

Sentence Combining Introduction: Producing Complexity with Clarity

There are 2 principles of good subject choice:

- A. The first is to make, when possible, the subject one wants to focus on the grammatical subject of the sentence one is writing.
- B. The second is, again when possible, to prefer personal and/or concrete, specific subjects to vague, abstract, general ones.

There are three sentence-beginning errors that inexperienced writers make:

- A. The most common mistake is to use highly abstract subjects when there is no need to do so, when other alternatives are available. (The academic thing to do.) One of the characteristics of academic discourse is the use of abstract subjects. Trouble is these subjects usually produce the verb be in the verb position and abstractions don't do things negating the option to make the sentence active which is preferable. Abstractions don't do things, don't act.

- b. Second, which is actually a form of the first one is to begin a high percentage of sentences with a personal possessive followed by an abstract word. Normally the possessive represents the best subject rather than the abstract word:
- a. My reason for doing this was . . .
 - b. I did this because . . .
 - c. His improvement was enormous.
 - d. He improved enormously.
 - e. Their actions were taken because . . .
 - f. They acted because . . .
- c. The third, less common, mistake is to begin a sentence with the expletives there or it when they are inappropriate.
- a. There were two actions that could have been taken.
 - b. We could have taken two actions.
 - c. It will be required that an essay test will be taken.
 - d. Each student will have to take an essay test.

Clarity and complexity can coexist if you avoid vague pronoun reference and passive subjects.