Chem 197
Fall 2019

# writing exercise v

***tool 9: let punctuation control pace and space***

Clark claims that we use punctuation marks to control the pace at which we read text and to group together individual words into meaningful units. There are rules for punctuation, of course, but Clark suggests considering how fast you want your reader to move through your narrative and then adjust your punctuation accordingly. The following pairs of sentences are from a section of Edwin L. Battistella's book *Sorry About That*, which describes a meeting between Oprah Winfrey and James Frey, a writer who became enmeshed in controversy when it was discovered that his memoir included embellished and fabricated event. The pairs of sentences differ in their use of punctuation. As a group, read the sentences out loud (each of you should do this) and then discuss how the change in punctuation affects the pace at which you experience them? Which version do you prefer—the author has his preferences—and why? These examples are from the Battistella's blog post "Using Punctuation to Pace" at https://blog.oup.com/2019/05/using-punctuation-to-pace/.

### Sentence Pair 1

We are all a bit like Oprah and James Frey: we make mistakes, misspeak, mislead, and misbehave. We can be inconsiderate, rude, and even offensive. Some of us lie and cheat and steal, and some people kill or commit historic crimes.

We are all a bit like Oprah and James Frey. We make mistakes. We misspeak, mislead, and misbehave. We can be inconsiderate, rude, and even offensive. Some of us lie and cheat and steal. And some people kill or commit historic crimes.

### Sentence Pair 2

When we face our transgressions, we often feel the need (or are called upon) to apologize.

When we face our transgressions, we often feel the need—or are called upon—to apologize.

### Sentence Pair 3

Some of us apologize well and use language to repair relationships and restore respect; others apologize poorly and our insincerity leaves transgressions unresolved or even causes new harm.

Some of us apologize well and use language to repair relationships and restore respect. Others apologize poorly and our insincerity leaves transgressions unresolved or even causes new harm.

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***tool 11: prefer the simple over the technical***

When we write about measurements and data, it is easy to get lost in the technical details. When we do, our writing becomes turgid and our readers struggle to understand us. Clark encourages us to use simpler words, shorter sentences, and shorter paragraphs when we write about complex ideas. In their book *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace*, Joseph M. Williams and Gregory G. Colomb give this example of text borrowed from Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style*:

> Revising is part of writing. Few writers are so expert that they can produce what they are after on the first try. Quite often you will discover, on examining the completed work, that there are serious flaws in the arrangement of the material, calling for transposition. When this is the case, a word processor can save you time and labor as you rearrange the manuscript. You can select material on the screen and move it to a more appropriate spot, or, if you cannot find the right spot, move the material to the end of the manuscript until you decide whether to delete it. Some writers find that working with the printed copy of the manuscript helps them to visualize the process of changes; others prefer to revise entirely on screen. Above all, do not be afraid to experiment with what you have written. Save both the revised and the original versions; you can always use the computer to restore the manuscript to its original condition, should that course seem best. Remember, it is no sign of weakness or defeat that your manuscript needs major surgery. This is a common occurrence in all writing, and among the best writers. (199 words)

Williams and Golomb cut this back to just 51 words

> Most writers revise because few write a perfect first draft. If you work on a computer, you can rearrange the parts by moving them around. If you save the original, you can always go back to it. Even great writers revise, so if you manuscript needs surgery, it signals no weaknesses. (51 words)

but note that most readers will find this too terse and less interesting. Try to shorten Strunk and White's original paragraph to a more manageable 100–150 words while retaining more of its distinctive voice than you find in William and Golomb's shorter version.