Awkward Sentences

Sometimes a sentence just doesn’t sound right because it has a confusing and awkward structure. If you find yourself slowing down or stumbling over a certain sentence while reading aloud, you might need to rewrite the sentence and phrase it more clearly.

How to Fix Awkward Sentences

There is no single rule or technique to correct awkward phrasing. A writer must develop an “ear” for what sounds right and be willing to reword a sentence until it sounds smooth, clear, and direct. However, remember that writing is often overcomplicated. With this in mind, pretend to describe your writing subject to a close friend. Notice how much more clear it sounds when it is simplified. Say it out loud, then write it down. This is often a great fix for awkward sentences.

Awkward: Taking life a day at a time is how I think it should be done to be happy.
Better: Taking life one day at a time will make you happy.

Identifying the Main Noun and Verb

A more methodical approach to fix an awkward sentence is to identify the main noun (subject) and verb (action), then cut the sentence down accordingly. Ask yourself, “What is this sentence about—what is the core subject?” (Choose a noun.) Then ask, “What is this subject doing?” (Choose a verb.) Try to choose a strong verb that conveys action, not a “be” verb. (See “Improving Style” lesson).

Awkward: The fact that we don’t eat a balanced diet is our biggest health problem and that we don’t get enough exercise is also a big issue.
Better: Poor diet and lack of exercise contribute to our greatest health problems.

Here’s another example.

Awkward: The article sums it up pretty well regarding what her plan is about.
Better: The article summarizes her plan well.
Also: The article presents an effective summary of her plan.