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Revising and editing your academic writing

HGSE Writing Center, fall 2020
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Agenda

- Revising vs. editing
- The four stages of revision
- Structure and organization
- Paragraphs and sentences
- Wording and style
- Grammar and mechanics



Revising

Changing your writing to better present your ideas

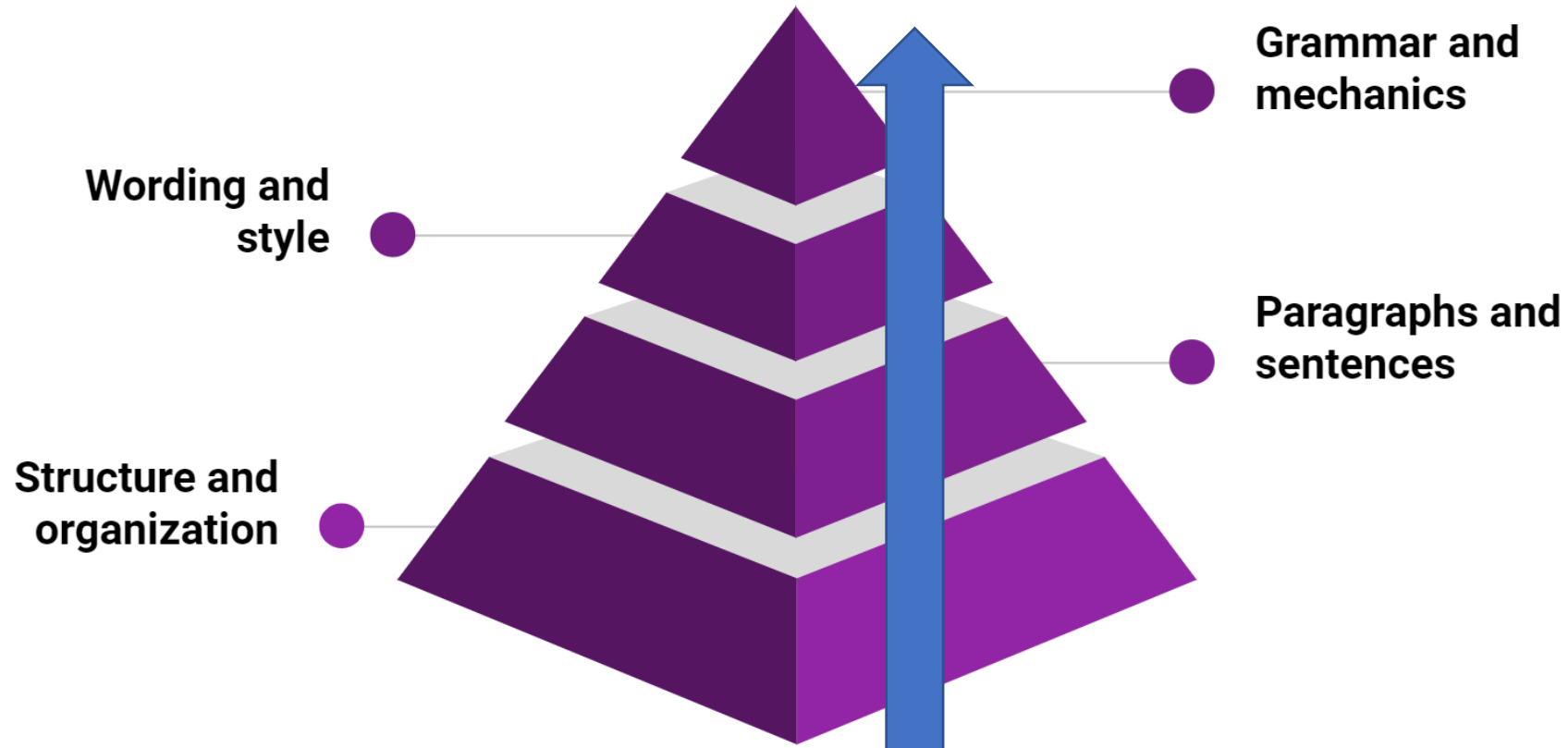
- Add or change words to be specific & vivid
- Remove or reorder words to be clear and succinct
- Reorganize paragraphs and sentences

Editing

Correcting your writing and language use

- Fix spelling, grammar, punctuation, and capitalization
- Change incorrect words (e.g. effect/affect, your/you're)
- Review formatting

Four stages of revision



Don't try to do it all at once!



Prioritize the big stuff

Today we'll focus more on the top of the pyramid.

But structure, organization, and paragraphs should be your priority!

- Don't waste time on details until you're satisfied with the argument
- Teaching teams care most about ideas

Structure and organization

- Check your assignment. Have you met all criteria?
- Is your thesis statement debatable and specific?
- Does each topic sentence relate to the thesis?
- Have you considered your audience?
- Does the argument flow logically between paragraphs and sections?

A vertical watercolor splash in various shades of blue, ranging from deep navy to light sky blue, occupies the left side of the slide.

Paragraphs and sentences

- Does each paragraph have a topic sentence that captures its main idea?
- Do the supporting sentences relate to the topic sentence?
- Do you present enough evidence to support your claims? Or too much evidence, burying your point?
- Have you interpreted or analyzed your evidence, making clear how it relates to your argument?
- Do you vary your sentence structure, making your writing more pleasant to read?

Vary sentence length and complexity

- Follow long or complex sentences with short, simple sentences that pack a punch
- Avoid run-on sentences or fragments

Two or more sentences combined without proper punctuation

Words that cannot stand alone as a complete sentence

- Missing a verb
- Missing a subject
- Subordinate clause (sometimes called a dependent clause)



Vary the sentence structure

Sentence structure refers to the grammatical arrangement of words, including subject, verb, and other parts of speech.

The district planned the bilingual immersion classroom over the summer. The district created a committee of teachers to provide input on the plan. They also surveyed parents about their desires. The district began to implement the plan in the fall. They received twice as many applications as available seats. The district used these data to apply for a grant to support another bilingual immersion classroom.

Every sentence starts with subject + verb, and they're all about the same length.



The district planned the bilingual immersion classroom over the summer. The district created a committee of teachers to provide input on the plan. They also surveyed parents about their desires. The district began to implement the plan in the fall. They received twice as many applications as available seats. The district used these data to apply for a grant to support another bilingual immersion classroom.

How would you
edit this?

The background of the slide features a vibrant blue watercolor texture. Overlaid on this are several geometric shapes: a large hexagon in the top left, a smaller hexagon in the center, and a large rounded rectangle on the left side. The text 'How about...' is positioned to the right of the central hexagon.

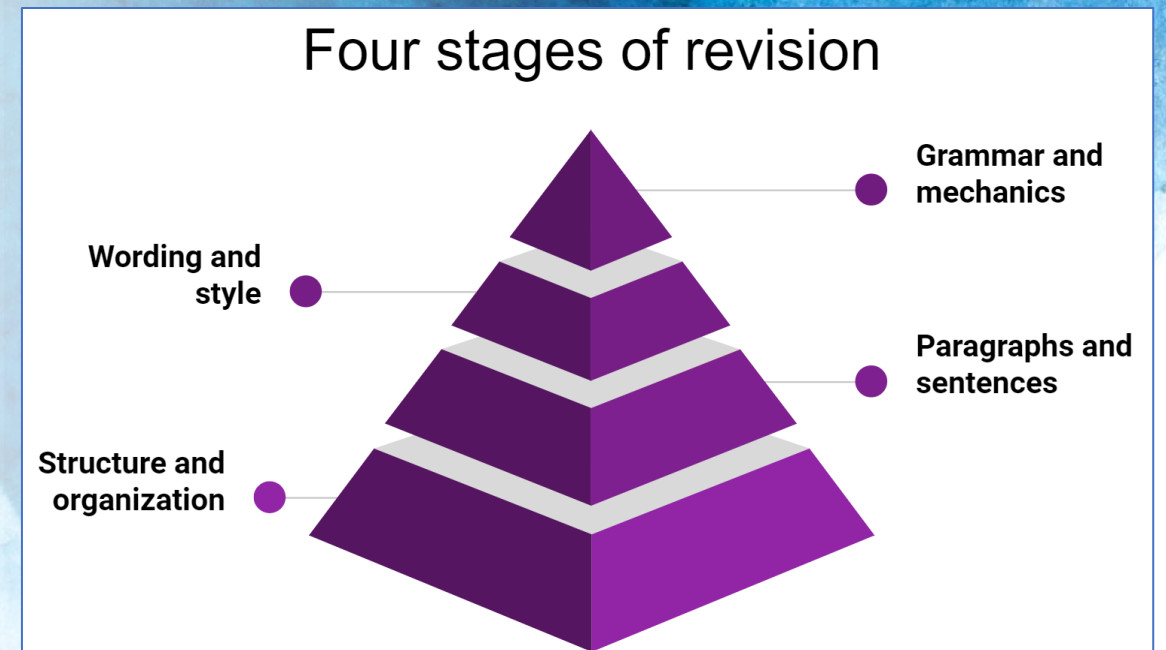
How about...

The district planned the bilingual immersion classroom over the summer, with input from a committee of teachers and a parent survey. They began to implement the plan in the fall.

When the district received twice as many applications as available seats, they used these data to apply for a grant to support a second bilingual immersion classroom.

Wording and style

- Signal phrases
- Transition words
- Passive vs. active voice
- Choose clear, specific words
- Rely less on the verb "to be"



acknowledges | adds | admits | affirms | agrees
| answers | argues | asserts | claims | comments
concedes | confirms | contends | counters
declares | defines | denies | disputes | echoes | endorses
estimates | finds | grants | illustrates | implies | insists
mentions | notes | observes | predicts | proposes
reasons | recognizes | recommends | refutes | rejects
reports | responds | reveals | speculates | states
| suggests | surmises | warns | writes

Signal phrases

- Introduce evidence
 - Chuol (1990) finds...
- Contextualize the source
 - Brazilian philosopher Paolo Freire wrote...
 - According to prominent legal scholars...
- Help the reader interpret your point
 - Garcia (2010) refutes this claim...
 - Xi and Liu (2014) confirmed...
- Add variety to your citations



Transition words

- Highlight connections between ideas, sentences, and paragraphs
- Choose carefully to emphasize your point
- Don't overuse – too many are jarring

Types of transition words

To list or combine: also, besides, first, finally, further, in addition, lastly, second, moreover, next

To compare or contrast: although, but, similarly, despite, likewise, however, otherwise, nonetheless, yet

To prove or show cause: so, hence, accordingly, because, for, since, evidently, in fact, therefore, consequently

To show time or sequence: at the same time, next, previously, thereafter, subsequently, since then, following

To summarize or clarify: that is, in other words, in sum, i.e., essentially, in conclusion, as I have shown, on the whole

To give an example: for example, e.g., for instance, to illustrate, to demonstrate, in this case, specifically

To emphasize: In particular, especially, critically, naturally, surprisingly, chiefly, surely, indeed, undoubtedly, clearly

To concede: granted, of course, naturally, while it is true that, although, to be sure

Try adding signal phrases and transitions!

Heliocentrism¹ was declared to be heresy² (Pope Paul V, 1613). The earth moves around the sun (Galilei, 1616).

¹ The idea that the earth moves around the sun

² Contrary to religious beliefs or teachings

The school measures performance using test scores. Many factors besides test scores are important. Social emotional (SEL) skills support academic growth. SEL predicts college and career success. Schools should examine discipline, attendance, and graduation rates.



How about these?

Pope Paul V declared heliocentrism to be heresy in 1613, but astronomer Galileo Galilei (1616) insisted that the earth moves around the sun.

The school measures performance using test scores, but many other factors are important. For example, social emotional (SEL) skills support academic growth and predict college and career success. Schools should also examine discipline, attendance, and graduation rates.

Passive vs. active voice

All sentences have a *subject* (the focus of the sentence) and a *verb*.

In active voice, the subject is active – the subject "does" the verb.

In passive voice, the subject is passive – it is "acted upon."

Active voice should be your default. It is usually clearer and less wordy.

Passive	<p>It was decided that all students should take three years of math.</p> <p>Instructions were given to each participant by the study director.</p>
Active	<p>The committee decided that all students should take three years of math.</p> <p>The study director gave instructions to each participant.</p> <p>Or</p> <p>Each participant received instructions from the study director.</p>

Word choice

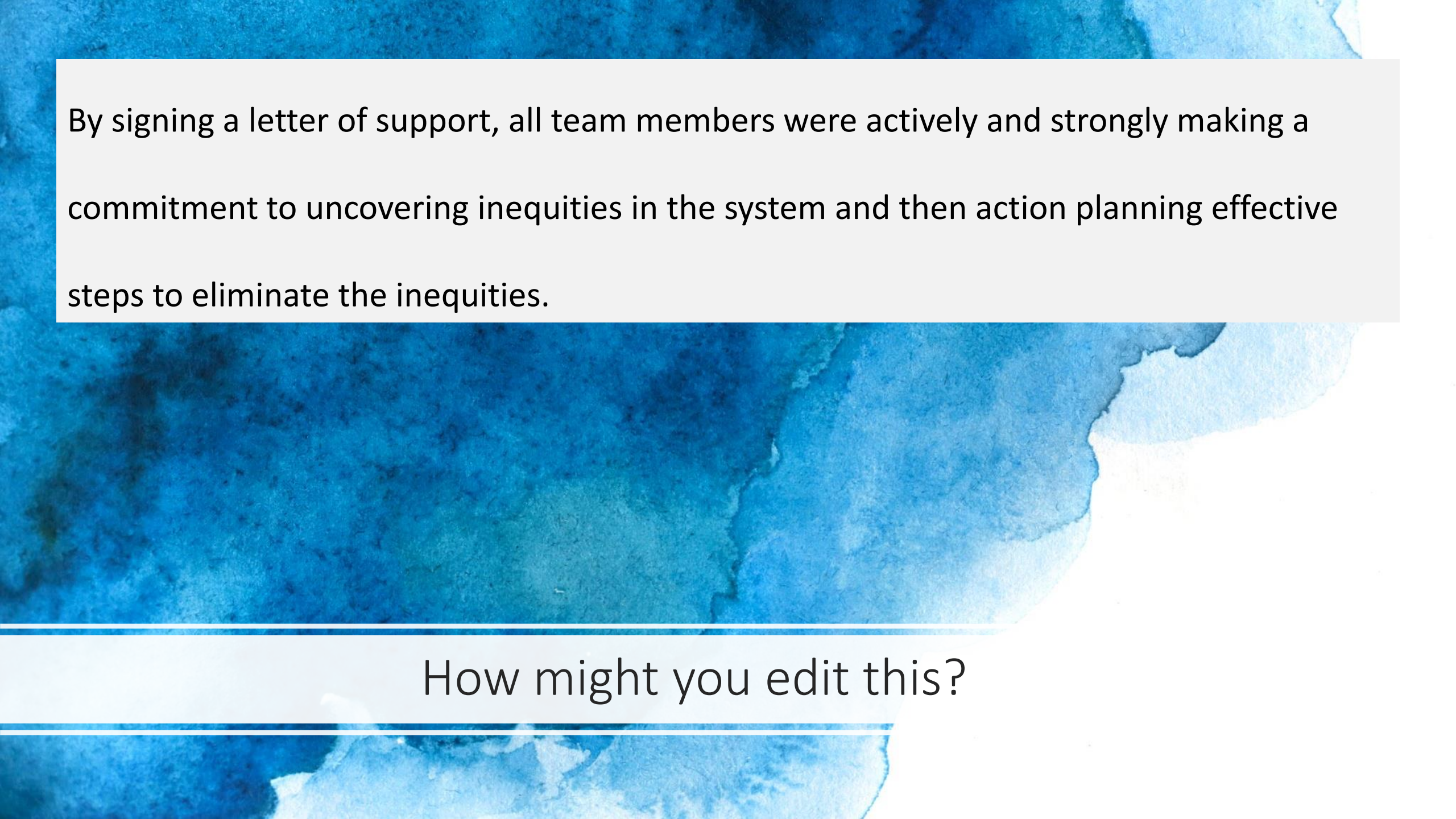
- Choose simple and clear over unnecessary jargon
- Be careful with your thesaurus
- Don't use two words if one will do
- Use adjectives and adverbs sparingly

I gained insight into the reality that...	I realized... I learned...
Effectively provide suggestions for...	Suggest
I was in an overwhelmed state...	I was overwhelmed
The study uncovered various differences between the groups that were surprising in nature.	The study uncovered surprising differences between the groups.
Teachers have a tendency to teach in ways that are really more based on factors of their own schooling experiences than trying any new practices they may not be familiar with.	Teachers tend to replicate their own schooling experiences rather than attempt unfamiliar practices.

I review relevant literature and provide recommendations for practice.	I review literature on self-efficacy, learner identity, and growth mindsets, and recommend strategies to build students' confidence.
Maria Montessori was the designer of a child-centered model of schooling.	Maria Montessori designed a child-centered model of schooling.
These findings are suggesting that an intervention is needed.	These findings suggest the need for an intervention.

Be clear and concise

- Replace or remove vague words (e.g. things, stuff, very, quite)
- In academic writing, it's easy to become vague
- Look for forms of the word "to be"
 - am, is, are, was, were be, being, been
 - Not "bad," but often weak and wordy

The background of the slide is a vibrant blue watercolor wash, with darker, more saturated blue on the left and right sides, and a lighter, more translucent blue towards the center and bottom. The texture is soft and painterly, with visible brushstrokes and color blending.

By signing a letter of support, all team members were actively and strongly making a commitment to uncovering inequities in the system and then action planning effective steps to eliminate the inequities.

How might you edit this?

By signing a letter of support, all team members were actively and strongly making a commitment to uncovering inequities in the system and then action planning effective steps to eliminate the inequities.

All team members signed a letter of support representing their active commitment to uncovering and eliminating inequities in the system.

Here's one alternative...

Grammar and mechanics

- Conjugating verbs
- Subject/verb agreement
- Unclear referents
- Parallelism



A decorative blue watercolor splash is located on the left side of the slide, extending from the top left towards the bottom left.

Conjugating verbs

- When writing about evidence, use the *present tense*. The findings and evidence are still valid today.
 - Pierre and Johnson (2014) claim...
 - Based on interviews with 25 paraprofessionals, Ahmad (2003) finds...
- When focusing on past actions or events, use the *past tense*.
 - Pierre and Johnson (2014) published a paper, claiming...
 - Ahmad (2003) interviewed 25 paraprofessionals...
- Keep verb tense consistent

Subject-verb agreement

- Only the subject affects the verb, regardless of the other words
 - The theory of multiple intelligences posits...
 - The scholars, who recently published a new book, are concerned...
- Either, neither, or, & not only...but also
 - Either the professor or the TF leads section
(*Either the professor leads it, or the TF leads it.*)
 - Either the librarians or the TFs answer her questions.
(*Either the librarians answer, or the TFs answer*)
 - Neither the students nor the teacher knows.
 - Neither the teacher nor the students know.
- Pronouns
 - Every/each student submits a portfolio.
 - Somebody/anybody/nobody submits a portfolio.
 - All/most/few/many/both/some students submit portfolios.



Unclear or misplaced referents

The findings reveal significant variation in public opinion. This has not received much media attention.

- Even though the study revealed significant variation in public opinion, the findings have not received much media attention.
- The findings reveal significant variation in public opinion, even though the media tends to focus on one narrative.

When meeting with my advisor, she said my draft had improved.

- When I met with my advisor, she said my draft had improved.
- When my advisor met with me, she said my draft had improved.
- When meeting with my advisor, I was happy to hear that my draft had improved.

Many students of education read John Dewey's books, who is sometimes called the father of modern education.

Many students of education read books by John Dewey, who is sometimes called the father of modern education.



Parallelism

When listing multiple ideas or pieces of information, they should have the same grammatical form.

The workshop includes a presentation, a question and answer session, and reflecting on your own experience.

The workshop includes a presentation, a question and answer session, and time to reflect on your own experience.

Progress reports, grading essays, and meeting with parents is part of my job.

Writing progress reports, grading essays, and meeting with parents is part of my job.

Bryk and Schneider (2002) studied reform in twelve elementary schools. "The absence of suspicion and distrust...was a key element" (Bryk & Schneider, 2002, p. 6). When becoming a principal, the focus should be building strong, sustained, lasting trust with all community members. The authors suggest that each teacher need to believe that competence, acting with integrity, personal regard for others, and respect are embodied by the leader and expectations and a coherent vision for schooling are clear. And feel that they have a voice. The authors suggested that this is the way to create a very good school culture where everyone, including students and parents feel that they are welcome and academics will also improve.

How might you edit this?

Bryk and Schneider (2002) studied reform in twelve elementary schools and find that the most successful initiatives were characterized by “the absence of suspicion and distrust” (p. 6). According to the authors, teachers need to believe that their leader embodies competence, integrity, personal regard for others, and respect. Other key factors include clear expectations, a coherent vision for schooling, and opportunities for each teacher to share their voice. Not only do these elements produce a positive school culture where all students, parents, and staff feel welcome, but they also lead to academic improvement. New principals should therefore focus on building and sustaining trust with all community members.

Here's how we did it!



Thank you! Questions?

Sign up for an appointment with a Writing or Communications Lab TF and find more resources at communicate.gse.harvard.edu

Write on!