

7.6 Writing clear sentences

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Total: 14 marks

Objective

Build the skills to write sentences a reader can process **once**.

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

1 Worked examples

Study these first. Each one shows the method for a task used later.

■ 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.

■ 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.

■ Agency

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

■ 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.

2 Practice

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

[2]

2.2 Explain what nominalisation does to a sentence. [2]

2.3 Sentence: "The facilitation of an improvement in outcomes was undertaken by the department."

(a) State two problems. [2]

(b) Rewrite it. [2]

3 Exam-style questions

3.1 "Mistakes were made" is criticised mainly because it [1]

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

3.2 The most reliable test of sentence clarity is whether [1]

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

3.3 Rewrite for clarity: "There was a consideration by the board, following the receipt of representations, of the possibility of a postponement of the decision." [4]

4 Go further

- work through the **7.6 Writing clear sentences** lesson on the **Learn** page;
- read the **Qualifying Arguments, Syntax, and Conventions** section of the AP English Language handout on the **Know** page.

Solutions

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

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

2.3 (a) nominalisation ("facilitation", "improvement"); passive construction that delays the agent. (b) e.g. "The department improved outcomes".

3.1 B. the construction removes responsibility from the sentence.

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

3.3 removes the nominalisations; names the agent as subject; one clear sentence, e.g. "The board considered postponing the decision after receiving representations".