William Zinsser, the author of **On Writing Well** said,

"The secret of good writing is to strip every sentence to its cleanest components. Every word that serves no function, every long word, every adverb that carries the same meaning that's already in the verb, every passive construction that leaves the reader unsure of who is doing what – these are the thousand and one adulterants that weaken the strength of a sentence. <u>And they usually occur in proportion to education and rank.</u>"

(Emphasis mine)

 (Zinsser, 2006 edition, p. 7)

A Note about Grammar: Please do not let good grammar or good sentence and paragraph structure hinder the writing process on the initial draft of the paper. Concentrate first on getting a draft with your ideas and research accurately portrayed. The sentence structure and grammar can be critiqued and corrected during the first edit. That said, grammar and structure are very important on the final draft of the paper.

Sentences

A good sentence contains at least one subject and one verb. Good sentences also have consistent subject/verb agreement in tense and form. Finally, the meaning of a good sentence is clear and understandable.

Sentence structure: English sentences generally have a Subject-Verb-Object construction. The three types of sentences are: simple, compound, and complex. Varying the type of sentence makes for more enjoyable reading.

Simple sentences express a complete thought (also known as an independent clause).

Compound sentences have two independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so — also known by the acronym: FAN-BOYS).

Complex sentences have an independent clause joined by a dependent clause (a clause without a verb) and include a subordinate conjunction such as *because, since, after, although, while, if, although, when,* etc., or a relative pronoun such as *that, who, which,* et cetera.

See more information about sentence structure at: http://www.eslbee.com/sentences.htm

Sentences should have *parallel construction*, that is the forms of adjective, nouns, and clauses should be the same in compound or complex sentences. For example:

[right] The book was both stimulating and challenging.

[wrong] The book was both stimulating and a challenge.

[right] We hope to accomplish the following: finding better speakers, giving more people a vote, and increasing membership.

[wrong] We hope to accomplish the following: better speakers, giving more people a vote, increase membership. (Sabin, 2005)

Run-on sentences Run-on sentences occur when too many independent and dependent clauses link together in a single sentence. For example, the following is a single sentence despite the capitalization and punctuation:

> *Eleven Latinas, most of whom were first-generation college students and were in their third year or beyond in the process of earning a doctoral degree in psychology, participated in the study and answered the following questions: Describe, as clearly and concretely as you can, events or experiences that illustrate your experience as a Latina doctoral student in psychology?; Describe how your Latina identity plays a role in your graduate education experience?; What would you say to another Latina who is interested in pursuing a doctoral degree in psychology?*

> **Corrected by breaking into 3 sentences**

> *Eleven Latinas participated in in-depth interviews. Most of the participants were first-generation college students and were in their third year or beyond in the process of earning a doctoral degree in psychology. They answered the following questions: describe, as clearly and concretely as you can, events or experiences that illustrate your experience as a Latina doctoral student in psychology; describe how your Latina identity plays a role in your graduate education experience; what would you say to another Latina who is interested in pursuing a doctoral degree in psychology?*

Verbs: the action or state of being (conjugations of the *be* verbs) of the sentence or clause

Active Versus Passive Voice Good writers use active voice as often as possible. Academic writing often uses passive voice but there is a movement within academia to change that. Content written in active voice is easier to read, more direct, and more concise. It is also more powerful and authoritative. Passive voice places emphasis on the object rather than the subject of a sentence. It slows the reader down, is wordy, and can create unintentional confusion:

Example: Active voice <u>uses</u> strong, direct, clear verbs.

                Less strong verbs <u>are used</u> in passive voice; they slow the action down and add wordiness.

Writers should not use passive voice when active voice is a viable choice. For example:

> The cake was made by Jane. . .[Jane made the cake]

> It has been determined that . . . [who determined it?]

> Mistakes were made . . . [who made the mistakes?]

However **passive voice is necessary when** the do-er of the action is <u>unknown, unimportant, or indefinite</u> (Einsohn, 2006, pp. 395-396). For example:

> Fax machines are located in the library.

> Each panelist was identified by institutional affiliation and field of experience.

> The statistics were drawn from thirty field tests.

Special note about verb tense: maintain a consistent tense in your writing. When writing in the past tense, keep all verbs in the past tense throughout the document. When writing in the present tense, keep all verbs in the present tense throughout the document

Negatives

When expressing a negative idea, only use one negative expression; using two negatives gives the sentence or clause a positive meaning. For example:

> He was not unaware of the consequences. [He was aware of the consequences.]

> She was not unattractive. [She was attractive.]

Prepositions: ending a sentence with a preposition is not wrong and can keep the sentence from sounding clunky because it is more natural. However, placing prepositions at the end of sentences is informal so check with your advisor or style guide regarding the level of formality expected.

Troublesome prepositions:

- at/about
- beside/besides
- between/among
- due to/because of/on account of
- like/as/as if
- towards/toward

Pronouns: pronouns must agree with the antecedent (the word they refer to) they modify; singular pronouns (he/she) modify one person, plural pronouns (they, we) modify groups of people. Special note: you may not use their after using he and she, or his and hers, or words that are considered common gender words (that is they include both male and female).

For example:

[wrong] Each student received multiple assignments from their professors.

[right] Each student received multiple assignments from his or her professors.

[right] All students received multiple assignments from their professors.

Which/That *Which* introduces either restrictive or non-restrictive clauses and *that* introduces only restrictive clauses. If a comma is necessary for the clause, use *which*. If a comma is unnecessary, use *that*.

Restrictive clauses are necessary to understand the meaning of the sentence; non-restrictive clauses can be left out and the meaning remains the same. Also, *that* should not be used to refer to people; use "who" instead.