Using the Belcher Diagnostic Test for Revisions

About the Test
The Belcher Diagnostic Test focuses on identifying specific words and phrases that can negatively affect quality of writing. Conducting the test will help determine potential sentence-level issues in your essays. By following the recommendations in this handout, you will be able to improve sentence structure and clarity without having to remember all the rules behind the suggestions.

Test Instructions
To start this diagnostic test, use the Find and Replace feature in Microsoft Word. Follow the descriptions below to look for each set of words and phrases listed as problematic, and change them to the specified color below. Here are the exact steps to accomplish this:

1. Ctrl + H
2. Click inside the box that says “Replace with…”
3. Type ^& (Shift + 6, Shift + 7)
4. Click on More > >
5. Check box “Find whole words only”
6. At the bottom of the box, select “Format” and then “Font.” Now you will be able to change the font color.

Then, consult the following sections and the chart for each set’s color and information on how to improve individual sentences.

When searching for all the forms of a particular verb mentioned in Part III, such as forms of “to be” and “to have,” check the box “Find all word forms.”

Part I: Finding Unnecessary Words

Red Signal Words (and, or)
These words may indicate that your sentences include doubling. Doubling occurs when two words in the sentence have the same purpose and meaning.

Example: My math test left me exhausted and worn out.

Both exhausted and worn out mean essentially the same thing, so one of these words can be removed.

These words can also point out run-on sentences. When possible, it is best to split run-ons into two or more sentences.

Blue Signal Words (there, it, that, which, who)

There, It
Both of these words may appear with weak verbs, such as forms of the verb to be. Try to remove these words and use a stronger verb.
Example: *There* were five students at the meeting.
Improved: Five students attended the meeting.

Both words can also signal the use of a dangling participle (a phrase that incorrectly modifies the subject of a sentence).

Example: When the paper is finished, *there* are supposed to be revisions by the student.
The phrase is incorrectly connected to the word there.

Improved: When the paper is finished, the student needs to complete revisions.
Now the phrase modifies what the student is doing, not what there is doing.

Sometimes, *it* indicates an unclear pronoun. Make sure that every instance of this pronoun has a clear antecedent (a noun that gives the pronoun its meaning).

*That, Which, and Who*
When used with *it, there,* and forms of the verb *to be,* these words can usually be deleted to make sentences more concise.

Example: The professor’s argument is *that there is* no reason for a student to miss more than three classes per semester.
Improved: The professor argued that students should miss no more than three classes per semester.

Example: *There* is not a single person *who* likes that movie.
Improved: No one likes that movie.

**Purple Signal Words (of, by, as, to, for, toward, on, at, from, in, with, as)**
Phrases that include these prepositions may be unnecessary and make sentences wordy.

Example: *In order to* conduct research *in* the field *of* history, the researcher must use primary source materials.
Improved: Historical research must incorporate primary source materials.

If the prepositional phrase is not essential to the meaning of the sentence, it can be deleted.

**Part II: Finding Missing Words and Floating Pronouns**

**Orange Signal Words (this, these, those, he, she, they, them, their, its)**
*This, These,* and *Those*
Look for these demonstrative pronouns. If they appear alone in a sentence, the meaning of the sentence may be lost. It must be clear what word or phrase the pronoun is taking the place of. To improve clarity, words might need to be added.
Example: *This* proves the existence of global warming.
Improved: *This experiment* proves the existence of global warming.

*He, She, They, Them, Their and Its*
If these pronouns appear too far from their antecedents, then the meaning of the sentence may not be clear. Pronouns should also not precede their antecedents.

Example: After *she* studied, Mary felt better about the upcoming test.
Improved: After Mary studied, *she* felt better about the upcoming test.

**Part III: Words to Change**

**Green Signal Words (to be, do, make, have)**
*To be*: is, was, were, are, am, be, being, and been
Sometimes using a form of *to be* is necessary, such as when the actor is not important or when emphasis needs to be placed elsewhere in the sentence. In most cases, though, the forms of *to be* should be replaced with stronger verbs. For more information on passive voice (using *to be* verbs) and active voice, check out this handout available on the UT Dallas Writing Center website: Writer’s Resources → Writing Center Handouts → General Writing → Passive Voice [http://www.utdallas.edu/studentsuccess/doc/writingC/handouts/generalwriting/PassiveVoice.pdf](http://www.utdallas.edu/studentsuccess/doc/writingC/handouts/generalwriting/PassiveVoice.pdf)

Using *to be* verbs can bury the active verb in a sentence. This can also happen when using other verbs, including forms of *to have* (*have, had, has*)

Example: The team *has* completed the season with a winning record.
Verb Unburied: The team completed the season with a winning record.

Other verbs that can create buried verbs or cluttered sentences include the forms of *to do, to make, to provide, to perform, to get, to seem,* and *to serve.*

**Brown Signal Words (not, very, -ly)**
*Not*
Use of the word *not* could indicate multiple negatives, as well as weak nouns and adjectives. Remove the word when possible.

Example: He will *not* be on time to the meeting.
Improved: He will arrive late to the meeting.

*Very* and *–ly*
Words with this ending could be a sign of weak verb usage. Try to rewrite the sentence without these words.

Example: Many students *really* did *very* well on the midterm.
Improved: Many students scored high grades on the midterm.

Removing empty words makes sentences stronger and more concise.
### Improving Weak Phrases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Words To Look For</th>
<th>How To Replace Them</th>
<th>them</th>
<th>the students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>are careful or cautious</td>
<td>are careful</td>
<td>this</td>
<td>unfortunately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are short and brief</td>
<td>are brief</td>
<td>they</td>
<td>the team left early</td>
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<tr>
<td>due to the fact that</td>
<td>because</td>
<td>is a cause of</td>
<td>causes</td>
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<tr>
<td>in the event that</td>
<td>if</td>
<td>is a critic of</td>
<td>criticized</td>
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<td>it is those who build</td>
<td>builders</td>
<td>is a need for</td>
<td>must</td>
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<td>the people who ran</td>
<td>runners</td>
<td>is unfortunate that</td>
<td>unfortunately</td>
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<tr>
<td>the bread that they ate</td>
<td>their bread</td>
<td>it is this which</td>
<td>this</td>
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<td>there are those who</td>
<td>they</td>
<td>there are cars which</td>
<td>Some cars</td>
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<td>a small part of</td>
<td>some</td>
<td>y was led by x</td>
<td>x led y</td>
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<td>a variety of</td>
<td>different</td>
<td>do a study of</td>
<td>study</td>
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<td>after</td>
<td>have a tendency to</td>
<td>tend to</td>
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<td>for</td>
<td>make a practice of</td>
<td>habitually</td>
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<td>despite</td>
<td>make use of</td>
<td>use</td>
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<td>by way of pulling</td>
<td>to pull</td>
<td>serve as an example</td>
<td>exemplifies</td>
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<td>whether</td>
<td>there have been many</td>
<td>many have</td>
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<td>basically</td>
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<tr>
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<td>except</td>
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<td>similar</td>
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<td>the paper’s purpose</td>
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<td>few</td>
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<td>the great number of</td>
<td>many</td>
<td>not very hard</td>
<td>easy</td>
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<td>by, in, of</td>
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### Contact

Want to learn more about revising? Come work with a tutor at the Writing Center! Drop by or use the information below to contact us and set up an appointment.

(972) 883-6736  WritingCenter@UTDallas.edu
www.UTDallas.edu/StudentSuccess/Writing