

Professional Issues Assessment 2: Ecclesiastes

Philip Wadler

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This exercise is based on a passage in George Orwell, *Politics and the English Language*, 1946.

I am going to translate a passage of good English into modern English of the worst sort. Here is a well-known verse from *Ecclesiastes*:

I returned and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all. (49 words, 60 syllables.)

Here it is in modern English:

Objective considerations of contemporary phenomena compel the conclusion that success or failure in competitive activities exhibits no tendency to be commensurate with innate capacity, but that a considerable element of the unpredictable must invariably be taken into account. (38 words, 90 syllables.)

The first sentence contains six vivid images, and only one phrase (“time and chance”) that could be called vague. The second contains not a single fresh, arresting phrase, and in spite of its ninety syllables it gives only a shortened version of the meaning contained in the first. Yet without a doubt it is the second kind of sentence that is gaining ground in modern English.

Your task is to rewrite the passage from *Ecclesiastes*, aiming to be vivid and clear. Invent your own images; improve on the phrase “time and chance”. Count the number of words and syllables in your text.

Name _____