

8 Sentence craft under time pressure

— Part 2

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Recall

- You have run out of time and left an essay unfinished.
- You know your first sentence is usually not your best.
- You have spent five minutes on an opening and rushed the argument.

New ideas

Read these first. Each idea has a short worked example. Then do the Practice below.

■ 1 Plan the reasoning, not the sentences

Under time pressure, planning should produce the *sequence of claims*, not polished wording. Sentences can be written once; a wrong order costs the whole essay.
Worked example. Three claims in the right order, plainly written, outscore two elegant paragraphs and no conclusion.

■ 2 Front-load the argument

State the thesis early and make each topic sentence carry a claim. A reader who runs out of your essay should still know what you argued.
Worked example. If the last paragraph is missing, an essay whose claims are in its topic sentences still shows its reasoning.

■ 3 Revise what changes meaning

With minutes left, fix unclear pronouns, missing verbs and misplaced modifiers before word choice. Those errors change what the sentence says; a plain word does not.
Worked example. Correcting “this shows” to “this rise shows” is worth more than replacing “big” with “substantial”.

Watch out: Elegance is the last thing to add and the first thing to sacrifice. An essay that is clear and complete beats one that is beautiful and unfinished.

Practice

2.1 State what planning should produce under time pressure. [2]

2.2 Explain why a wrong order costs more than plain wording. [2]

2.3 State what each topic sentence should carry and why. [2]

2.4 Name two errors to fix first with minutes remaining. [2]

2.5 Explain why those errors matter more than word choice. [2]