

Some suggestions for making your papers sound “smarter”

--work in progress!!--

1) USE ACTIVE VERBS. Try to find spots where you can substitute in a more active verb for “is,” “was,” or other forms of “to be.”

Example 1

In fifteenth-century England, landowners **were beginning** to fence in their land, undermining the medieval customs that left some land available for common use.

-can be rewritten as-

In fifteenth-century England, landowners **began** to fence in their land, undermining the medieval customs that left some land available for common use.

Example 2

Utopia **is a lay-out** for a society that prospers under equality and harmony.

-can be rewritten as-

Utopia **depicts** a society that prospers under equality and harmony.

2) REMOVE “DR. SEUSS” SENTENCES. You may also be able to take short sentences using “is” as the verb and use them as appositive phrases within an earlier or later sentence.

Ex: My father is a businessman from New York. He was nearly hit by a car in Greenwich village.

-can be rewritten as-

My father, **a businessman from New York**, was nearly hit by a car in Greenwich village.

3) ELIMINATE SOME COMPOUND SENTENCES. Look for compound independent sentences joined by an “and” or “but,” and then see if you can write it without these conjunction conjunctions. “And” in particular is a very weak conjunction; it simply adds a thought without suggesting at all the relationship between the two thoughts. You might try:

- **substituting a subordinating conjunction (or adverb) that will transform one of the clauses into a dependent (or subordinated) clause. A simple example**

would be substituting “although” for “but”—a small change admittedly, but occasionally provides some needed variety.

Example 1

More writes of the Utopian love of learning and religion, but he talks about both in very distinct areas of the text.

-can be rewritten as-

Although More writes of the Utopians’ love of learning and religion, he keeps both as their own separate entities.

- **turning one half of the compound sentence into a present participial phrase (but be careful—this doesn’t always work!*)**

Example 2

Many scholars recognize that changes such as the rise of capitalism was a central target for More’s criticisms, **and speculations** have been made that More’s *Utopia* reflects a socialist belief system.

-can be rewritten as-

Many scholars recognize that changes such as the rise of capitalism was a central target for More’s criticisms, **leading some to speculate** that More’s *Utopia* reflects a socialist belief system.

Example 3

Soon, “the nation organized as the one great business corporation in which all other corporations were absorbed,” **and this eliminated** many problem such as overproduction, waste, and economic crises.

-can be rewritten as-

Soon, “the nation organized as the one great business corporation in which all other corporations were absorbed,” **thereby eliminating** many problem such as overproduction, waste, and economic crises.

- **turning one half of the compound sentence into an introductory clause or phrase,**

Example 4

Ames remarks on the critical nature of Utopia and recognizes More’s subtle hints at social unrest in England at the time.

* This method only works when the entire first independent clause leads logically somehow to the second independent clause. I’ve given a couple examples below of how this can work.

-can be rewritten as-

Remarking on the critical nature of Utopia, Ames recognizes More's subtle hints at the social unrest in England at the time.

- **substituting a simple semicolon or period for the conjunction (remember, there are other—often better—ways to join ideas together than with just a conjunction).**

Example 5

As agricultural capitalism emerged in England, many people observed the problems with workers and wages, and as Kautsky emphasized, More was one of the few to take the criticisms a step further.

-can be rewritten as-

As agricultural capitalism emerged in England, many people observed the problems with workers and wages. Kautsky emphasized that More was one of the few to take the criticisms a step further.

- **simply splitting the sentence into two. Sometimes a simple period can do the job quite nicely.**

4) TRY SOME GERUND PHRASES. Look for “which” or “that” clauses and see if you can replace a few of them with a gerund phrase.

Example

Plato depicts a city that degenerates from an ideal state to tyranny.

-can be rewritten as-

Plato depicts a city degenerating from an ideal state to tyranny.

5) MORE EXPRESSIVE WORDS FOR EXPRESSION. Instead of “says” or “writes,” try some other verbs: **suggest, argue, assert, insist, maintain, support, advocate, champion, recognize, allude, point to, point out, observe, notice, etc.**

6) SOME WORDS TO AVOID!

- *basically*: we use it a lot in conversation, but often it is unnecessary. See if you can delete it.
- *lifestyle*: sometimes it fits, but most often we mean something else (culture, way of life, social conventions, social norms, etc.) Remember, “lifestyle” suggests a very modern notion of choice. Try to think of another word.