

Tips for Creating Clear Sentences

What distinguishes a random collection of words from a sentence? The relationship between the words.

The following tips will guide you in establishing relationships between your words so that readers will easily understand your sentences, no matter how complicated the thoughts you want to convey.

Keep the core of your sentences together: subject-verb-object

- Subject - the person or thing performing the action
- Verb - the action being performed
- Object - the recipient of the action
- Use phrases before the subject for introductory or transitional information
- Use phrases after the verb (or object) for explanatory details

Verbs are the most important parts of a sentence

- Use specific and active verbs
- Show, don't tell

Start each sentence with a short, concrete subject, followed immediately by a verb

- A subject is short if it's one word (like *Jack*)
- A subject is concrete if you can see it (like *Jack* or *a tree*)
 - You can't see abstract concepts like *the issue* or *the question*
- Don't put any words between the subject and the verb

Put later information in a sentence into subject/verb pairs

- Short, concrete subjects followed immediately by verbs

Start each sentence with familiar information

- New information can be hard to digest
- Stick with the same subject

Take advantage of stress positions

- Words at the beginning and end of a sentence receive the most emphasis; words in the middle the least

Use the period liberally

- Avoid sentences too long to be read in one breath
- Aim for 2 to 3 lines or 20 to 25 words

Shorten sentences when conveying technical information

Use short, simple words

- Readers might not understand certain long or complicated words
- Readers pause when they read fancy words
- Short, easy words are harder to misuse

Prefer the active voice

Ensure that subjects and verbs agree in number

Avoid shifts in tense

Don't fuse sentences

Don't fragment sentences

Limit negative expressions