13. Cohesion

Cohesion in any kind of prose that comes from making clear the relationship of one *idea* to another; natural-seeming movement results from integrity of meaning and the showing of relationships. These are realized on the page through the structures of presentation, namely syntax.

14. Syntactic Symbolism

Syntax is by nature more limited than meaning, for it must carry many different meanings. A noun and a transitive verb and an object, for example, form a specific, single structure, of which there are millions of examples, all meaning different things. But now and then a skilled writer may use the same structure in a way that mimics the particular actions the sentence describes.

Revising Prose

Professor Richard Lanham offers a straight-forward technique for revising prose. The material for this section was excerpted from the following book:

Lanham, R. (2006), *The Longman Guide to Revising Prose*, Pearson/Longman, New York.

He refers to his process of revising prose as the “paramedic technique,” because a writer “revives” her or his writing by using the following principles in order.

1. Circle the prepositions.
2. Circle the “is” forms.
3. Find the action.
4. Put this action in a simple (not compound) active verb.
5. Start fast—no slow windups.
6. Read the passage aloud with emphasis and feeling.
7. Write out each sentence on a blank screen or sheet of paper and mark off its basic rhythmic units with a “/”.
8. Mark off each sentence with a “/”.

We will *begin* with these general principles, but we will not *end* with them.

Examples of Prose and Applicable Revisions

The following examples are excerpted from the writing of my student-professionals in BUS 302 (“The Gateway Experience”). The writing improvement that I see in my students within the course of a single semester is extraordinary. I learn something from my talented and motivated students each day.

Our overall goal in this document is to transfer knowledge and learning from one set of (recent) students to another set of (current) students. The specific goal of using these examples is to rewrite the sentence to address one or more of the following four questions—Is waste minimized? Have I maximized the reader’s time productively? Are all of the composition rules followed consistently? Has overall clarity been improved?

1.

Original:

The increasing of global partnerships, establishing “store front” facilities, implementing online programs and introducing three interdisciplinary majors will all hope to be realized by the year 2012.

Issue(s):

The present participle verb inflection (“-ing” ending) is used primarily when the verb is the subject of the sentence. Also, the present participle is used with the “to be” suite of verbs. A present participle used as a noun is called a gerund, but repetitive gerunds as part of a list can be disorienting.

Additionally, the realization of the goals is arguably more important than the precise details (or a long list of details). Besides, the reader might forget the “realization” concept after reading a (potentially long) list.

Potential Revision(s):

The organization hopes to realize the following by the year 2012: increase global partnerships, establish “store front” facilities, implement online programs, and introduce three interdisciplinary majors.

2.

Original:

Approximately four months into the contract, from the audited statement from Giant, Goliath had only realized \$10,462,500.

Issue(s):

“From” is not a coordinating conjunction.

“...from the audited statement from Giant” is a subordinate clause between an opening subordinate clause and an ending independent clause. The clause is question is likely a parenthetical clause.

Potential Revision(s):

Approximately four months into the contract, the audited statement from Giant indicates that Goliath had only realized \$10,462,500.

Approximately four months into the contract, Goliath had only realized \$10,462,500 (Giant audited statement).

3.

Original:

In addition to key changes that were mentioned above, there were very little discretionary findings to support faculty research, travel to professional meetings, and participate in other professional development activities.

Issue(s):

The word “that” (called a “complementizer”) can be deleted because the word doesn’t refer to a subject in the sentence; therefore the word “were” is also superfluous. Since the key changes were mentioned previously, the definite article “the” is appropriate. It is not clear that the word “very” is informative. Use the word “few” when the number of items can be counted (in general, “findings” from a study are countable because they can be enumerated).

Potential Revision(s):

In addition to the key changes mentioned above, there were few discretionary findings to support faculty research, travel to professional meetings, and participate in other professional development activities.

4.

Original:

These donations are made because they have a firm belief that the school will use them wisely, if they don’t then the sponsors might get discouraged and not want to be part of that institution because not only is the school not using the funds correctly but their business is getting bad publicity.

Issue(s):

There is too much going on in this sentence, or all of the parts don't agree (called a "mixed construction"). 1), the relative plural pronoun "they" shifts the context in a subtle, yet critical way, 2), a school (or entity) is an "it" (not a "they"), 3), "get" (along with "go") is too vague of a term, and the sentence contains too many negations (which make it hard for a reader to follow the logic without re-reading).

If a paragraph should generally be about one central idea (a thesis identified with a topic sentence), than a sentence should generally be about one and only one sub-idea. This is especially true in technical writing, including business communication. Sometimes, two or more sentences are needed to improve clarity.

Potential Revision(s):

These donations are made because the donors have a firm belief that the school will use them wisely. If the school doesn't use them wisely, then the sponsors might get discouraged and not want to be part of that institution. In addition to the school using the funds incorrectly, the donors' businesses may receive bad publicity.

5.

Original:

Therefore class sizes increased; faculty salaries decreased, being less than the national average; faculty members were unable to follow up the developments related to their fields.

Issue(s):

Remember that your job is assist the reader. Write in parallel contexts and use the correct punctuation.

Potential Revision(s):

Therefore, class sizes increased and faculty salaries decreased. The salaries decreased below to the point of being less than the national average. Consequently, faculty members were unable to follow the developments related to their fields.

6.

Original:

One of the Strategic that can implement is by using SWOT strategy analysis, by implement that they can see the Strength, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats of the University.

Issue(s):

This sentence is unreadable and makes no sense.

Potential Revision(s):

The University can implement a Strength, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis to assist with strategy.

7.

Original:

Another way to further develop student's skill and knowledge is having a tutoring center where students have free access to whenever they need help creates a welcoming atmosphere for many students.

Issue(s):

This sentence contains numerous errors. This is an example of writing without rewriting. Professionals, managers, and executives incorporate due diligence is everything they do, including the articulation of a single idea in a single sentence.

Potential Revision(s):

Another way to further develop skills and knowledge in students is to have a tutoring center where students have free access to materials whenever they need help. Such a tutoring center creates a welcoming atmosphere for many students.

8.

Original:

Ethical issues need to be considered at all times, it rotates around relationships among company and its stakeholders.

Issue(s):

The comma should likely be a period or a semi-colon. The word "it" kills the meaning of the second clause, "rotates around relationships" is either misleading or incorrect, and the word "among" is the wrong word anyway.

Potential Revision(s):

Ethical issues need to be considered at all times. Ethical issues are embedded in the relationships within a company and its stakeholders.

Ethical issues need to be considered at all times. Ethical issues are embedded in the relationships between a company and its stakeholders, and also between companies.

9.

Original:

Having created some alliances with international schools, this will be able to create one or more international partnership MBA programs.

Issue(s):

“This” is a demonstrative pronoun. While “this” can function as a noun equivalent, make sure the use of the word is absolutely clear (which it won’t be if it appears at the end of a sentence). Remember to always put something after the word “this” regardless of where it appears in a sentence. Besides, it’s clearer. Or rewrite the sentence.

Potential Revision(s):

Creating some alliances with international schools will enable the university to create one or more international partnership MBA programs.

10.

Original:

MBA students with their increased knowledge in the business world will raise the rate of success of regional businesses that hire students from NWSU's MBA programs.

Issue(s):

A prepositional clause that uniquely identifies a specific set of MBA students or limits the meaning of a subject is called a restrictive clause, and a restrictive clause *must not* be enclosed in a set of commas. A prepositional clause that adds descriptive information about MBA students and does not limit meaning of a subject is called a non-restrictive clause, and a non-restrictive clause *must* be enclosed in a set of commas. The reason is that this use is clearer in many contexts.

Potential Revision(s):

MBA students, with their increased knowledge in the business world, will raise the rate of success of regional businesses that hire students from NWSU's MBA programs.

11.

Original:

Under the contract, it is implemented that Giant Theatres Inc., has 475 theatres across the United States only.

Issue(s):

Many pronouns, but especially “it” can be vague.

Potential Revision(s):

According to the contract, Giant Theatres Inc. has 475 theatres across the United States.

According to the contract, Giant Theatres Inc. has 475 theatres across the United States. Additionally, Giant Theatres has theatres only in the United States.

12.

Original:

An international alliance would also diversify the student pool the university has access to.

Issue(s):

In formal writing, we try to end each sentence with noun or in some cases a verb. These are called “concept” words—all other words are called “function” words, including the word “to.” Readers are expecting something after the word “to,” so it’s awkward if the writer doesn’t provide that “something.”

Potential Revision(s):

An international alliance would also diversify the student pool within the university’s service area.

An international alliance would also diversify the student pool.

13.

Original:

For example, strategic goal one globalize student study through a variety of international affiliations, increase in percentage of international programs on both undergraduate and graduate level.

Issue(s):

Make sure all of the “connective tissue” words are present in the sentence.

Potential Revision(s):

For example, the first strategic goal is to globalize student study through a variety of international affiliations, and increase the percentage of students enrolled in international programs at both undergraduate and graduate level.

14.

Original:

It does not mention in the case, the goals set by the University to what kind of profit it wants to achieve for the stakeholders.

Issue(s):

The clauses can be grammatical (that is, correct), but nonsensical. This is an error in revision possibly due to not allocating enough time for review.

Potential Revision(s):

The University did not indicate to our firm the level of profit needed for the stakeholders.

15.

Original:

According to a study of Michelle Agle and Wood suggests that stakeholder’s and their interests be evaluated on three different dimensions: legitimacy, power, and urgency.

Issue(s):

Don’t confuse the use of the apostrophe for the possessive and for the genitive (plural). Also, this sentence is missing one or more words.

Potential Revision(s):

A study conducted by Michelle Agle and Wood suggests that stakeholder’s interests be evaluated on three different dimensions: legitimacy, power, and urgency.

16.

Original:

Letting the faculty who felt that the system that had damaged them was working just fine now develop the new model was not the best idea.

Issue(s):

There is more than one idea in this sentence, and moreover, the ideas are clouded by the opaque placement of the clauses.

Potential Revision(s):

Some faculty felt that the existing system had damaged them. It was not the best idea to let those faculty develop the new model.

17.

Original:

But the faculty felt that the traditional model of education was working and just fine, the committee felt it to be important for the school to compete with “store front” operations.

Issue(s):

Just the rearrangement of a few words can make all the difference in the world with respect to improved clarity.

Potential Revision(s):

The faculty felt that the traditional model of education was working well, but the committee felt it would be vital for the School to compete with “store front” operations.

18.

Original:

Becoming more popular because of the increase in international students is a good example of thinking in time.

Issue(s):

Decide what part (actor or action) is the most important part of the sentence.

Potential Revision(s):

A good example of thinking in time is becoming successful due to an increase in international students.

19.

Original:

If the screening companies were restricted geographically, they might have never signed an agreement with Goliath, so the missing terms can then in turn be reversed and Giant can file a law suite against Goliath stating that if it were the case, they would have never signed the agreement in the first place.

Issue(s):

This sentence is long, verbose, redundant, and circular.

Potential Revision(s):

If the screening companies were restricted geographically, they might have never have signed an agreement with Goliath. Therefore, the missing terms could be reversed and Giant could file a lawsuit against Goliath.

20.

Original:

Using our statistical analysis, we will show Sierra what funds their company is liable for and what Mr. Washington should be able to recover.

Issue(s):

This sentences needs a couple of different words and one small, but important, punctuation change.

Potential Revision(s):

Using our statistical analysis, we will calculate the liability and exposure for Sierra, and estimate what Mr. Washington should be able to recover.

21.

Original:

This shows that Sierra that the goods are of “merchantable quality and fit for intended purpose” means the goods should be delivered in proper working conditions and set up

Issue(s):

The word “that” has to be used very carefully.

Potential Revision(s):

This shows Sierra that the goods are of “merchantable quality and fit for intended purpose”—this means that the goods should be delivered in proper working conditions and set up correctly.

22.

Original:

For example, if Sierra Nevada Trees, Inc. had certain procedures that must be followed that said where the Christmas trees could safely be placed and the specific outlets they can use to plug in the lights on the Christmas Trees.

Issue(s):

Especially with technical and engineering issues, one must clear and precise.

Potential Revision(s):

For example, if Sierra Nevada Trees, Inc. had certain procedures that must be followed when setting up their Christmas trees, the fire at Burger Ranch in Canoga Hill could have been prevented. These procedures could have included where the Christmas trees could safely be placed and the specific outlets that could be used to plug in the lights on the Christmas trees.

23.

Original:

While you ensure that the films are watched, you are forcing exposure to films that could damage the popularity of the blockbuster film. No second person.

Issue(s):

Use the third-person for most case reports.

Potential Revision(s):

While a theater ensures that the non-blockbuster films are watched, the theatres are forcing exposure to non-blockbuster films that could damage the popularity of the blockbuster film.

24.

Original:

In addition to this problem the faculties salaries began to fall behind forcing the school to hire part-time faculty in an effort to reduce salary expenses, these part-time faculty were not in tune with the way the university was run which made it more difficult for the students to get the proper education they had signed up for.

Issue(s):

This is a run-on sentence. Faculty is often used as a collective noun (that is, it can be both singular and plural.) Also, try not to end a sentence with a preposition (for).

Potential Revision(s):

In addition to this problem, the faculty salaries began to fall behind forcing the school to hire part-time faculty. In an effort to reduce salary expenses, these part-time faculty were not in tune with the way the university was run which made it more difficult for the students to get the proper education for which they had signed up.

25.

Original:

An international alliance might by helping facilitating research and development faculty can collaborate in along with other universities.

Issue(s):

This sentence makes no sense to the reader. Keep your noun phrases, verb phrases, and prepositional phrases separate and distinctive. Also, don't place two participles ("-ing") immediately adjacent.

Potential Revision(s):

An international alliance might be beneficial as it can facilitate research and development faculty to collaborate with other universities.
