

## Polishing International Journal Manuscripts: A Plain-English Perspective

Sheng Yu\*

School of the English Language&Culture, Xiamen University Tan Kah Kee College, China

\*yusheng@xujc.com

### Abstract

In this paper, I first summarize the basic principles of Plain English, based on my research into, and experience in, revising international journal manuscripts, in particular, SCI and SSCI ones. Then, I figure out the major problems Chinese researchers have encountered. They are as follows. First, most science and engineering authors abuse the passive voice--by writing dangling modifiers, they make doers of an action ambiguous. Second, most liberal-arts authors who include China's policies use long-winded Chinglish constructions, blurring their meaning and dampening readers' interest. Third, many authors, who are fully aware of the logic in certain constructions, run into logical fallacies. Fourth, cohesion and coherence are never satisfactory. Thus on each of the listed problems I give specific suggestions. This paper provides authors of international journal papers with specific principles and revision examples and is meaningful to teachers and students of the English language by updating them on the latest linguistic and market trends.

### Keywords

Polishing; International Journal; Manuscripts; Plain English.

### 1. Introduction

China's growing international role has propelled its academia to publish papers in international journals, particularly those included in Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) and Science Citation Index (SCI). Although most authors in this era have better writing abilities than ever before, they still lack a command of English writing for high-quality international journals which may reject badly-written manuscripts. In the past, inept writers had recourse to translation agencies; nowadays, however, their improved writing abilities and the advent of AI translation have made self-writing possible and given rise to a larger market for polishing/revising. This is, after all, more economical for them. Yet, AI translations often fail to produce a work that is intact, cohesive, coherent, succinct, logical, and error-free. Human effort is therefore indispensable. For this reason, I decided to write this paper based on my research into and experience in revising international journal manuscripts. Most of the published works cited in this paper can be indexed on Web of Science, while some working papers are available online.

In this paper, *polish* means "to improve (sth) by correcting, making small changes or adding new material"; *revise* means "to change a piece of writing by adding new information, making improvements, or correcting mistakes". These two words, which can be used interchangeably, are different from merely "proofreading" (only involving correcting mistakes) or "editing" (involving including and cutting out certain parts). Language revision is based on plain English, a style that is faster to write and enables readers to get a message across more often, more easily, and in a friendlier way. In drafting this paper, I have consulted many internationally famous style guides on the modern English language. Most of them favor the plain-English style, at odds with the common belief that academic writing should be authoritatively complicated.

The main findings of this paper are: Chinese scholars have difficulty in 1) turning nominalizations into strong verbs, 2) making the discourse concise, 3) ruling out dangling modifiers, and 4) placing emphatic words at the right place.

## 2. Literature Review

The Plain Language Campaign originated in the United Kingdom in the 1970s and has dominated the English-speaking world. As a result, the Campaign has received support from governments, institutions of higher education, and companies in major English-speaking countries, as well as international organizations such as the United Nations and the European Commission (Li, 2018). The US government even produced a plain-English version of its Constitution (Madison et al, 2010). Since most researchers these days can easily edit out grammar mistakes before submitting for revision, I mainly review more advanced issues about the academic writing style.

### 2.1. Using the Active Voice

Penrose and Katz (2005) note that “although the ‘scientific passive’ has a long and venerable tradition, it is often easier and more direct to write in active voice, in the interests of brevity and clarity.” Biologist Ivan Valiela echoes similar concerns in *Doing Science* (2001), noting that the passive voice has its appropriate uses, “but is overused in much scientific writing.” Indeed, the overall landscape of the active and passive voices is changing.

Writing guides of international organizations mainly insist on several principles that provide implications for paper authors. The first one is to use more active voice. The European Commission’s *How to Write Clearly* includes “By changing passive verb forms into active ones, the writing will become clearer because writers will be forced to name the agent—the person, organization or thing that is carrying out the action”. *A Guide to Writing for The United Nations* accentuates the use of the active voice by claiming “let us do rather than be done to”, because the active voice is action-oriented. Major media have also championed the active voice. *The AP Stylebook* advocates the use of active verbs. *The Economist* and *The BBC News Styleguide* echo similar suggestions.

Automatic grammar checkers for grammar and style, such as Grammarly and Microsoft Word, will usually highlight any usages of the passive and recommend using the active as an alternative.

*The Chicago Manual of Style* holds that “the passive voice is typically, though not always, inferior to the active voice”. The *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA) suggests “using the active voice as much as possible to create direct, clear, and concise sentences”, similar to the view in *The IBM Style Guide*.

Journals prefer the active voice, too. Most journals in their submission guidelines instruct authors to use the active voice in their manuscripts as they feel that the active voice would help readers comprehend the subject matter of the paper more easily. For example, *Science* suggests the use active voice when suitable, particularly for correct syntax. *Nature* journals prefer authors to write in the active voice because readers find directly-written concepts and results to be conveyed more clearly. Elsevier’s *Writing Style Guidelines* even suggests expunging virtually all use of the passive voice.

Most books on good scientific style advocate the active voice (Schultz, 2009). Some even suggest using the active voice whenever possible (Kaufman and Straus, 2021). Despite those style guides, many researchers still use the passive, simply trying to observe a “rule” that scientific reports and papers must be written in the past tense, passive voice and third person (or impersonal) (Kirkman, 2005). Overuse of passive voice, however, makes the manuscript dense to read, and including more active voice generally strengthens manuscripts (Schultz, 2009).

This is why most recent books on good writing prefer the active form to the passive and why recently, researchers and journal editors have been encouraging smart and appropriate use of the active voice in scientific writing.

Sometimes, however, the passive voice does function well in the Methods section to avoid repetition (Gastel and Day, 2016). Other reasons for using the passive as a better option include: 1) To describe a continuous process where the doer(s) is (are) self-evident or unimportant; 2) when it is unnecessary, difficult, or impossible to identify the originator of the action; 3) to maintain flow in your writing; 4) to avoid repetition (Wallwork, 2013; Gastel and Day, 2016; Alley 2018; Majumder, 2019; Kaufman and Straus, 2021). Overall, writers should always seek a balance between the active voice and the passive voice (Rabinowitz and Vogel, 2009).

## 2.2. Use of “I” and “We”

Using the active voice and first-person pronouns in some fields—recognition of the personal voice and ethos of the researcher(s) in a formal scientific text—is a profound shift in the social conventions (Penrose and Katz, 2005). Kirkman (2005) mentions that “of 500 journals, just two specified an impersonal or passive style throughout”.

Elsevier’s *Writing Style Guidelines* suggest telling a story. And good stories are compelling and memorable, with concrete characters that perform vigorous actions to achieve a goal: character-action-goal. An introduction is story-like, which means having a plot that answers all the “why” questions of the reader one by one and includes the writer (“we”) (Lebrun, 2011). In the Conclusion part, authors may be permitted greater use of the first person as they discuss conclusions they have drawn based on their experience and research (Rabinowitz and Vogel, 2009).

Gastel and Day (2016) point out that many journals permit the use of “I” and “we”. Try to avoid wordier, and sometimes more ambiguous, constructions such as “It was found in the present investigation that...” and “It is concluded that”. “the authors” is pretentious, verbose, and imprecise. Alley (2018) asserts that “for research papers, using the first person judiciously is an excellent strategy”. As long as the emphasis remains on the work and not the author(s), nothing is inherently wrong with using “I” or “we”. The reason may well be that readers want to know who did the thinking or gave the assumption—the author, or some other experts. Schultz (2009) finds several guides on writing academic papers actually advocate the use of the first person. In his *Writing Tips for Economics Research Papers*, Nikolov (2013), champions the use of “I” and “we”, using materials from several of the world’s top universities.

## 2.3. Placing Emphatic Information of a Sentence at the End

Chinese students, at least, have been taught to place the most important information at the beginning of a sentence. This is incomplete, however. The emphatic places in a sentence are beginning and end, the end being the more so (Barzun, 1975). Strunk and White (2000) state that “the proper place for the word, or group of words, which the writer desires to make most prominent is usually at the end”. Pinkham and Jiang (2000) echo a similar view in their *Translator’s Guide to Chinglish*. Also, as Pellatt and Liu (2010) point out, “English is end-heavy, saving up long, complicated, shocking information for the very end of the sentence”. The reason is that human cognition of new knowledge is based on the known.

## 2.4. Conciseness

Chinese authors frequently write superfluous words, including unnecessary category nouns, verbs, and time phrases, as well as saying the same thing twice (Pinkham and Jiang, 2000). This is because the monosyllabic Chinese takes little space, as opposed to the polysyllabic English, and sometimes those words are indispensable for rhythm and rhyme.

Indeed, how to write succinctly has long been taxing for many around the world where the value of conciseness is arguably greater than ever (Rabinowitz and Vogel, 2009). To this end,

the whole English world has been making efforts. For example, the European Commission's *How to Write Clearly* introduces the KISS (keep it short and simple) principle. Perelman et al. (1998) include conciseness as one of the characteristics of effective technical communication. Schuster et al. (2014) claim that the language should be clear and concise, even when we describe very complex research concepts. Nevertheless, conciseness is unhelpful if it decreases clarity (Lebrun, 2011).

## 2.5. Using Verbs

Another problem in scientific writing is the verbosity resulting from nominalization. Nominalization is a typical feature of academic writing but students tend to overuse it and thus produce stodgy writing (Wallwork, 2013). Indeed, authorities on English consistently condemn the use of abstract language. Similar suggestions can be found in the above style or writing guides of international organizations. Another mistake to avoid is the noun plague—a series of nouns modifying a noun (Garner, 2016). The malady can be corrected by turning the nouns into verbs, which could give directness and life to the statements (Williams 1990; Kirkman, 2005; Gastel and Day, 2016). In general, reducing the number of abstract nouns and using strong verbs will strengthen the writing (Alley, 2018).

The in-depth reason for Chinese researchers to use nominalizations in English writing may be as follows: 1) English is more static than Chinese (Chen, 2011), which is true, though now English also prefers more verbs (as reviewed in this paper). 2) Having long been affected by European languages, especially English, many (potential) researchers tend to use nominalizations quite often in Chinese writing, even more so in academic writing (Li and Yang, 2020). When such nominalizations are translated into English, they may become successive nouns or noun phrases, which at most times are irritating.

## 3. Polishing Manuscripts

In this section, I list, from the original manuscripts, examples with certain style problems and analyze how I have revised them based on the plain-English principles.

### 3.1. Using the Active Voice Smartly

Using the active voice makes a sentence more concise and helps avoid dangling modifiers (or danglers), top-heavy constructions, and ambiguous actors.

#### Example 1:

**The original:** Observing from the extreme values, the gap between the maximum and minimum land saving potential has also been slightly reduced from...

**Revision:** *Judging from the extreme values, (we find) the gap between the maximum and minimum land-saving potentials also slightly narrows from...*(Wang et al., 2020)

**Analysis:** In Example 1, there is a dangling modifier “observing... the gap”, because it is the authors—and the readers alike if the authors are trying to be reader-friendly—that “observe”. The main clause is not dangled but not concise, apart from an improper, if not wrong, tense. This is why the polisher changed the wordy “has also been slightly reduced” passive construction into the simpler active “also narrows”. Strictly speaking, however, the revision still consists of a dangling modifier “Judging from...the gap”, though this type of dangling has been widely accepted as an independent modifier (Bo, 1990). To make the sentence entirely clear, we can change the original into other active constructions, such as “Observing...we can find that the gap...narrows” and “We can observe from the extreme values that the gap...narrows”.

#### Example 2:

**The original:** In order to investigate the mechanical and acoustic properties of tectonic coal, uniaxial compression tests were carried out on tectonic coal and non-tectonic coal, and acoustic emission signals were collected synchronously throughout the process.

**Revision:** To investigate the mechanical and acoustic properties of tectonic coal, we conducted a uniaxial compression test for tectonic and non-tectonic coal, and acoustic emission (AE) signals have been simultaneous captured in the compression process (Liu et al., 2020).

**Analysis:** With a passive phrasal verb, the original in this example contains a salient dangler “in order to...uniaxial compression tests were carried out”. When a sentence begins with an infinitive, the subject of the main clause should be someone. If, however, the original had been written as “...tests were carried out...coal, (in order) to investigate...”, it would be readily acceptable since the subject can be regarded as an implicit one. Clearly in the original the subject is the research team or simply “we”, and the use of “we” naturally leads to an active (phrasal) verb. Another thing to note is that the original contains a purpose and an action or process when the team collected the signal. This process seems to be a result, though the polisher failed to confirm it. Since most style guides suggest limiting sentence length and “one idea in one sentence”, the polisher divided the original into two sentences, though a more cohesive version of the second sentence may be “throughout the process, we acquired...”

Note that my first revision was “In addition, we simultaneously captured acoustic emission (AE) signals throughout the process.” but the authors again changed it, without notifying the polisher, to the passive-voice construction with an error “simultaneous captured”.

### Example 3:

**The original:** To remove a hydrophilic sizing agent (mainly hydrophilic surfactant and polyvinyl alcohol), CF bundles (0.02 g) were immersed in acetone (500 mL).

**Revision:** To remove a hydrophilic sizing agent (mainly hydrophilic surfactant and polyvinyl alcohol), we immersed CF bundles (0.02 g) in acetone (500 mL) (Liu et al., 2020) (partly polished).

**Analysis:** This example dangles in the same way as Example 2 does, thus the same approach to revision.

The following examples are top-heavy or confusing, extracted from manuscripts under review or to be submitted. These extracts contain only general information and I have asked permission of the author(s).

### Example 4:

**The original:** Based on above, the concept of material surface integrity, including surface state and performance, has been proposed.

**Revision:** Based on the above fact, author(s)' name(s) proposed the concept of material surface integrity, including surface state and performance (Gui et al., 2022).

**Analysis:** In this example, the use of the passive voice is both top-heavy and confusing, since it contains a long subject, compounded by a parenthesis. Such a construction takes time to read through the sentence for “who did what”, which is usually the readers' concern, especially in the introduction or literature review (Gastel and Day, 2016; Wallwork, 2013; Alley 2018; Majumder, 2019; Kaufman and Straus, 2021). A feasible way is to change the passive construction into the active, and the polisher, without professional knowledge, managed to inform the authors of the how-to.

### Example 5:

**The original:** Due to its potential application, RSP has been attracting a lot of attention, and various theoretical schemes have been proposed in past two decades, including...

**Revision:** Because of its potential application, RSP has been attracting tremendous attention from researchers, who have in the past two decades proposed various theoretical schemes, including...

**Analysis:** In this example, although readers can readily guess that these schemes have been proposed by many people, the passive voice is somewhat top-heavy and the most important information is not in the right place. By adding “researchers” and using a non-restrictive clause, the polisher managed to clarify the meaning and logic, and make the exemplified words closer to the more general “schemes”.

On a few occasions, however, the active voice may at best be changed into the passive.

#### Example 6:

**The original:** The stock tail risk is significantly and negatively related to expected returns if excluding small-cap stocks following...(2019).

**Revision:** There exists a significant negative correlation between the stock’s tail risk and its expected returns when small-cap stocks are excluded, according to...(2019).

**Analysis:** In this example, the original version dangles twice: 1) the logical subject of “excluding” should be an agent or agents, not the “tail risk”, and 2) the subject of “following” should be, as can be easily inferred, the authors of the manuscript or “we”. This is why the polisher used the passive voice to avoid mistakes in grammar and logic.

#### Example 7:

**The original:** (...an international standard). At present, ESG technology is not mature because of the late introduction of ESG in China. So most companies are more cautious in using this standard.

**Revision:** (...an international standard). In China, however, this standard is not favored by most companies, since ESG technology is immature because of the late introduction of ESG.

**Analysis:** In this example, even though the active voice is grammatically correct, the polisher changed the active voice into the passive. This is because the “standard” in the second sentence is known and should therefore be relocated to the beginning of the sentence to save up the end for the unknown information. The same applies to example 8, where the material is known and the AE probe is new information.

#### Example 8 (a translation from Chinese):

**Revision:** Due to stress and other factors, a certain point in the material will break and release the elastic wave. The surface of the material will be captured by an acoustic emissions (AE) probe as the elastic wave propagates.

### 3.2. Using the First-person Pronouns or Determiners

Since most SCI and SSCI papers are co-authored, I mainly analyze the use of “we” and “our”. If a paper is done by an individual, he or she may use “I”, discreetly.

#### Example 1:

**The original:** By sorting out the public data, there are 2,517 listed companies existing stock pledge financing in China, with the number of 19,600 mortgage events, more than 419.8 billion shares pledged, and the total pledged market value is more than 4.1 trillion RMB before the end of December in 2021.

**Revision:** By sorting out the public data, we find that by the end of December 2021, 2,517 listed Chinese companies have been financed by stock pledging, with a total number of 19,600 pledges involving 419.8 billion stocks worth CNY 4.1 trillion.

**Analysis:** This example is again dangled, though it lacks a passive construction. The original is long-winded and garbled, with a Chinglish expression “companies existed” and several figures in disorder. Here, it is “we” who sort out data, thus the addition of “we” at the beginning of the

main clause. Note that in economics, the common practice is to use the present tense almost throughout a paper, thus “we find”. The two sentences joined by “and” are combined into one sentence that is syntactically and logically clearer.

#### **Example 2:**

**The original:** Taking all pledge events as the benchmark sample, the day of pledge actual occurred is  $t=0$ , taking 6 days before and after the event, totally 13 days.

**Revision:** Taking all pledges as the benchmark sample, we have in total 13 days covering the pledge date ( $t=0$ ) plus 6 days both before and after the pledge (Gui et al, 2022).

**Analysis:** Again, it is “we” who take these pledges as the benchmark sample. The reason why the original was written so may be that the Chinese language has in nature many zero-subject sentences. This feature causes great problems for non-professional human translators and professional machine translators. The remedy to this mistake is to add “we” boldly if it is “we” who took the action.

#### **Example 3:**

**The original:** Saliency-induced price pressure (order imbalance) analysis suggests that...

**Revision:** Our saliency-induced price pressure (order imbalance) analysis suggests that...

**Analysis:** This example is an extract from an abstract. For brevity, the original omits the contributor(s) (“we”) to the saliency-induced analysis, consequently leaving readers at a loss. The common practice is to add “in this paper” or “in the present paper” after “analysis”. A simpler way, though, is to add “our” to the beginning of the sentence. Similar writing examples are available in many style guides.

### **3.3. Placing Emphatic Information of a Sentence at the End**

#### **Example 1:**

**The original:** In addition, ESG equity mutual funds have attracted record net flows in recent years.

**Revision:** In addition, ESG equity mutual funds have in recent years attracted record-high net flows.

**Analysis:** In Example 1, except for using “record” as an adjective, the original is almost impeccable, at least grammatically. The problem is the last part “in recent years”. If the time is the emphasis, then writing like this is a deliberate choice. In this way, however, there must be some other time adverbials around, as a comparison. There are no such adverbials, unfortunately. The reason why the original is written so may be that it is simply a machine translation or that Chinese researchers have, back in school, been taught to use end-of-a-sentence adverbials as non-emphasis and beginning-of-a sentence ones as emphasis. Native English users, however, place the emphatic words at the end, as cited in the literature.

The correct emphasis in this example is the “record-high net flows” and thus the polisher relocated “in recent years” to the middle as incidental information.

#### **Example 2:**

**The original:** In general, a stock’s ... distribution is a good and easily accessible mental representation of the stock for investors...

**Revision:** A positive and easily accessible mental representation is, in general, a ...distribution...(Sun et al., 2021)

**Analysis:** In this example, one of the reasons for repositioning the components is that the preceding sentence of the original is about “representation”. For cohesion, this information should come at the beginning of the sentence. Another reason for such repositioning is that the authors intended to introduce a distribution, which is the emphatic information and should therefore be placed at the end.

**Example 3:**

**The original:** Nowadays, the urban boundary has begun to acceleratly expand outward and the utilization scale of land resources has also been enlarged in China, along with the rapid development of the economy and the sharp accumulation of population to the city.

**Revision:** Nowadays, the booming economy and the massive migrants to the city have led cities to expand rapidly their way outward, and accordingly, the use of land resources is also growing in China (Wang et al., 2020).

**Analysis:** In writing the original, the authors put the “along with” part at the end, to avoid a cumbersome “preposition+long noun phrase” construction at the beginning. This, however, shifted the emphasis to the end. A closer study of this construction reveals verbosity, too. This is why the polisher relocated the part to the beginning as a shorter (grammatical) subject and added a verb to connect the subject to the more complicated, emphatic, and end-heavy object.

**Example 4:**

**The original:** ... is higher than the average level of YRB by about 0.101 ~ 0.402. Hunan and Hubei in the middle reaches are the next most efficient, and their industrial carbon emission efficiency is close to the regional average.

**Revision:** ...about 0.101 ~ 0.402 higher than YRB's average. Close to the average were the second most efficient Hunan and Hubei provinces in the middle reaches (Wang et al. 2021).

**Analysis:** In this example, the “close to” part is not as important as the two provinces, which are the research object of the paper. This part also forces a top-heavy construction, thus reducing readability. To this end, the polisher relocated the shorter predicative to the beginning, thus keeping related information closer, avoiding being top-heavy, and leaving the end to the place for important new information.

**Example 5:**

**The original:** When the share pledged by shareholders is large, in order not to be diluted the control rights, shareholders will do more things conducive to companies, such as earnings management, private placement or release good news to maintain the share price.

**Revision:** When this stock is large, shareholders will, for the sake of their controlling power, endeavor to maintain the stock price by, for example, earnings management, private placement, or release of good news.

**Analysis:** The original of this example is quite involved, with successive time and purpose adverbials at the beginning and a purpose at the end. The emphatic words “shareholders will do something” are stuck in the middle—the place for the least important information. Worse still, “in order not to be diluted the control rights” is a wrong use of the passive; the correct expression is “in order not to dilute their controlling rights”.

To revise this deadening and confusing sentence, the polisher first combined the two purposes into one. Yet, a closer look showed that “earnings management”, “private placement” and “release good news” are self-evidently conducive to a company, while “to maintain the share price” is indeed rather important. A second approach may be to divide the sentence into two: “when...is large, shareholders will...in order not to...These include earnings management...good news”. Considering that modern English writing avoids using “negation”, the polisher further changed “in order not to dilute” to the positive and shorter “for their controlling power”. Since short prepositional phrases can often serve as parentheses, the polisher then put the “controlling power” part after “will” and used the “subject + verb + object” construction, leaving the end of the sentence to the most important, specific measures.

**3.4. Conciseness****Example 1:**

**The original:** the...stress on surface tends to inhibit or delay the surface fatigue crack initiation...



**Revision:** the...stress on surface tends to inhibit or delay the fatigue crack initiation...

**Analysis:** In this example, anyone with some English proficiency can discern the two “surface”s, but we should be cautious about professional terms. The polisher deleted the second “surface”, after being confirmed by the author that all professionals know that the fatigue crack initiation starts from the surface.

#### **Example 2:**

**The original:** ...several spatial econometric models are applied to explore and identify specific influencing channels for emission efficiency.

**Revision:** ...we also apply several spatial econometric models to identify specific influencing channels for emission efficiency (Wang et al., 2021).

**Analysis:** In this example, we can convincingly tell that “identify” involves exploration. Thus for conciseness, the polisher deleted the implied “explore”.

#### **Example 3:**

**The original:** ...CF’s biocompatibility. Bao and Dai [15] used time gradient nitric acid modification to achieve biocompatibility.

**Revision:** ...CF’s biocompatibility. To achieve this,... used time gradient nitric acid modification (Liu et al., 2020).

**Analysis:** This example is simple. The two “biocompatibility”s repeat, and the most important information is stuck in the middle. By relocating the purpose to the beginning of the sentence, the polisher made the sentences more cohesive and concise, and the information more emphatic.

### **3.5. Using Verbs**

#### **Example 1:**

**The original:** Our paper focuses on the performance of the tail risk effect in the Chinese stock market and the sources behind it.

**Revision:** This research paper focuses on how the tail risk effect performs in the Chinese stock market and where the effect stems (Sun et al., 2021).

**Analysis:** In Example 1, the original contains too many nouns connected by two prepositions, thus not that readable. Another confusing point is the personal pronoun “it”, which grammatically refers to “market”, though it was intended to mean the “effect”. Since modern English writing advocates using more concrete verbs than abstract nouns, the polisher changed “on the performance of...” to “how...performs” and “the sources behind it” to “where the effect stems”.

#### **Example 2:**

**The original:** Despite the important role played by a firm’s profitability in the prediction of the cross-section stock returns, most existing studies concerning profitability are based on the perspective of static profitability level.

**Revision:** Although a firm’s profitability is crucial in predicting cross-sectional stock returns, most existing studies on profitability are based on static profitability (Yin and Yang, 2022).

**Analysis:** In Example 2, the original uses “despite”, which must be followed by nouns or noun phrases. Worse still, using the nominalized “in the prediction of” makes the original long-winded. As a remedy, the first step is to change the “despite + noun” construction to an “although (or ‘though’) + verb” one. The second step is to change “in the prediction of” to “in predicting”, making it more succinct.

Note that the original also uses an unnecessary category noun “perspective”, compounded by the preposition after it. The revision, with three “profitability”, can be further simplified, though the polisher failed after several attempts.

**Example 3:**

**The original:** ...the stakeholders can not have an objective and comprehensive understanding of the enterprise.

**Revision:** ...the stakeholders cannot understand the enterprise objectively and comprehensively (Hsiao et al., 2021).

**Analysis:** The original is readable and readily understandable, but again the “weak verb + a nominalization + preposition” construction weakens the power of the sentence. We should always bear “conciseness” in mind, changing weak verbs into strong ones. Some of the English originals are a result of machine translation, which usually renders everything of the original text.

**Example 4:**

**The original:** ...found that the pledge will lead to the occupation of funds by controlling shareholders...

**Revision:** ...prove that pledges by controlling shareholders lead them to occupy corporate funds...(Gui et al., 2022)

**Analysis:** Akin to Example 3, the “lead to the occupation of” construction is meaninglessly long and therefore time-consuming to read. A more prudent look at the original also unfolds that the preposition “by” immediately modifies “funds”, while the authors intended to refer to “occupation”. Using nominalizations can therefore be perilous.

**3.6. Miscellaneous****3.6.1. Limiting the Sentence Length**

Example:

**The original:** The purpose of this paper is to construct a unified analysis framework for urban land intensive use evaluation and influence channel analysis on the basis of evaluating urban land intensive use through the technical efficiency measurement method, and provide an empirical test for the application of this analytical framework using the panel data of 38 districts and counties in Chongqing from 2009 to 2018.

**Revision:** This paper aims to construct a unified framework for evaluating the intensive use of urban land and analyzing its influence channels. It is based on the evaluation of the intensive use of urban land via the technical efficiency measurement and provides an empirical test to apply this analytical framework using the panel data of 38 districts and counties in Chongqing ranging from 2009 to 2018 (Wang et al., 2020).

**Analysis:** In this example, the first sentence contains thirty-seven words, with a verbose “the purpose of something is to” construction, followed by a grammatically wrong noun phrase “urban land intensive use evaluation” and a juxtaposed “influence channel analysis”. Even worse is the “preposition” on, which directly modifies “analysis” but was intended for the verb “construct”. Apart from those problems, using “and” to join the two far-distance verbs is pretentious and unintelligent.

Note that in the revision, the second sentence can be further changed to “By evaluating...via...this paper provides (or *we provide*) ...” or, even better, separated into two parts and reconstructed as “Our framework is based on...measurement. It provides...” This is because “provide an empirical test” in the original is not a purpose but a fact. This is why in the published version the sentence has been rewritten.

**3.6.2. Ruling out Logical Fallacies**

Example 1 :

**The original:** The...process is based on the ... deformation which was induced by a hydraulic driven ball mounted on...

**Revision:** The...process induces... deformation via a hydraulically-driven ball that is mounted on...(the manuscript under review).

In this example, the process (a technique of treating metals) is not based on deformation, but causes this phenomenon. Thus the polisher changed “is based on” to “induces”, and replaced the relative clause (“which was induced by a hydraulic driven ball”) with a more concise compound adjective “hydraulically-driven”.

Example 2:

**The original:** In order to avoid the control group having missing values in the time interval, we find the 10 control groups closest to the BM ratio for each pledge event.

**Revision:** To avoid missing values of the control group within the time range, we find for each pledge 10 control groups with a BM ratio closest to that of the very pledge (Gui et al, 2022).

This example is not only one of misplaced emphasis, but one of wrong modification. In the original, “for each pledge event” modifies “the BM ratio”, but this part was intended to modify “we find”. The polisher managed to remedy it by relocating this part to the middle, as a parenthesis without commas.

## 4. Conclusion

This paper reviews the literature on some of the most important principles of plain English, including using verbs, first-person pronouns and determiners, active voice, and concise constructions. Based on the literature and my experience of polishing international journal manuscripts, I analyze in detail how I revised the original versions. The main findings of this paper are: Chinese scholars have difficulty in 1) turning nominalizations into strong verbs, 2) making the discourse concise, 3) ruling out dangling modifiers, and 4) placing emphatic words at the right place.

Hopefully, this paper can provide some English-writing tips for Chinese researchers, the latest trends in academic writing styles for Chinese teachers and researchers of the English language, and reference materials for Chinese-English translators of research papers.

There are some limitations, too. First, as a non-native English speaker, the polisher is incompetent to reproduce error-free versions, though almost all manuscripts he polished have been accepted as SSCI/ SCI Papers. Future research may focus on a “native Chinese + native English” cooperation model, or the like. Second, this paper covers a limited range of research fields, and therefore future research may delve into different areas. Third, this paper only lists the most salient, and easily tractable, principles, in the interest of word count and readership. Future investigations can focus on more advanced issues.

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