

Sentence-Level Revision Strategies



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If you're working to improve the clarity and accuracy of your sentences, try the strategies in this guide.

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Focus on the most important sentences first

Find your thesis, topic sentences, and any other sentences that introduce a key claim or connection. Rewrite each as many ways as you can. Then, look at your list of sentences and decide which versions are easiest to understand. Can you identify what makes them clearer? How could you use this knowledge in future writing?

Rewrite one sentence

Choose one sentence you feel is unclear. Write it out as many ways as you can. Then, identify the clearest version. Once you're done, notice what you changed (an agreement error, wordiness, etc.). With any remaining time, look for that pattern in the rest of the paper.

Work on transitions

To help your sentences move more clearly from one idea to the next, try using one of the following transitions to show:

- Cause and effect: accordingly, as a result
- Comparison: along the same lines, similarly
- Addition: also, and, in addition
- Example: as an illustration, consider

- Conclusion: as a result, hence
- Contrast: although, however, in contrast
- Concession: admittedly, granted
- Elaboration: by extension, in short

Vary your sentence structure

If all or most of your sentences are long, try breaking up one or two. If you can, read your paragraph out loud, pausing after each period, and notice how this changes the flow of ideas.

If you tend to write short sentences, try sentence combining. Short “kernel” sentences like the following can be combined in several different ways:

- *The Odyssey is an epic poem by Homer.*
 - *The Odyssey is about Odysseus’s journey home.*
 - *Odysseus encounters many obstacles on his journey.*
1. Homer’s epic poem *the Odyssey* is about Odysseus’s journey home and the many obstacles he encounters.
 2. In Homer’s epic poem *the Odyssey*, Odysseus journeys home, encountering many obstacles along the way.

Revise for a specific audience

Based on your reader’s expectations, revise sentences for word choice, concision, and tone. Look for:

- Formal vs. informal language
 - Wordiness
 - Key words your audience expects to see
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- Repetition
 - Anything your professor has pointed out in prior feedback

Work on clarity

If you've been told your writing is unclear, try changing the order of information within individual sentences. **Look at the following sentence pairs:**

At the center of the controversy, Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook, chose to endorse the candidate.

COO of Facebook Sheryl Sandberg caused controversy when she chose to endorse the candidate.

Working to recognize one's own emotions as well as others' can help a leader develop their emotional intelligence.

Leaders can develop emotional intelligence by working to recognize their own emotions as well as others'.

The second sentences in each example (black) are clearer than the first (red) because easy-to-understand information appears first.

To revise, change the order of information in a sentence. Then, compare your sentences and decide which version is easiest to understand.

Change your reading strategy

Listen

Read your paper out loud (or have a partner or computer program read it to you). Pause anytime you notice a confusing sentence, find yourself saying it differently from how it is written, or notice that you've used the same word or phrase several times. Work to revise any sentence that catches your attention.

Read in a different format

If you've been reading and re-reading a draft, try one of the following strategies to get a fresh look:

- On your computer, change the font of your draft. Try using a new font, or making the current font very large. Now re-read your draft, noticing where revision is needed.
- Read your draft backwards, sentence by sentence, starting with the final sentence (you can do this reading out loud or silently). Underline the sentences that catch your attention and revise them.
- Depending on how long your draft is, re-type it (or parts of it, if it is long.) As you type each sentence afresh, make revisions.



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