

Revising through Ratiocination

Ratiocination is a systematic revision strategy. Through a process of coding and decoding, students can establish variety in their sentences, manipulate syntax and diction, change passive verbs to active, avoid repetition and clichés, and clarify their thinking.

Ratiocination is a step-by-step process:

1. **Circle the “to be” verbs (am, is, was, were, are, be, being, been, must be, will be, has been, had been, can be, could be, would be, might be).**

Eliminate half of your “to be” verbs and rewrite the sentences using active verbs that will have more impact or be more specific.

For practice, rewrite one of your sentences that uses an unnecessary “to be” verb so that it has a strong active verb.

2. **Make a wavy line under words that you have repeated several times.**

Leave the word if it is necessary for emphasis or clarity. Omit the word or exchange it when the word choice has been careless. (Do not include articles: a, an, the)

3. **Underline every sentence with a colored pencil. Break the line at the end of each sentence. Alternate between colors to see if your sentences have a variety of lengths.**

When all or most of the sentences are long, shorten some. When sentences are short, combine some. If any a sentence is rambling or confusing, rewrite it. (Getting rid of a bad sentence is often the best way to fix it.)

4. **Bracket the beginning of each sentence—the first word, phrase, or clause.**

If too many begin with the same word(s) or start with the same phrase or clause, then experiment with a variety of sentence beginnings. For practice, change one of your sentences so that it includes a gerund or infinitive phrase at the beginning.

example: *I walk three miles a day, and it is good for my cardiovascular system.*

try these instead . . .

gerund: *Walking three miles a day is good for my cardiovascular system.*

infinitive: *To walk three miles a day is good for my cardiovascular system.*

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Variations of Sentence Beginnings

Noun:	Jessica Simpson gave the performance of her life.
Pronoun:	She sang the “National Anthem.”
Article:	The performance received outstanding reviews.
Adjective:	Great music inspires Ms. Simpson.
Gerund:	Singing in front of an audience still makes her nervous.
Infinitive:	To sing at Busch Stadium was her dream, because she loves the Cubs.
Adverb:	Gradually, Ms. Simpson’s fame is spreading.
Adverb Clause:	When Ms. Simpson sang the anthem, she received a standing ovation.
Prepositional Phrase:	Of all the great classical composers, Ms. Simpson says she enjoys Madonna best.
Noun Clause:	That Ms. Simpson has the greatest voice in pop music remains debatable, but there is no doubt that her intellectual acuity will serve her well in the music business.