

Exercises

The Hemingway Editor/App

We have compiled these exercises and classroom activities to encourage students to become more self-reflective, confident, and critical writers when using grammar- and style-checking tools.

Some exercises have been designed with a specific tool in mind, while others are more generic. Most can be adapted for use with any other writing tool, as long as the two tools fulfil similar functions. Some activities may work better as individual student tasks; others as small group exercises, or even class-wide discussions. Again, feel free to adapt the format to match your needs.

Learning to be more assertive in writing (Version 1)

individual  group  classroom 

Ask your students to prepare a short piece of argumentative writing (it could be their draft to an upcoming essay, a brief opinion piece from an online discussion thread, etc.) and share it with a peer. Instruct the students to use The Hemingway App to identify modifiers and adverbs in their writing and have them follow the tool's suggestions for getting rid of those. Students can then review one another's revisions and discuss how the exercise has strengthened (or has not strengthened) their rhetoric, concision, clarity and style. Further, how has this activity changed the tone of the writing, the stance of the writer, and the readerly appeal? What has been gained and what has been lost as a result? This exercise can start as individual or pair work, and end as a class-wide discussion.

Learning to be more assertive in writing (Version 2)

individual  group 

Like The Writer's Diet, The Hemingway App can be used efficiently to help students revise their drafts before peer review. The "wordier" writers among your students should follow the editor's advice on eliminating some modifiers and adverbs in their writing, and limiting the use of passive voice. Those students who are confident in their writing could use the editor to focus on improving style (e.g., by varying their sentence length or structure to achieve a better flow).

Evaluating "easy-to-read" and "difficult-to-read" writing

group  classroom 

For this exercise, students can work in groups. The collective task for each group is to find one "well-written" piece of a "difficult-to-read" text (according to the Hemingway App), and one "badly written" but "easy-to-read" piece. The students should then discuss the editor's evaluation of each piece, commenting on very specific aspects of writing that make each piece difficult or easy to understand. Aspects to discuss could include sentence length, word length, the use of adverbs, syntax, word choice, etc. At the same time, the students should also be asked to evaluate each piece according to their own understanding of what makes good writing (rhetoric, style, coherence and cohesion, etc.). Finally, give each group an opportunity

to share their examples and findings with the rest of the class (make sure you have the document camera ready, or any other device that allows for easy sharing of digital content). It is a good idea to model the activity for the students first by showing them some contrasting examples (e.g., an excerpt from a well-written article in *The New Yorker* and a sample of Donald Trump's tweets) so that they can sense the scope of differences in style.

Exploring the role of adverbs and adjectives in writing

group  classroom 

Use The Hemingway Editor as a conversation starter about the role of adverbs and adjectives in writing. What rhetorical and stylistic effect can they have (ask students to provide examples)? When are these words helpful and how? In which cases are they redundant (the students should again explain why)? Using adjectives and adverbs as a starting point, shift the discussion to the role of other parts of speech, such as nouns and verbs. Ask your students if they can come up with some active verbs and concrete nouns that make adverbs and adjectives unnecessary. Sometimes, an adverb can also be omitted by simply deleting it and replacing the adjective (e.g., substitute "very big" with "large"). After this activity, the students can move on to work with The Writer's Diet (see below), which asks the writer to pay attention to similar issues (i.e. the over-reliance on specific types of adjectives/adverbs, and the use of weak verbs and abstract nouns).

Noting rhythm and flow in writing

individual  group  classroom 

Encourage students to experiment with various rhythms in writing by playing with syntax and sentence length. They can use their own writing for this exercise (e.g., a draft to an upcoming essay or another assignment). What would happen if they rewrote their text to completely get rid of all the highlights made by The Hemingway App? Ask the students to shorten or split the highlighted sentences to please the editor. Your students can then share their results and insights with the rest of the class. Make sure you have the necessary technology (document cameras, big screens, etc.) set up for the purpose.

Improving the readability of writing

individual  group 

Academic writing is often obscure, jargon-laden, and otherwise unnecessarily complicated. Students who are unaware of this tendency run the risk of imitating it as they learn to write in academic forums. The Hemingway Editor can help students undo the damage that might have been done by teaching them how to simplify writing without "dumbing it down." But adverbs and adjectives should not be simply removed from writing, and more complex nouns should not be blindly replaced by ostensibly simpler synonyms. Instead, the work done by an adverb could be assumed by choosing a more precise verb. Warn the students about the dangers of simple but generic writing that says nothing: precision is another skill that students can develop while working with this tool. This activity might best be used before peer review.

Assessing readability levels in various contexts and styles of writing

group  classroom 

For this exercise, students work in groups to discuss how context (e.g., the purpose, target audience, medium and other contextual aspects) changes the expectations and conventions for readability. For example, what makes web content stylistically, linguistically, rhetorically, and practically different from an

academic article, a literary essay, or a political speech? Use the Hemingway App's insistence on "simple, bold writing" as a starting point to address the alleged conventions of different genres of writing.