**Avoiding Clichés, Awkward Phrasing, and Wordiness**

A cliché is an expression that has been used so often it has lost its originality and effectiveness. Whoever first said “light as a feather” had thought of an original way to express lightness, but today that expression is worn out. Most of us use an occasional cliché in speaking, but clichés have no place in writing. The good writer thinks up fresh new ways to express ideas.

Here are a few clichés. Add some more to the list that you know.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| The bottom lineOlder but wiserLast but not leastIn this day and ageDifferent as night and dayOut of this worldWhite as a ghost/sheetSick as a dog | The thrill of victoryOne in a millionBusy as a beeEasier said than doneBetter late than neverAt the top of their lungsTired and true |

Clichés lack freshness because the reader always knows what’s coming next. Can you complete any of these expressions?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| The agony of…Breathe a sigh of…Lend a helping…Odds and … | Raining cats and…As American as…Been there…Worth its weight… |

Clichés are expressions too many people use. Try to avoid them in your writing.

**Awkward Phrasing**

Another problem—awkward phrasing—comes from writing sentence structures that no one else would use because they break basic sentence patters, omit necessary words, or use words incorrectly. Like clichés, awkward sentences might sound acceptable when spoken, but as polished writing, they are usually unacceptable.

**Awkward**

There should be great efforts in terms of the communication between teachers and their students.

**Corrected**

Teachers and their students must communicate.

**Awkward**

During the experiment, the use of key principles was essential to ensure the success of it.

**Corrected**

The experiment was a success. OR We did the experiment carefully.

**Awkward**

My favorite was when the guy with the ball ran the wrong way all the way across the field.

**Corrected**

In my favorite part, the receiver ran across the field in the wrong direction.

**Wordiness**

*Good writing is concise writing*. Don’t use ten words if you can say it better in five. “In today’s society” isn’t as effective as “today,” and it’s a cliché. “At this point in time” could be “presently” or “now.”

Another kind of wordiness comes from saying something twice.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| There is no need to write this  | because | All you need to write is… |
| in the month of August | August *is* a month | in August |
| 9 a.m. in the morning | 9 a. m. *is* morning | 9 a.m. |
| my personal opinion | an opinion *is* personal | my opinion |

Still another kind of wordiness comes from using expressions that add nothing to the meaning of the sentence (often called non-quantifiers because they don’t show any amount).

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| The point is that we can’t afford it | = | We can’t afford it. |

Here is a sample **wordy** sentence:

The construction company actually worked on that particular building for a period of six months.

And here it is **after eliminating the wordiness**:

The construction company worked on that building for six months.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Wordy writing | Concise writing |
| Advance planningAn unexpected surpriseAsk a questionAt a later dateBasic fundamentalsGreen in colourBut neverthelessCombine togethercompletely emptydown beloweach and everyend resultfewer in numberfree giftin order toin spite of the fact thatjust exactlylarge in sizenew innovationon a regular basispast historyrectangular in shaperefer backrepeat againserious crisissufficient enoughthere in persontwo different kindsvery unique | planningAn surpriseAsk laterfundamentalsGreenBut (or nevertheless)Combine emptybeloweach (or every)resultfewergifttoalthoughexactlylargeinnovationregularlyhistoryrectangular refer repeat crisissufficient (or enough)theretwo kindsunique |

Proofreading exercises

The following student paragraphs contain examples of cliché, awkward phrasing, and wordiness. Revise the paragraphing so that they are concise examples of Standard Written English. When you’re done, compare your revisions with the sample answers at the back of the book.

1. Technologies in this day and age are getting more and more advanced. All of the friends that I have have cell phones with cameras in them. Anyone who doesn’t have on is just not up with the times. For instance, my friend was getting robbed, and he took a picture of the guy who robbed him and of his truck as he was driving away from the scene of the crime. And when the police got there, my friend showed them the picture on his phone screen, and they sent out a description of the truck and the man who robbed my friend. They arrested hi in just a few hours. When it came to the trial, if my friend hadn’t had his cell phone with the camera in it, it would have just been my friends’ word against the man’s.
2. My favorite old movie is Grease. Grease is my favorite movie because it is really lively, and they sing a lot. I also like it because John Travolta is in it, and I really like him. I think that John Travolta did a good job in that film. I don’t really like musicals that much, but his film is great.
3. I’ve been trying to help my small son finish his first-grade homework every night, but that’s easier said than done. Of course, I thing that he is the smartest kid in the world, but getting him to show it takes a lot of hard work. When I do get him to sit down in from of his workbooks, he will work for a few minutes on them and then run off as soon as my back is turned. I try to tell him that when I was his age, I got in big trouble if I didn’t do my homework. Unfortunately, my son’s teacher just doesn’t give him a sticker for that day if he doesn’t do his. Stickers don’t do the trick as motivators. I hope with all my heart that my son will learn the value of keeping up in school.

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1. Technologies today are getting more advanced. My friends all have cell phones with cameras in them. Anyone who doesn’t have on is behind the times. When my friend was getting robbedhe took a picture of the guy and his truck as he was driving away from the scene of the crime. When the police got there, my friend showed them the picture on his phone, and they sent out a description of the truck and the man The Police arrested him a few hours later. When it came to the trial, if my friend hadn’t had his cell phone, it would have been my friends’ word against the man’s.
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