

## Principles of Writing Clear Sentences -- In Action

### **Express Crucial Actions in Verbs**

- *Not This:*  
It is my feeling that a continuance of my academic education would increase the effectiveness of my contribution to the future of American industry.
- *But This:*  
I feel that I can contribute more effectively to the future of American industry if I continue my academic education.

### **Say Who Performed the Action**

- *Not This:*  
There is a growing reluctance to allow new hazardous waste facilities to be built near population centers.
- *But This:*  
The public is increasingly reluctant to allow the chemical industry to build new hazardous waste facilities near population centers.

### **Put as Little Information as Possible between the Subject and the Verb**

- *Not This:*  
The key to understanding Abco Refining's authority to use accounting methods which include imported raw materials and production part costs into inventory costs when paid, rather than when such materials and parts were imported, lies in Schedule C and its attachments.
- *But This:*  
Schedule C and its attachments are the key to understanding Abco Refining's authority to use accounting methods which include the cost of imported raw materials and production parts into inventory costs when the materials and parts are paid for rather than when they are imported.
- *Or This:*  
Abco Refining uses accounting methods which include the cost of imported raw materials and production parts into inventory costs when the materials and costs are paid for rather than when they are imported. The key to understanding Abco's authority to use these methods lies in Schedule C and its attachments.

### **Put Shorter Elements of the Sentence before the Verb, Longer Elements after the Verb**

- *Not This:*  
If the borrower is going to make an informed choice, the finance charge, the total payments, "total sale price," and especially the balloon payment are essential information.

- *But This:*  
If the borrower is going to make an informed choice, he must know the finance charge, the total payments, "total sale price," and especially the balloon payment.

**Use Parallel Constructions: Make the Structure of the Sentence or Group of Sentences Reflect the Relationships among the Ideas it Expresses**

- *Not This:*  
It therefore seems evident that the SEC meant to establish a two-level materiality test, the first level of which enveloped all proceedings which could be generically grouped with the second level selecting out economically material proceedings and requiring the same individual description (including relief sought) as required for other material legal proceedings.
- *But This:*  
It therefore seems evident that the SEC meant to establish a two-level materiality test: the first level groups all proceedings which are generically related; and the second level selects out economically materials proceedings and requires for them the same individual description (including relief sought) that is required for other material legal proceedings.

**Put Repeated, Expected Information near the Beginning of the Sentence; Put New, Important Information near the End of the Sentence**

- *Not This:*  
Particular ideas toward the beginning of each clause focus the reader's attention, so Topics are crucial. Cumulatively, the thematic signposts that are provided by these ideas should focus the reader's attention toward a well-defined set of connected ideas. Moving through a paragraph from a cumulatively coherent point of view is made possible by a sequence of Topics that seem to constitute a coherent sequence of connected ideas. A lack of context for each sentence is one consequence of making the reader begin sentences with random shifts in Topics. Feelings of dislocation, disorientation, and lack of focus will occur in the reader when that happens. The rest of the sentence as well as whole paragraphs will be affected by a reader's point of view as a result of Topic announcement.
- *But This:*  
Topics are crucial because toward the beginning of each clause, they focus a reader's attention on a particular idea. Cumulatively, through a series of sentences, these ideas provide thematic signposts that should focus your reader's attention on a well-defined set of connected ideas. If a sequence of Topics seems coherent, that consistent sequence will move your reader through a paragraph from a cumulatively coherent point of view. But if through that paragraph your Topics shift randomly, then your reader has to begin each sentence out of context, from no coherent point of view. When that happens, your reader will feel dislocated, disoriented, out of focus. You must provide your readers with a coherent point of view, with a logical continuity that will guide them not only through individual sentences but through whole paragraphs.

## Use the End of the Sentence to Emphasize Important Information

- *Not This:*  
In response to the problems identified in the self-study, several activities have evolved at this college to meet the ever-expanding needs of our students, but the traditional goals of the college, which are to educate the whole person in the basic skills of liberal education, are not neglected by these new programs.
- *But This:*  
In response to the problems identified in the self-study, this college has evolved several programs to meet the ever-expanding needs of our students. But the new programs do not neglect the traditional goals of the college -- to educate the whole person in the basic skills of the liberal arts.

## Use Key Words at the Beginnings of Sentences to Focus and Relate Key Ideas

- *Not This:*  
At the outset this sum may not appear to be particularly onerous. However, the troublesome provision is not the \$500 fine, but the "six months in county jail." The fact that the violations are criminal in nature causes serious concern, even though no jail sentences have been rendered against Abco so far. The growing mistrust and hostility toward large, international corporations combined with California's emphasis on consumerism and the criminal aspects of these violations make it appropriate that we re-evaluate the way these alleged violations are dealt with.
- *But This:*  
At the outset this sum may not appear to be particularly onerous. However, the troublesome provision is not the \$500 fine, but the "six months in county jail." Even though no jail sentences have been rendered against Abco so far, the fact that these violations are criminal in nature causes serious concern. The criminal aspects of these violations combined with the growing mistrust and hostility toward large, international corporations, and California's emphasis on consumerism, make it appropriate that we re-evaluate the way these alleged violations are dealt with.

Adapted from: *The Little Red Schoolhouse*, University of Chicago.