

## writing exercise i

As a group, consider each of the following prompts and be prepared to share your conclusions.

**tool 1: begin sentences with subjects and verbs**

**Prompt 1.** Consider the following four sentences that tell a simple story. For each sentence, who is the subject of the sentence? (Examples adapted from Gopen, *Expectations: Teaching Writing From the Reader's Perspective*.)

- Mary smashed John in the face with a pie.
- Mary smashed a pie into John's face.
- John's face was smashed by Mary's pie.
- A pie hit John in the face.

**Prompt 2.** Consider the following three sentences. For each, who is the subject of the sentence? (Examples adapted from Gopen, *Expectations: Teaching Writing From the Reader's Perspective*.)

- Although Smith constantly complains, Jones plays the radio at a high volume.
- Jones plays the radio at a high volume, although Smith constantly complains.
- Jones play the radio at high volumes and Smith constantly complains.

**Prompt 3.** Here are three sentences that have the same **subject-verb** pair: **drones are**. Which of the three sentences is weakest and why? Rewrite this sentence by dividing it into two sentences. Which of the three sentences builds the most tension? Why? When might you choose this sentence over the one remaining sentence?

- Smaller than queens, with rounder abdomens and enormous eyes that meet on the top of the head, **drones are** male bees.
- **Drones**, smaller than queens, with rounder abdomens and enormous eyes that meet on the top of the head, *are* male bees.
- **Drones are** male bees, smaller than queens, with rounder abdomens and enormous eyes that meet on the top of the head.

**Prompt 4.** Clark gives this as an example of a weak sentence. Revise the sentence so that it is stronger; the subject and verb identified by Clark are in *italics*

*A bill* that would exclude tax income from the assessed value of new homes from the state education funding formula *could mean* a loss of revenue for Chesapeake County schools.

*tool 2: order words for emphasis*

**Prompt 5.** The end of a sentence should provide new information that emphasizes your main point; that is, it looks forward to the sentence that will follow. If it does not, then rewrite the sentence using one of three strategies: (1) by removing redundant information, (2) by shifting the peripheral information to the left, or (3) by shifting the new information to the right. Revise these sentences so that they better emphasize the text in bold. (Examples adapted from Williams and Colomb, *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace*.)

- Sociobiologists claim that **our genes control our social behavior** in the way we act in situations we are in every day.
- The data offered to prove ESP **are too weak**, for the most part.
- Questions about **the ethics of withdrawing intravenous feeding** are more difficult than the questions about withholding medication.

**Prompt 6.** These two paragraphs use a nearly identical set of words but place the emphasis in each sentence on a different set of words. How does this choice change how the reader experiences these paragraphs? (Examples adapted from Williams and Colomb, *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace*.)

- The administration has blurred an issue central to nuclear arms control, the issue of verification. Irresponsible charges, innuendos, and leaks have submerged serious problems with Iranian compliance. The objective, instead, should be not to exploit these concerns in order to further poison our relations, repudiate existing agreements, or, worse still, terminate arms control all together, but to insist on compliance and clarify questionable behavior.
- The issue of verification, an issue central to nuclear arms control, has been blurred by the administration. Serious problems with Iranian compliance have been submerged by irresponsible charges, innuendos, and leaks. The objective, instead, should be to clarify questionable behavior and insist on compliance, not to exploit these concerns in order to further poison our relations, repudiate existing agreements, or, worse still, terminate arms control all together.

*key take-aways: your reader expects that...*

- ...the action of a sentence is articulated by its verb
- ...the subject of a sentence is followed almost immediately by a verb
- ...the subject of a sentence appears first in the main clause
- ...the beginning of a new sentence connects back to the previous sentence
- ...the most important information in a sentence (or in a clause) appears at its end