



The Paramedic Method for Revising Sentences

Adapted from Richard Lanham

Nobody wants to read boring, redundant prose. Yet, writers often create it. The Paramedic Method is meant to help writers revise their sentences to become clearer, stronger, and more effective. Here are the steps:

1. Circle the prepositions (of, in, about, of, for, onto, into)
2. Draw a box around the “is” verb forms (is, am, are, was, were, be, being, been)
3. Ask, “Where’s the action?” and “Who is the doer?” (Who is kicking whom?) Make the actor (doer) the subject of the sentence. (Sara kicked the ball.)
4. Change the action into a simple, strong, action verb.
5. Eliminate any unnecessary slow wind-ups.

Example Sentence: As a result of an infraction of a minor nature, Jonathan was kicked in the shin by Matthew, which caused Jonathan pain of a medium degree.

This is a wordy, boring sentence that doesn’t seem very “active” considering it’s about a school yard brawl. Let’s go through the steps of the paramedic method to revise this sentence.

Step One: As a result of an infraction of a minor nature, Jonathan was kicked in the shin by Matthew, which caused Jonathan pain of a medium degree.

Count: **6 Prepositional Phrases**; we can probably eliminate most of these in our revision.

Step Two: As a result of an infraction of a minor nature, Jonathan was kicked in the shin by Matthew, which caused Jonathan pain of a medium degree.

Step Three: The main action is “kicked.” Let’s focus on that in our sentence. The doer is Matthew. Let’s bring him into the forefront of the sentence.

Step Four: Mathew kicked Jonathon in the shin, causing Jonathan pain.

Step Five: After Jonathan committed a minor infraction....

Fully revised sentence: After Jonathan committed a minor infraction, Mathew kicked Jonathan in the shin, causing Jonathan pain.

Much better right? Let’s look at the **Lard Factor** from the original sentence to the revised version. The original version had 26 words. We cut the revised version to 15 words. That’s a **Lard Factor of 57.69%** (LF = Revised Words/Original Words). Great work!

Now it’s your turn. Look for three sentences in your current draft and use the paramedic method to cut the lard from your prose.