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.

Adapted from Kate L. Turabian, Student’s Guide to Writing College Papers, 4th ed. [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010], p. 130.