



UNIVERSITY *of* CAMBRIDGE
International Examinations

Readability of Questions

Nicky Rushton



Syntax 1

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Simplify the following sentence.

The racing car went out of control hitting the barrier several times before it came to a stop on a grassy bank.

The car hit the barriers several times and stopped.

The car had an accident



Syntax 2

It is better to avoid long qualification phrases where possible, especially where they qualify the noun.



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Remove the qualifying phrase.

The boy with the heavy books in his schoolbag hurried home.

The boy hurried home.



Syntax 3

Precise use of pronouns is important for clarity of reference and to avoid ambiguity.



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Clarify the following.

I carried a parcel and a bag. It was heavy.

I carried a parcel and a heavy bag.

I carried a parcel and a bag. The bag was heavy.



Syntax 4

Conjunctions can cause difficulty, especially logical conjunctions where there is an element of contradiction.



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Rewrite the following without the conjunction.

Some people agree with that point of view, however, others do not.

Only some people agree with that view.

Some people agree with that point of view. Others do not.



Syntax 5

Where words are omitted it should be clear which words have been left out.

Where judgement is necessary there can be ambiguity or confusion.



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Where judgement is necessary there can be ambiguity or confusion.

Clarify the following.

He went to the cinema and home by bus.

He went to the cinema by bus and then went home by bus.

He used the bus to and from the cinema.

He went by bus to the cinema and then took the bus home.



Verbs 6

Correct tense can be an issue of consistency. It can also be used to structure the narrative of a question.



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Write the sentence underlined in the present tense.

Mariam had RM 72. She spent RM 9.

How much did she have left?

Mariam had RM72. How much is left after she spent RM9.



Verbs 7

The active voice is a simpler construction than the passive voice.

The dog chased the cat. (active)

The cat was chased by the dog. (passive)

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The dog chased the cat. (active)

The cat was chased by the dog. (passive)

Write the following in the active voice.

The book was read by the student.

The student read the book



Verbs 8

The conditional can cause uncertainty and tense confusion.



Verbs 8

The conditional can cause uncertainty and tense confusion.

Remove the conditional in the following sentence.

If some children passed round a block of ice their hands would feel cold and wet.

Some children passed round a block of ice.

Would they feel cold and wet?



Verbs 9

Modals such as *can, could, may, might* can cause problems because of different degrees of uncertainty. They can also refer to ability, permission, prediction.

He might leave.

He should leave.

He must leave.



Verbs 9

Modals such as *can, could, may, might* can cause problems because of different degrees of uncertainty. They can also refer to ability, permission, prediction.

He might leave.

He should leave.

He must leave.

Rewrite the following without the modal verb.

You may show your working in the space provided.
Show your working in the space provided.



Meaning 10

Fore-grounding – it is better to place the main idea at the beginning of the sentence followed by the main verb and then the rest of the sentence.

Sam realised he had made a mistake when he got on the train.

When he got on the train, Sam realised he had made a mistake.



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When he got on the train, Sam realised he had made a mistake.

Rewrite the following.

After the rain had stopped, Ria went for a walk.

Ria went for a walk after the rain stopped.

The rain stopped. Ria went for a walk.



Meaning 11

Context can obscure the focus of the question.



Meaning 11

Context can obscure the focus of the question.

Remove the unnecessary context.

Sam read 34 pages of her **story** book **during the weekend**.

Lara read 78 pages of her **favourite** book **about animals during the weekend**.

How many pages did they read altogether?



Meaning 12

It is easier to process positives rather than negatives. Even partial negativity or words with negative effects can cause difficulty.



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Rewrite the following in the positive.

Which of the following are not odd numbers?

Which of the following are even numbers?



Meaning 13

Ambiguity can cause confusion.



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Ambiguity can cause confusion.

Clarify the following.

He walked from the shop to the car which was only five minutes from the beach.

He walked to the car. It was only five minutes from the beach.
He walked from the shop to the car. The car was only five minutes from the beach.



Meaning 14

It is easier to understand text when a sequence of events is told in chronological order.



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It is easier to understand text when a sequence of events is told in chronological order.

Rewrite the following in chronological sequence.

She held flowers in her hand which she had picked for her mother as she walked through the wood.

She walked through the wood. She picked flowers and held them in her hand.



Layout

- Start each sentence on a new line
- Several short sentences are preferable to one long one
- Don't use very sophisticated or technical language