

Fall 2017 Knight Award for Writing Exercises and

WINNER

The Knight Award for Writing Exercises recognizes excellence in short exercises and/or handouts designed to improve student writing. Appropriate topics may be drawn from the whole range of writing issues, large scale to small scale, such as development of theses, use of secondary sources, organization of evidence, awareness of audience, attention to sentence patterns (e.g., passive/active voice; coordination/ subordination), attention to diction, uses of punctuation, attention to mechanics (e.g., manuscript formats, apostrophes). Exercises and handouts may be developed for use in or out of class.

Submissions should comprise three parts: (1) A copy of the handouts or instructions that go to students. (2) An explanation of the exercise/ handout and of the principles behind it, addressed to future instructors who may use the material. (3) If possible, an example of a student response.

Submissions may range in length from one to four or five pages.

Winning entries will be deposited in a web accessible archive and made available to other instructors under a creative commons attribution, non-commercial license. (See creativecommons.org for more information about cc licensing. No undergraduate student's writing will ever be published in this archive.)

To facilitate future searching of the Institute's archive, we ask that you provide a brief descriptive abstract (about 75 words) of your document, and a short list of appropriate keywords that might not appear in the text. Examples might include terms like "rhetorical situation," "style," "citation," etc. **Any borrowings such as quotations from course texts or handbooks must be cited properly in the document itself.**

The two winning entries will receive \$350; second place winners (if any) will receive \$125.

Submissions are due in 101 McGraw Hall by Thursday, December 14. No exceptions can be made.

Fall 2017 Knight Award for Writing Exercises and Handouts

~Please Print Clearly. Do not staple. Use paper clips only~

Instructor's name Carrie Freshour

Department DSOC Course # and title 1200 "Do You Want Fries with that?" Food Work and Workers

Home telephone same as above

Student ID number 2000100

Should I win a prize, I give the John S. Knight Institute permission to publish, quote from, and/or distribute copies of the writing exercises, and to distribute publicity to newspapers and other publications, local and/or national, about my winning the prize. I also grant the Knight Institute permission to deposit the writing exercises in a web accessible archive and make them available under a creative commons attribution, non-commercial license. I am prepared to send electronic versions of my text to Donna Newton (dlo1@cornell.edu) in the Knight Institute. I understand that I will receive the award for my prize-winning essay upon submission of the electronic text.

Tackling Long, Complicated Sentences

Title of Writing Exercises

Instructor's signature

C. Freshour

Date 12/12/2017

Fall 2017 Knight Award for Writing Exercises and Handouts
Instructor: Carrie Freshour

Tackling Long, Complicated Sentences

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Fall 2017 Knight Award for Writing Exercises and Handouts
Instructor: Carrie Freshour

Title of Exercise: Tackling Long, Complicated Sentences

Overview: This is a handout for an in-class lesson, provided midway through the semester on correcting long, wordy, complicated sentences to improve student writing for clarity. Students revisit this activity during a peer-review session on the second draft of their final papers.

Background: Many students at Cornell come from elite high schools or were at the top of their graduating class and excel in writing. Yet, I found throughout the semester, my most thoughtful students in class discussion were writing in an unclear way. Their ideas were often lost in overly complicated sentences. They were writing sentences with multiple and competing clauses, run-on sentences, and sentences that were wordy and obtuse. When we spoke about this issue in the first conference, many students would admit it was their attempt to “sound smart,” and to write “intellectually.” This is how they envisioned good academic writing. In these sessions, I had students re-read sentences that I pulled from their drafts out loud. They would often laugh in confusion. We would laugh together. It became clear that they needed to make some adjustments. Next, we would re-write the sentence on the white board together, often breaking up the sentence into two new sentences, or deleting words altogether. After confronting this problem again and again, I created a writing workshop to address this issue in the classroom.

Rationale: This lesson should come early to mid-way through the term. I pulled examples from the first draft of students’ fourth essay. They also referred back to this workshop in the second peer review of their final essays. This requires some preparatory work from the instructor, a projector, and a few classroom laptops (4 in our class).

1st Exercise:

In-Class Handout- “Tackling Long, Complicated Sentences”

This handout [1] is adapted from a [handout](#) by Vanderbilt University’s Writing Center. It provides students with a way to first identify long and complicated sentences, and second to remedy these sentences.

First, I had a few students volunteer to read the first section aloud in class.

Then, I asked students some questions for a group discussion:

- Why do we write really long sentences?
 - “sounding smart”
 - wanting to convey several ideas at once
 - wanting to write comprehensively and/or inclusively
 - writing broadly- often because we do not know what it is we’re actually trying to say
- How might the reader view these sentences? How do you view these kinds of sentences as a reader?
 - annoying
 - not fun to read

- confusing
- boring
- makes me want to stop reading!

Next, I had a few students volunteer to read the “suggested remedies” section.

With the handout and discussion fresh in their minds, I split students up into 4 small groups of 4. This activity is perfect for a smaller class size, but could also work with up to 25 students. Each group had one laptop and opened up the [google doc](#) I prepared the day before. I also projected this doc from my own computer at the front of the classroom.

Preparing the Google Doc...

I collected examples of long, complicated sentences from students' own writing in their draft of the fourth essay. This essay was an analytical essay using two oral histories with poultry workers, from my fieldwork from 2014-2016. This essay prepared them for their final project, in which they wrote a research paper analyzing food worker oral histories that they collected themselves, in small groups. You could gather sentences from any writing assignment. Each student submitted a draft of this essay a few days before, to Blackboard. I skimmed each essay, looking for sentences that were run-ons, confusingly long, too wordy, or trying to present too many ideas. I tried to use at least one sentence from each students' paper, to show that this is a common problem. I numbered each of these sentences, and double spaced the document to allow for better readability.

One group of students got to sit at the front of the room, with their back to the google doc projected on the screen. They sat in the “judges” seat. I gave them a printout of the sentences. They selected a number at random, and we all focused on that sentence. They could discuss how they might revise the sentence. Each of the other 3 groups made edits into the google doc. It was really fascinating to see their thought process in real-time, on the projected screen. I gave them 3 minutes to revise the sentences. This was a good amount of time, as the groups were able to complete the edits, but didn't have much extra time and were encouraged to think quickly. You could adjust this based on your students' grasp of the previous workshop.

After 3 minutes were up, the “judges” looked at the final sentences to choose the best one. These are bolded in the google doc, provided here. We then discussed why this was better than the other edits. Did it retain the original information? Was it written in a clear and persuasive way? Was it concise? Grammatically correct?

The winners of each round got candy. They really liked this! We did 4 rounds. This took about 35 minutes in total.

We re-visited this activity in the second peer-review on their final essay drafts [handout 2]. This provided a “refresher” as students approached their final revisions, allowing students to find these sentences in their peers' essays, while also thinking about their own writing in the process.

Results: This in-class activity received the highest feedback on the end of semester evaluations as students' most “memorable” and useful activity. Additionally, my students' papers showed

improvement, not only on their fourth essays, from which these sentences were drawn, but also on their final essays through peer-revision. They really enjoyed the “game-like” interaction in this activity, the physical movement from *contestants’* to *judges’* seats, the candy, and the collective use of google docs. Throughout the semester, I found google docs to provide an excellent learning tool, one that allows students to work collaboratively, efficiently, and in real-time.

Tackling Long, Complicated Sentences

Some questions to consider:

- Why do we write really long sentences?
- How might the reader view these sentences?
- How do you view these kinds of sentences as a reader?



Is your sentence too long and complicated? If so, ask yourself:

- 1) How many ideas am I trying to communicate in this one sentence?
- 2) Are any of these ideas repetitive?
- 3) Do all of these ideas relate to each other?
- 4) Do any of these ideas compete or contradict other ideas?
- 5) Do some of these ideas need more emphasis than they have right now?
- 6) Do some of these ideas need less emphasis than they have right now?
- 7) Does my wording confuse the point I am trying to make in this sentence?

Suggested remedies:

- 1) Try to divide sentences by replacing semicolons, conjunctions, and other clause joiners with periods.
- 2) Identify dependent clauses and develop those ideas further in a separate sentence.
- 3) Eliminate tangential information and nonessential parenthetical comments.
- 4) If you find that you just can't break down an unusually long sentence, try reordering the information.
 - a. Identify the strongest claim and make that your independent clause/central section.
 - b. Check for passive voice and replace them with more direct, concise active voice.
 - c. If all else fails, make sure the sentences around it are relatively short so that the rest of the paragraph is clear and direct.

Sources Consulted

"Clarifying Long, Complicated Sentences." Handout. Vanderbilt Writing Studio. Nashville, TN. July 17, 2008. [PDF online.](#)

Google Doc: Long, Complicated Sentences

can be accessed here: <https://docs.google.com/a/cornell.edu/document/d/1Nwd4L8VDsB2h2-YO-zRvHWrmIV9qYI3KblCsIACvLc/edit?usp=sharing>

Sentences in **bold** are the “winning” corrected sentences from the class activity.

- 1) Sandra immigrated from El Salvador illegally when she was 17 but was lucky enough to be granted temporary protected status (TPS) so she does not have to constantly watch her back while going about her daily life.
- 2) Working long hours could be a social problem because when workers work long hours, the long hours are actually providing them the sufficient income, not the wages.
- 3) Both women are making an annual income above the national poverty line if they work a typical 40 hour work week which means they can afford to support their children and have basic necessities but not much more.

Both women make an annual income above the national poverty line. Working 40 hours a week allows them to support their children with basic necessities, but not much more.

- 4) Natasha came to the poultry industry from jobs such as marketing, working in a nursing home, and a retail job, but while a consistent income was an important aspect of her choice, she couldn't remain at her other jobs because of poor attendance.
- 5) The hiring of these workers perpetuates the exploitation of all workers, including both undocumented and legal citizens, because people in higher positions easily manipulate and threaten undocumented workers, leading to horrible working conditions for everyone.
- 6) From their accounts of their experiences, we can come to a few conclusions, including that many low income employees at poultry processing plants see their jobs as temporary but exceptional opportunities, and they have larger dreams for themselves and their children.

Many low income employees at poultry processing plants see their jobs as temporary. Although they provide exceptional opportunities, they have larger dreams for themselves and their children.

- 7) Despite not knowing English when he first came to America, he learned to find different outlets to not only help his community but tie in his original dreams of

“[giving] culture,” elucidating his determination despite the hardships he faces in his job.

- 8) Sandra explains the inequalities that “some people at work will get favoritism or higher position based on their race”, while Hispanics, who in her opinion are the best workers, are discriminated against and almost never receive promotions.
- 9) Poultry work is physically and mentally exhausting due to its repetitive nature, yet it is one of the more desirable jobs in the food production chain, which is one of the fastest growing sources of employment in the United States.

Poultry work is physically and mentally exhausting due to its monotonous nature. Exponential growth in the food chain industry makes poultry work one of the most desirable jobs.

- 10) The testimonies from Sandra and Natasha reveal that without a massive social upheaval, individuals in the food chain will continue to be taken advantage of because any improvements in their situation and their children’s future are based in blind hope.
- 11) In comparison, individuals that have a low- income background and a lack of academic and financial resources are put at a severe disadvantage due to their inability to have a post-secondary education, to find a prosperous career path, and to move around when looking for a new job.
- 12) Both these women know how difficult it can be working in the poultry plants, and despite the fact that they do not make much of an effort to leave their jobs and appreciate the benefits, they still want something better for their children.
- 13) All of these factors come together to illustrate that the life of an immigrant contains many struggles that can make living in an entirely new world difficult as the living environment is not shaped around the immigrants, but rather immigrants are forced to assimilate into American society.
- 14) So, in some instances the poultry industry brings families together, as it allows for other members of the family to take care of the things around the household that Natasha and Tiara cannot do because of the time given off from work.

- 15) Being a woman is a disadvantage to begin with in the workplace, however if you are a woman of color in the workplace you are even further disadvantaged, this is because white collar supervisory and lower professional positions are filled by white women not those of color (Glenn, 1992).
- 16) This is interesting because Tiara and Sandra both had a lot of complaints about their current jobs, which shows that they do not love their jobs, or find the same passion in it that they want their children to have.

Tiara and Sandra dislike their jobs and had many complaints. They encourage their children to find jobs that they are passionate about.

Name:

Peer-Review of _____'s paper.

Final Peer-Review:

1) Long, Complicated Sentences, 2) Citations, 3) Conclusions

- 1) **Long, Complicated Sentences:** Skim through your partner's paper. Underline any sentences that are more than two lines long or are overly wordy. Look for semicolons, conjunctions, and clauses. Review the handout from week 9 "Clarifying Long, Complicated Sentences." Suggest remedies for at least two of the sentences you find and write them below.

pg#:____; paragraph#:____

pg#:____; paragraph#:____

- 2) **Citations:** First, skim through your partner's paper looking for in-text citations. Circle each in-text citation. Make sure there is an author and year for each parenthetical citation, unless the author is mentioned directly in the text. Notice that the period goes *after* the closed parenthesis. Check that each source cited in the essay is included in the "Works Cited" page at the end of the essay.

Examples:

Similar to the pork processing plant in Tar Heel, NC, many undocumented immigrants working in the food industry were knowingly recruited by their employers (Bacon, 2013).

Arlie Hochschild (2010) argues that women often work a "second shift" when they return home from their paid employment.

Second, skim through your partner's paper looking for quotations. Check to make sure a page number is included for each quote from a secondary source. If the quote comes from an oral history, make sure that the name and date are included. While there may not be enough time to carefully read each quote to ensure it is properly integrated, make sure that block quotes (more than three lines) are introduced and indented. Mark any quotations that are poorly integrated for your partner to address later in their own revisions.

Examples:

While many consumer-based movements around food argue to support local, organic, and environmentally sustainable food production, this paper argues for consumers to support food workers with more than our forks. Instead, it is important for us to occasionally “get out of the farmers’ markets and into the streets” (Lo and Koenig, 2017: 152).

Because Sarah grew up in a middle-class family, she did not have to work during high school. Sarah explained, “I didn't need it nor was it acceptable; it was frowned upon to work in high school” (Sarah, 2017). As she found herself working in low-wage jobs, she went against her own life trajectory.

Alicia. (2017, October 27). Interview by J. Firth, A. Xu, and S. Xu. Translated by A. Arteaga. [Tape recording].

Jackson. (2017, October 24). Interview by M. Chen, S. Huo, T. La, and R. Morehouse. [Tape recording].

Mouay. (2017, October 26). Interview by D. Diamond, M. Lisboa, and S. Zhang. [Tape recording].

Sarah. (2017, October 23). Interview by E. Latella, N. Matolka, S. Rosenthal, and B. Stahley. [Tape recording].

- 3) Self-Review Conclusions:** Effective conclusions can be difficult to write, but they play an important role in every paper! Think of the conclusion as the “last word” on the topic and bring your essay to a logical close. While you may use the conclusion to remind your reader of your thesis and main points, make sure that your conclusion is **not** just a summary. You may also use your conclusion to describe the consequences of your argument, answering the “so what?” question.

Don't

- ☒ Do not begin with “in conclusion.”
- ☒ Don't overstate your findings. Make a reasonable claim.
- ☒ Don't end on a weak final sentence.

- ✗ Don't copy and paste your thesis from the introduction to the conclusion.

Do

- ✓ Reiterate or remind your readers of your thesis and the main supporting points you've made throughout your essay. But do not end there!
- ✓ Include a detail or example from your introduction to bring your argument full circle.
- ✓ Propose a new course of action or a solution.
- ✓ If there were questions that your research *could not* answer, then identify these for your reader. Raise qualifications to your argument (limiting or opposing viewpoints).
- ✓ Be Honest. It's okay if your "findings" have led to more questions for other scholars to research. That's the beauty of research!
- ✓ Connect your findings to larger issues. What are the "broader impacts" of your research? Why does it matter? While you want to remind your readers of what you have said, don't be afraid to leave them with something more to think about!

Look at your own conclusion. Which approach(es) have you taken?

Can you integrate any other approach(es)? If so, which ones do you plan on using? Write a draft below.

Sources Consulted

Hamilton College. "Strategies for Conclusions." <https://www.hamilton.edu/academics/centers/writing/writing-resources/conclusions>

Vanderbilt University. "Writing Conclusions." <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/writing/wp-content/uploads/sites/164/2016/10/Conclusions.pdf>

End of Semester Self-Assessment

You've written a lot this semester! You've planned and conducted an oral history! You've written annotations, various essays, and a research paper integrating both primary and secondary sources! These are all a great start to the rest of your career at Cornell.

In just a few sentences, what have you learned this semester that sticks out in your memory?

I liked the videos we watched in class because they were informative and impactful, especially the Rape in the Fields video. It was amazing to see how many women can get together and still no action occurs.

What activities did you find helpful to improve your writing?

I like the activity where the class rewrote the long and wordy sentences and the judging group determined whose group had the best sentence. I also found the explanation of possible conclusion ideas on the second peer review to be helpful in rewriting my own conclusion.

What do you consider to be the worst thing you've written this semester? Why?

The essay on paternity leave was disorganized because there were too many ideas going on at once. I did not clearly outline the entire essay beforehand, so when new ideas came to me while writing, I placed them into the essay even when it did not all fit properly together.

What do you consider to be the best thing you've written this semester? Why?

I liked the speech assignment the best because it felt useful and it was easier to argue since it was happening in real life. It was also a unique assignment because it made me think of the reasons that a manager would not want to raise wages besides the obvious ones which I think led to a more interesting essay that had points that maybe not everyone in the class had.

In what ways has your writing—or your beliefs and behaviors surrounding writing—changed?

I learned the importance of outlining at the beginning of a piece, especially a long one since it can be difficult to go back when you are 12 pages in and try to add something while at the same time making it all fit with everything else you've written. Preparation from the start is key.

What new writing goals do you have after this semester?

I hope that in my next FWS class we can write more types of writing that we didn't get to do in this class. The speech writing was a different assignment and I hope that I can write another one and improve on my speech writing skills, since a large part of a good speech is what one says.

Elizabeth
Latella

End of Semester Self-Assessment

You've written a lot this semester! You've planned and conducted an oral history! You've written annotations, various essays, and a research paper integrating both primary and secondary sources! These are all a great start to the rest of your career at Cornell.

In just a few sentences, what have you learned this semester that sticks out in your memory?

This semester I have learned to examine the reasons and stay behind something as simple as buying an apple from the grocery store. I have learned how complex and interconnected our society is. However, I have also learned how to find and write these connections myself.

What activities did you find helpful to improve your writing?

I found the peer review activities especially helpful. I also found the sheets handed out in class like the lengthy sentence worksheet to greatly improve my skills.

What do you consider to be the worst thing you've written this semester? Why?

I think the worst thing I wrote this semester was my first piece because I didn't quite know how to synthesize everything I wanted to say clearly. I also was unsure how to think of the bigger picture.

End of Semester Self-Assessment

You've written a lot this semester! You've planned and conducted an oral history! You've written annotations, various essays, and a research paper integrating both primary and secondary sources! These are all a great start to the rest of your career at Cornell.

In just a few sentences, what have you learned this semester that sticks out in your memory?

- The poultry industry is controlled only by 3 major companies.
- Low wage workers deserve a voice as loud as any of ours.
- Inequality stems from so many places that I hadn't thought about before. We need to do something about it.

What activities did you find helpful to improve your writing?

The activity on shortening complex sentences was helpful. I also feel that writing conferences were very beneficial as well.

What do you consider to be the worst thing you've written this semester? Why?

My op-ed because I could have incorporated sources better.

End of Semester Self-Assessment

You've written a lot this semester! You've planned and conducted an oral history! You've written annotations, various essays, and a research paper integrating both primary and secondary sources! These are all a great start to the rest of your career at Cornell.

In just a few sentences, what have you learned this semester that sticks out in your memory?

I believe the main take away I got from this course was effectively conducting an oral history. I have never done an oral history or really knew much about it before, so having the opportunity to conduct one this semester was truly a learning experience. I am proud ^{of} the way I handled the interview with Mouay as well as the work produced by my entire group.

What activities did you find helpful to improve your writing?

I thought the activity we did on clarifying long sentences was particularly helpful for me because I tend to struggle with this in my writing. I also liked that we went over how to create effective outlines because this really helped me in bringing together my paper.

What do you consider to be the worst thing you've written this semester? Why?

I think the worst thing I've written this semester would probably be my warm-up essay. Without a clear prompt or rubric to follow, I struggled with knowing how to organize my essay or even what to write about. I believe that this caused my writing to sound a bit repetitive.

End of Semester Self-Assessment

You've written a lot this semester! You've planned and conducted an oral history! You've written annotations, various essays, and a research paper integrating both primary and secondary sources! These are all a great start to the rest of your career at Cornell.

In just a few sentences, what have you learned this semester that sticks out in your memory?

While it's tough to condense a whole semester's worth of material in a few sentences, topics such as social reproduction, sociological imagination, inequality, the social construction of race, social stratification, education and social mobility, and the influence of the industrial revolution all stick out to me.

My favorite topics of discussion were Bacon's article on NAFTA and Striffler's article in which he explored the origins of the poultry capital of the world and the transformation of the industry during World War II.

I also really enjoyed reading articles that meshed sociology with economics. For example, I liked the Jacobs and Graham-Squire article, *Labor Standards for School Cafeteria Workers, Turnover and Public Program Utilization*, which explored the different mechanisms that absorb the costs associated with paying workers higher wages. Although this article focused on cafeteria workers, it connected nicely with other ideas such as flexibilization that we discussed earlier in the semester.

What activities did you find helpful to improve your writing?

My two favorite activities were clarifying long sentences and quote integration. I am also a huge supporter of revisions so I enjoyed peer review activities.

What do you consider to be the worst thing you've written this semester? Why?

My worst piece of writing was probably my oral history on Beto. I thought I had a lot of great ideas and integrated the effects of NAFTA in the background of this analysis; however, I think it came off a bit awkward because I didn't highlight the role of immigration in my thesis. I also tried to do too much in a small amount of space. Nevertheless, I took your feedback and learned from my mistakes. I think I did a good job organizing my ideas in my final paper so while this was my worst piece of writing, I learned a lot from this about myself as a writer.

What do you consider to be the best thing you've written this semester? Why?

Raquel Morehouse

DSOC 1200/Food Work & Workers/Fa2017
Carrie Freshour

End of Semester Self-Assessment

You've written a lot this semester! You've planned and conducted an oral history! You've written annotations, various essays, and a research paper integrating both primary and secondary sources! These are all a great start to the rest of your career at Cornell.

In just a few sentences, what have you learned this semester that sticks out in your memory?

This semester I have learned a lot about the power structures from farm to table and how workers are taken advantage of within these structures. I never knew anything about the working conditions in the food chain being so bad or never really thought about it.

What activities did you find helpful to improve your writing?

I think the "clarifying long, complex sentences" activity was very helpful. Also the activity about using evidence and incorporating it effectively was very helpful.

What do you consider to be the worst thing you've written this semester? Why?

The worst thing I've written this semester was the speech from the point of view of a farm worker. I think it was too artificial and didn't sound like something that a farm worker would actually say when addressing a crowd at a protest.