**TECHNICAL WRITING**

**Readability and Style**

**Guidelines for improving readability:**

1.

Use active voice when possible.

Passive: Active:

Core samples were tested on site by field technicians. Field technicians tested core samples on site.

Passive: Active:

All data were subjected to a standard co-variance analysis for verification.

For verification, experimenters subjected all data to a standard co-variance analysis.

2.

Avoid unnecessary noun clusters. Use connectors in, of, for, about to separate ideas.

Cluster: Correct: Cluster: Correct: Correct:

blood cholesterol maintenance control diet

a diet to control and maintain cholesterol in blood chemical environment protection agency

agency for monitoring the protection of the chemical environment OR Agency for protecting the environment and monitoring chemical abuse

3.

Avoid deletion of "who," "which," or “that” function if it is necessary.

Ambiguous: The supervisor wanted the chemicals locked up in low-humidity storage. This could mean one of the following:

The supervisor wanted the chemicals that were locked up in low-humidity storage.

OR

The supervisor wanted someone to lock up the chemicals in low-humidity storage.

4.

Do not insert lengthy phrases between a subject and verb or verb and object.

Difficult:

The task force, on engineering grounds, on conservative grounds, and on economic grounds, approved all design detail.

The task force approved the design details because they met engineering, conservation, and economic standards.

Revised:

5.

Organize ideas clearly.

Unclear:

If the insulation contains a formaldehyde derivative, and if the insulation comes in contact with the wall board, and if no polyethylene barrier is used, and if no ventilation is provided for the insulation, health hazards may result.

Improved:

Health hazards may result if the following conditions exist: (a) the insulation contains a formaldehyde derivative, (b) the insulation comes in contact with the wall board, (c) no polyethylene barrier separates insulation and wallboard, and (d) no ventilation is provided for the insulation.

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6.

Use the positive rather than the negative statement.

Negatives: Positive:

The contradictory results did not nullify the findings of the satellite laboratory. The contradictory results agreed with the findings of the satellite laboratory.

**READABILITY EXERCISE**

**Directions:**

Rewrite each of the following sentences using one of the guidelines described in this handout. In some cases, you may need to add an actor or other pertinent information.

1.

The building was renovated by the cadets.

2.

The cadets did not agree on which facility would be acceptable for their meetings.

3.

This is the only modification required. We must level the existing base.

4.

The staff was told this. All personnel on the list would get an immediate raise and a bonus.

5.

Molybdenum, because it is a hard, ductile, highly malleable metal able to withstand high temperatures, and because it has a crystalline structure, is used in airplane and rocket parts.

6.

The word processor is a computerized typewriter. It can make any business more efficient by reducing the clerical workload.

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7.

The analytical sensitivity obtained for each arsenic species under the conditions recommended in this procedure is presented in Table 1.

8.

Amplification of wavelengths is achieved by stimulating the quartz cell.

9.

If the cadets finish their daily tasks, and if they reach a consensus on which facility to use, and if they have received a grade of C or higher on the exam, they will be excused from Tuesday's class.

10.

The disorption efficiency must be determined over the sample range by the technicians at the installation.

**NOTE:**

Once you have finished the revisions, reread your sentences to make sure they are clear and concise. Circle those that seem to need further improvement.

**Adapted from:**

DeGeorge, J.; Olson, G.A.; & Ray, R. (1984). Style and readability in technical writing: A sentence-combining approach.

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