

## 5 Top Techniques That Improve Your Writing

By Barbara McNichol

As writers, you have a message to share and a story to tell. You want to accomplish that as clearly as possible. When I see patterns of unclear writing, I recommend using the following Five Top Techniques to change them. When you apply them consistently, you'll see instant improvement in your writing.

### 1. Ignite Your Verbs

The meaning of a sentence comes across more clearly when its verb is "alive."

Compare these sentences:

Passive—"The juicy watermelon was eaten by the boy."

Active—"The boy chomped into the watermelon's belly, enjoying each juicy bite."

### 2. Get Agreements

When you put a singular subject with the plural form of the verb, you weaken your writing, confuse your reader and make grammarians groan. Example sentence: "A group of writers were in town." Note that the subject of the sentence "group" is singular while the verb "were" belongs with a plural subject. Instead, write this: "A group of writers was in town" or "Several writers were in town." Better yet, liven up the sentence with an active verb: "A group of writers landed in town" or another more imaginative verb.

However, beware of verb agreements using the subject "none" as in: "None of the writers were in town." In this case, "were" is correct because "none" means "not any of the writers." Therefore, none is a plural subject requiring the plural form of the verb.

### 3. Nix Mixed Modifiers (aka Dangling Participles)

"When thinking about a good place to eat, many choices are available." Are the "many choices" doing the thinking? I don't think so! Mixed modifiers and dangling participles get in the way of crisp, intentional communication. Write this instead: "When thinking about a good place to eat, the meeting planner had many choices." It's now clear who is doing the thinking—the meeting planner.

### 4. Pursue a Parallel Path

Don't let a mixed bag of sentence structures wiggle its way into your writing. Here's what I mean: "His attitude makes a difference in changing, succeeding, and when he wants to move on." The writer forces the reader's mind to shift gears too abruptly by throwing in a non-parallel phrase at the end of the sentence. It broke an expected pattern. Instead, the sentence should be: "His attitude makes a difference in changing, succeeding, and moving on." That would keep those mental gears from grinding.

## 5. Match the Word to the Meaning

Do certain words tend to trip you up? Do you write “further” when you mean “farther” or “accept” instead of “except?” Selecting the correct word from similar-but-different options saves confusion for the reader and embarrassment for you as the writer. Jump into your dictionary when you’re not sure if “choose” or “chose” is correct within the context of your paragraph. Better yet, keep a reference guide handy, one that specializes in clarifying trick combos such as than vs. then, stationery vs. stationary, loath vs. loathe and so on. I recommend my Word Trippers ebook, available on my website.

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