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SKU: 9780199036851-TEST-BANK

Chapter 2
Technical Sentences

Multiple Choice Questions

1. Select the correct sequence of activities when revising sentences:
    a) Check grammar and mechanics, edit for conciseness, edit for clarity, edit for gender-neutral language, find the real verb, find the real subject.
    b) Find the real verb, find the real subject, edit for clarity, edit for conciseness, edit for gender-neutral language, check grammar and mechanics.
    c) Find the real subject, find the real verb, edit for conciseness, edit for clarity, edit for gender-neutral language, check grammar and mechanics.
    d) Check grammar and mechanics, find the real subject, find the real verb, edit for conciseness, edit for gender-neutral language, edit for clarity.

2. Which of the following is NOT true about the "subject"?
    a) It is the thing that is acted upon in the sentence.
    b) It is the thing that makes the action in the sentence happen.
    c) It refers to the topic of the sentence.
    d) It is best placed at the start of the sentence.

3. Which of the following sentences does NOT contain a weak expletive?
    a) It is advisable to wear sun protection when working outdoors.
    b) Many vendors are currently active in the province.
    c) It is not expected that we pay immediately.
    d) There are two fire exits east of the lab.

4. Which of the following sentences is in the active voice?
    a) In the last six months, no job offers were made by management.
    b) The instrument was carefully calibrated by the engineer.
    c) The workers wore protective gear.
    d) The room was entered by the painting crew.

5. Which of the following is true about passive voice?
    a) It is clear and concise.
    b) It makes the writer seem more competent and objective.
    c) It should be used when you need to address your reader directly.
    d) It can be used when you don't care or don't know who the agent is.

6. Which of the following sentences uses the imperative mood?
    a) You should refuse their offer today.
    b) Please do not perform tie-ins during the summer months.
    c) The report must be submitted in triplicate hardcopy.
    d) All efforts should be made to ensure that water is discharged onto landscaped or pervious areas.

7. Which of the following sentences does NOT contain verb nominalizations?

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a) The completion and submission of trip reports should be undertaken by team leaders.
b) Our firm is in agreement with the notion that we will give assistance to the external compliance-audit.
c) The research teams must discuss how best to analyze the soil samples.
d) This investigation recommends that modification be made to the product to increase consumer safety.

8. Which of the following is an example of a verb nominalization?
   a) perform a demonstration
   b) during the period of
   c) proximity
   d) gain access to

9. "During the month of April" is an example of _____.
   a) verb nominalization
   b) imperative mood
   c) passive voice
   d) wordiness

10. On average, your sentences should be no more than _____.
    a) 40 words long
    b) 20 words long
    c) 10 words long
    d) It doesn't matter how long they are, as long as the subject is clear.

11. Which of the following sentences does NOT contain redundancies?
    a) If the symptoms still persist, call me.
    b) We used off-the-shelf components.
    c) The chemist mixed together the reagents.
    d) We won't proceed at the present time.

12. Which of the following is NOT true about jargon?
    a) They are an easy shorthand that can be useful in technical writing.
    b) They can be annoying and inappropriate.
    c) They have a tendency to make sentences excessively long.
    d) They are terms and expressions unique to a specific discipline.

13. "Administer," "substantiate," and "ascertain" are all examples of _____.
    a) passive constructions
    b) imperative voice
    c) redundancies
    d) big words

14. "Interface," "synergy," and "conspicuous" are all examples of _____.
    a) jargon
    b) gerunds
    c) active voice
    d) big and possibly confusing words

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15. When the subject's gender is unknown, which technique should you avoid?
    a) changing the subject to a plural
    b) changing the sentence so that pronouns are unnecessary
    c) using a plural pronoun (i.e. they, their)
    d) using the terms he/she or him/her

16. "Police officer," "firefighter," and "actor" are all examples of _____.
    a) sexist language
    b) inclusive language
    c) gerunds
    d) jargon

17. The phrase "triangular in shape" is an example of _____.
    a) nominalization
    b) jargon
    c) redundancy
    d) all of the above

18. The phrase "it has been noted that" is an example of _____.
    a) wordiness
    b) redundancy
    c) a passive construction
    d) imperative construction

19. Addressing the reader directly using "you" _____.
    a) should be avoided because it signifies lack of objectivity
    b) is an example of active voice
    c) is an example of passive voice
    d) should be avoided because it is considered impolite

20. A weak expletive is _____.
    a) a meaningless expression that takes the place of the main noun and verb
    b) an expression you use when the object of the sentence is unknown
    c) a politically correct alternative to swearing
    d) something that should never be used under any circumstances

21. Which of the following is true about active voice?
    a) It is overly aggressive and should be avoided.
    b) It contains a subject that precedes the verb.
    c) It is required in every sentence.
    d) It makes the writer sound less objective.

22. Identify the real subject in the following sentence:

The decision of the engineers was to double the chlorine concentration in the water treatment process.

    a) chlorine

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b) engineers
c) decision of the engineers
d) water treatment process

23. Identify the real subject in the following sentence:

The drainage of runoff should be directed onto pervious ground.

a) drainage
b) runoff
c) directed
d) ground

24. The following sentence suffers from _____.

The investigation into the Johal noise complaint was conducted on May 15.

a) use of passive voice
b) lack of a clear subject
c) too much jargon
d) a verb nominalization

25. The following sentence suffers from _____.

The head of each tech unit should check his e-manual for automatic updates, which are frequent.

a) wordiness
b) lack of a clear subject
c) a run-on sentence
d) lack of inclusive language

True or False Questions

1. Technical sentences generally work best if the grammatical subject appears prominently in the middle of the sentence.
2. Technical paragraphs should not begin with their topic sentence.
3. A technical writer should, whenever possible, make the grammatical subject a real person or something concrete.
4. Technical writers tend to overuse the active voice.
5. The passive voice communicates a writer's objectivity.
6. When the agent of an action is unknown or irrelevant, the writer should use the passive voice.
7. Command voice, imperative mood, and "you-understood" voice are the same thing.
8. Nominalizations should be avoided in technical writing.
9. The imperative mood is at odds with the active voice.
10. Technical writers should not replace nominalizations with simple, direct verbs.

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11. On average, technical paragraphs should not exceed 7 lines.
12. The phrase "it has been noted that" should always be avoided.
13. Breaking up noun chains goes against a basic principle of technical writing.
14. Never compel readers to look up one of your words in a dictionary.
15. Technical writers are not compelled to use inclusive language.

Short Answer Questions

1. Describe the meaning of the word "subject." Where should the subject go in a sentence? Why?
2. Describe what a "weak expletive" is. In what situations is it acceptable to use a weak expletive?
3. Why do technical people have a tendency to overuse the passive voice? Why can overuse of the passive voice be problematic?
4. What is the active voice? Why is it preferable to the passive voice?
5. Why are short sentences generally preferred over long ones? Name one situation in which making a sentence longer is acceptable.
6. Define *redundancy* as it pertains to writing. Why should redundancy be avoided?
7. What is "jargon"? Provide three examples of jargon used in your field of study and some words or phrases with which they can be replaced.
8. Describe four ways you can revise a sentence when you are unsure of the subject's gender.
9. Identify the problem contained within each of the following sentences. Revise the sentences so that they follow the principles of good technical writing.
    a) My tools were lost by the intern.
    b) It can be challenging to teach work safety.
    c) A new shift schedule needs to be organized by the team.
    d) Your own pencils, ink pens, and calculators should be brought to the exam.
10. Rewrite the following sentences to make them more direct. Keep the meaning of the original.
    a) Dehydration, it was decided by the committee, is the number one problem facing production workers working on the factory floor.
    b) As of today, I have not received your application. Once I have received it, I can see about an interview.
    c) Grade adjustments that become necessary after May 1 can only be made in consultation with the program chair.
    d) It has been recently brought to my attention that readers, having read your report, have further questions.

Long Answer Questions

1. Explain the difference between active and passive voice and the reasons why you might use one over the other in a technical writing scenario.

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2. When editing sentences, what does it mean to "find the real subject"? How can you achieve this? Why is finding the real subject important in technical writing?
3. Describe the steps involved in writing for clarity and its significance to technical writing.

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Answer Key

Multiple Choice Questions

1. **c**
2. **a**
3. **b**
4. **c**
5. **d**
6. **b**
7. **c**
8. **a**
9. **d**
10. **b**
11. **b**
12. **c**
13. **d**
14. **a**
15. **d**
16. **b**
17. **c**
18. **a**
19. **b**
20. **a**
21. **b**
22. **b**
23. **b**
24. **a**
25. **d**

True or False Questions

1. **F**
2. **F**
3. **T**
4. **F**
5. **F**
6. **T**
7. **T**
8. **T**
9. **F**
10. **F**
11. **T**
12. **T**
13. **F**
14. **F**
15. **F**

Short Answer Questions

1. The word "subject" has two different meanings in relation to a sentence. The first meaning is grammatical—it refers to the thing in the sentence that makes the action (verb) happen. The subject also refers to the topic of a sentence, i.e., what the sentence is about. Sentences generally work best when the grammatical subject and the topic of the sentence are one and the same. The subject is best placed at the beginning of the sentence; this ensures the reader knows right from the start what the sentence is about.
2. Weak expletives are expressions, such as "there are" and "it is," that take the place of the main noun and main verb at the beginning of a sentence. Although not technically wrong, weak expletives are vague and meaningless and therefore should be avoided. It is acceptable to use a weak expletive if there is no way to reword the sentence without making it sound worse. For example, the answer to an "is-there-or-isn't-there" question will sound better if it begins with "there is," e.g., "There is no reason to keep him on staff."
3. Technical people have a tendency to overuse the passive voice because they think it makes them sound more objective. Overuse of passive voice, however, can make the writing faceless and can

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frustrate the reader's natural desire to visualize an agent of the action that is taking place. It can also force the writer into long, vague, and awkward sentence constructions.

4. In the active voice, the subject (agent) performs the action and precedes the verb. The active voice is preferable to the passive voice because it is clearer and more concise.
5. Short sentences are generally preferred over long ones because they tend to be clearer and easier to understand. Short sentences typically express one main thought, with possibly a few supporting thoughts. This makes information easier for readers to digest. Writing a long sentence is acceptable, however, if the idea you are expressing is quite complex—provided that this long sentence remains clear and concise and is surrounded by shorter sentences.
6. Redundancy refers to the use of words that repeat the same idea or meaning as other words in the sentence. For example, the phrase "end result" is redundant because the word "end" is already implied by the word "result" (results usually occur at the end of something). Redundancies clutter up sentences; they are a form of wordiness that makes sentences longer and less precise.
7. Jargon refers to terms and expressions that are unique to a profession or discipline. Within those disciplines, jargon can serve as useful shorthand, but when jargon is misapplied outside of its specific technical application, it is inexact and irritating. Examples of jargon will vary. See the text for a list of examples.
8. When you are unsure of the subject's gender you can employ the following strategies: Construct the sentence so that the subject is plural ("When tax payers file their returns by themselves, they should keep all their documentation for seven years); change the subject to use "you" or "your" ("When you file your tax return, keep your documentation for seven years."); change the sentence so that the pronouns become unnecessary ("After filing a tax return, the taxpayer should keep all receipts for seven years."). If none of the above strategies are possible, it is acceptable to use a plural pronoun to refer to a single subject (i.e. "they" or "their").
9. Identify the problem contained within each of the following sentences. Revise the sentences so that they follow the principles of good technical writing.
    a) My tools were lost by the intern. **Passive voice. Possible revision: *The intern lost my tools.***
    b) It can be challenging to teach work safety. **Weak expletive. Possible revision: *Teaching work safety can be challenging.***
    c) A new shift schedule needs to be organized by the team. **Passive voice. Possible revision: *The team needs to organize a new shift schedule.***
    d) Your own pencils, ink pens, and calculators should be brought to the exam. **Lacks imperative mood. Possible revision: *Bring your own pencils, ink pens, and calculators to the exam.***
10. Rewrite the following sentences to make them more direct. Keep the meaning of the original.
    a) Dehydration, it was decided by the committee, is the number one problem facing production workers working on the factory floor. **Possible revision: *The committee decided that dehydration is the main problem facing factory floor workers.***
    b) As of today, I have not received your application. Once I have received it, I can see about an interview. **Possible revision: *I can arrange an interview when I receive your application.***

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c) Grade adjustments that become necessary after May 1 can only be made in consultation with the program chair. **Possible revision: *After May 1, grade adjustments can only be made in consultation with the program chair.***

d) It has been recently brought to my attention that readers, having read your report, have further questions. **Possible revision: *Readers of your report have further questions.***

Long Answer Questions

1. Answers will vary, but should mention the following information:
   - In the active voice, the subject (agent) performs the action and precedes the verb. In the passive voice, the subject (agent) is not performing the main action and, if it appears at all, follows the verb.
   - The active voice is clearer and more concise. It also makes the writer sound more competent, forthright, confident, and professional.
   - The passive voice can frustrate the reader's desire to visualize an agent for an action, and force the writer into awkward, tangled sentence constructions.
   - The passive voice is acceptable when the thing you are writing about is in fact passive. For example, if you are writing a description of a room, it would be acceptable to write "The room is shaded by the tree."
   - The passive voice is also acceptable when you do not know or care who the agent is, or when you don't want the reader to know who the agent is (i.e. "Mistakes were made…").
2. Answers will vary, but should mention the following information:
   - "Finding the real subject" means determining who or what is driving the action in the sentence and making this clear and explicit.
   - To achieve this, place the subject at the start of the sentence, make the subject a real person or something concrete (rather than an abstract concept), avoid weak expletives, use the active voice, and use the imperative mood.
   - Finding the real subject is important in technical writing because it improves clarity and directness.
3. Answers will vary, but should mention the following information:
   - Editing for clarity involves
     - breaking up noun chains—even if the revised sentence is longer, it will be clearer, and clarity is always a priority in technical writing;
     - using simple language—use the simplest word that will convey your meaning, while still ensuring it is the word that most accurately expresses what you need to say;
     - avoiding jargon—although it can be a useful shorthand among colleagues who understand you, when misapplied outside of its specific technical application, it vague and irritating.

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