



MODULE 6 IMPROVING YOUR REPORT

Duration: 6 - 8 hours

What can you do to ensure that your text is well written, especially with regard to style and mechanics?



Introduction

In this module, you will begin the revision stage of the report writing process. This is the stage where you will consider what improvements you need to make before your report is complete.

In the first module, you thought about what makes writing effective and what causes barriers to effective writing. At that time, you were introduced to the four core assumptions about effective writing espoused in this course. Effective writing is

- Well organized and concise
- Analytically sound
- Reader focused
- Written with good style and mechanics.

This module focuses primarily on the last assumption—good style and mechanics. You will concentrate on writing at the sentence level, analyzing sentences that follow principles of effective writing and those that do not. Along the way, you will get ample practice in revising sentences. You will also gain familiarity with some resources available from the World Bank Group regarding rules of style and punctuation.



"The most important quality of a good report is readability. It has to be written in such a way that our principal clients can get into it quickly and relate to it."
—Sector Manager



Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, you should be able to

- Identify stylistic and mechanical elements of ineffective sentences.
- Revise paragraphs to improve topic sentences, the use of connectors for paragraph unity, and sentence structure.
- Revise documents to simplify your sentence style and meet appropriate standards for English usage and mechanics.
- Revise overly complex sentences.



Writing in an “Institutional Style”

Even when you have a firm grasp of the overall organization of your report, you still need to put words together in sentences that make sense to your readers. Sometimes, this happens easily. Other times, you may struggle with your choice of words, their placement in the sentence, and the rules of the English language.

Often the result is long-winded prose filled with jargon, unnecessary elaboration, and verbs whose action is buried in abstract nouns. Despite all your efforts, you might write this sentence:

In order for an optimization in the reduction of the rate of return for fund members, it was concurred, not without considerable and vigorous debate, by policymakers that the implementation of a mild relative rate of return guarantee would, inter alia, create fiscal synergies to contribute to the financial prosperity of fund investors.

Why do we write this way? One reason is the culture of the organization—its jargon, its apparent lack of clear accountability, its elaborate review process. Another is the understandable insecurity of writers new to the job, writing in a language that is not their own. Your [Background Readings](#) refer to this style of writing as “institutional writing.”

The best way to avoid the weakness of institutional writing is to recognize its various forms and revise your mechanics and style word by word and sentence by sentence.

We have saved this discussion of mechanics and style for the last module because that is where you should deal with it in the actual report writing process—at the end, after you’ve gotten your main ideas down on paper according to the organization you developed in your plan.



Common Problems in World Bank Group Writing

Let’s take a look at the example that was used on the previous screen to illustrate ineffective writing. The example is contrived for the purposes of this demonstration, but it is still typical of how a text that has many stylistic flaws can create problems for your readers. It contains each of the sentence problems that you are going to examine in this module:

- Sentence branching
- Absence of action (noun-based style, passive voice)
- Unnecessary words
- Jargon, acronyms, foreign expressions
- Elegant variation

To reveal these problems, click on the different parts of the example with your mouse.

In order for an optimization in the reduction of the rate of return for fund members, it was concurred, not without considerable and vigorous debate, by policymakers that the implementation of a mild relative rate of return guarantee would, inter alia, create fiscal synergies to contribute to the financial prosperity of fund investors.

Sentence branching

Absence of action
(noun-based style)
(2 instances)

Absence of action
(passive voice)

Unnecessary words
(2 instances)

Unnecessary foreign
expression

Jargon

Elegant variation

You will now analyze each of these sentence problems in turn.



Sentence Branching

Because its grammar is relatively simple, English is primarily a language of word order; in other words, English has a fairly firm expectation about the order in which words will appear in a sentence. When the expected word order is changed, the sentence is likely to need more punctuation. More important, the sentence may become disjointed and less clear.

The core of the English sentence includes three elements:

- Subject
- Verb
- Object

Other elements are often needed in a sentence in order to specify *place*, *manner*, *time*, or *purpose*, but these other elements should ordinarily be kept outside the core of the sentence. When the development is not direct, a sentence may “branch.”

Here are two examples of sentences that have too much branching. For each example, try to find the main subject and verb and note their positions in the sentence. Notice where the branching occurs. When you click on the **Show Problems** button, you will see the subject and verb underlined and the branching highlighted.

Example 1

Despite the fact that the general prohibitions regarding personal financial transactions are not applicable to pre-existing financial holdings, if you hold prior investments in financial assets of a country or group of countries to which you have been newly assigned and with respect to which you are likely to have access to confidential information, you should seek the views of the officer designated by management.

Show Problems

Example 2

So-called right-to-information provisions, by the use of which the regular residents of villages of all sizes can (at least in theory) gain access to documents in which official expenditures are detailed, have been enacted in all three provinces to ensure greater participation in government processes.

Show Problems



Types of Sentence Branching

What is causing the problem with the sentences you've just looked at? Branching creates a disruption of the natural sentence structure of subject/verb/object. It is a sign that the writer has tried to pack too many related ideas together.

Sentence branching creates difficulties in two ways:

- **Left-branching:** Lengthy or significant elements before the subject of the sentence
- **Mid-branching:** Major interruptions between subject and verb or between verb and object

Following is a sentence, rewritten in two ways to illustrate the difficulties created by left-branching and mid-branching. Have a look and consider the readability of each version. Note again the placement of the main subject and verb of the sentence.

Left-branching

Because most existing studies have examined only a single stage of the supply chain, for example, productivity at the farm, or efficiency of agricultural markets, in isolation from the rest of the supply chain, policymakers have been unable to assess how problems identified at a single stage of the supply chain compare and interact with problems in the rest of the supply chain.

Explain the Branching

Mid-branching

Policymakers, because most existing studies have examined only a single stage of the supply chain, for example, productivity at the farm, or efficiency of agricultural markets, in isolation from the rest of the supply chain, have been unable to assess how problems identified at a single stage of the supply chain compare and interact with problems in the rest of the supply chain.

Explain the Branching

Do these cautions about branching mean that all sentences must be simple? Not necessarily. Even long sentences can be readable if they are structured properly. The best way to do this is to keep your main subject and verb together and to present them early in the sentence.



Analyze Sentence Branching

When does branching in sentences add necessary details, and when does it distract the reader and lead to misunderstandings? Review these four sentences. For each one, do the following:

- Identify the main subject and verb.
- Identify the type of branching that is occurring.
- Determine if the branching is a barrier to understanding. If you feel it is, rewrite the sentence to make the meaning more obvious.

Example 1

Although industrialized countries typically store 15 to 20 percent of their annual demand for gas, and although this is considered to be a good practice and is well understood as such, Ruritania has no reserves stored.

Main subject and verb:	<input type="text"/>
Type of branching:	<input type="text"/>
Revision:	<input type="text"/>

Example 2

Pending the appropriate authorizations, and assuming the financial arrangements can be finalized in time, Vivace Worldwide has agreed to sell 20 percent of its holdings to Ringtone Communications by September, 2011.

Main subject and verb:	<input type="text"/>
Type of branching:	<input type="text"/>
Revision:	<input type="text"/>

Example 3

So-called right-to-information provisions, by the use of which villagers can (at least in theory) gain access to documents in which official expenditures are detailed, have been enacted in all three provinces to ensure greater participation in government processes.

Main subject and verb:	<input type="text"/>
Type of branching:	<input type="text"/>
Revision:	<input type="text"/>



The Absence of Action

Believe it or not, report writing should be **action oriented** and even **energized**. Those terms sound more appropriate to superheroes than written reports, but the statement is true nonetheless. There is nothing less inviting to a reader than a passage of text that does nothing. If you don't believe this, then consider an experience that you would normally associate with action and energy. Let's take professional sports, for example. Here is a simple play-by-play description:

Zidane runs up the field with the ball and passes it to Henry. Henry leaps up and pops the ball high into the air toward the net. The goalkeeper is running for it, but I don't think he'll get it. Oh no, Ribery redirects the ball with a back-kick over the goalkeeper. It's heading for the corner! Maloua heads it the other way. He scores!

Now what would happen if you took the action out of that experience by imposing a institutional style? Here is the result:

A run up the field is taking place on the part of Zidane, who provides a pass to Henry. Henry succeeds in delivering the ball by a leap and a pop high into the air toward the net. The goalkeeper is carrying out a run at the ball, but it is considered that his reception of it will not occur. Oh no, a back-kick delivered by Ribery enables a redirection of the ball

over the goalkeeper. The ball is being projected toward the corner. A header is carried out by Malouda, effecting a change in the direction of the ball. A goal is scored!

It's not quite the same, is it? The difference is all in the action. There are two main elements of institutional style in this example—noun-based writing and the overuse of the passive voice. Both contribute to the lack of action in the sentences.



Absence of Action in Institutional Writing

Let's look at an example that you are more likely to see in the context of the World Bank Group. This paragraph employs exactly the same poor techniques of noun-based writing and passive voice. Click on the buttons to see the problems and to show a suggested revision.

Provisions to secure further funding are being made on the part of Country X, which has conducted a meeting with Country Y to revitalize the project. So far, Country Y has formed an agreement to deliver supplies while Country X will secure the appointment of a team to perform an evaluation of the project. Further meetings will be carried out to ensure continuation of the project according to schedule. These efforts will be made with the full participation of both countries until the project goals have been achieved.

Show Problems

Show Revision



Use Verbs Instead of Nouns to Drive the Action

Noun-based writing places abstract nouns (like *redirection*) in the position of subjects and uses a much weaker verb (*carry out*) to complete the sentence, but without any sense of action.

Recall that we looked at a [professional sports play-by-play](#). When the sports play-by-play is written in an institutional style, the people doing the action are not the subjects of any of the sentences. So instead of "Zidane running up the field", we have "the run taking place by Zidane". In this case, the action verb run is converted to a noun and the sense of action is diminished.

The same effect occurs whether you are writing about scoring goals in sports or achieving the millennium development goals through World Bank Group projects. A sentence without action will fail to engage its readers. Have a look at a similar comparison of sentences: one is noun-based, and the other is verb-based (action-oriented).

A noun-based sentence

Consistent with its mandate, the organization has made a commitment to the mobilization of the vastly increased resources that are needed for the establishment of the Global AIDS and Health Fund.

(31 words)

Show nouns

Show passive voice

Revised sentence using more verbs

Consistent with its mandate, the organization has committed to mobilizing the vastly increased resources needed for establishing the Global AIDS and Health Fund.

(23 words)

Show active verbs



Put Verbs to Work

Revise these sentences to eliminate some of the abstract nouns and make verbs do more of the work. You will likely also be able to eliminate several unnecessary words in each example without changing the meaning. Please note that the suggested solutions are not the only solutions.

Example 1

The mission team, having held meetings with the relevant authorities, conducted a thorough evaluation and assessment of the situation in question.

Check Answer

Example 2

As of yet, there is no clear indication of the precise extent to which the privatization process will actually be carried out or implemented. At such time as more information becomes available for analysis, staff will conduct an in-depth review on the matter of the privatization process.

Check Answer

Example 3

According to Bank Group policy, the hiring of STCs by staff should be done only for the provision of support for a specific task.

Check Answer

Example 4

The determination of a long-term policy and the related establishment of improved administrative procedures would have the result of helping the achievement of the target growth rate.

Check Answer



The Active and Passive Voices

In the play-by-play passage of the soccer game, you may have also noticed the change in verbs from active in the first example to passive in the second.

Active Voice	Passive Voice
I don't think he'll get it.	It is considered that his reception will not occur.

The ball is heading for the corner.	The ball is being projected toward the corner.
Malouda heads it the other way.	A header is carried out by Malouda.
He scores!	A goal is scored!

Overusing passive voice is another characteristic of the institutional style. Like noun-based writing, it tends to sap the sentence of any sense of action.



Comparing Active and Passive Voices

There are times when the passive voice is appropriate, but some writers use it unnecessarily. To keep your sentences direct and concise, you should review your writing for overuse of the passive voice and revise if necessary.

You can be deliberate about your choice of active or passive to suit your purposes for writing. Whatever you choose, you should have a good reason for your decision. Following are a few reasons for each.

Benefits of the active voice	Benefits of the passive voice
The active makes it clear who is performing the action in the sentence (i.e., the doer).	The passive tends to emphasize the event itself, rather than the doer.
Show examples	
The active voice is more concise and direct.	The passive may be useful when the doer is not known.
Show examples	
The active voice gives the writer the option of being more personal.	The passive can disguise the doer.
Show examples	



Unnecessary Words

Aside from using weak, passive verbs, institutional writing typically suffocates its message with too many words. To avoid this pitfall, look for unnecessary words as one important step in your revising process. Professional editors recognize several patterns of wordiness, including the following:

- Words that say the same thing, such as clear and transparent, safe and secure, provide and deliver, will in future. Sometimes these are known as **multiple modifiers**.
- Descriptions that are so obvious as to be meaningless, such as *detailed* programs, *safe* health standards, *high-quality* modules. (Think of the opposite of these words. Do you think that anyone would develop *unsafe* health standards or *low-quality* modules?)
- **Filler** words and phrases, such as *those that are intended to be carried out*, *very*, *essentially*.

Applying these patterns, which of the words in the following paragraph should you eliminate? Do you know why?

This specific sector represents a clear "picture of the future" and encompasses all the noted and major challenges that Indian agriculture faces in a world where food patterns are changing because of increasing incomes and wealth; delivery schedules are more demanding with the recent emergence of supermarkets; and barriers and challenges to trade such as tariffs and subsidies are less important than the challenges posed by incredibly high and stringent sanitary standards.

Your response:

Show unnecessary words

Show revised version

Did you recognize the patterns of wordiness? The activity on the next page gives you more practice.



Eliminate Unnecessary Words

One way to eliminate unnecessary words and inject some action into your sentence is to become familiar with some of the more common words and phrases that will alert you to the institutional style of writing.

Look at the sentences below. Try improving them by eliminating unnecessary words. When you have finished, click to compare your answers.

Institutional writing examples	Revisions
The study relies on a cross-country analysis of three countries: Brazil, Peru, and Chile.	<input type="text"/> <p>Show Revision</p>
It could readily build strength for the negotiating position it is currently taking by being willing and able to bring about reforms to its own trade regime.	<input type="text"/> <p>Show Revision</p>
At the WTO, India must aggressively seek not only significantly lower levels of foreign protection, but also much greater transparency, simplicity, reliability and predictability in foreign trade regimes.	<input type="text"/> <p>Show Revision</p>
change the direction of economic policy	<input type="text"/> <p>Show Revision</p>
a higher level of funding	<input type="text"/> <p>Show Revision</p>
during the time period 2009-2012	<input type="text"/> <p>Show Revision</p>
since the events of August 2012 took place	<input type="text"/> <p>Show Revision</p>
Over 6,000 of the total are in this category.	

	<input type="text"/> <input type="button" value="Show Revision"/>
It is not unreasonable.	<input type="text"/> <input type="button" value="Show Revision"/>
a problem for the country as a whole	<input type="text"/> <input type="button" value="Show Revision"/>
The economy suffered negative economic growth.	<input type="text"/> <input type="button" value="Show Revision"/>
changing the decision-making process of investment planning	<input type="text"/> <input type="button" value="Show Revision"/>
weakness from a technical and financial standpoint	<input type="text"/> <input type="button" value="Show Revision"/>



Jargon, Acronyms, and Foreign Expressions



*"We need to use language that clients will grasp, not jargon.
Don't write that the tax plan is 'regressive';
write that it's not equitable."
—Country Program Coordinator*

Jargon is a specialized language, developed by a narrow group of people who understand each other. Jargon can be very useful when everyone understands what the writer means. However, if readers are not part of the circle of specialists who use this type of language, they might not understand it.

If you write a phrase like "an agrostological study" or "vinification projects" for example, such terms will be fine for horticulturalists. But what about the rest of your readers?

This same principle applies to the use of acronyms and foreign expressions. It is possible that not all of your readers will understand them. If you are using the same acronym throughout your text, it is standard practice to write out the full term first, followed by the acronym. For example, "The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has reported an increase in the number of refugees worldwide." Finally, avoid using foreign terms if there is an English equivalent.

When you are tempted to use jargon, acronyms, or foreign expressions, first ask yourself these questions:

- Am I making my communication clearer by using these terms?
- Will all of my intended readers understand what these terms mean?
- If readers might not understand, have I decided how and where to define the terms?
- Will I include a glossary or list of the terms?
- If I must use the terms, am I making my sentences shorter to compensate?

If you answer "no" to any of these questions, you probably should not use the term. Instead, revise the term to one more commonly understood.



Revise for Clarity

The following sentences contain examples of jargon, foreign expressions, and acronyms used inappropriately. Read each sentence and then revise it in order to make it clearer.

The WARDM (West African Regional Development Marketplace) has received over 1,800 proposals in response to a call for proposals for the best business ideas in each country.

Show Revision

In the case of local or regional procurement, the rule of caveat emptor must apply.

Show Revision

The minister stated that his counterpart seemed to have an *idée fixe* on the subject.

Show Revision



Elegant Variation

The term **elegant variation** was coined by the English language stylist H.W. Fowler. What does this term mean? In elegant variation, the writer tries to be elegant by varying the words used to convey a single idea.

The economist D.N. McCloskey provides a detailed description of this term and why it is problematic for writers and readers.

Elegant Variation uses many words to mean one thing, with the result that in the end the reader, and even the writer, don't quite know what is being talked about. A paper on economic development used in two pages all these: "industrialization," "growing structural differentiation," "economic and social development," "social and economic development," "development," "economic growth," "growth," and "revolutionized means of production." With some effort, you can see in context that they all meant about the same thing. The writer simply liked the sound of the differences.

Some people who write this way mistake the purpose of writing, believing it to be an occasion for display of many synonyms that have the same meaning. As McCloskey makes clear, elegant variation can make writing look impressive, but it is not reader friendly. If your goal is to make your readers understand you, then you should avoid this technique.



Identify Elegant Variation

To help your reader understand your meaning, use key terms consistently. Did the writer of the segment below do this? Review the document and find examples of elegant variation that make the reader work harder for the meaning.

Read the passage. Note that it begins "A delegation from Wonderlandia." As you read, highlight every time you think the writer is referring to this delegation. Hold down the left mouse button and move the cursor across the words to highlight them. When you are finished, click on the **Check Answers** button at the bottom of the document.

Question 1.

The meeting which Elena attended lasted much longer than planned.

Revision:

Show answer

It would have been easier to keep the **delegation from Wonderlandia** and the **mission in Wonderlandia** distinct if the writer had used the terms consistently instead of falling into the trap of elegant variation.



Review of Institutional Style

Now that you have considered different elements of institutional style, let's see how well you can identify and revise these elements in a text. The sample text below contains several examples of institutional style that you've learned about in this module. Read through it and try to identify these ineffective elements. Once you've done that, you can attempt to revise the text to make it more readable. If you need help identifying problem areas in the text, click the **Show Hint** button.

Example: Ruritania

The GOR has a well-established policy in the matter of release of documents, and in view of this, it would find it difficult if Bank Group documents of any category were to be released for the information and use of the general public even after a lapse of some time. Prior consultation with and approval of the concerned country should be an important prerequisite in evolving any policy on the subject, and it would not be advisable for decisions on such matters to be taken by the Bank Group on its own. The Government of Ruritania therefore suggests that a common policy along the lines of the President's Memorandum which would apply to all countries would not be appropriate and, with reference to the documents relating to Ruritania, the Government of Ruritania's concurrence should be obtained before releasing the document even after a lapse of time.

Your revision:

Show Hint

Show Revised Version



Review Your Own Writing

Now that you've had a chance to think about institutional style, it's time to look at your own writing. Use this checklist to review the writing sample you submitted when you applied for this course, or another recent sample of your writing. If you discover a phrase that now seems institutional, try rewriting it. Use your results as a guide for your future writing—it is easier to eliminate problems if you are aware of them!

REFLECTION



[Reflection 10: Review Your Own Writing](#)





Mechanical Aspects of Writing

Although sometimes the terms **mechanics** and **style** can mean the same thing, for the purposes of this course they have distinct meanings. Up to this point of the module, you have been working with **style**—learning how to compose direct and concise sentences. In contrast, **mechanics** refers to the detailed elements that combine to construct words, sentences, and paragraphs, such as spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Mechanics is more closely related to the rules of the English language. This part of the module will remind you of some of the important rules and provide tips on how to revise your work with these rules in mind.

Following the rules of writing is a lot easier when you know what they are. The best way is to adopt a standard reference text as your guidebook for correct writing. The value of a reference text is that it simplifies your choices for how to construct a word or sentence. It also provides a useful authority on mechanics that you can rely on in case of editorial uncertainty. World Bank Group style is based on U.S. rules, taken largely from *The Chicago Manual of Style*. The World Bank Group recommends the following references for writers and editors:

- [Background Readings](#): Section 5. Guidelines on the Mechanics of Writing and World Bank Group Style
- *The Gregg Reference Manual*. McGraw-Hill/Irwin, 10th edition, 2004.
- *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. Merriam-Webster, 11th edition, 2004.



Pretest Part 1: Knowledge of Mechanics

Do you think you know how to write with perfect grammar, spelling, and punctuation? The only way to find out for sure is to test yourself. There are two parts to this test: knowledge and application.

The first part is a simple test of your knowledge of mechanics. You will be asked a few straightforward questions about spelling, grammar, and punctuation. The test will help you assess how well you use English-language mechanics for your writing at the Bank Group.

Answer the following questions by choosing the correct answer from the choices provided.

**You need to upgrade
your Flash Player**



Pretest Part 2: Application of Mechanics

The second part of the test involves reading, analyzing, and revising a text that contains several mechanical errors. Take your time with this part. If you can catch most of the errors, then you will know that you already have a good knowledge of mechanics for writing in English and applying World Bank Group style.

Morocco is still saddled with high levels of poverty, glaring income inequality and low human development indicators relative to other countries in the region. Despite great strides in expanding basic education and resolving gender imbalances over the last decade morocco still suffers the historical legacy of little attention to social issues. At present about 15% of the population is considered poor and an additional 25 per cent as economically vulnerable. Roughly two thirds of the poor live in rural areas, although the share in urban areas is rising, moreover there are great differences not only between urban and rural areas but within each. Indeed, two communities can exist side by side with 80% and 5% poverty levels respectively. Morocco's extremely low ranking on the 2005 UNDP (United Nations development program) human development index, 124th position out of 177 countries, came as a wake-up call to many in the country.

Your revision:



Sentence Patterns and Punctuation

In Module 5, you were introduced to simple, compound, and complex sentence patterns. Your focus then was on using connecting words and phrases to bring out the logical relationships of ideas within your sentences and paragraphs. Such ideas are expressed grammatically as clauses, which form the main parts of a sentence. A clause is a group of words containing a subject and a verb.

Apart from using words to guide your readers, you can also make your meaning clear by using correct punctuation. Generally, you can think of punctuation as a set of markers to direct your readers through a text. To help your readers, try to use standard patterns for punctuating correctly and precisely. Let's take a look at some of those patterns.

Below are the basic patterns for punctuating three main types of sentences: simple, compound, and complex.

Simple sentences

A simple sentence is an independent clause—it contains a subject, a verb, and sometimes an object. It can also contain additional information, which follows a standard pattern: namely, **Subject, Verb, Object** (direct and indirect), **Place, Manner, Time**, and **Purpose** (SVOPMTP). These are expressed in single words or as groups of words called phrases.

Simple sentences



Compound sentences

A compound sentence joins independent clauses (each containing a subject, a verb, and possibly other elements listed above). There are three ways to join two independent clauses.

Compound sentences



Complex sentences

A complex sentence joins a dependent clause with an independent clause. The dependent clause is introduced by a subordinating conjunction (e.g., since, although, if, because). The dependent clause can introduce the sentence, end the sentence, or interrupt the sentence. Your punctuation for a complex sentence depends upon where you place your dependent clause.

Complex sentences



Punctuating Series and Lists

In addition to the sentence patterns already covered, there are other patterns that require careful punctuation. Let's start with how to punctuate series and lists.

Items in a series

Use commas to separate a series of three or more items.

Note: This guideline follows official World Bank Group preferences, which are based on *The Chicago Manual of Style*. Other organizations might not use this comma, but the Bank Group does require it.

They traveled to Syria, Iran, and Jordan.

During our mission, we will visit the most hard-pressed areas of the country; assess whether they should receive financial aid or other kinds of assistance; and report on actions taken by the government, efforts made by NGOs, and progress made by the team.

(Note: Use semicolons to separate items in a series if the series has internal commas or is too complex for a comma.)

Vertical list

This is a list used to set off the text, or show complex information effectively in an outline style.

During their mission in December 2011, they visited the following locations:

- **Lagos, Nigeria**
- **Dakar, Senegal**
- **Luanda, Angola**

Vertical list (items in a sequence)

When you want to show a list of items in sequence, use a numbered list rather than a bulleted list.

During their mission in December 2011, they visited the following locations:

1. **Lagos, Nigeria (Dec. 1–9)**
2. **Dakar, Senegal (Dec. 10–21)**
3. **Luanda, Angola (Dec. 22–31)**



Punctuating for Extra Information

You can also use punctuation for phrases that add detail to the sentence. The following are two specific examples of this type of punctuation, using commas and parentheses.

Introductory expressions

Use commas after introductory words, phrases, or clauses.

Unfortunately, the committee rejected the proposal.

As of January 15, the proposal has been endorsed by several managers.

According to our policy, reports must be available to those concerned.

Parenthetical statements

Use parentheses to set off information that is not essential to the meaning of the sentence.

The Board of Directors approved the investment (\$7 million loan and \$2 million equity).

Use parentheses to enclose a word, phrase, or sentence that serves to explain, amplify, or translate another part of the sentence. This includes following a title with an acronym.

The World Bank Institute (WBI) provides training for middle-level and senior government officials.

The committee recommended three new people for the mission team (Appendix 2).

Schools across the country are closed in an act called katalypsi (takeover).



Using Which, That, and Who

The words **which**, **that**, and **who** are all relative pronouns. This means they relate groups of words to other nouns or pronouns. In the examples below, click on the relative pronoun to find out which word or group of words each one relates to.

I have never been to Dakar, **which** is reputed to be very beautiful.

[**Which** relates to "Dakar."]

The books **that** hold the greatest appeal are not the ones recommended by our teacher.

[**That** relates to "the books."]

I would like to speak with the consultant **who** wrote this report.

Determining when to use **that** and **which** to introduce a clause depends on whether the clause is essential to the reader's comprehension of the sentence. As a result, using **that** and **which** correctly can reduce possible misinterpretations of meaning.

Which

When a clause is descriptive or parenthetical and could be removed from the sentence without changing the sentence's meaning, use **which** and enclose the clause with commas.

The Environmental Policy Report, **which** Elena introduced at yesterday's meeting, is under review.

Because "the Environmental Policy Report" is the name of a specific report, the reader knows which report the sentence is referring to. The clause "which Elena introduced at yesterday's meeting" is simply additional information. Therefore, **which** should be used. The clause "which Elena introduced at yesterday's meeting" is not essential to the reader's understanding of the noun.

That

When a clause serves to limit or define the noun it is modifying, use **that** to introduce the clause.

The report **that** Elena introduced at yesterday's meeting is under review.

Without the clause "that Elena introduced at yesterday's meeting," the reader will not know which report the sentence is referring to. The likelihood for misinterpretation by the reader is great. Therefore, **that** should be used. Also, because the clause is essential to the sentence's construction, there should be no commas.



Capitalization

As with commas, capitalization is one of those mechanical elements that writers sometimes use inconsistently. Whenever you find yourself in doubt, it is best to consult your references. In this course, we outline the main principles. For more details, consult the guidelines on mechanics in the [Background Readings](#), the *World Bank Group Style Guide*, or *The Gregg Reference Manual*.

You should always capitalize proper nouns. However, many words can also appear in lower case without loss of meaning. Have a look at the following examples that show when to use capitalization.

Rule	Example
	The delegation met with the president at the White House.

When you use words like <i>president, state, administration, government, or ministry</i> generically, there is no need for capitalization.	
However, when you use the same words as part of a proper noun or title, then you need to capitalize.	The delegation was greeted by President Obama at the White House.
The same applies for geographic names: capitalize names of places, but use lowercase for general areas, descriptions, or positions.	The recent project involved loan agreements managed by various Latin American central banks. The project for the northern part of the country was conducted in collaboration with the Central Bank of Colombia.
For writing at the World Bank Group, you should capitalize names of projects and loans.	The World Bank Group's Board of Executive Directors today approved a US\$50 million loan for Brazil to enhance the impact of the Federal Water Resources Management Project (PROAGUA) in the country's most drought-prone regions.



Posttest on Mechanics

The pretest for this section gave you an opportunity to think about mechanics; this posttest gives you a chance to apply what you learned in this module. Are these sentences correct? If not, correct them.

**You need to upgrade
your Flash Player**



Revising for Mechanics and Style

As you have realized from this module, there are plenty of rules to remember regarding mechanics. (This module has touched on a few of the more important ones. See more resources on mechanics and style in the [Resources and Documents](#) for this module.) Also, your [Background Readings](#) provide some helpful techniques for reviewing and revising your own writing.

Because there are many rules to remember, and because effective writing takes practice, it is a good idea to adopt a deliberate approach to reviewing and revising your writing. You can consider revising at five different levels, each focusing on a different aspect of the overall text:

1. Context, content, and sequence
2. Guideposts that help the reader anticipate and follow the discussion
3. Clarity, conciseness, and appropriateness of language
4. Mechanics of writing
5. The whole document a final time to proofread for any errors

Use the comprehensive checklist from your [Background Readings](#) (page 35) to ensure that you have revised carefully. See the Reflection file below.

REFLECTION



[Reflection 11: Checklist for Revising—Five Levels](#)



Assignment 6: Full Report or Revised Report Section

You have two options for this assignment. You may either revise and resubmit the report section you submitted in Assignment 5, or you may submit up to 15 pages of the complete report you are working on. If you found the mechanics section particularly challenging, you may wish to choose Option 1. If you are comfortable with mechanics, you may prefer to get more general feedback from your tutor by choosing Option 2.

Completing your assignment



- **Option 1:** [Resubmit via Moodle](#) your report section from Assignment 5. First, you should revise this text based on what you now know about institutional style and good mechanics. Second, you should improve upon any other aspects of the text as suggested by your tutor. Your tutor will review your submission with a focus on style and mechanics.
- **Option 2:** Write a substantive section of your report and [submit it via Moodle](#) to your tutor for feedback. Ideally, the section will be from 5 to 10 pages. The maximum acceptable length is 15 pages. Your tutor will provide general feedback on the style and structure of your report and will suggest ways to further develop your writing skills.



Completing the Course

The assignment for this module marks the end of your work on this course. Once you have submitted your final assignment, you will receive feedback from your tutor as usual. In addition, your tutor will confirm that you have completed the course. You can see the status of your assignments and review past tutor comments at any time in the Assignment section of [Moodle](#). Be sure to save assignments with comments to your own hard drive since these courses are inaccessible after the end date. The legend for assignment status is on the [Moodle](#) home page.

At that point, you will have two further tasks to complete:

- Fill out a confidential course evaluation form to be submitted to an online survey site. We would like to know what you thought of the course and whether you have any ideas for improving it. The Commonwealth of Learning will direct you to the online survey form.
- Check the next section of this course, called [Next Steps](#). There you will find information about further opportunities for training in writing at the World Bank Group.

Once you have successfully completed the course, you are eligible for one-on-one tutorials with a writing instructor in the World Bank Group's Writing and Speaking Skills Program. In tutorials, you will work on applying the course principles to a current report. Each tutorial is a live, one-hour session in which you will connect with the instructor by phone and webinar. Please contact [Elena Gontcharova](#) to sign up for a tutorial.



Resources and Documents

Reflections Files

- [Review Your Own Writing](#)
- [Checklist for Revising—Five Levels](#)

Other resources

- The Gregg Reference Manual. McGraw-Hill/Irwin. 10th edition, 2004.
Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary. Merriam-Webster, 11th edition, 2004. (also available [online](#))
- [European Commission: How to Write Clearly](#) (available in other languages as well)
- [World Bank Group Editorial Style Guide](#) (available on the intranet)
- ["Job Aids"](#) on the website of the [Writing and Speaking Skills Program](#) (available on the intranet)
- [Self-study modules](#): Click on **English as a Second Language (ESL) Resources** to jump down to the modules. The modules cover the following topics: Sentence Structure (parts 1 and 2), Adjective Clauses, Articles, Simple Past and Present Perfect Tenses, and Subject-Verb Agreement. (available on the intranet)
- [Background Readings: Report Writing](#)
- [Module 6 Printable \(PDF format\)](#)



Summary

Drafting is the process of getting the words onto the paper and into paragraphs and sentences. Now that you've done this, you can revise your text while focusing on the various sentence problems that make your writing less effective than it could be. These problems contribute to institutional style, which includes

- Sentence branching

- Absence of action (noun-based style, passive voice)
- Unnecessary words
- Jargon, acronyms, foreign expressions
- Elegant variation

By eliminating these problem areas from your writing, you will help increase your reader's attention to and comprehension of your work. Ineffective writing undermines your purpose and contributes to the reputation for stuffy, incomprehensible writing that persists in many large organizations.

Also, as you revise your report, you should be aware of the rules of mechanics used to ensure the quality and consistency of written materials at the World Bank Group. Be sure to use Bank Group-recommended reference texts, such as style guides and dictionaries. The final stage of reviewing your report involves the closest look at the details of style and mechanics. By paying attention to these details, you will be able to write clear, readable reports to help decision makers take appropriate action.



*"Although nobody in your audience is reading your report
for pleasure, a well-written report can be
a pleasure to read."
—Sector Manager*



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