

Characters

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When character is lost, all is lost.

—Anonymous

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF CHARACTERS

- 1a. The CIA feared the president would recommend to Congress that it reduce its budget.
- 1b. The CIA had fears that the president would send a recommendation to Congress that it make a reduction in its budget.

- 1b. The CIA had fears that the president would send a recommendation to Congress that it make a reduction in its budget.
- 1c. The fear of the CIA was that a recommendation from the president to Congress would be for a reduction in its budget.

1d. There was fear that there would be a recommendation for a budget reduction.

DIAGNOSIS AND REVISION: CHARACTERS

Three things have to know:

1. When your subjects are not characters
2. If they are'nt, where you should look for characters
3. What you should do when you find them
(or don't)

Governmental intervention in fast-changing technologies has led to the distortion of market evolution and interference in new product development.

1.Underline the first seven or eight words

Governmental intervention in
fast-changing technologies has led to the
distortion of market evolution and
interference in new product development.

2.Find the main characters.

Governmental —→ Government

Market evolution —→ Market

3. Skim the passage for actions involving those characters, particularly actions buried in nominalizations.

governmental intervention	→	government intervenes
distortion	→	[government] distorts
market evolution	→	market evolve
interference	→	[government] interferes
development	→	[market] developes

When a government intervenes in fast-changing technologies, it Distorts how markets Envolve and Interferes with their ability to develop new products.

Medieval theological debates often addressed issues considered trivial by modern philosophical thought.



Medieval theologians often debated issues that modern philosophers consider trivial.

QUICK TIP:

First step in diagnosing a dense style:

Look at subjects.

If you don't see main characters in a few short, concrete words, you have to look for them.

When you are revising your writing:

Make those characters the subjects of verbs naming those actions. Then string together those character-action pairs into complete sentences.

When you are reading :

Focusing on the characters, try to retell the story in the sentences, one action at a time. If that fails, list character-action pairs and rewrite the sentences yourself.

RECONSTRUCTING ABSENT CHARACTERS

A decision was made in favor of
doing a study of the disagreements.

We decided that I should study why they disagreed.

I decided that you should study why he disagreed.

Research strategies that look for more than one variable are of more use in understanding factors in psychiatric disorder than strategies based on the assumption that the presence of psychopathology is dependent on a single gene or on strategies in which only one biological variable is studied.

If ***one/we/researchers*** are to understand what causes psychiatric disorder, ***one/we/they*** should use research strategies that look for more than one variable rather than assume that a single gene is responsible for a psychopathology or adopt a strategy in which ***one/we/they*** study only biological variable.

QUICK TIP:

When explaining a issue to someone involved in it,
imagine sitting across the table from the person,
say *you* as often as you can

Taxable intangible property includes financial notes and municipal bonds. A one-time tax of 2% on its value applies to this property.



You have to pay tax on **your** intangible property, including **your** financial notes and municipal bonds. On this property, **you** pay a one-time tax of 2%.

Taxpayers have to pay tax on ***their*** intangible property, including ***their*** financial notes and municipal bonds. On this property, ***they*** pay a one-time tax of 2%.

Abstractions as Characters

To understand what causes psychiatric disorder, ***studies*** should look for more than one variable rather than adopt a strategy in which ***they*** test only one biological variable or assume that a single gene is responsible for a psychopathology.

The **argument** is this. The cognitive component of **intention** exhibits a high degree of **complexity**. **Intention** is temporally divisible into two: prospective **intention** and immediate **intention**. The cognitive function of prospective **intention** is **representation** of a *subject's* similar past **actions**, *his* current situation, and *his* course of future **actions**. That is, the cognitive component of prospective **intention** is a **plan**. The cognitive function of immediate **intention** is the **monitoring** and **guidance** of ong oing bodily **movement**.

I **ARGUE** this about **intention**. It HAS a complex cognitive component of two temporal kinds: prospective and immediate. We **USE** prospective **intention** to **REPRESENT** how *we* have **ACTED** in our past and present and how we **WILL ACT** in the future. That is, *we* **USE** the cognitive component of prospective **intention** to **HELP us PLAN**. *We* use immediate intention to **Monitor** and **Guide our** bodies as *we* **MOVE** them.

Here's the point:

When you must write about abstractions, turn them into virtual characters by making them the subjects of verbs that tell a story. Avoid using a lot of other abstract nominalizations around your abstractions.

Try a general term for whoever is doing the action when revising an abstract passage and have problem with hidden characters.

CHARACTERS AND PASSIVE VERBS

subject

verb

object

Active:

I

lost

the money

character/agent

action

goal

	subject	be+verb	prepositional phrase
Passive:	The money	lost	[by me]
	goal	action	character/agent

We can manage the problem if we control costs.

Problem management requires cost control.

- Neither of its actions—management and control— are verbs; both are nominalizations.
- The subject is problem management, an abstraction.
- the sentence lacks flesh-and-blood characters.

Choosing Between Active and Passive

1. Must your readers know who is responsible for the action?

- The president **WAS RUMORED** to have considered resigning.
- Those who **ARE FOUND** guilty can **BE FINED**.
- Valuable records should always **BE KEPT** in a safe.

2. Would the active or passive verb help your readers move more smoothly from one sentence to the next?

We must decide whether to improve education in the sciences alone or to raise the level of education across the whole curriculum. **The weight given to industrial competitiveness as opposed to the value we attach to the liberal arts** new information **WILL DETERMINE** active verb **our decision.** familiar information

We must decide whether to improve education in the sciences alone or to raise the level of education across the whole curriculum. *Our decision* familiar information **WILL BE DETERMINED** passive verb **by the weight we give to industrial competitiveness as opposed to the value we attach to the liberal arts.** new information

3. Would the active or passive give readers a more consistent and appropriate point of view?

By early 1945, the *Allies* HAD essentially DEFEATED Germany; all that remained was a bloody climax. *American, French, British, and Russian forces* HAD BREACHED its borders and WERE BOMBING it around the clock. But *they* HAD not yet so DEVASTATED Germany as to destroy its ability to resist

By early 1945, *Germany* HAD essentially BEEN
DEFEATED; all that remained was a bloody climax. *It's*
boarders HAD BEEN BREACHED and *it* WAS BEING
BOMBED around the clock. *It* HAD not BEEN so
DEVASTATED, however, that *it* could not RESIST

↑
active

Here's the point:

- You don't know who did an action, readers don't care, or you don't want them to know.
- You want to shift a long and complex bundle of information to the end of a sentence, especially when doing so also lets you begin with a chunk of information that is shorter, more familiar, and therefore easier to understand.
- You want to focus your readers' attention on one or another character.

The “Objective” Passive vs. I/We

Based on the writers’ verbal intelligence, prior knowledge, and essay scores, their essays were analyzed for structure and evaluated for richness of concepts. The subjects were then divided into a high-or-low-ability group. Half of each group was randomly assigned to a treatment group or to a placebo group.

This paper is concerned with two problems. How can **we** best handle in a transformational grammar certain restrictions that..., To illustrate, **we** may cite..., **we** shall show...

Science the pituitary-adrenal axis is activated during the acute phase response, **we** have investigate the potential role... Specifically, **we** have studied the effects if interleukin-1...

Passive, Characters, and Metadiscourse

- Some refer to research activities: *examine, observe, measure, record, use*. Those verbs are usually in the passive voice: *The subjects were observed...*
- Others refer not to the subject matter or the research, but to the writer's own writing and thinking: *cite, show, inquire*. These verbs are often active and in the first person: *We will show...* They are examples of what is called METADISCOURSE.

- your thinking and act of writing: *We/I will explain, show, argue, claim, deny, suggest, contrast, add, expand, summarize...*
- your readers' actions: *consider now, as you recall, look at the next example...*
- the logic and form of what you have written: *first, second; to begin; therefore, however, consequently...*

To determine if monokies elicited an adrenal steroidogenic response, **I ADDED** preparations of...

To determine if monokies elicited a response, **preparations...WERE ADDED.**

[So that **I** could] determine if monokies elicited a response, preparations **WERE ADDED.**

I procured a triangular glass prism, to try therewith the celebrated phenomena of colors. And for that purpose, having darkened my laboratory, and made a small hole in my window shade, to let in a convenient quantity of the sun's light, I placed my prism at the entrance, that the light might be there by refracted to the opposite wall. It was at first a very pleasing diversion to view the vivid and intense colors produced thereby.

QUICK TIP:

Some teachers prohibit the use of *I* everywhere in the writing of their students not because it is wrong ,but because in experienced writers begin too many sentences with *I think ...*, *I believe ...*, and so on. Others forbid I because they want to discourage students from writing a narrative account of their thinking: *First I read...*, *Then I considered...* On those two occasions, follow their advice.

Here's the point :

Some writers and editors avoid the first person by using the passive everywhere, but deleting an I or we doesn't make a researcher's thinking more objective. We know that behind those impersonal sentences are still flesh-and-blood people doing, thinking, and writing. In fact, the first-person I and we are common in scholarly prose when used with verbs that name actions unique to the writer.

Noun+Noun+Noun

Early *childhood thought disorder misdiagnosis* often result from unfamiliarity with recent *research literature* describing such conditions. This paper is a review of seven recent studies in which are findings of particular relevance to *pre-adolescent hyperactivity diagnosis* and to *treatment modalities* involving *medication maintenance level evaluation procedures*.

1

2

3

4

5

early

childhood

thought

dsiorder

misdiagnosis

misdiagnose

dsiordered

thought

in early

childhood

5

4

3

1

2

Physicians misdiagnose⁵ disordered⁴ thought³ in young¹
children² because they are unfamiliar with
recent literature on the subject.

Physicians misdiagnose⁵ through disorders^{4, 3} in young²
children¹ because they are unfamiliar with recent literature
on the subject.

CLARITY AND THE PROFESSIONAL VOICE

Apart from theoretical conceptualization there would appear to be no method of selecting among the indefinite number of varying kinds of factual observation which can be made about a concrete phenomenon or field so that the various descriptive statements about it articulate into a coherent whole, which constitutes an "adequate," a "determinate" description. Adequacy in description is secured insofar as determinate and verifiable answers can be given to all the scientifically important questions involved. What questions are important is largely determined by the logical structure of the generalized conceptual scheme which, implicitly or explicitly, is employed.

Without a theory, scientists have no way to select from everything they could say about a subject only that which they can fit into a coherent whole that would be an "adequate" or "determinate" description. Scientists describe something "adequately" only when they can verify answers to all the questions they think are important. They decide what questions are important based on their implicit or explicit theories.

Whatever you describe, you need a theory to fit its part into a whole.

You need a theory to decide even what questions to ask and to verify their answer.

Here's the point:

When you read or write a style that seems complex , you must determine whether it needs to be so complex to express complex ideas precisely.

SUMMING UP

1. Readers judge prose to be clear when subjects of sentences name characters and verbs name actions.
2. If you tell a story in which you make abstract nominalizations its main characters and subjects, use as few other nominalizations as you can:

A nominalization is a **replacement** of a verb by a noun, often resulting in **displacement** of characters from subjects by nouns.

- ✓ When **a nominalization REPLACES** a verb with a noun, it often **DISPLACES** characters from subjects.

3. Use a passive if the agent of an action is self-evident:

The voters **REELECTED** the president with 54% of the vote.

✓ The president **WAS REELECTED** with 54% of the vote.

4. Use a passive if it lets you replace a long subject with a short one:

Research demonstrating the soundness of our reasoning
and the need for action **SUPPORTED** this decision.

✓ This decision **WAS SUPPORTED BY** research
demonstrating the soundness of our reasoning and the need
for action.

5. Use a passive if it gives your readers a coherent sequence of subjects:

✓ By early 1945, the *Axis nations* had BEEN essentially DEFEATED; all that remained was a bloody climax. *The German borders* had BEEN BREACHED, and both *Germany and Japan* were being bombed around the clock. *Neither country*, though, had BEEN SO DEVASTATED that *it* could not RESIST.

6. Use an active verb if it is a metadiscourse verb:
The terms of the analysis must BEDEFINED.

✓ We must DEFINE the terms of the analysis.

7. When possible, rewrite long compound noun phrases:

We discussed the board¹ candidate² review³ meeting⁴ schedule⁵.

✓ We discussed the schedules⁵ of meetings⁴ to review³ candidates² for the board¹.

END