

Sentence construction tips

1. Put the subject of your sentence—the most important element—in the subject position:

Example:

This sentence does not identify the specific actor and action.

If rain forests are stripped to serve short-term economic interests, the earth's biosphere may be damaged.

Revision identifies who is responsible as the subject of the sentence:

Developers and loggers will continue to strip rain forests if their activities are not regulated. Continued destruction may damage the earth's biosphere.

Keep the subject close to the verb.

Don't put clumps of words between subject and verb. Your reader will have a difficult time putting these two important elements together.

Example:

If your sentence, because of one interruption after another, seems to stop and start, your readers are, if they are typical, likely to judge that your sentence, as this one does, lurches from one part to the next.

Or: Satire brings to the attention of the public serious issues.

Revision: Satire brings serious issues to the attention of the public.

Trim wordy or less important phrases from the end of the sentence.

Example:

Sociobiologists claim that genes determine our social behavior in the ways we act in everyday situations.

Revision: Sociobiologists claim that our genes determine our social behavior in everyday situations.

Put old material at the beginning of the sentence, and new material at the end. Put short material at the beginning of the sentence, and long material at the end. (Old to new; short to long.)

Example:

Similar to the previous tip, this suggestion will help you improve your writing—but only if you're listening now!