

# Paramedic Method for Revising Prose

Adapted from Richard Lanham's *Revising Prose*, 3rd edition.

1. Circle the prepositions: for, in, of, at, etc. (In **yellow, bold, and underlined** below.)
2. Circle the weak verbs: is, have, and do. (In **orange, bold, and italic** below.)
3. Ask, "Where's the action? Who's kicking who?"
4. Lead with the people doing the action.
5. Put this kicking action in a simple, active verb — ideally one word.
6. Add extra paragraph breaks so each sentence is on its own line.
7. Look at the start of each sentence and consider deleting slow starts.
8. Compare the sentence lengths in the paragraph and edit to add variation.
9. Read aloud and revise.

## The Official Style

Here are some sentences in the "official style," printed without emphasis, and then to show the effect of the excessive prepositional phrases. The last few examples are Lanham's.

1. It is widely known that the need for targeted specific services has increased over time in the region of the country served by the Ross Regional Center.
  - a. It **is** widely known that the need
  - b. **for** targeted specific services
  - c. **has** increased over time
  - d. **in** the region
  - e. **of** the country
  - f. served **by** the Ross Regional Center.

→ Client needs for services have steadily increased in the Ross Regional Center's service area.
2. The challenge we face is that the number of potential clients is going up at the same time the number of permanent staff we have to deal with clients' needs is decreasing.
  - a. The challenge we face
  - b. **is** that the number
  - c. **of** potential clients
  - d. **is** going up
  - e. **at** the same time the number
  - f. **of** permanent staff
  - g. we **have**
  - h. **to** deal with clients' needs
  - i. **is** decreasing.

→ Our staff numbers have declined, though we have more potential clients.

3. An evaluation of the results of the changes implemented by the program will be initiated after the midterm report is filed and we are able to discuss possible refinements and changes with the Foundation.

- a. An evaluation
- b. **of** the results
- c. **of** the changes implemented
- d. **by** the program
- e. will **be** initiated
- f. **after** the midterm report
- g. **is** filed and
- h. we **are** able
- i. **to** discuss possible refinements and changes
- j. **with** the Foundation.

→ We will complete a comprehensive evaluation after sharing our midterm report with the Foundation and discussing possible program refinements.

4. The integration of a set of common value patterns with the internalized need-disposition structure of the constituent personalities is the core phenomenon of the dynamics of social systems.

- a. The integration
- b. **of** a set
- c. **of** common value patterns
- d. **with** the internalized need-disposition structure
- e. **of** the constituent personalities
- f. **is** the core phenomenon
- g. **of** the dynamics
- h. **of** social systems.

5. In the light of the association in the last quarter of the sixteenth century of wit with the means of amplification, which consist mainly of the processes of dialectical investigation, this definition probably has more validity than has generally been accorded it.

- a. **In** the light
- b. **of** the association
- c. **in** the last quarter
- d. **of** the sixteenth century
- e. **of** wit
- f. **with** the means
- g. **of** amplification, which consist mainly
- h. **of** the processes
- i. **of** dialectical investigation, this definition probably
- j. **has** more validity than has generally been accorded it.

## Qualities of the Official Style

1. Built on nouns, often abstractions, often Latinate, often ending in -tion.
2. Adjectives made from other nouns often modify these nouns. Or, another noun usurps the place of the adjective to make a noun-cluster.
3. All action is passive and impersonal.
4. No active verbs, no direct objects, no attribute agency. (Ask "Who's kicking who?")
5. Nothing called by its ordinary name. Teachers=Learning Facilitators.
6. All motion is converted into stasis, preserving the status quo and concealing agency.