

## Richard Lanham's Lard Factor and the Paramedic Method

### Revising to enliven

In *Revising Prose*, Richard Lanham lambastes writers for composing sentences that “have been assembled from strings of prepositional phrases glued together by that all-purpose epoxy ‘is’” (3). He opens his book thus:

Since we all live in a bureaucracy these days, it's not surprising that we end up writing like bureaucrats. Nobody feels comfortable writing simply “Bill loves Marge.” The system requires something like “A romantic relationship is ongoing between Bill and Marge....” Or still better, “One can easily see that an interactive romantic relationship is currently being fulfilled between Bill and Marge.” (1)

As a cure, Lanham offers his “Paramedic Method” for cutting out the sentence's fat and reducing its “lard factor.” It goes like this:

- Take a sentence
- Highlight or circle the prepositions (*at, in, on, to, of, for*, etc.).
- Highlight or circle the “is” forms.
- Ask, “Where is the action?” “Who's kicking whom?”
- Put this “kicking” action in a simple active verb.
- Put the “who” in the subject spot.
- Start fast – no slow wind-ups.

### Applying Lanham's method

Take this sentence for example:

**In** response **to** the issue **of** equality **for** educational and occupational mobility, it **is** my belief that a system **of** gender inequality exists **in** the school system.

After highlighting the prepositions and be-verbs, Lanham suggests, realign the sentence:

In response  
to the issue  
of equality  
for educational and occupational mobility,

it is my belief that a system

of gender inequality exists  
in the school system.

We can now locate the dormant action of the sentence: "it is my belief."  
Change the is-form to produce an active verb and true action: "I believe."  
Eliminate all unnecessary prepositional phrases and qualifiers.  
Recast the sentence: "I believe that gender inequality exists in the schools."

According to Lanham's analysis, we now have replaced a 26-word sentence with an equally meaningful 9-word sentence. The 17-word reduction represents Lanham's "lard factor" of 65%.

**Try it on this sentence.**

The point I wish to make is that the employees working at this company are in need of a much better manager of their money.

**Challenge:**

Locate at least three sentences in your essay that could benefit from the Paramedic Method and perform it on them.