

A Quick Diagnosis

Here is a quick way to determine how you have managed the beginnings of your sentences: Break your text into its smallest passages. Then in each passage underline the first six or seven words of every sentence and read the underlined phrases and clauses straight through, as if they were a list. If any of them seems to introduce an idea that clearly falls outside the general sequence of topics or if few of them capture what your good sense tells you the whole passage is generally "about," try revising them. And if those first few words regularly include connectors like *therefore, consequently, moreover*, and so on, try deleting all of them. If what's left cannot stand on its own, then the whole passage probably needs more than tinkering at its style. However, give the benefit of the doubt to connectors like *however, but, nevertheless, on the other hand*. You must always warn readers when you are about to contradict something that you have just said.

Exercise 6-4

Revise these three passages so that they have more consistent topic strings. Before you begin, decide who the main character should be, and then make that main character the subject of as many sentences as you can. In the first example, I have boldfaced topics so that you can see how inconsistent they are.

1. **Some potential threats** exist in the modern mass communications media, though there are many significant advantages. If a **powerful minority** should happen to control it, **public opinion** could be manipulated through biased reporting. And while a **wide knowledge of public affairs** is a great advantage that results from national coverage, **divisiveness and factionalism** can be accentuated by connecting otherwise isolated, local conflicts into a single larger conflict as a result of showing that **conflicts about the same issues** are occurring in different places. It will always be true, of course, that **human nature** produces differences of opinion, but **the threat of faction and division** may be reinforced when **national coverage** publicizes uninformed opinions. According to some, **education** can suppress faction when **the true nature of conflicts** reaches the

public through the media, but **history** has shown that as **much coverage** is given to people who encourage conflict as to people who try to remove conflict.

2. Some sort of palace revolt or popular revolution plagued seven out of eight reigns of the Romanov line after Peter the Great. In 1722, achievement by merit was made the basis of succession when the principle of heredity was terminated by Peter. This resulted in many tsars not appointing a successor before dying, including Peter. Ivan VI was less than two months old when appointed by Czarina Anna, but Elizabeth, daughter of Peter the Great, defeated Anna and ascended to the throne in 1741. Succession not dependent upon authority resulted in the boyars' regularly disputing who was to become sovereign. Male primogeniture became the law in 1797 when Paul I codified the law of succession. But conspirators strangled him, one of whom was probably his son, Alexander I.
3. Many issues other than science faced Truman when he was considering the Oppenheimer committee's recommendation to stop the hydrogen bomb project. A Sino-Soviet bloc had been proclaimed by Russia and China, so the Cold War was becoming an issue. Support for Truman's foreign policy was shrinking among Republican leaders in Congress. And the first Russian atom bomb test made the public demand a strong response from him. Truman's conclusion that he could not afford letting the public think that Russia had been allowed to be first in developing the most powerful weapon yet was inevitable. In retrospect, the risk in the Oppenheimer recommendation was worth taking according to some historians, but the political issues that Truman had to face were too powerful to ignore.

Exercise 6-5

Revise the "moral climate" passage. First, cut redundancy. Then revise topics so that the passage does not repeat the same topic in the same position in every sentence. You can replace some topics with *it*. You can also combine some sentences:

Hitler contributed to the moral climate in Germany in the 1930s when he ...