

MIT OpenCourseWare
<http://ocw.mit.edu>

21L.007 World Literatures: Travel Writing
Fall 2008

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <http://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.

The Paramedic Method for Revising Prose (adapted from Richard Lanham)

A/ Jim kicks Bill.

OR

B/ Bill is being kicked.

One can easily see that a kicking situation is taking place between Bill and Jim.

Kicking Bill is an activity Jim currently partakes of.

Kicking is one of the many ways in which Bill and Jim participate in the rich complexities of human interaction.

The scene mentions kicking, and two characters are involved.

Principles for getting from B to A:

1. Circle all the "be" verbs (e.g., "is taking place")
2. Circle the prepositions (not, between, of ...).
3. Ask, what's the action, who's performing it? Who's kicking who?
4. Put the action into a simple active verb (not compound -- "is taking" -- or passive -- "is being kicked").
5. Start fast -- cut out introductory verbiage ("one can easily see ...").
6. Once you have a revised, shorter sentence, check to see if you need to add more information (who is kicking who? Where? And why?).

Central **to** our understanding **of** the nature **of** the relationships which exist **between** human beings **in** Daniel Defoe's eighteenth century novel *Robinson Crusoe* is a careful consideration **of** the passage **in** which the print **of** a human foot is seen **by** Crusoe **on** the shore.

Central to our **understanding** of the nature of the **relationships** which exist **between** **human beings** in Daniel Defoe's eighteenth century novel *Robinson Crusoe* is a careful

consideration of the passage in which **the print of a human foot is seen by Crusoe on the shore**.

When Defoe's character Robinson Crusoe sees a human footprint on the sand, his reactions help us understand the novel's view of human relations.

After eighteen years alone, Defoe's character Robinson Crusoe sees a human footprint on the sand. His reactions exemplify the novel's view of human relations as basically competitive.

More sample sentences (to fix, not imitate)

1. This allows Ariel to achieve a good outcome, while Caliban finishes the play and is still unclear as to what is his ultimate outcome.
2. As is clearly evident, Powhatan then continues in this scene with the colonists and Pocahontas and says that it is really extremely wrong to kill others in these circumstances, it will never, ever be him who is the one to begin it.
3. Also, it is said by Rowlandson that the Indians who are dressed up in English clothing are foul and that they are heathens.
4. The film and history are similar, yet different in many ways, and both use many techniques specific to their genre.
5. Though both captives write about their captivity, they do so using different approaches, and as a result, leave the reader with two distinct impressions.

Sample fixes

Finally, Prospero gives freedom to the willing Ariel, but leaves Caliban neither free nor led.

Disney's Powhatan chooses peace, refusing to let killing "begin with me."

Rowlandson derides Indians in English dress as "foul ... Heathens" (94).

....

Mary Rowlandson finds herself cast into a howling wilderness populated by savages; for Jemison, this savage wilderness yields a domestic happiness violated only by the arrival of settlers.