



Business & Market Research
Information for the Competitive Edge



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-- Jan Knight, Owner – Bancroft Information Services

Five Top Techniques To Improve Your Writing

Barbara McNichol

As writers, you have a message to share and a story to tell and you want to accomplish that as clearly as possible. I recommend using the following Five Top Techniques to make your writing as strong and clear.

1. Make Verbs Dance

The meaning of a sentence comes across effortlessly and 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. Watch for Mixed Modifiers

“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 organizer had many choices.” It’s now clear who is doing the thinking – the organizer!

4. Stay on a Parallel Path

Don’t let a mixed bag of sentence structures wiggle 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 toward the end of the sentence. It broke an expected pattern. Instead, the sentence needs a parallel structure, in this case, three “ing” words: “His attitude makes a difference in changing, succeeding, and moving on.” That keeps those mental gears from grinding.

5. Select the Right Word

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. Choose the perfect word when it matters most.

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*Barbara McNichol helps authors, speakers, and consultants perfect their manuscripts and marketing materials. This professional writer/editor has created the eBook *Word Trippers: The Ultimate Resource to Choosing the Perfect Word When It Matters Most*, available at www.wordtrippers.com on Books to Buy page.”*

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