

How To Be A Better Writer.....and assorted other lies

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Style or voice?

**THE PLAINTIFF CONTENDS THAT THE COURT ERRED WHEN
IT REJECTED THE CREDENTIALS OF THE EXPERT.**

Style or Voice?

**IT IS CONTENTED BY THE PLAINTIFF THAT ERROR WAS
COMMITTED BY THE COURT WHEN THE CREDENTIALS OF
THE EXPERT WERE REJECTED.**

Style or voice?

**THE CONTENTION OF THE PLAINTIFF IS THAT THE
REJECTION BY THE COURT OF THE CREDENTIALS OF THE
EXPERT WAS ERROR.**

Style or voice?

**IT IS THE CONTENTION OF THE PLAINTIFF THAT IT WAS
THE REJECTION BY THE COURT OF THE CREDENTIALS OF
THE EXPERT THAT WAS ERROR.**

A GUIDE FOR ANALYZING AND EDITING YOUR OWN WRITING

- 1. DRAW CIRCLES AROUND THE PASSIVE VERBS.**
- 2. DRAW BOXES AROUND VERBS OF BEING AND
EXPLETIVES.**
- 3. UNDERLINE THE NOMINALIZATIONS.**
- 4. NOTE DISTANCE BETWEEN SUBJECT AND VERB.**

DEFINITIONS:

PASSIVE VERBS: VERBS WHOSE SUBJECTS ARE NOT THE ACTORS OF THE ACTIONS, BUT RATHER ARE THE THINGS ACTED UPON. USUALLY SIGNALLED BY A FORM OF THE VERB, "BE," AND THE PAST PARTICIPLE OF THE VERB.

VERBS OF BEING: LINGUISTIC 'EQUALS SIGNS'--"IS, AM, ARE, WAS WERE, BE, BEING, BEEN."

EXPLETIVES: "IT IS...," "THERE IS...," AND "THERE ARE...," WHERE 'IT' AND 'THERE' ARE EMPTY SLOTS THAT MERELY FILL IN THE BLANK BEFORE A BEING VERB.

NOMINALIZATIONS: NOUNS (AND SOMETIMES ADJECTIVES) MADE FROM VERBS AND OFTEN MARKED BY THE SUFFIXES "-NCE," "-AL," "-ION," "-MENT," "-URE" AND "-ITY."

EXAMPLES

1. The court can arrive at a determination of the questions by the application of well-settled principles of law .
2. In the claimant's complaint, it is alleged that she was unable to be located due to a change of address and that, for said reason, a continuance was requested but denied without the opportunity to cross-examine the employer and its witnesses having been afforded to counsel for the claimant.
3. The defendant's principal contention here is that the closing remarks of the district attorney to the jury were of such nature and so prejudicial that a reversal and new trial is commanded by law .
4. The injection of the question of negligence in this suit for malicious prosecution even though at the time it was given no objection was made, so infected the trial that it would have to be returned for a new trial had the greater error of failure to prove a cause of action not occurred.

GLOSSARY

ACTIVE VERB = A VERB WHOSE ACTION IS DONE BY THE SUBJECT OF THE SENTENCE.

AMPHIBOLY = AN AMBIGUITY ARISING FROM THE INTERRELATION OF WORDS IN A CONSTRUCTION, RESULTING IN SOMETHING THAT CAN BE UNDERSTOOD IN AT LEAST TWO DIFFERENT WAYS.

ANAPHOR = (ALSO, ANAPHORA) A WORD (USU. A PRONOUN) WHICH SUBSTITUTES FOR A CONCEPT PREVIOUSLY EXPRESSED BY A DIFFERENT GRAMMATICAL CONSTRUCT.

BEING VERB = A FORM OF THE VERB, "TO BE" --IS, AM, ARE, WAS, WERE, BE, BEING, BEEN.

CLAUSE = A GROUP OF RELATED WORDS HAVING BOTH A SUBJECT AND A PREDICATE.

CONNOTATION = THE ASSOCIATIVE, EMOTIONAL OR SECONDARY MEANING OF A WORD.

DEEP EMBEDDING = THE EMBEDDING OF KERNELS WHICH PRESERVES LITTLE OF THE SYNTACTIC STRUCTURE OF THE ORIGINAL KERNEL. *E.G.*, IN "FRED HAS A RED CAR," THE EMBEDDED KERNEL, "THE CAR IS RED," RETAINS LITTLE OF ITS ORIGINAL SYNTAX.

DENOTATION = THE EXPLICIT, PRIMARY OR 'DICTIONARY' MEANING OF A WORD.

EMBEDDING = THE COMBINING OF KERNEL SENTENCES INTO OTHER SENTENCES.

EQUIVOCATION = (ALSO, EQUIVOQUE) A TYPE OF AMBIGUITY ARISING FROM DIFFERENT MEANINGS OF THE SAME WORD.

EXPLETIVES = GRAMMATICAL CONSTRUCTIONS CONSISTING OF AN INDEFINITE PRONOUN SUCH AS “IT” OR “THERE” USED WITH A BEING VERB AT THE BEGINNING OF A SENTENCE. E.G., “IT IS...” OR “THERE ARE...”

EYE-VOICE SPAN = THE DISTANCE, IN WORDS, BETWEEN THE WORDS A READER READS ALOUD AND THE WORDS WHICH THE EYE IS PERCEIVING IN ADVANCE. THE LONGER THE EVS, THE MORE READABLE IS THE PROSE.

FUNCTION WORDS = WORDS, OFTEN PREPOSITIONS AND CONJUNCTIONS, THAT COMMUNICATE THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CONTENT OR MEANING WORDS IN SENTENCES.

KERNEL SENTENCES = THE BASIC OR UNDERSTOOD CONSTRUCTIONS WHICH ARE TRANSFORMED TO MAKE UP MORE COMPLEX SENTENCES. E.G., “FRED HAS A RED CAR” CONTAINS THE KERNELS, “FRED HAS A CAR” AND “THE CAR IS RED.”

MEANING WORDS OR CONTENT WORDS = THOSE WORDS, USUALLY NOUNS, VERBS, ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS, THAT COMMUNICATE THE CORE MEANING IN SENTENCES.

NOMINALIZATIONS = NOUNS (OR SOMETIMES ADJECTIVES) WHICH DERIVE FROM VERBS. E.G., “ARGUMENT” [NOUN] FROM “ARGUE” [VERB].

PASSIVE VERB = A VERB WHOSE ACTION IS NOT DONE BY THE SUBJECT OF THE SENTENCE.

PHRASE = A GROUP OF RELATED WORDS THAT LACKS A SUBJECT OR A PREDICATE OR BOTH.

SEMANTIC STRUCTURE OF A SENTENCE = A SENTENCE DESCRIBED IN TERMS OF ITS SEMANTIC UNITS, NAMELY, ACTORS OR AGENTS, ACTIONS, AND THINGS ACTED UPON.

SURFACE EMBEDDING = THE EMBEDDING OF KERNELS WHICH PRESERVES MUCH OF THE SYNTACTIC STRUCTURE OF THE ORIGINAL KERNEL. E.G., IN "FRED HAS A CAR WHICH CAR IS RED," THE EMBEDDED KERNEL, "THE CAR IS RED," RETAINS MUCH OF ITS ORIGINAL SYNTAX.

SYNTACTIC STRUCTURE OF A SENTENCE = A SENTENCE DESCRIBED IN TERMS OF ITS SYNTACTIC UNITS, NAMELY, NOUNS, VERBS, OBJECTS, ETC.

SYNTAX = THE RULES OR PATTERNS WHICH GOVERN GRAMMATICAL SENTENCES.

BENEFITS AND DRAWBACKS OF VARIOUS TYPES OF ENGLISH VERBS

ACTIVE VOICE

- + EFFICIENT—USUALLY USES FEWEST WORDS
- + EASY FOR READER TO PROCESS—GRAMMAR AND ACTOR/ACTION BOTH MOVE LEFT TO RIGHT

PASSIVE VOICE

- + ALLOWS WRITER TO DE-EMPHASIZE OR ELIMINATE ACTOR
- WORDIER THAN ACTIVE
- MORE DEPENDENT ON FUNCTION WORDS
- HARDER TO PROCESS BECAUSE ACTION OCCURS BEFORE ACTOR REVEALED

BEING VERBS

- + GOOD FOR RIGOROUS LOGIC, "A = B"
- + ACT AS LINGUISTIC EQUALS SIGNS
- NO ACTION IN VERB
- HARDER TO PROCESS BECAUSE SUBJECT AND VERB DO NOT REFLECT ACTOR AND ACTION
- OFTEN DEPENDENT ON FUNCTION WORDS

NOMINALIZATIONS

- + HANDY SHORTENINGS OF WORDIER CONCEPTS
- DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND IF USED IN STRINGS
- TAKE ACTION OUT OF VERB AND PLACE IT IN NOUN
- HARDER TO PROCESS BECAUSE ACTION USUALLY REVEALED BEFORE ACTOR IS

EXPLETIVES

- + MAY BE USED TO DEEMPHASIZE BOTH ACTOR AND ACTION
- LEAVE SUBJECT/PREDICATE NOMINATIVE AS THE ONLY CONTENT IN THE CLAUSE