

# Good Writing Practice

## Syntactic structure

### Circumlocution: Dependent clauses



### Introduction

Circumlocution is the usage of a multiword structure instead of a shorter syntactic unit, for example, usage of a clause instead of a phrase. The distraction consequence of circumlocution can be sentence pattern disruption and unintended over-emphasis of less important information.

The examples in this article are arranged firstly by section type (experimental, contextual) and secondly by actual sequence in a journal article (e.g., Materials and Methods → Results; Introduction → Discussion).

### Experimental sections

#### Part 1 – Adjectival clause

**Example 1: Materials and Methods section: experimental approach**

A CR was defined as any movement during the CS period of the nictitating membrane which was equal to or greater than 0.5 mm.

**Revision 1 (syntactic reduction)**

A CR was defined as any movement during the CS period of the nictitating membrane **equal to or greater than 0.5 mm**.

**Revision 2 (syntactic reduction + transposition)**

A CR was defined as any movement ( $\geq 0.5 \text{ mm}$ ) during the CS period of the nictitating membrane.

#### Notes

In the Materials and Methods section, the objective is to convey multiple details as succinctly as possible. Toward this end, attenuated syntax is useful; that is, attenuated syntactic units and symbols prevail.

In Revision 1, the relative pronoun *which* and the linking verb *was* are deleted to obtain an elliptical adjective clause. In Revision 2, further concision is possible by conversion into a noun phrase/symbol, which is most pertinent when contiguous to *movement*.

**Example 2: Results section: observation**

On day 1 of dosing, the patient experienced a severe adverse event which was judged to be treatment related.

**Revision (syntactic reduction)**

On day 1 of dosing, the patient experienced a severe adverse event **judged** to be treatment related.

#### SECTION EDITORS



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#### Notes

Attenuation by deletion of the relative pronoun *which* and auxiliary verb *was* results in a participle, which is less emphasised by length than the unattenuated adjective clause.

#### Part 2 – Adverbial clause

**Example: Results section: data-based trend**

The performance error for non-adaptive and adaptive schedules decreased for all learning sessions as shown in Figure 1.

**Revision (syntactic reduction)**

The performance error for non-adaptive and adaptive schedules decreased for all learning sessions (**Figure 1**).

#### Notes

In the Results section of a journal article, an elliptical adverb clause is often used to convey the secondary information of table or figure location. However, the elliptical form of an adverb clause *as it is shown in Fig. 1* is unnecessarily emphasised by length and end-of-sentence position, especially for non-conceptual secondary information (i.e., data location). De-emphasis involves syntactic structure reduction into a parenthesised noun phrase.

#### Part 3 – Noun clause

**Example: Results section: data preliminary interpretation**

The fact that the chemicals were impure possibly caused the delay.

**Revision (syntactic reduction + thematic focus)**

The **chemical impurity** possibly caused the delay.

## Notes

The noun clause is in apposition to the grammatical filler subject *the fact*. A test of the grammatical filler function of *the fact* is its replacement by *the chemical impurity*. Although this test may apply to all words to which an appositive is in apposition, if the word is a filler then it is unnecessary. The reduction in the number of words by four is accompanied by more thematically focused information, which also minimises the delayed predication.

## Contextual sections

### Part 1 – Noun clause

**Example: Introduction section: research problem pertinent background**

The main characteristic of TCP-PR is that it detects packet loss only by timers without using duplicate acknowledgements.

#### Revision (syntactic reduction)

The main characteristic of TCP-PR is **packet loss detection** only by timers without using duplicate acknowledgements.

## Notes

The length-caused over-emphasis of a noun clause is similar to that of an adjective clause; further-

more, the noun clause over-emphasis also results from a wordy narrative pattern focused on agents and actions.

The use of two narrative words, the personal pronoun *it* and the verb *detects*, adds to the length of clause. Consequently, the narrative *that it detects packet loss* can be revised into the conceptually descriptive noun phrase *packet loss detection*. Although the reduction of words is small (two) the change in conceptual emphasis is not. In addition, the backtracking from *it* is eliminated.

### Part 2 – Adjective clause

**Example: Discussion section: hypothesis-support limitation**

A series of tests under conditions that were identical often yielded results that were different.

#### Revision (syntactic reduction + transposition)

A series of tests under **identical** conditions often yielded **different** results.

## Notes

In the Revision, the singular adjectives *identical* and *different* remaining after attenuation (deletion of the relative pronoun *that* and the verb *to be*) are transposed to the pre-noun attributive position of the noun being modified. In addition to circumlocution, another reason for attenuation is

the syntactic number: repetition is more obvious between clauses than between words.

## Summary

All three types of clauses (adjective, adverb, and noun) distract by their length: a disruption of sentence pattern and over-emphasis of lesser information. To revise such circumlocution, the clauses can be syntactically reduced to a noun phrase functioning as an adjectival or as an appositive, followed by transposition if necessary for modifier-modifiee contiguity. In contrast, the full clause may be appropriate to match the importance of the information. This matching of syntactic structure to rhetorical intent is the essence of syntactical fluency.

Of the six examples, four are in the experimental sections of journal articles and two in the contextual. This distribution may indicate that concision is more typical for the experimental sections (Materials and Methods; and Results sections).

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