

# Fun(?) with Scholarly Writing

UCSB McNair Scholars Program

# Topics covered

- ▶ Choosing short words/mixing it up
- ▶ Eliminating unnecessary words
- ▶ Using active and passive voice
- ▶ Writing more readable text

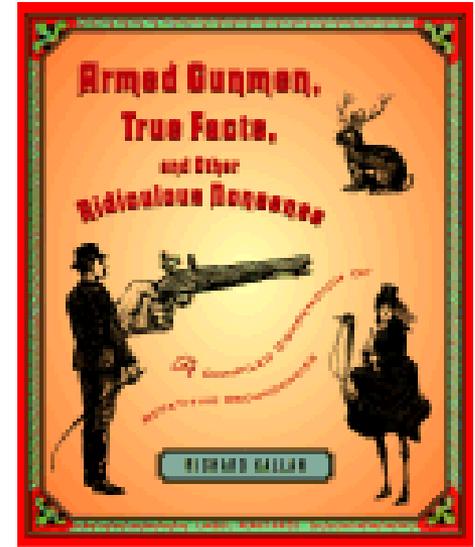
# Choosing Short Words Instead of Long Ones – OR MIXING IT UP!

- Assistance
- Commence
- Component
- Demonstrate
  - Endeavor
  - Equivalent
- Fundamental
- Substantiate
- Modification
  - Optimum

# Eliminate Unnecessary Words

- ▶ Redundant Phrase: A phrase in which a modifier repeats the meaning of the word(s) being modified (e.g., free gift)
  - Redundant phrases bloat the text and may lower the writer's credibility.

**Redundant Phrases  
from  
Richard A. Kallan's**



*Armed Gunmen, True Facts, and  
Other Ridiculous Nonsense: A  
Compiled Compendium of  
Repetitive Redundancies  
(Pantheon, 2005)*

# EXTREME FANATIC

One repulsed by moderate  
fanaticism

# UNKNOWN STRANGER

A stranger without a name tag

# DISAPPEAR FROM VIEW

The scenic way to  
disappear

# MONETARY FINE

When you want to ensure that payment is not made with a promise to do your laundry

# TODAY'S SOUP DU JOUR

Fresher than yesterday's soup du jour

# ARMED GUNMAN

When you want to distinguish  
between two gunmen, one of  
whom is missing a couple of limbs

# Eliminate Unnecessary Words

- ▶ Pleonasm: More words than required. [There exist] many sentences [that could serve to] illustrate [the occurrence of] pleonasm, but because [of the fact that] space is limited and [in order] to save time, this [sentence] will have to do.

**Solution: Eliminate unnecessary words.**

# Eliminate Unnecessary Words

- ▶ Circumlocution: Roundabout expression that creates wordy constructions: “I am of the opinion,” or “They are of the Hindu persuasion.”

**Solution: Eliminate unnecessary words.**

# Exercise:

## Eliminating Unnecessary Words

- ▶ I am of the belief that your idea is great.
- ▶ Here is a check in the amount of \$50.
- ▶ We could not complete the project on time due to the fact that our supplies arrived late.
- ▶ We want to continue to be able to give you staff support.

## Exercise:

### Eliminating Unnecessary Words

- ▶ We should eliminate the occurrence of undressing at the beach.
- ▶ Our argument is based on the assumption that Bill lied.
- ▶ The project was finished in a quick manner.

# Exercise:

## Eliminating Unnecessary Words by Keeping Verbs as Verbs

- ▶ We will conduct an investigation of the matter.
- ▶ We should perform an evaluation on Bill.
- ▶ We must arrive at a decision about layoffs.
- ▶ We should undertake to do a study of the problem.

# Using active and passive voice

# Active & Passive Voice Defined

- ▶ **Active Voice:** Subject of sentence acts
  - *I conducted a study.*
  - *Professor Smith addressed the audience.*
- ▶ **Passive Voice:** Subject of sentence is acted upon or receives the action
  - *A study was conducted by me.*
  - *A study was conducted.* (actor left out)

# Use Active Voice

## ▶ Active Voice

Present: *She observes a family.*  
Past: *She observed a family.*  
Future: *She will observe a family.*

## ▶ Passive Voice

Present: *A family is observed.*  
Past: *A family was observed.*  
Future: *A family will be observed.*

# Might want to use the passive voice when . . .

- The actor is unknown (e.g., “My stereo was stolen.”).
- You don’t want to blame the actor (e.g., “The surveys were lost.”).
- You are submitting an article to a journal that prefers the passive voice to the first person (e.g., “An experiment was conducted to examine the effects of early intervention on school dropout rates.”)
- You have used the first person a lot in a particular section of your manuscript and you want to add variety to your text (e.g., “Interviews were conducted by telephone.”)

# Exercise:

## Using Active Voice

- ▶ A copy of the award letter is kept by the CEO.
- ▶ A modified payment plan was written by the creditors.
- ▶ The awards will be won by the best people.
- ▶ A mistake could have been made by Bill.
- ▶ An agreement would never have been discussed secretly by our Director.

# Exercise:

## Using Active Voice

- ▶ The file cabinet will be moved by Tony.
- ▶ Considerable savings have been accomplished by our new financial plan.
- ▶ Solutions have been proposed.
- ▶ An improvement in quality was made.

# Use Synonyms to Avoid Repetition: An Illustration

I work at a psychiatric institution where there are patients with dual diagnoses. Working in the psychiatric institution, I have learned to maintain a level of professionalism when dealing with psychiatric patients.

I **work** at a **psychiatric** institution where there are **patients** with dual diagnoses. **Working** in the **psychiatric** institution, I have learned to maintain a level of professionalism when dealing with **psychiatric patients**.

I **work** at a **psychiatric institution** where there are **patients** with dual diagnoses. During my **employment** at the **hospital**, I have learned to maintain a level of professionalism when dealing with the **clients on the ward**.