

TECHNICAL WRITING: IMPROVING WORDY AND AWKWARD SENTENCES

Example: **“For the writer, the practice of bad writing is harmful for it results in an inhibition of her responses to intellectual and imaginative stimuli.”**

Steps to improve a wordy or awkward sentence:

1. Underline, circle, or highlight all the nouns, pronouns, and verbs.

Example: **“For the writer, the practice of bad writing is harmful for it results in an inhibition of her responses to intellectual stimuli.”**

2. From the underlined words, pick out the main subject and verb and the subjects and verbs of any clause.

Example: **practice . . . is it . . . results**

3. Check to see if the subjects are weak pronouns (like “it” or “this”) or abstract nouns (like “situation” or “state”).
4. Check to see if the verbs are weak verbs like “is” or “are” or “has” or “have.”
5. Ask yourself what action the sentence really conveys (“Who’s kicking who[m]?”). Your primary goal is to rewrite the sentence to convey that action or idea more directly.
6. Now separate the concrete nouns and active verbs from the abstract nouns and weak verbs. You may want to eliminate as many abstractions and weak verbs as possible.

<u>Concrete nouns</u>	<u>Abstract nouns</u>	<u>Active verbs</u>	<u>Weak verbs</u>
writer	practice	results	is
writing	inhibition		
	responses		
	stimuli		

7. See if any of the concrete nouns will qualify as the subject. “Writing” will work fine, but sometimes you will have to look outside the sentence for a concrete subject.
8. See if any of the active verbs will work with that noun.

Example: **“Bad writing results in an inhibition of the writer’s responses to . . .”**

9. To improve this sentence even more, look through some of the other key words for a better main verb (“inhibits” or “harms”).
10. Notice that we’ve found our verbs by changing the forms of the key words. By changing two more key words, we can eliminate the last of those abstract nouns:

Example: **“Bad writing inhibits the writer’s intellect and imagination.”**