Strategies for

Writing with Style

**Overview:** This packet will provide a refresher on academic style through practice with the grammatical forms and stylistic possibilities of the English language. It will introduce participants to new methods for achieving clarity in their academic writing at the sentence level.

**Goals**

1. To understand the basic grammatical elements of English
2. To learn how to use these elements to create clarity and interest
3. To help you develop the ability to play with sentences and create stylistic options

**The English Sentence**

The most basic elements of a sentence are the subject (noun) and the predicate (verb). When you have both together, you have an independent clause (sentence).

Example:

**The dog** **runs** **The dog runs.**

Subject **+** Predicate **=** Independent Clause

(noun) (verb) (sentence)

You can add on to these basics with adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, gerunds, infinitives, phrases, subordinate and coordinate clauses, and conjunctions. But you will always need a subject and a predicate. Additional clauses, phrases, and adjectives can be used to add information and clarity but can never replace a subject and its predicate.

**5 Style Principles**

1. Start with the verb

*Clarity, precision, and interest all can begin with the verb.*

1. Place important information in the main clause

*If something is important, put it into an independent clause; if it’s not so important, put it into a dependent clause (or make it a modifier).*

1. Use sentence position for emphasis

*If something is important, try to put it into the first or last position in the sentence.*

1. Repeat important words

*If something is important, think about repeating it within the sentence.*

1. Punctuate for clarity

*If something is important (or unimportant), use punctuation marks--dashes and parentheses and even colons--to signal that importance (or lack of importance)*

Developing an effective style is about generating a variety of possibilities and choosing from among them. Don’t settle on your first version of a sentence; always play around.

**Practice**

Our road trips to Florida were long ones, but they never seemed too long. That’s because we always had so much fun. The first leg of our trip was always given over to “Broadway.” My two brothers and I would create and then perform three or four skits for my parents. For example, we once put on “The Courtship of Our Parents” as we imagined it, plus “A Trip to the Principal” and then a musical called “Blue Christmas.” My parents would judge the skits, and the best performer would get an extra scoop of ice cream at our lunch stop. Then we started getting close to South of the Border. South of the Border is a pit stop and a tourist trap located about halfway between New York and our Florida destination. We stopped there on every trip for 2-3 hours. My brother and I would go on all the rides while our parents rested. (They needed it, believe me.) South of the Border was always a great treat. When the day was over, we would stay at a motel. After a good night’s sleep, we’d be off again.

**References**

Faigley, Lester, and Jack Selzer. *Good Reasons with Contemporary Arguments and Handbook*,

2014.

Morenberg, Max, and Jeffrey Sommers. *The Writer's Options: Lessons in Style and*

*Arrangement.* New York: Longman, 2008.

**A Note About this Packet and the Graduate Writing Center**

Please note that this packet and the workshop it is based on are designed to address general writing principles. As a result, you may not find the information in this packet or the workshop as directly applicable to your field or your current study. This packet is intended to provide a discussion of general skills that should transfer across disciplines. This means that the workshop and the packet are not substitutes for becoming literate in the genre practices in your own field and asking questions of peers and advisors.

The Graduate Writing Center (GWC), located at 111 H Kern, provides free, one-on-one consultations for graduate students working on any kind of writing project – from seminar papers to presentations to articles to dissertations. Scheduling an appointment with the GWC is an excellent way to follow up on the practical information you receive during the workshops and this packet.

To learn more about the GWC, please visit the center’s website at [gwc.psu.edu](http://gwc.psu.edu/) or email [gwc@psu.edu](mailto:gwc@psu.edu). Please note that the appointment schedule is posted one week in advance and appointment times book quickly.