

The Paramedic Method: Editing for Clarity

The Paramedic Method

(Adapted from the Purdue OWL site: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu>.)

1. Draw a box around the "to be" verb forms (be, am, are, is, was, were, being, been).
2. Ask, "Where's the action?" or "Where are other possible verbs?" Underline them and move your chosen verb to the action position in the main clause. Remember to switch from passive to active when necessary.
3. Circle possible "doers" and move one into the subject position. On some sentences, you may have to come up with a "doer."
4. Replace all coordinating conjunctions with an = sign.

List of Coordinating Conjunctions	List of Subordinating Conjunctions (from Hacker Manual, p. 14)	
F or	After	Unless
A nd	Although	Until
N or	Because	When
B ut	Before	Where
O r	If	Which
Y et	Since	Who
S o	That	

5. Cross out any unnecessary slow wind-ups.

Common Empty Phrases (from Hacker Manual, p. 2)	
Along the lines of	In order to
At the present time	In spite of the fact that
Because of the fact that	In the event that
By means of	Until such time as
Due to the fact that	It is x that/ There are

6. Cross out any redundancies.
7. Put brackets around prepositional phrases (they start with of, to, in, about, for, onto, into, etc.) or modifying phrases.

Example:

Children are learning from each other about how they are different and how they are the same and with this knowledge students' communities will begin to create racial understanding.

As children from different backgrounds interact in school, their communities also begin to foster racial understanding.

Editing for Clarity: Exercises

Exercise 1. Use the paramedic method to fix the following sentences.

- A high-performing school is a school that works hard to educate students and to engage their communities to support their learning and growth of all students.

- People are creating stereotypes about minority students that is affecting their ability to succeed, interfering with all children's development.

Exercise 2. Combine the following sentences to create one clear and concise sentence.

- Marshall McLuhan is fully aware media is changing around him. Therefore, he stresses the importance of appreciating these changes.

- In addition, the medium controls whether an object is used for positive or negative purposes. McLuhan argues that the user should not determine this.

Exercise 3. Use the paramedic method and strategies from the sentence-combining exercises to fix instances of wordiness, vagueness, and repetition in the following paragraphs.

A large number of people enjoy reading murder mysteries regularly. As a rule, these people are not themselves murderers, nor would these people really ever enjoy seeing someone commit an actual murder. They probably enjoy reading murder mysteries because of this reason: they have found a way to escape from the monotonous, boring routine of dull everyday existence.

To such people the murder mystery is realistic fantasy. It is realistic because the people in the murder mystery are as a general rule believable as people. They are not just made up pasteboard figures. It is also realistic because the character who is the hero, the character who solves the murder mystery, solves it not usually by trial and error and haphazard methods but by exercising a high degree of logic and reason. It is absolutely and totally essential that people who enjoy murder mysteries have an admiration for the human faculty of logic.

But murder mysteries are also fantasies. The people who read such books of fiction play a game. It is a game in which they suspend certain human emotions. One of these human emotions that they suspend is pity. If the reader stops to feel pity and sympathy for each and every victim that is killed or if the reader stops to feel terrible horror that such a thing could happen in our world of today, that person will never enjoy reading murder mysteries. The devoted reader of murder mysteries keeps uppermost in mind at all times the goal of arriving through logic and observation at the final solution to the mystery offered in the book. It is a game with life and death. Whodunits hopefully help the reader to hide from the hideous horrors of actual life and death in the real world.