

Exercise walk-through

Writing clear sentences ■ 7.6

eXercise

You must be able to

- keep the subject and its verb close together
- avoid excessive nominalisation
- put the agent in the subject position where it matters
- revise a sentence a reader must reread

Method — Subject and verb

The reader holds a subject in mind until the verb arrives. “The committee, having reviewed submissions from three departments over two months, recommends...” is readable; add another twenty words and it is not.

Method — Nominalisation

“The implementation of the reduction of costs” hides two verbs inside nouns. “Cutting costs” says the same in two words and names an action.

Method — Agency

Passive constructions can conceal who acts. “Mistakes were made” is grammatical and evasive. Where responsibility is the point, name the agent.

Method — The reread test

If you must read a sentence twice to parse it, so will the reader. That is the whole test, and it is reliable.

Practice 2.1 ■ 2 marks

State why a long gap between subject and verb causes difficulty.

Solution 2.1

Method: Subject and verb

Worked steps

the reader must hold the subject in mind until the verb arrives **B1**; a long gap overloads that hold **B1**.

Practice 2.2 ■ 2 marks

Explain what nominalisation does to a sentence.

Solution 2.2

Worked steps

it hides verbs inside nouns **B1**, lengthening the sentence and removing the action **B1**.

Practice 2.3 ■ 2 marks

Sentence: “The facilitation of an improvement in outcomes was undertaken by the department.”

- (a) State two problems.
- (b) Rewrite it.

Solution 2.3

Worked steps

(a) nominalisation (“facilitation”, “improvement”) **B1**; passive construction that delays the agent **B1**. (b) e.g. “The department improved outcomes” **B2**.

Exam-style 3.1 ■ 1 mark

“Mistakes were made” is criticised mainly because it

- A** is ungrammatical
- B** conceals the agent
- C** is too long
- D** uses subordination

Solution 3.1

Method: Agency

A is ungrammatical

B conceals the agent 

C is too long

D uses subordination

Worked steps

B. the construction removes responsibility from the sentence.

Exam-style 3.2 ■ 1 mark

The most reliable test of sentence clarity is whether

- A** it is under twenty words
- B** the reader must read it twice
- C** it uses no passives
- D** it begins with a subject

Solution 3.2

Method: The reread test

- A it is under twenty words
- B the reader must read it twice**
- C it uses no passives
- D it begins with a subject



Worked steps

B. rereading is the direct symptom of a processing failure.

Exam-style 3.3 ■ 4 marks

Rewrite for clarity: "There was a consideration by the board, following the receipt of representations, of the possibility of a postponement of the decision."

Solution 3.3

Worked steps

removes the nominalisations **B2**; names the agent as subject **B1**; one clear sentence, e.g. “The board considered postponing the decision after receiving representations” **B1**.