Making Your Text Reader-friendly (Part 2)

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In our last module, you learned that your reader has expectations as to the sequencing of information. In order to create reader-friendly texts, you need to put 'given', or *familiar*, information before presenting 'new' concepts or ideas. You also found out that the grammatical subject of the sentence is so important in English that we even go so far as to put special punctuation, a *comma* [,], to separate and make the subject stand out from the rest of the text. Today, in this module, we will continue the theme of creating user-friendly, or reader-friendly texts, by exploring two other essential principles that you need to consider when organizing your texts, as well as some strategies accomplish this.

Task 1: What is wrong with this text?

Does this text follow reader's expectations?
Has the writer placed 'given' before 'new' information?

> [1]Romance languages descend from a Latin parent, and many words based on Latin are found in other modern languages such as English. [2]English has become the lingua franca, the learned language of science and trade. [3]Science is based on experimentation, description, and categorization.
> [4]Descriptions of the 'northern lights', or Aurora Borealis, often include the words 'twinkle' or 'flicker' to explain the movement created when solar ions collide with the Earth's atmosphere.

Task 2

Underline the <u>subjects</u> in the text below.
Has the writer been successful in keeping familiar information in subject position? What is this text about?

[1]Planning of the campus for the Helsinki University of Technology (TKK) in Otaniemi was carried out between 1949 and 1966. [2]In 1953, the task of designing the Main Building and Library was awarded to Aalto. [3]A very visible, central place on top of a hill that had once been the site of the Otaniemi Manor was the location chosen by Aalto for the Main Building. [4]The focal point of the Main Building is an amphitheatre that soars like a tower above the other parts of the building. [5]Staircase-like ascending rows of windows are an important feature of the two lecture halls housed in the amphitheatre. [6]The auditoriums demonstrate an exceptional use of natural light. [7]The illusion of increased height is created in the lecture halls by reflecting indirect light against the white ceiling from rows of hidden windows. [8]Furthermore, a clear message is conveyed by the choice of materials in the Main building: the red brick reminds us of old industrial architecture and symbolizes the close connection between the university and Finnish industry.

2. Stay on topic

Task 2 (continued)

Here is the exact same information, packaged differently.
Underline the <u>subjects</u> in the texts below. What are the <u>topics</u> of texts A and B?
Which text is better at 'staying focused' by keeping to a single topic?

A [1]Alvar Aalto planned the campus for the Helsinki University of Technology (TKK) in Otaniemi between 1949 and 1966. [2]In 1953, he was given the task of designing the Main Building and the Library of TKK. [3]Aalto placed the Main Building in a very visible, central location on top of a hill that had once been the site of the Otaniemi Manor. [4]He chose an amphitheatre that soars like a tower above the other parts of the Main Building as *the focal point for the university*. [5]Aalto designed this amphitheatre to house two lecture halls featuring staircase-like ascending rows of windows. [6]Aalto demonstrated an exceptional ability to make use of natural light. [7]In the lecture halls, Aalto created the illusion of increased height by reflecting indirect light against the white ceiling from rows of hidden windows. [8]Furthermore, Aalto's choice of materials in the Main Building conveys a clear message: the red brick reminds us of old industrial architecture and symbolizes the close connection between the university and Finnish industry.

Topical focus: ……………………

B [1]The Helsinki University of Technology campus in Otaniemi was planned by Alvar Aalto between 1949 and 1966. [2]In 1953, the university gave Aalto the task of designing the Main Building and the Library. [3]The Main Building was placed in a very visible, central location on top of the hill that had once been the site of the Otaniemi Manor. [4]The building is dominated by an amphitheatre that soars like a tower above the other parts of the building to provide the focal point for the university. [5]The amphitheatre houses two lecture halls that feature staircase-like ascending rows of windows. [6]These lecture halls demonstrate Aalto's exceptional ability to make use of natural light. [7]The rows of hidden windows in the lecture halls provide indirect light, which is reflected from the white ceiling to create the illusion of increased height. [8]Furthermore, the choice of materials used in the Main building conveys a clear message: the red brick reminds us of old industrial architecture and symbolizes the close connection between the university and Finnish industry.

Topical focus: ………………………….

3. Keep it "Light"

English prefers sentences that contain a **short subject**, come quickly to the verb and then can go as long as needed. However, what is most undesirable are sentences that are "top-heavy". In other words, you should avoid overloading your reader by placing heavy elements at the beginning of the sentence. Instead, English prefers "heavy-bottomed" sentences —those that place most of the information at the end of the sentence after the verb.
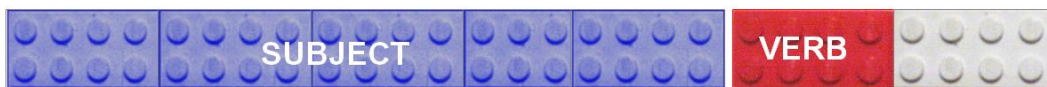
BEST!

| SUBJECT | VERB | | | | | | | | |

ACCEPTABLE *(if subject not too long)*

| SUBJECT | VERB | | | |

BAD!

| SUBJECT | | VERB | |

WORST!!

| SUBJECT | VERB |

Ending clauses and sentences with a verb creates "top-heavy" sentences that seem badly imbalanced. Instead, good writers try to place the verb as soon as possible after the subject of the sentence. This can clearly be seen in the example below. There is such a strong need to avoid placing the **VERB** at the end that native speakers feel compelled to place a *noun phrase* (e.g., *The environmental effects of … warming*) after the verb in order to create a sentence that feels more "balanced". There are numerous strategies that you can use as a writer to help balance your sentences. The next page lists some of the most common.

> 🙁 The effects of increasing atmospheric carbon dioxide and methane levels on the global warming **WERE ANALYZED.**
>
> The effects of increasing atmospheric carbon dioxide and methane levels on the global warming **ARE ANALYZED** in this paper.
>
> 🙂 **This paper** **ANALYZES** the effects of increasing atmospheric carbon dioxide and methane levels on the global warming.

STRATEGIES FOR RE-ORDERING INFORMATION

1. Passive-Active Alternation

Engineers **need** good English language skills. **[active]**

Good language skills **are needed by** **engineers**. **[passive]**

2. Equative Shift

One form of pollution that has received much attention **IS** air pollution.

Air pollution **IS** **one form of pollution that has received much attention**.

3. Animate-Inanimate Shift

In this report, systems that use speech recognition **are described**.

Ø **This report** **describes** systems that use speech recognition.

4. Personal-Impersonal Shift

In this report, systems that use speech recognition **are described**.

In this report, **we** **describe** systems that use speech recognition.

5. Means-Purpose Shift

The humidity ratio **was calculated (by) using** Equation 8.

Equation 8 **was used** **to calculate** the humidity ratio.

6. Introductory "It" (dummy subject)

Adding heat and **raising** the temperature of the gas **would be** **necessary**.

It **would be** **necessary** **to heat** and **raise** the temperature of the gas.

7. Existential "There" (dummy subject)

A processor overhead associated with reconfiguration **is** available.

There **is** a processor overhead (that is) associated with reconfiguration.

8. Resultative non-finite clause (*so that ---> thus + -ing*)

The laser light forms an EM field, **so that** the vibration of the atoms **is slowed**.

The laser light forms an EM field**, thus slowing** the vibration of the atoms.

9. Purpose clause (*so that ---> to* infinitive)

The algorithm selectively clones a procedure, **so that** the code **can be optimized**.

The algorithm selectively clones a procedure **(in order) to optimize** the code.

10. Split relative clause (that / which)

An algorithm **that** can facilitate fast image browsing **is proposed**.

An algorithm **is proposed that** can facilitate fast image browsing.

11. Nominalization (verb ---> noun)

Health experts fear that **technology addiction will increase**.   [increase = verb]

Health experts fear **an increase** in **technology addiction**.   [increase = noun]

12. When / before / after + -ing

Economical feasibility is an important factor **when a PMR solution is selected**.

Economical feasibility is an important factor **when selecting a PMR solution**.

13. Reorder clauses

Various algorithms **to generate** testing automata **have been developed**.

Various algorithms **have been developed to generate** testing automata.

14. Find a default subject (*e.g., this thesis, this work, research*)

Many gesture measuring devices for computer input **have been devised**.

Many researchers have devised gesture measuring devices for computer input.

Task 3

Revise the following top-heavy sentences to satisfy the light-heavy principle.

1. Chemical processes from fossil fuels, hydrolysis of water with oxygen as a by-product, or thermal decomposition **can produce** hydrogen.

   ……

2. To overcome these limitations, an automated test system capable of flexibly handling a wide variety of test conditions **was developed**.

   ……

3. Using our methodology, these interactions **can be** automatically and compositionally **detected**.

   ……

4. Further work is required so that safety standards regarding the storage and recycling of spent nuclear waste **can be developed**.

   ……

5. In this study, a technique that scans and labels pixels into components based on pixel connectivity **was used**.

   ……

6. The process of sorting through large amounts of data and picking out relevant information **is known as** data mining.

   ……

7. Trees shelter buildings through direct shading and evapotranspiration, so that the costs of heating in the winter and cooling in summer **will be reduced**.

   ……

8. The fact that LED brake lights improve highway safety by giving drivers 0.5 seconds more time to react than conventional lights **has been reported**.

……
…

9. Some basic experiments must be conducted before the simulation **can begin**.

……

10. The participation of women in almost all professional fields during the past decade **has** greatly **increased**.

……

11. Writing the mass number as a subscript to the left of the chemical symbol (e.g., 65Cu) **can be used** to name isotopes.

……

12. In the next section, the verified interconnection scheme **is** briefly **described**.

……

13. Evolutionary preferences for certain types of landscapes that can be traced back many thousands of years to the savannas of Africa in the distant past of the human species **may influence** our aesthetic preferences.

……

14. Improving the socio-economic conditions of the rural population through the creation of more farmland, increase in production, relocation of farm buildings, or development of urban life **has been** an important task for land-use planners.

……

15. The following four principles for future management of these oak forests **are suggested**.

……

16. On the coast of Ostrobotnia, land uplift ensures that new wetland habitats **are** constantly **created**

……

17. The data transfer rate is critical in applications in which long data streams **must be stored** or **retrieved**.

……

18. In the 1980s, China introduced a policy where parents who had only one child **were rewarded**.

……

19. Until now, no electronic stethoscope in which all the advantages of electronic technology are incorporated **has been designed**.

……

……

20. In the company, an information system in which the production and maintenance data on its machinery are collected **has been developed**.

……

……