
Revising Prose at the Sentence Level

Now that you have revised your argument strategy by developing, completing and re-organizing paragraphs and parts of paragraphs to create a stronger and more persuasive argument that has a strong stance, you are ready to revise the writing in the sentences that comprise those paragraphs.

Before you proceed, however, keep the following in mind:

- A. Sentences can sound good (rhythm) and use pretty words that sound educated, but that doesn't make them good sentences in a paragraph—or well-written. What matters is that the language and sentence structure connect to paragraph focus, makes sense, and convey specific, focused, clear, concise meaning that relates to and supports that sentence's main point or the paragraph's main focus and function in the overall argument.
- B. ALL sentences must contribute to a paragraph—DO something—not just work as pretty placeholders.
- C. ALL words must contribute to a sentence—DO something—not just sound pretty or smart.
- D. Most pretty long-winded sentences “say absolutely nothing profoundly”: they favor style over substance.
- E. Sentences can be long & grammatically correct, but still fail to relate to paragraph focus or convey meaning.

Directions: Choose a paragraph at a time from your “In-Between-Draft” or “Revision-In-Progress

Part I: A) Read your paragraph silently (and slowly) once or twice AND then slowly out loud to see and hear how sentences sound, but more importantly, how they flow—connect—make sense—run-on—etc.

Mark all prepositions: if you see a strong of prepositions, revise.

Mark all uses of the verb “to be” or “to have” and replace with concrete, vivid, action verbs.

Underline Passive Voice sentences that should be changed to Active Voice (to show responsibility, fault, causality)

Draw a line through “throat-clearing words that beat around the bush and delay the start of the main ideas of the sentence; Since the dawn of time... Throughout history...

Circle redundant words: excessive adjectives and adverbs, overused pronouns—especially “IT”

Replace abstract, broad, general nouns and verbs with precise, concrete, nouns, verbs, Keyterms

Note any sentences written in Passive Voice and revise so that they are written in Active Voice.

B) Draw a VERTICAL line between the sentences in the paragraph. Now READ each sentence as a unit:

Is each sentence a complete sentence?

Are there sentence fragments or run-on sentences?

Are the sentences written in exactly the same way?

Can you identify the sentences as Simple, Compound, Complex, Compound-Complex?

Where can sentences be combined to connect ideas? Where can sentences be subordinated?

Does the sentence relate to the sentence before it? If so, HOW?

Does the sentence relate to the sentence after it? If so, HOW?

Does the sentence relate to the main focus of the paragraph? If so, HOW?

Does the sentence perform a particular Rhetorical Structural Move? Which one? If not—do you want it to? Which one? What does a sentence DO? How does it connect to other sentences in the paragraph? Are there gaps in thought/missing information? Disconnections? Contradictions?

Part II: After you have done the above you can—and only then—should you EDIT your paper for grammar, mechanics, spelling, and punctuation.

***You can perform the same procedure with a writing workshop partner.