

PART V EFFECTIVE WRITING

WD 53/OD 41

Sentences and Paragraphs

PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES

WD 53/OD 41

Sentences and Paragraphs

Properly demonstrate the use of various parts of speech, as outlined in this text, by writing meaningful sentences and identifying the purpose of each part.

PART V - INTRODUCTION

It is time to turn our attention to the basic unit of written communication, the sentence. In this section of the text, we study these things about the sentence:

First, we examine selected parts of speech and their contribution to the communication process. These parts of speech were selected as being particularly troublesome to Fort Wolters writers:

VERBS, both active and passive;

VERBALS;

PRONOUNS and their antecedents; and

MODIFIERS.

Within this section of the text on parts of speech, we take a look at the concept of SMOTHERED VERBS. We examine what they are and what they are not.

Second, we analyze sentence form and content. We see how the form and content of sentences contribute to effective communication.

Third, we study transitions within and between sentences. It is in this section of the text that you have your first significant opportunity to write sentences within the guidelines imposed by the text.

Finally, we consider the sentence as a part of the larger unit of expression, the paragraph. In this portion of the text, you are asked to design, construct, and evaluate your own paragraphs.

Turn the page now and begin Part Five.

THE PARTS OF SPEECH - THE VERB

Let's begin our study of sentence parts with a brief review of VERBS. As you know, the verb is the heart of the sentence: it is the engine that makes the sentence go. It naturally follows, then, that an effective sentence requires an effective verb that is effectively used.

Before we talk about effective and ineffective verb usage, let's briefly review some important things about verbs.

Verbs can be classified in these three ways:

- ✓ 1. TRANSITIVE VERBS are verbs that have direct objects on which they act, as in "John hit Fred."
- ✓ 2. INTRANSITIVE VERBS are verbs that require no direct objects, as in "Fred bled."
- ✓ 3. LINKING VERBS are verbs that connect the subject of a sentence with a word that describes the subject or that can be equated with the subject, as in "Fred was inconsiderate."

With those definitions out of the way, here are some sentences in which we want you to classify the verb as TRANSITIVE, INTRANSITIVE, or LINKING. Enter the class of the verb in the space provided beside each sentence.

- 1. trans The colonel summoned the lieutenant.
- 2. intrans The lieutenant saluted.
- 3. linking Happiness is a warm salute.

The first sentence contains the TRANSITIVE verb, the second contains the INTRANSITIVE verb, and the last contains the LINKING verb.

In addition to being transitive, intransitive, or linking, a verb has VOICE. It has a definite voice for the first, second, and third persons. Here is an example using the verb "to be":

I am a captain.

You are a major.

He is a lieutenant.

A verb also has TENSE. It has a form for the present, past, and future tenses.

I am a captain.

I was a lieutenant

I will be a major.

A verb also has NUMBER. This means that it must agree in number with its subject.

Captains are of company grade rank.

A major is of field grade rank.

Now that we have reviewed CLASS, VOICE, TENSE, and NUMBER of verbs, we will take a closer look at NUMBER and VOICE because these two things are real problem areas for USAPHC/S writers.

First, we will cover agreement in NUMBER between verbs and their subjects. One of the most troublesome areas in verb agreement is in the use of compound subjects.

Compound subjects are usually treated as plurals; therefore, their verbs are usually plural in number as this example shows:

Tom and Stan have new cars.

However, when the compound subject forms a unit that is treated as one, the verb is singular. Which of the following has the verb with the correct NUMBER? Check the response of your choice.

- () 1. In most foreign countries, the husband and father have the last word in family decisions.
- (✓) 2. In most foreign countries, the husband and father has the last word in family decisions.

The "husband and father" in the exercise above is the same person, and this compound subject is treated as one. The correct response is sentence number two.

With compound subjects, as the preceding exercise shows, the MEANING of the compound subject has a great deal to do with the number of the verb. The same is true of COLLECTIVE subjects. Normally, collective subjects are treated as singular subjects, and they have singular verbs, as in this example:

The team goes to out of town games by air.

There are times, however, when the collective subjects refer to individual members. In these instances, a plural verb is required.

The team were arguing among themselves.

In this type of agreement, there is almost always another word in the sentence to give you a clue. "Themselves" in the sentence above is such a word.

Place a check mark beside any of the sentences below in which the verb does NOT agree with its collective subject in number.

- () 1. The committee determines next year's budget.
- (✓) 2. The public ^{do have} has their own ways of finding the truth.
- () 3. The army travels on its stomach.
- () 4. The jury is still out.

The second sentence is the only one in which there is subject and verb disagreement. The clue word in that sentence is "their".

This brief discussion of compound and collective subjects was designed to point out that we often choose our verb form on the basis of MEANING rather than on FORM. This method of choosing verb form can be disastrous to effective writing at times. This is particularly true when a noun comes between a subject and its verb, and that noun has a number that is different from that of the subject. Here is an example:

Once in a while an aircraft such as the UH-1B, the OV-1E, and others is designed for one role and used in some other role.

In this type of subject and verb agreement, it is critical that you correctly identify the real subject and not be led astray by

some intervening noun. In the preceding example, the hazard is to have the verb "is" agree in number with the "others" that immediately precedes it rather than with its real subject, "aircraft".

In the exercises that follow, you are to UNDERLINE the real subject in each sentence and select the correct verb form from the two alternatives that we offer. Draw a circle around the verb that agrees in number with the subject that you identified.

1. Today's child, unlike his parents when they were children, (expect) (expects) to be entertained.
2. A type ~~of column~~ that you find in many newspapers (is) (are) advice to the lovelorn.
3. Certain breeds ~~of horses~~ such as the American Quarterhorse (is) (are) ideal for working cattle.
4. Everything including farm buildings, equipment, and stock (was) (were) wiped out by the storm.

The subjects and appropriate verbs should have been identified as follows:

1. child. . . expects
2. type. . . is
3. breeds. . . are
4. Everything. . . was

With that exercise in subject and verb agreement in NUMBER, we

leave verb number and go into verb VOICE in more detail.

There is probably no other feature of verb usage more abused, misused, and misunderstood than verb voice. This is true among USAPHC/S writers and, indeed, among all military writers.

Pick up almost any piece of official correspondence from an Army letter to a local publication such as the Daily Bulletin and you will see the truth of the preceding statement.

To understand this abuse of verb voice, let's talk about it briefly.

A verb "speaks" to the reader in either the ACTIVE voice or the PASSIVE voice. Here is the test for active and passive voices:

1. In ACTIVE voice construction, the subject of the sentence performs an action, as in "JOHN" (the subject) HIT the ball. The subject of the sentence, "John", performed the action of hitting the ball. The verb "hit", therefore, is an ACTIVE verb.

In PASSIVE voice construction, the subject of the sentence is acted upon, as in "THE BALL" (the subject) WAS HIT by John. The subject of the sentence, "The ball", has an action performed on it. The verb "was hit", therefore, is a PASSIVE verb.
2. To recognize the passive voice, remember this: the passive voice always uses some form of the verb "to be" (is, am, are was, were, etc.) with the past participle form of the action verb, as in "It is desired", "It is requested", "The aircraft

was flown", "the quarters' allowance is terminated", etc.

Be careful, though, in identifying the passive voice that you do not confuse the past participle form of the action verb with the same verb form used as an adjective. Here is an example of what we mean:

The student was pleased by the test score.

That sentence is passive voice construction. To be active voice it would read: "The test score pleased the student."

The student was pleased but sad.

This sentence IS NOT passive voice construction. The past participle, "pleased", is an adjective that modifies "the student". "Was" is simply a linking verb that connects the subject with a word that describes the subject. In the exercise that follows, you will have a chance to show us that you can recognize the difference between these two forms.

In some colleges and universities, there is a game the students play known as "flickerball". In the following sentences about flickerball, tell us which sentences are in the ACTIVE voice and which are in the PASSIVE voice. Write active or passive in the blanks provided.

passive

1. Flickerball will be played by college students.

active

2. College students will play flickerball conscientiously.

X ~~passive~~

3. Conscientiously played flickerball provides a healthful outlet for youthful energies.

passive

4. Gouges, bruises, and abrasions are also provided by conscientiously played flickerball.

active

5. The college staff likes flickerball.

active

6. Consequently, we like flickerball.

passive

7. Flickerball is not liked by doctors and nurses.

Sentences one, four, and seven are in the passive voice. The remainder are in the active voice. How did you do on sentence number three? Did you identify it correctly as active voice construction? If you did not, you were probably led astray by "conscientiously played flickerball". "Played" is a past participle form of "play" that serves as an adjective here, and it modifies "flickerball". The real clue that the sentence was active voice construction is in "flickerball provides". To be passive voice, it would be written like this:

A healthful outlet for youthful energies is provided by conscientiously played flickerball.

Now that you can identify active and passive voices, let's see how verb voice is misused in military writing.

Read this short narrative, and select a response that best describes it.

A meeting was held in the post commander's office on 5 May, and a special report on base accidents was rendered as a result of that meeting. This special report is contained in the Safety Bulletin of 12 May, and it is desired that all post personnel read subject report.

- () 1. The preceding narrative is direct and to the point. The use of the passive voice does not detract from the direct tone of the narrative.
- ✓ () 2. The misuse of the passive voice in the preceding narrative makes it impossible to determine who met, who rendered the report, and who desires that base personnel read the report.
- () 3. The preceding narrative is a judicious mixture of both the active and passive voice. It is direct, but it is direct without being too abrupt.

The correct response is number two. The narrative is a good example of indirectness in military writing caused by a misuse of the passive voice.

Here are three versions of the same narrative. Read each version carefully, and decide which version you honestly prefer. Place a check mark beside your choice.

- () 1. Military writing abuses the passive voice through overuse. When the military writer wants to be deliberately vague, he selects the passive voice. When the writer desires to be pretentious, he reaches for the passive voice. It is easy to avoid vagueness and pretentiousness by not using the passive voice, but too much active voice causes the style to be too direct. The effective writer strives for a judicious mixture of both active and passive voices.

- () 2. The passive voice is abused in military writing through overuse. When deliberate vagueness is wanted, it is the passive voice that is selected by the military writer. When pretentiousness is desired, the passive voice is invariably reached for by the writer. Vagueness and pretentiousness are avoided if the passive voice is not used, but a too direct style is caused by too much active voice. A judicious mixture of both active and passive voices is striven for by the effective writer.
- () 3. Military writing abuses the passive voice through overuse. When deliberate vagueness is wanted, it is the passive voice that is selected by the military writer. When the writer wants to be pretentious, he invariably reaches for the passive voice. It is easy to avoid vagueness and pretentiousness by not using the passive voice, but too much active voice causes the style to be too direct. The effective writer strives for a judicious mixture of both active and passive voices.

If you read each of the narratives carefully, you noted that narrative number one is entirely in the active voice, number two is entirely in the passive voice, and number three is a mixture of active and passive voice. The clue for the response that we wanted is inherent in the message of all three narratives. The effective writer uses a judicious mixture of active and passive voices, and, on the basis of this, we hope that you chose the last narrative as being the one that you prefer. While you might have honestly preferred the first narrative, you should not have selected the second narrative under any circumstances.

Once again, we want to stress that it is not the passive voice that is bad; it is its misuse that is bad.

We recently came across a short narrative that is filled with the passive voice, but we could not criticize the writer for his use of the passive voice. Here is the narrative. After you have

read it, select one of the responses that follows that best describes what the writer was trying to accomplish with his use of the passive voice.

The security classification signs are filed in the textbook warehouse. The administrative section signs are also stored in the warehouse. No other signs were required for the conference. No art work was required. Vertical standards were constructed to hold the security classification signs on the platform, and these new standards are also stored in the warehouse. These same standards were used outside the conference building to point the way to the auditorium. The nameplates for the podium were obtained from the base Civil Engineering shop.

- () 1. The writer of the preceding narrative was attempting to be pretentious with his consistent use of the passive voice.
- (✓) 2. The writer of the preceding narrative was more concerned with reporting what was done than he was with reporting who had done it, and the passive voice does this well.
- () 3. The writer of the preceding narrative wasn't paying attention as he wrote, and habit caused too much of the passive voice to sneak in.

The correct response is number two. If your writing problem requires that you write about WHAT was done, rather than WHO did what, then use the passive voice.

Don't let anyone tell you that the active voice is all good and the passive voice is all bad. It isn't that simple. How did it all get started, this misuse of the passive voice in military writing? No one knows for sure, but we can provide some pretty accurate

guesses. In the alternatives below, check all of those that you consider to be probable reasons that the passive voice is misused in military writing.

- (☒) 1. To be purposefully vague and indirect.
- (☐) 2. To be pretentious.
- (☒) 3. Habit or custom.
- (☒) 4. Lack of writing ability.
- (☐) 5. Through oversight.
- (☐) 6. Letterhead stationery.

Which did you select? Well, we suspect that all of the above are probable reasons. Did you select number six, "letterhead stationery", as being a probable reason, or did you eliminate that as appearing to be inconsistent with the other five reasons? Letterhead stationery has had a greater influence on the use of the passive voice in military writing than you might think. A look at the examples on the two pages that follow might convince you.

Here is a sample military letter NOT ON LETTERHEAD STATIONERY:

REPLY TO

ATTN OF: WOC White/7165

1 Jul 68

SUBJECT: Immunization

TO: All Fort Wolters students

1. It is desired that all Fort Wolters students report to the immunization clinic in Bldg 50 to begin a series of 12 inoculations for the creeping crud which is. . . .

TWELVE inoculations? After the initial shock had worn off, your next reaction would probably be which of the following?

- () 1. Who desires that I report to Bldg 50?
- () 2. The creeping crud? What's that?
- () 3. Wow, how'll I ever explain this?
- () 4. How do you know if you've got it?
- () 5. By the way, where is Bldg 50?
- () 6. How does one get out of this chicken outfit?

Your reaction may have been any one or all of the above, but you would probably be wondering by whose authority WOC White was ordering you to submit to this ordeal.

Now take a look at the letter on the next page.

Here is the same letter as it appears ON LETTERHEAD STATIONERY;

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
UNITED STATES PRIMARY HELICOPTER CENTER
Fort Wolters, Texas 76067

AKPWO-ASD

1 Jul 68

SUBJECT: Immunization

TO: All students

1. It is desired that all warrant officer candidates report to the immunization clinic in Bldg 50 to begin a series of 12 inoculations for the creeping crud which is. . . .

After reading that letter, you might ask "Why me?" but you would not have to ask WHO desires that you report to the immunization clinic. Although the statement "It is desired" is in the passive voice, and it does not specify who is doing the desiring, you can make an accurate guess. Who, among the following, is desiring that you present your reluctant body to the immunization clinic?

- () 1. A WOC White.
- () 2. The hospital commander.
- (✓) 3. "Big Daddy."

No, you don't have to ask "Who desires". The letterhead tells

it all. This dependency on the letterhead to provide the authority for official directions and actions has done much to encourage the misuse of the passive voice in military writing.

As a final exercise in the use of the active and passive voices in military writing, we have selected some passive phrases from official correspondence that need to be recast into the active voice. Following each phrase there is a blank in which you are to rewrite the phrase from its passive form to an active form. When you are finished, you may check your responses against ours.

1. It is desired that all personnel. . . .

We desire

2. It is requested that action be taken to. . . .

We request action to be taken

3. This request is forwarded in order that your office. . . .

4. Studies are being conducted by this office. . . .

5. It is hoped that all personnel will. . . .

6. Your pay records were misdirected to this organization. . . .

Check your responses against ours on the following page.

1. It is desired that all personnel. . . .

The question is, WHO desires? The statement would be much more effective if it were written as "I desire", "We desire", or even more effective, "We WANT".

2. It is requested that action be taken. . . .

This one is really bad, but as bad as it is, it is common. A more effective version would be "I want (or someone wants) you to do thus and so".

3. This request is forwarded in order that your office. . . .

Why not say "We are sending this request so that. . . ."?

4. Studies are being conducted by this office. . . .

"We're studying it. . . ."

5. It is hoped that all personnel will. . . .

"We ask all personnel to. . . ."

6. Your pay records were misdirected to this organization. . . .

"Someone sent your pay records to us by mistake. . . ."

It doesn't matter if your responses differed from ours. What does matter is that you recast all of the statements into the active voice. It is only in doing this that you can see for yourself the critical

difference that the active voice can make in your writing.

This completes our examination of active and passive verb voices. In it, you have seen that a judicious use of verb voice can go a long way in making your writing more effective.

While we are still on the subject of verb usage, let's take a look at a near relative of the verb, the verbal, and see how it, too, can affect your writing.

VERBALS

You use verbals in your writing and speaking every day, but can you recognize one when asked to do so? And even more important, can you explain the role of verbals in effective writing?

Here is a verbal, one of several types, used in a sentence. Examine the form of the verbal and the position it occupies in the sentence and be able to tell us a couple of things about it in the exercise that follows.

He used compressed air to inflate the tire.

In the exercises that follow, select two alternatives that best describe the verbal underlined above. The two alternatives that you select must be true of the verbal in the sentence above and TRUE OF ALL OTHER VERBALS AS WELL.

- () 1. A verbal is an adjective form of a verb that modifies a noun.
- ✓ 2. A verbal is a word that is derived from a verb, but which no longer functions as a verb.
- () 3. A verbal is a form of the verb that ends in "-ed".
- ✓ 4. A verbal is a form of writing shorthand in which an involved concept can be stated very briefly.

The correct responses are numbers two and four. Choices one and three are true of the verbal in the basic sentence, but choices two and four describe the verbal in the basic sentence AND ALL OTHER VERBALS.

A verbal, any verbal, is both of these things:

1. A word that is derived from a verb that no longer functions as a verb.
2. A form of writing shorthand in which a complex concept can be stated in a minimum of words.

Here is the basic sentence again:

He used compressed air to inflate the tire.

In this sentence "compressed" sums up an involved concept in just one word. The concept is the act of putting air under pressure and confining it. "Compressed" is derived from the verb "compress",

but it no longer functions as a verb. In the basic sentence, it is used as an adjective to modify the noun, "air". As it is used in the basic sentence, the verbal allows us to exercise greater control over the emphasis in the sentence. It is this feature of the use of verbals that concerns us most; the control of emphasis within the sentence. In the basic sentence, notice that the emphasis is on the inflation of the tire. Where is the emphasis in this version of the sentence without the verbal?

He used air that had been put under pressure and confined to inflate the tire.

- (✓) 1. The emphasis is on the compression of the air.
- () 2. The emphasis is on the inflation of the tire.

In the last version of the sentence, the emphasis is on the compression of the air.

Now that you know what verbals DO, let's look at three types of verbals. The three types that we consider are these:

- 1. INFINITIVES, such as "to fly";
- 2. PARTICIPLES, such as "compressed" or "compressing"; and
- 3. GERUNDS, such as "flying" or "swimming".

Note that each of the examples provided is derived from a verb, but the new verbal form can no longer function as a verb. Let's begin our examination of the role of verbals in effective writing with the infinitive.