

FIVE PRINCIPLES FOR CLEAR SENTENCES

To draft clear sentences or revise unclear ones, follow these five principles:

1. Make subjects short and concrete, ideally naming the character that performs the action expressed by the verb that follows.
2. Avoid interrupting the subject and verb with more than a word or two.
3. Put key actions in verbs, not in nouns.
4. Put information familiar to readers at the beginning of a sentence, new information at the end.
5. Avoid long introductory phrases: get to a short, familiar subject quickly.

Skim the first seven or eight words of every sentence you've written to make sure they meet these criteria.