



An Introduction to College Writing Tutorial IV: Writing with Clarity

This handout is a companion to the fourth video tutorial in the Hixon Writing Center's "Introduction to College Writing" series. You can use this handout in a variety of ways: it can serve as a space to take additional notes while watching the video; it can help you refresh your memory of the video; or it can be used as a standalone resource because it closely replicates the video's logic and information. Like the rest of our "Introduction to College Writing" series, this resource will probably be most useful to writers who are new to the demands of college-level academic writing.

WHY PRIORITIZE CLARITY IN YOUR WRITING?

As a writer, your goal is to make things as easy as possible for your reader to understand. Good ideas are often complex, but the language that describes them should strive to be simple.

WHAT ARE THE COMPONENTS OF CLARITY?

- **Coherence** depends on how your writing is organized at the paragraph and paper levels.
- **Cohesion** is determined by how logically your ideas are connected at the sentence level.
- **Concision** entails using the fewest words possible to say exactly what you mean.

HOW CAN I MAKE MY WRITING MORE COHERENT?

- **Check the Organization**
 - **Do I have an effective central claim or thesis statement?** In order to assess this, ask yourself the following questions about the sentence you would identify as your thesis:
 - **Is it arguable?** In other words, do you make a claim that someone could disagree with? Be sure to go beyond restating the prompt or stating a fact.
 - **Is it specific?** Beware of making a claim that is too general. For instance, the following statement would NOT make a good thesis because it is both too general and not arguable enough: "Jane Austen writes about courtship." If you were to ask questions like "how?" or "why?" in response to this statement, then you would be able to get closer to an arguable and specific thesis statement.
 - **Is it relevant?** If you are writing in response to a prompt, does the central claim respond to the question(s) posed in the prompt?
 - **Do I have a topic sentence at the beginning of each paragraph? And, are these topic sentences arguable, specific, and relevant?**
 - **Do I have conclusions and/or transitions at the end of each paragraph that flow logically into the next paragraph's topic sentence?**
 - **Do I have introduction and conclusion paragraphs?** The **introduction** should provide the context – and, in some cases, a roadmap – for the overall argument. The **conclusion** should sum up the argument and put it back into context. However, it should NOT just restate the same information that was in the introduction.

- **Build a Logical Progression**

One way to check the logical flow of a paper is to use a **reverse outline**: If someone were only to read the thesis statement and topic sentences in order...

- Could they guess what the paper is about?
- Would they see how all of the paragraphs support the central claim?
- Would they think that the topic sentences made sense in their current order?

Does each new topic sentence build on the previous one? Every new paragraph should offer new insights and build on what was said in the previous paragraph. One way you can achieve this is by examining different cases or exploring different aspects of the same claim.

HOW CAN I MAKE MY WRITING MORE COHESIVE?

- Move from old to new information.
- Avoid interrupting the subject and the verb. In general, it is best to position your subjects and verbs together, as this helps you avoid confusing your reader.
- Use effective transitions.

HOW CAN I MAKE MY WRITING MORE CONCISE?

- Be as precise as possible in your word choice.
- Eliminate redundancies.
- Delete unnecessary words.

Want to explore academic writing more? The HWC can help! Visit writing.caltech.edu/tutoring for more information about how to set up a meeting with a tutor.