



University of Vermont Graduate Writing Center

Sentence Strategies for Creating Flow

Worried that your sentences sound choppy? Want to stay true to the complexities of your subject without overwhelming and confusing readers? Try these tips for creating sentence-level clarity and flow from George Copen's and Judith Swan's "The Science of Scientific Writing."

1. Follow the grammatical subject as soon as possible with its verb.

Confusing: Research regarding the benefits of almond yogurt, even though the benefits of almond milk have been documented, is lacking.

Better: While the benefits of almond milk have been documented, research regarding the benefits of almond yogurt is lacking.

2. Place the "new information" you want to highlight in the **stress position** (usually at the end of a sentence) and place "old information" (material already stated in the previous sentence) in the **topic position** (at the start of the sentence) to clearly show the new sentence's link to the previous sentences *and* to contextualize and spotlight the new information now being introduced.

Confusing: Research regarding the benefits of almond yogurt is lacking even though the benefits of almond milk have been documented. Almond yogurt

Better: While the benefits of almond milk have been documented, research regarding the benefits of almond yogurt is lacking. Almond yogurt ...

3. Place the person or thing whose "story" a sentence is telling—the sentence's **true subject**—at the beginning of the sentence, in the topic position.

Confusing: A promising alternative to animal-derived dairy products is offered by the almond.

Better: The almond offers a promising alternative to animal-derived dairy products.

4. When possible, favor active verbs over "to be" verbs".

Wordy: The focus of this study will be on the health benefits of almond yogurt for lactose-intolerant individuals.

Better: This study will focus on the benefits of almond yogurt for lactose-intolerant individuals.