

Passive Voice and Pronouns without Antecedents

Note: passive voice obscures the subject (not good for compact, powerful writing or for positive theory, which needs actors doing actions) and usually produces weaker prose than active voice.

“To know what the voters want is another assumption that Tufte makes.”

“Tufte also assumes that [incumbents (?)] know what the voters want.”

“It is toward the resolution of these two questions and a reassessment of Tufte’s position that this paper is aimed.”

“This paper aims to offer a resolution of these two questions and a reassessment of Tufte’s position [on...?].”

Split infinitives (& more)

“It is necessary to historically situate Hibbs’ view of the American political economy in the post-World War II era.”

“To situate Hibbs’ view of the American political economy historically within in the post-World War II era is necessary.”

or

“Scholars [One] must situate Hibbs’ view of the American political economy historically within the post-World War II era.”

“Rather, in the opening chapters of his book, Hibbs seeks to empirically discover the true costs of both unemployment and inflation.”

“Rather, in the opening chapters of Hibbs’ book, he seeks to discover empirically the true [objective?] costs of both unemployment and inflation.”

Agreement across and within clauses:

“According to Edward R. Tufte’s book, he demonstrates through evidence that we hold the performance of the economy as relevant in determining whether or not we will re-elect the politicians that represent us.”

“In *Political Control of the Economy*, Tufte demonstrates empirically that voters find macroeconomic performance relevant in determining whether they will re-elect the politicians that represent them.”

Clause agreement fixed; “demonstrates through evidence” cumbrous [“demonstrates empirically”]; “we” vague; and just “whether” not “whether or not.”

“In Tufte’s book, *Political Control of the Economy*, he offers what can be considered a quasi-political business cycle.”

“In *Political Control of the Economy*, Tufte offers a ‘quasi-political business cycle’ theory of macroeconomic policymaking in democracies.”

The clauses now agree, and consider the suggested replacement for the passive, wordy, and vague “what can be considered a quasi-political business cycle.”

FYI regarding hyphenation (see below...)

Agreement between noun and pronoun

“Each party tries to appeal to their core constituents.”

“Each party tries to appeal to its core constituents.”

Parallelism in lists:

“Eisenhower wanted a balanced budget and to avoid inflation at all costs.”

“Eisenhower wanted to balance the budget and to avoid inflation at all costs.”

Or

“Eisenhower wanted a balanced budget and low inflation at all costs.”

The rules about commas and hyphens:

Retaining the final comma before *and* or *or* in a list is good practice; it helps clarify whether the final two are to be considered a paired unit or two items.

A list of modifiers (adjectives, adverbs, modifying phrases) two or longer generally requires comma separation. Minor or common modifiers, like *big* or *small*, are exceptions. If sense requires avoiding the comma separation, then hyphenation to create compound modifier(s) and/or noun(s) or verb(s) is required. Thus, e.g.:

In the labor market... because one adjective, *labor*, one noun, *market*, but *Labor-market policy...* creating the compound adjective, because otherwise comma separation would be required. This is the rule, not the oft-cited *hyphenate when adjective, not when noun*, although you can perhaps see why that simpler statement usually would work.

E.g. *vs.* I.e. = “For example” *vs.* “That is”

Items a series, lists of reasons, etc.

Firstly *vs.* First, Secondly *vs.* Second, and so forth

Omit Needless Words (from Strunk and White’s *The Elements of Style*)

the question as to whether whether

whether or not whether

there is not doubt but that no doubt (doubtless)

he is a man who he

her story is a strange one her story is strange

“It is the case that...” or “The fact that...” become simply “That...”

“so as to” or “in order to” become simply “to”

Dangling prepositions / Verb Choice (Diction):

To put up with = to tolerate, to acquiesce, to accept, etc.

To take on = to undertake, to do, etc.

To go on = to continue, to proceed, etc.

To make up = to redress, to create, to substitute, to comprise, etc.

To back up = to substantiate, to evidence, to support, or to reverse, etc.

To wrap up = to finish, to complete, etc.

To take on = to undertake, to do, etc.

To go on = to continue, to proceed, etc.

To make up = to redress, to create, to substitute, to comprise, etc.

To back up = to substantiate, to evidence, to support, or to reverse, etc.

To wrap up = to finish, to complete, etc.