

## PEER REVIEW: SENTENCE CLARITY

**Purposes:** To revise sentences based on an understanding of the structures that readers perceive as clear; to “produce clear, coherent prose,” an objective for all WR courses

Readers of English find sentences easier to understand when they find a concrete subject and a specific verb near the beginning of the sentence or clause. As a reminder, here are Turabian’s five principles for clarity and coherence (refer to pages 129-138 for more guidance):

1. *Make subjects short and concrete.*
2. *Put key actions in verbs, not in nouns.*
3. *Avoid interrupting the subject and verb with more than a word or two.*
4. *Old before new (familiar information before unfamiliar).*
5. *Simplicity before complexity (short phrases before long).*

**Select one paragraph in your partner’s draft, preferably a paragraph that seems confusing. Try to apply Turabian’s principles by following these steps.** Note that sometimes, you will have to choose between conflicting principles.

1. Closely examine each sentence. Ignoring brief introductory phrases, do you come to a concrete subject and a specific verb within the first 6-7 words?
2. If not, ask “**WHO is doing WHAT?**” In other words, try to identify the sentences’ real main characters (even if they are not the grammatical subjects) and those characters’ important actions (even if they are not the sentences’ main verbs) by doing the following:
  - a. **Bold all the verbs in the paragraph.** (Are there a lot of weak “to be” verbs?)
  - b. **Underline the subjects of the verbs.** (Are they people, or abstract concepts?)
  - c. **Change the font color of nominalizations** (that is, nouns that could also be verbs, such as “argument”). Can you make the nominalizations into verbs?
  - d. Fill in the **right side of the chart with the specific, strong verbs** you find in the paragraph or in nominalizations (not vague verbs like *to be*, *to have*, *to do* etc).
  - e. Fill in the **left side of the chart with characters**. If there are any people referenced in the sentence, include them in the list.

Characters	Actions

3. Attempt to revise long, confusing sentences to put a concrete, simple subject and a specific, active verb near the beginning. If there are long phrases in between subjects and verbs, move them somewhere else in the sentence.
4. Are the first several words in each sentence linked to key words or ideas in the preceding sentences? “Old before new” means revising to put information familiar to readers at the beginning of a sentence and new information at the end. (This principle is especially important for **transitions**.)
5. Do your sentences begin with long introductory phrases? “Simplicity before complexity” means that short, simple phrases should come before long, complex ones. Get to a short, familiar subject right away.