

AP Style Frontloading for Concise Writing: Embellishing vs. Supporting

AP style, otherwise known as the Associated Press style, is primarily used in publications such as magazines and newspapers. However, elements of AP style can also be used for powerful and concise writing. As we see in the news and on social media, the main idea of most articles is presented immediately to the readers in the title and the first few lines of text. Any information that comes after is used to inform the reader further about the details.

AP style writing centers around “frontloading,” which means that essential information comes first, and supplemental information follows. A common pitfall that many student writers encounter is aiming for a certain page requirement. This often leads to beginning with a long-winded build-up of background information before presenting the main idea. This results in a redundant mass of writing that ends up lacking in substance. Too much of the writing is focused on *embellishing* the main idea instead of *supporting* the main idea clearly and succinctly.

Embellishing

Embellishing occurs most often when not enough research has been done or writers are scrounging for a word count. More often than not, more words are written than necessary, and what has been written severely lacks substance and depth. Embellishment easily becomes redundancy and repetition without depth of meaning.

Example Text

The central nervous system is a highly important function of the human body.¹ It is in charge of processing data and transmitting motor control demands throughout the body.² Without the support of the central nervous system, the functioning of the body would be severely hampered.³ It is essential that the functioning of the central nervous system is maintained at a high level of quality.⁴

Example Text with Embellishment Statements Labelled

The central nervous system is a highly important function of the human body. It is in charge of processing data and transmitting motor control demands throughout the body. Without the support of the central nervous system, the functioning of the body would be severely hampered. It is essential that the functioning of the central nervous system is maintained at a high level of quality.

In the above example, everything highlighted in red is an embellished statement of the main claim, “The central nervous system is important.” Although each of the sentences has its own way of rationalizing this main point, having all three sentences in this passage is redundant. To make the passage more concise, delete two of the embellishing statements and expand on the second sentence, which could be a supporting statement. None of these embellishing statements are “wrong,” but presented together, they don’t contribute any subsequent information, thus taking away from the cohesion of the passage as a whole.

Supporting

The first step to providing high-quality supporting statements is to research the topic and gain relevant information. Supporting information ties the topic to the sub-topics in a way that makes readers more invested in the discussion. The information that becomes linked to the main idea answers the “so what?” question that gives the information relevance.

Often, if only minimal research has been done, the author resorts to rewriting the main claim in a variety of different ways, which becomes redundant. The subsequent topic sentences then lack connections to other ideas. To support means to go deeper and offer credible information and extensive background information to give substance to the main claim.

The main idea presented in the previous example, “The central nervous system is important,” begins to expand in the second sentence. The central nervous system is important because “It is in charge of processing data and transmitting motor control demands throughout the body.” From there, more details on the specifics of the central nervous system can be introduced to develop this point and educate readers further. An additional sentence was added to the example below that explains the central nervous system on a structural level in a way that shows the reader that it is important because of how involved it is in the functioning of the entire human system.

Example Text with Support

The central nervous system is important. It is in charge of processing data and transmitting motor control demands throughout the body. The central nervous system is comprised of complex nerve tissues that are present and connected throughout the body, which allows for full-body communication between the brain and every other body part to occur.

Activity

Identify if the author is **embellishing** or **supporting** the main idea. If the passage seems to be **supported**, identify which additional information either links relevant and interesting information or adds credibility to the main claim. If the passage seems to be **embellished**, eliminate the redundant sentences.

*The main ideas are underlined.

1. That being said, by facilitating their bond with hip-hop to their coursework, student levels of value for their course material increases because of their ability to connect their content through the meaningful outlet of hip-hop. Hip-hop is meaningful to the students; therefore, it is what is needed to make them care more about their coursework. Having more hip-hop in the class room will facilitate more invested motivation towards their school work.
2. Learning English as a second language in the early-to-late teenage years can prove to be a difficult task. However, with persistence, ample resources, and social acculturation, individuals may attain near-native proficiency. Specifically, consistent and positive linguistic feedback from social peers has been found to be most effective in facilitating late second language learning.
3. Everything being equal, the members of the Student Council will think about the argument and come up with a final decision through a vote next week at an open meeting where everyone can come to witness given its open nature.

Answer Key

1. Embellished

Everything beyond the first sentence (the main idea) in this example can be deleted to make way for more supporting statements with specific facts and/or credibility-building information.

2. Supported

- “However, with persistence, ample resources, and social acculturation, individuals may attain near-native proficiency.” This statement takes the main claim further and opens the conversation to factors that contribute to second language acquisition. The main claim progresses from its static position and gives depth to the passage.
- “Specifically, consistent and positive linguistic feedback from social peers has been found to be most effective in facilitating late second language learning.” This statement further narrows down which factor the passage will focus on, thus drawing in the reader while still supporting the main claim.

3. Embellished (Slightly)

Many phrases included in this statement are already implied and thus count as embellishment. For instance, “Everything being equal” should already be implied because all voting processes must be equal. In addition, the Student Council will naturally “think about the argument,” and mentioning that is also redundant. Lastly, “at an open meeting where everyone can come to witness given its open nature” can be abbreviated to “at an open meeting.” By definition, everyone can attend an open meeting, so it’s unnecessary to reiterate.