

Although we often have to communicate complex ideas in our essays, it's important that we use clear and plain language so that we don't confuse our reader. Here are some strategies for writing clearer sentences.

Use short, simple sentences. Compare the examples below. Which is easier to understand?

UNCLEAR In Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, knowledge is actively produced through the mutual interaction between the subject and the object, producing unstable and limited knowledge since, as an object, external world can only be articulated through the subject, and the subject can only this object construct the world after mediating with it.

CLEARER In Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, knowledge is actively produced through the mutual interaction between the subject and the object. This interaction produces unstable and limited knowledge. As an object, the external world can only be articulated through the subject, and the subject can only construct the world after mediating with it.

Make sure you have a clear subject and an active verb at the beginning of your sentence. The *subject* is the thing that the rest of the sentence describes. It should be the person or thing performing the action, or *verb*, in the sentence (not receiving the action). When possible, place the verb directly after the subject at the start of the sentence. That way, the reader will know who is doing what right at the beginning.

UNCLEAR The first can be seen in chapter one, where they mistranslate virtue for strength.
[The "first" what? Who or what is doing the seeing?]

CLEARER The first problem in translation occurs in chapter one, where the authors mistranslate
subject verb
virtue as strength.

Make sure your subjects match their verbs. If a subject is singular, its verb should be singular, too. In the example below, "theory" is the subject, not "birds"; because theory is singular, the verb should be singular ("is," not "are"). Otherwise, there may be some confusion.

UNCLEAR His theory about migratory birds are popular among environmentalists.
[Is it the birds that are popular? Is that his theory?]

CLEARER His theory about migratory birds is popular among environmentalists.
subject verb

Choose strong, direct verbs. Often, one specific verb can replace several words. See examples below.

LESS DIRECT Drilling would cause the destabilization of the ecosystem of eastern Ecuador's rainforests.

MORE DIRECT Drilling would destabilize the ecosystems of eastern Ecuador's rainforests.

LESS DIRECT It was the mayor who made the final decision about septic tanks.

MORE DIRECT The mayor made the final decision about septic tanks.

LESS DIRECT The purpose of a peace bond is to order a person to keep the peace for a period of time.

MORE DIRECT A peace bond orders a person to keep the peace of a period of time.

Use one word instead of two (or three, or four). For instance, the phrases below can be reduced to one word without losing any meaning.

past history	history
end result	result
personal opinion	opinion
plan in advance	plan
cooperate together	cooperate
a large proportion of	many
at this point in time	now
in spite of the fact that	although
due to the fact that	because
for the purposes of	to

Beware of pronouns. Pronouns are words like *he, you, it, they, this*, etc. These words replace more specific words (e.g. the audience, Henry Kissinger, the Magna Carta). It should always be clear who or what the pronoun refers to.

UNCLEAR Professional athletes must have dedicated coaches. They must have physical and psychological stamina.
[Who is “they”? The coaches or the athletes?]

CLEARER Professional athletes must have dedicated coaches. Athletes must have physical and psychological stamina.

UNCLEAR We enjoy the freedom to practice our religion.
[Who is “we”? Students? Christians?]

CLEARER Canadians enjoy the freedom to practice their religion.

Pronouns should also match the words they replace: if the original word is plural (e.g. “students”), the pronoun should be plural as well (e.g. “they,” not “it”). Words like “it” or “this” are always vague, and should be avoided when possible: your writing will be clearer if you restate the original word.

Use parallelism. Parallelism improves readability and prevents wordiness. If you have a list or sequence of 2 or more things in your sentence, make sure they are in the same grammatical form. These things might be items, actions being performed by the same person, a series of questions, etc.

UNPARALLEL Society encourages males and females to act and to be thinking a certain way, and they also dress differently.

PARALLEL Society encourages males and females to act, think, and dress differently.

UNPARALLEL In this paper, a definition of gender will be provided. This paper will also examine what are gender stereotypes. Finally, this paper will also answer the question of whether there is still gender bias in the workplace.

PARALLEL This paper will provide a definition of “gender,” examine common gender stereotypes, and determine whether gender bias still exists in the workplace.