**Active Voice (a hallmark of clear communication) vs. Passive Voice (a hallmark of politics)**

**In business…**

*Passive:* A grant application was submitted by our company.

*Active:* Our company submitted a grant application.

**In an instruction manual…**

*Passive:* Flour and eggs are mixed together with a whisk.

*Active:* Mix the flour and eggs together with a whisk—*OR*—Whisk the flour and eggs together. \*

**In politics…**

*Passive:* Mistakes were made.

*Active:* I made mistakes—OR—We made mistakes.

**In a technical document…**

*Passive:* The cutting edge of the can opener is driven by the gears.

*Active:* The gears of the can opener drive the cutting edge.

\*Note: Some nouns, such as whisk, can be used as verbs to decrease wordiness.

**The “Real” Subject and Verb: Why You Shouldn’t Fake It**

**The real subject…**

*The use of scissors* is effective for cutting pizza.

*Scissors* are effective for cutting pizza.

We *discovered the presence of* water on Mars.

We *discovered* water on Mars.

*It is believed* that this company thrives on effective communication.

*We believe* that this company thrives on effective communication.

**The real verb…**

We should *give consideration to* every candidate whose resume arrives on time.

We should *consider* every candidate whose resume arrives on time.

We should *conduct an analysis on* why Blueberry Hill is so crowded on Thursday nights.

We should *analyze* why Blueberry Hill is so crowded on Thursday nights.

We should *effect a change in* our electoral system. \*

We should *change* our electoral system.

\*Note: Do you know *all* the differences between *affect* and *effect*?

**Parallelism OR How Language is like Math**

You wouldn’t write an equation like this, would you?

2x3 + x24 + (3)(x) + 20 = 0

Nope! It would be—

2x3 + 4x2 + 3x + 20 = 0

So why would you write a sentence like this?

We need to eat more fruits, vegetables, get more exercise, and we need to pay more attention to our health in general.

The parallel versions of that are—

We need to eat more fruits, eat more vegetables, get more exercise, and pay more attention to our health in general.

OR

We need to eat more fruits and vegetables, get more exercise, and pay more attention to our health in general.

*Nonparallel:* To see the beauty of a sunset in Venice is experiencing perfection.

*Parallel:* To see the beauty of a sunset in Venice is to experience perfection.

*Nonparallel:* Pry open the cover of the garage door opener, place the numbers 3, 5, and 7 in the “up” position, and the other numbers should be in the neutral position.

*Parallel:* Pry open the cover of the garage door opener, place the numbers 3, 5, and 7 in the “up” position, and leave the other numbers in the neutral position.

**Misplaced and Dangling Modifiers: Why Mom Doesn’t Smell Like Cinnamon**

(FYI—I didn’t know I was doing this wrong until I was a senior in college, and I majored in English.)

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*Misplaced modifier:* Smelling like cinnamon, Mom was making dessert.

(HUH??? Does MOM smell like cinnamon?)

*Correct:* Mom was making dessert, which smelled like cinnamon.

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*Misplaced modifier:* Once used only by fishermen, tourists and shops now covered the entire port.

(Did the fishermen use the tourists and shops?)

*Correct:* Once used only by fishermen, the port was now covered by tourists and shops.

OR—Tourists and shops now covered the entire port, which was once used only by fishermen.

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*Misplaced modifier:* Falling down the mountain, I was afraid that the boulder would hit me.

(I wouldn’t still be alive if *I* had fallen down the mountain, right?)

*Correct:* I was afraid that the boulder falling down the mountain would hit me.

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*Dangling Modifier:* Hiking up the mountain, the boulder started to fall.

*Correct:* As I hiked up the mountain, the boulder started to fall.

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*Dangling Modifier:* Using too much electricity, the power went out.

*Correct:* Because I was using too much electricity, the power went out.

**Restrictive and Nonrestrictive Clauses and Phrases: The *Real* Difference between “That” and “Which”**

**Commas or no commas?**

The waiter € who spilled the soup € is incompetent. No commas!

Without “who spilled the soup,” we wouldn’t know which waiter we were talking about. “Who spilled the soup” narrows the subject down from all the waiters in the restaurant to just the one we’re talking about. This is called *restrictive* because it *restricts* the subject.

Our waiter last night € who spilled the soup € is incompetent. Commas!

Without “who spilled the soup,” we’d still know which waiter we were talking about. It’s a useful bit of information about *why* he’s incompetent, but it’s not necessary information for us to know which waiter it is we’re talking about. This is called *nonrestrictive* because it *doesn’t restrict* the subject.

*Nonrestrictive:* Superman, who poses as Clark Kent, has an unsuccessful love life.

*Restrictive:* Superheroes who have secret identities have unsuccessful love lives.

*Restrictive:* Everyone who walks into the record store before 10:00 AM will receive a free CD.

*Nonrestrictive:* The first 100 customers, as a reward for their dedication to the store, will get a free CD.

*Restrictive:* The website *that* has the most innovative layout will win the competition.

*Nonrestrictive:* The winning website*, which* had the most innovative layout, is featured on our site.