

Sentence Fluency

Clarity. Clarity. Clarity. When you become hopelessly mired in a sentence, it is best to start fresh...

- Strunk and White
The Elements of Style

Read what you write aloud and **listen to the rhythm of the language**. Do you like what you hear? Does it make you sit up and take notice, or are you lulled to sleep by the singsong sameness of each sentence patter? Writers who read a lot notice that they develop a feeling for sentences that some people call “sentence sense.” It’s that sense that there’s more than one way to say a thing - but some ways just sound better than others.

Your sentences should be clear; they should make sense. **Cut the deadwood**. Don’t say: “At this point in time, we feel we are about ready to begin to snowboard.” Say, “Now we’re ready to snowboard!” Make every word work hard and your sentences will be powerful, full of punch.

Notice how your sentences begin. These beginnings are repetitive and boring: “We went to the beach, We had fun, We saw seagulls, We went home.” Yawn! Vary the openings and combine very short sentences: “Despite being overrun with pesky seagulls, we had fun at the beach.”

Don’t let sentences drift on too long, either. If a sentence feels unwieldy, out of control, slice it in half. Make two sentences. As William Zinsser tells us, “There is no minimum length for a sentence that’s acceptable... Among good writers, it is the short sentence that predominates.”

Read your work aloud and listen to the rhythm and flow of the words. Does the fluency match the mood and content? Long and flowing where the piece is descriptive and thoughtful; short and snappy where you need to make a point.

To write is to write is to write is to write is to write is to write is to write is to write is to write.

- Gertrude Stein