

Textbook Principles for Revision

A rule of thumb when writing to students is to think about the genre of textbook writing as more like technical writing, which is written for a general audience, than academic writing, which is written by scholars to other scholars. These tips for effective writing boil down to a single piece of advice: write directly to your audience in ways they find meaningful.

Audience

- Textbooks generally aim for a reading level of grade 8 to 12. Here are [five tips for writing to grade level](#). (Aimed at business writers, but generally good advice!)
- Involve the student directly by using “you” instead of “the student.”
- Provide multiple relatable examples. Provide even more examples than you think are necessary to increase the chance that one will connect.

Chunking

- Accessibility experts recommend shorter paragraphs (no more than 150 words), especially for online texts.
- Shorter sentences, in general, and variation in sentence length overall, keep readers engaged with the text.

Content and Clarity

- Focus on concepts rather than researchers or studies. Avoid long lists of in-text citations that interrupt the flow of sentences.
- Paraphrase complicated ideas from outside sources. Avoid direct quotes as much as possible, and only use them when the writing is particularly compelling. If the direct quote is complicated, provide a paraphrase (“In other words, this research is saying ...”) immediately afterwards.

Organization

- Begin paragraphs with clear, straightforward topic sentences and use the final sentence to explain why the subject is important and to transition to the next point.

Example of Revising for Tone

Current Text #1

Routines, broadly defined, refer to “patterned behaviors that have instrumental goals” (Segal, 2004, p. 500) and may be a mixture of scheduled daily activities, such as shared mealtimes, that reconcile “the diverse schedules and projects of individuals so as to produce points of intersection” (DeVault, 1991, p. 90). Routines and predictability can have positive effects for children, adolescents, and adults. In one of the systematic reviews on the topic, Boyce et al. (1983) found that family routines, or the predictable, repeated consistent patterns that characterize quotidian home life, as one of the fundamental “organizational units of ordinary life in families” (p.194), and are helpful in promoting health and wellbeing of the family members. Family routines can potentially be useful to foster emotional connectedness, efficiently complete family tasks, provide stability in times of change, and regulate family control (Harrist et al., 2019).

Revision #1

Routines, broadly defined, are repeated goal-focused behaviors.^[1] Your routines may include a mixture of scheduled activities, such as shared mealtimes or a game of pickup basketball on the weekends. The purpose of these routines, other than to get something to eat or enjoy some exercise, is to bring together people with different schedules so they can interact and accomplish a task.^[2]

Routines and predictability can have positive effects for children, adolescents, and adults. **Family routines** are the predictable, repeated consistent patterns that characterize everyday home life. As one of the fundamental structures of family life, these routines help to promote the health of the family members.^[3] Family routines bring us closer together, help us get work done, bring stability to our lives, and manage the day-to-day challenges.^[4]

Recommendations

1. Paraphrase direct quotes into language that students are more likely to understand.
2. Break apart longer sentences (over 25 words) and longer paragraphs (over 150 words).
3. Move citations into endnotes to keep the focus on concepts rather than on the researchers and studies (unless the research and study is the focus of the section). Check with your lead author about the preferred citation style.
4. Provide multiple relatable examples.

Example of Revising for Tone

Current Text #2

Routines in the home, such as bedtime routines and homework sessions, can have positive effects on children's mental health, physical health, academic achievement, and delinquent behavior (e.g., Manczak, Williams, & Chen, 2017; Brody & Flor, 1997; Hair et al., 2008). Family routines can give children a sense of stability and security, in turn potentially decreasing anxiety (Dacey, Mack, & Fiore, 2016). Positive child adjustment across the transition to kindergarten can be facilitated by family routines (Ferretti & Bub, 2017). Home routines can be especially helpful for children from low SES households in countering some of the elevated risk for experiencing chaotic and unpredictable family environments (Evans et al., 2005). Among children with developmental or intellectual disabilities, those with well-established routines tend to be more resilient (Schaaf et al., 2011).

Revision #2

It may seem obvious to you that routines bring people together and create stability. You may have felt this first hand growing up with routines that brought comfort and security, like reading bedtime stories with a favorite stuffed animal, or the absence of routines.

One way to understand the nature of contemporary families, beyond your personal experience, is to analyze patterns of social behavior. Recent research shows how routines affect outcomes for children:

- Routines in the home, such as bedtime routines and homework sessions, can have positive effects on children's mental health, physical health, academic achievement, and delinquent behavior.^[1]
- Family routines can give children a sense of stability and security, in turn potentially decreasing anxiety.^[2]
- Positive child adjustment across the transition to kindergarten can be facilitated by family routines.^[3]
- Home routines can be especially helpful for children from low SES households in countering some of the elevated risk for experiencing chaotic and unpredictable family environments.^[4]
- Among children with developmental or intellectual disabilities, those with well-established routines tend to be more resilient.^[5]

Sociologists study family routines because it helps us understand _____. When we understand _____, we can do _____. Each new study moves us closer to

understanding the complex nature of families and how we can change and improve these fundamental units of society.

Recommendations

1. Place the research in context by explaining why people do this kind of research and what it ultimately means.
2. Use bullet points to emphasize the individual outcomes when you have a list of more than three in a row.
3. Provide a conclusion that answers the “so what?” question.
4. All the recommendations from the first example apply to this one, too.

Example of Revising for Tone

Current Text #3

Rites of passage have three phases: separation, liminal, and incorporation. As van Gennep described. “I propose to call the rites of separation from a previous world, preliminary rites, those executed during the transitional stage liminal (or threshold) rites, and the ceremonies of incorporation into the new world postliminal rites.” In the first phase, people withdraw from their current status and prepare to move from one place or status to another. “The first phase (of separation) comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group ... from an earlier fixed point in the social structure.” There is often a detachment or “cutting away” from the former self in this phase, which is signified in symbolic actions and rituals. For example, the cutting of the hair for a person who has just joined the army. He or she is “cutting away” the former self: the civilian. The transition (liminal) phase is the period between states, during which one has left one place or state but has not yet entered or joined the next. “The attributes of liminality or of liminal personae (“threshold people”) are necessarily ambiguous.” In the third phase (reaggregation or incorporation) the passage is consummated [by] the ritual subject.” Having completed the rite and assumed their “new” identity, one re-enters society with one’s new status. Re-incorporation is characterized by elaborate rituals and ceremonies, like debutante balls and college graduation, and by outward symbols of new ties: thus “in rites of incorporation there is widespread use of the ‘sacred bond’, the ‘sacred cord’, the knot, and of analogous forms such as the belt, the ring, the bracelet and the crown.”cultures.

Revision #3

Rites of passage have three phases: separation, transition, and incorporation. These three stages were first described by French anthropologist Arnold van Gennep who [paraphrase the essential parts of the quote above.]

The first phase is separation, in which people withdraw from their current status and prepare to move from one place or status to another. During separation, people detach from their former

selves through symbolic actions and rituals. For example, when a civilian joins the army, they cut their hair to signal they are “cutting away” the former self.

The second phase is transition, also known as the liminal phase. It is the period between stages during which one has left one place or state but has not yet entered or joined the next. For example, [add example here].

The third phase is incorporation, or reaggregation. Once the ritual is completed, the individual assumes their new identity and re-enters society. Often this phase is characterized by rituals and ceremonies, such as debutante balls and college graduations. Often, people use outward symbols to represent this change. For example, [add example here].

Recommendations

1. Break paragraphs into smaller chunks.
2. Rephrase complicated scholarly quotes.
3. Provide examples that illustrate the concepts.
4. Use the simplest language as long as it is accurate and precise.
5. All the recommendations from the first example apply to this one, too.

Example of Revising for Clarity

I’ve provided three examples below of ways to revise for clarity. My edits are designed to show how you can make the text easier to read and understand for students.

Current Text #1

The concept of safety is one that is broad. As Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Theory and the First Nations perspectives show, safety is something that can be co-created in communities and something that an individual can experience. Safety is something that can be a goal of public policy - such as the passage of a law increasing funding for afterschool programs so that children have a safe and enriching place to go after school. Safety is something that can be provided by organizations - something we can see community organizations creating when they provide services to people leaving abusive relationships. Safety is something that can be created in relationships - for example, the intense love, trust, and connection that can be developed in a parent-child relationship. Finally, safety is something that an individual can feel - something we know that individuals can develop through positive childhood experiences and learning social and emotional skills.

Revision #1

Maslow’s theory and First Nations perspectives together show us that safety can be co-created in communities and experienced individually. Safety can be a goal of public policy, such as the passage of a law increasing funding for afterschool programs. Organizations, such as services

provided to people leaving abusive relationships, also create safety. In relationships, safety grows from the intense love, trust, and connection between child and parent. Finally, safety can be created by individuals and developed through positive childhood experiences and by learning social and emotional skills.

Recommendations

1. Cut topic sentences that are general or vague. Cut right to the chase.
2. Avoid unnecessary repetition. For example, Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the First Nations perspectives are introduced in the previous paragraph, so you can refer to them in a shortened form without loss of clarity.
3. Look for repetitive phrases: for example, "is something that" can almost always be cut; likewise "afterschool programs" tells the reader when the program takes place and who it's for, so it's not necessary to also say it's a place where children can go after school to be safe.
4. Avoid repeating the same word more than once in a sentence or starting several sentences in the same way. Variety keeps the reader on their toes.
5. Aim for active voice over passive voice as much as possible.
 - a. Passive: Safety can be created by the individual.
 - b. Active: Individuals create safety.

Current Text #2

Protective and Compensatory Childhood Experiences (PACES)

While safety is a need for individuals throughout the life course, childhood is a time where safety is even more important because of its role in children's cognitive and emotional development. Families play a significant role in providing children with experiences that will help them grow up into happy, stable, and successful adults. When families and communities have a sense of safety and stability, they are more able to provide children with the protective childhood experiences needed. There are ten **protective and compensatory childhood experiences** that have been identified that help children in their development and promote resilience, even if they also have some adverse or traumatic childhood experiences.

1. A caregiver who loves them unconditionally
2. A best friend - someone to have fun with and who they can trust
3. Regular opportunities to help others, through volunteering or participation in other community projects
4. Being physically active and/or playing sports
5. Being active in a social group (church, scout group, community group) outside of sports
6. An engaging hobby i.e. arts and crafts, reading, debate team, playing a musical instrument
7. An adult who is not their parent that they can trust and turn to for advice
8. A home that is clean, safe, and where there is enough to eat
9. A school with the resources and academic experiences that children need to learn
10. A home with routines and fair, clear, and consistently enforced rules

The ability to provide children with these kinds of experiences is directly related to macro and micro factors associated with safety. At the macro level, these experiences can only exist if families have access to resources - such as food, money, access to quality schools, and time to engage in the community. At the micro level, these experiences are born out of healthy relationships and a sense of community - children knowing that they have people who care about them. If we want children to grow into resilient adults, then we need families and communities to have the support that they need so that they are able to provide children with needed resources and build strong relationships.

Revision #2

Protective and Compensatory Childhood Experiences

Individuals need safety throughout the life course, but childhood is a time where safety is even more important because of its role in children's cognitive and emotional development (cite here). Families provide children with experiences that will help them grow up into happy, stable, and successful adults. When families and communities have a sense of safety and stability, they are more able to provide children with the protective childhood experiences needed (cite here).

Psychologists have identified ten **protective and compensatory childhood experiences (PACES)** that help children in their development and promote resilience, even if they also have some adverse or traumatic childhood experiences (cite here).

Here are ten PACEs critical to healthy child development:

1. A caregiver who loves them unconditionally
2. A best friend who they can trust and have fun with
3. An adult who is not their parent that they can trust and turn to for advice
4. Regular opportunities to help others, through volunteering or participation in other community projects
5. Physical activities and/or sports
6. Social groups, such as church, scout group, community groups
7. Hobbies, such as arts and crafts, reading, debate team, playing a musical instrument
8. A school with the resources and academic experiences that they need to learn
9. A home that is clean, safe, and where there is enough to eat
10. A home with routines and fair, clear, and consistently enforced rules

These experiences directly relate to macro and micro factors associated with safety. At the macro level, these experiences only exist if families have access to resources, such as food, money, access to quality schools, and time to engage in the community. At the micro level, these experiences develop from healthy relationships and a sense of community where children know they have people who care about them. If we want children to grow into resilient adults, we must support families and communities so they can provide children with needed resources and strong relationships.

Recommendations

These revision suggestions are aimed at making the writing as clear as possible for students who may struggle with the content:

1. Look for sentences that contain “is” and look for ways to rephrase to avoid an indirect or passive sentence structure. Example: “While safety is a need for individuals” to “Individuals need safety.”
2. Look for strings of verbs, such as “families play a significant role in providing,” and aim for the simplest verb possible: “families provide.”
3. Begin a new paragraph with the introduction of a new concept. Shorter paragraphs are OK, especially for online texts.
4. Look for sentences that begin with “there is/are” or “it is.” These can typically be cut to make the sentence more direct and active. Place the “actor” in the sentence in the subject position, as in this example: “Psychologists have identified ten **protective and compensatory childhood experiences (PACEs)**.” [Note: I added “psychologists” as a guess here. Students will appreciate knowing who’s doing the work of identification.]
5. When making a list, lead into it with a complete sentence followed by a colon, such as, “Here are ten PACEs critical to healthy child development:” and make sure that each item in the list starts in the same way (either all verbs or all nouns). I also reorganized the list to group like with like. Any time you make a list, consider ways to “chunk” the content to make it easier for the student to remember.
6. Look for repetitions of the same words at the start of a sentence or the same words within a sentence to find places where the text can be more streamlined.

Current Text #3

Childhood and adolescence are both periods where youth can benefit from positive social relationships. In Chapter 4, we look at the concept of nurturance, highlighting the ways that parenting and caregiving can be important responsibilities taken on within families. Baumrind’s parenting styles make a strong argument that the authoritative parenting style can help create safety for children. Children need supportive, emotionally responsive parents who have fair rules that are clearly explained and consistently enforced. This creates a sense of safety by providing children with a sense of psychological safety because children know what to expect if they break the rules, generally feel connected to and supported by their parents, and trust that their parents will openly communicate with them. This also creates a sense of spiritual safety where children know they will be treated with respect. All of these aspects work together to provide children with communal security - a sense of belonging within their families. The research on attachment theory, also discussed in Chapter 4, connects back to the idea of safety in a similar way. For children to have secure attachment, an indicator that they feel safe, parents need to be able to help children regulate their emotions. This also helps children develop a sense of deep or unconditional love from their caregivers:

knowledge that they will be supported and safe within their relationship with their parent(s).

Revision #3

Childhood and adolescence are times when youth can benefit from positive social relationships. In Chapter 4, we look at the concept of nurturance, highlighting the ways that parenting and caregiving can be important family responsibilities. Baumrind's parenting styles, which are introduced in that chapter, argue that the authoritative parenting style can help create safety for children (cite).

Children need supportive, emotionally responsive parents who have fair, clearly explained, and consistently enforced rules. As a result, children feel psychologically safe because they know what to expect if they break the rules. They generally feel connected to and supported by their parents, and they trust that their parents will openly communicate with them. When children know they will be treated with respect, they feel spiritually safe. Together these provide children with communal security, a sense of belonging within their families.

The research on attachment theory, also discussed in Chapter 4, connects back to the idea of safety in a similar way. For children to have secure attachment, an indicator that they feel safe, parents need to be able to help children regulate their emotions. This also helps children develop a sense of deep or unconditional love from their caregivers. They know they will be supported and safe within their family relationships.

Recommendations

1. Break up longer paragraphs into shorter subtopics.
2. Avoid repetitions of words within a sentence.
3. Use active voice whenever possible.
4. And many of the recommendations from the previous two examples.