

## Common Mistakes and Quick Fixes for Writing

●COMMON MISTAKE #1: INCLUDING TOO MUCH INFORMATION THAT IS NOT IMPORTANT TO THE STORY/PROMPT:

EXAMPLE: A paper is started with information that is not relevant to the story.

REMEMBER NOT TO:

- ❖ Start the story too far back-before the REAL story begins.
- ❖ Start with the wrong focus-beginning with information not important to the story.
- ❖ Start with too much CONFUSING information.

TRY THIS INSTEAD:

1. Draw a picture of your story showing the MOST important moment.
2. Don't go back in time. Start writing about where you were and what was happening at that VERY MOMENT (that you drew). DO NOT simply identify the scene and then move on.
3. Look carefully at your picture and FOCUS on the most important part.
4. Now, write slowly, remembering details that are important to your main point. Including details that don't set a clear scene or move the story forward will just confuse your readers.

POOR BEGINNING: *"It was a bright, hot sunny day. The day was November 13, 2010, the day I turned eleven years old. The first thing that happened, I had woke up and come downstairs..."*

GREAT BEGINNING: *"My eleventh birthday party was perfect...for about ten minutes. All of my friends were there, and the cake was sitting on a big table in the shade, surrounded by brightly colored gifts. Who could have guessed that this was the day the neighbor's dog would get loose?"*

●COMMON MISTAKE #2: TELLING, NOT SHOWING.

EXAMPLE: Papers (or paragraphs) that begin with "It was..." "I was..." "This was..." "One day..." and so on... These papers have many sentences that are vague and general.

REMEMBER NOT TO:

- ❖ Start compositions (or sentences) with the same generic phrases.

- ❖ Include these same phrases often, especially in the opening sentences.
- ❖ Use variations of these same phrases without recognizing them.

TRY THIS INSTEAD:

Boring Sentence: *"One nice, pretty day I was playing with my friends."*

Exciting Sentence: *"I threw the ball hard at Chrissy."*

VISUALIZE a picture in your mind. SEE the place, people, and ACTION of your words. Write like you are in it at the moment, not as if you are telling it from a far.

●COMMON MISTAKE #3: LISTING EVENTS WITHOUT DETAILS

EXAMPLE: *"I was sitting in my room. My mother called me. She wanted me to wash the dishes. I told her I was doing homework. She said to do them when I finished."* (BORING!!!)

REMEMBER NOT TO:

- ❖ Write too fast.
- ❖ Hurry to get finished.
- ❖ Just list what happened in order (what happened next...next...next)

TRY THIS INSTEAD:

1. Write the first sentence you are working on (first sentence of your story, paragraph, whatever)
2. READ what you wrote (out loud if you can!)
3. SEE the picture in your mind of what you are writing about.
4. THINK what else is in the picture that the reader needs to know.
5. ADD a sentence or two that might create a more interesting picture. TELL what people are thinking, feeling, or saying.
6. WRITE the next sentence from your story and REPEAT these steps for the WHOLE paper.

EXAMPLE (REVISED): *"I was sitting in my room listening to the new Lady GaGa CD and writing a note to my best friend. The pink pen I was using kept spitting goeey blobs out on the paper. My mother's voice suddenly roared into my ears, over the sound of the music. "Katie, I need you to wash these dishes!" she screamed. I tuned her out; I liked the sound of Lady Gaga better..."*

●COMMON MISTAKE #4: WRITING THAT RAMBLES ON AND ON

EXAMPLE: *"It was a hot Saturday. My family and I were in the backyard. My dad introduced me to my uncle. Then one day he came back to our house and we talked. Then we were going to have a family reunion, so we cleaned up the house. So the next day we got everything ready. Then everybody started coming. It was fun."*

REMEMBER NOT TO:

Tell EVERYTHING that happened. Most of what REALLY happened isn't important to the part of the experience you're writing. Including everything will only CONFUSE or BORE a reader. Decide what is important and write about THAT. Pretend the rest didn't happen.

TRY THIS INSTEAD:

1. Figure out why you wanted to write about this experience. What was the one most important thing that happened that made you think of writing about this?
2. Cross out everything before that part and everything after that part.
3. Now, rewrite the one part SLOWLY. Share your thoughts about what was happening and what you were feeling as it happened. Use dialogue.

EXAMPLE (REVISED):

*"I couldn't wait for our family reunion to start because my Uncle Jerry was coming. He lived in Arizona and I had never met him until he came to visit a few weeks ago. We sat in the hot backyard looking at my baseball card collection for an hour. We had been getting the house cleaned up for days, and now I watched every guest arriving hoping it would be Uncle Jerry so we could talk about baseball some more. 'Here comes Uncle Jerry', my little brother shouted."*

●COMMON MISTAKE #5: REPEATING YOURSELF

EXAMPLE: *"One day in the middle of the night, I woke to hear my mom crying in the living room. I got out of bed and heard my brother and sister talking about what had happened. I went into the room to ask them what had happened. They said they didn't know. So we all went into the living room to ask her what had happened..."*

REMEMBER NOT TO: Repeat the same word, phrase, or idea over and over in your story/paper.

TRY THIS INSTEAD:

1. Read your paper as you write. Look for places where you are repeating yourself.

2. Underline the repeated words, phrases or ideas.
3. Rewrite these parts and get rid of repetition.

EXAMPLE (REVISED): *"One night I woke to hear my mom crying in the living room. I got out of bed, heard my brother and sister talking, and went into their room to ask what had happened. Since they didn't know, we quietly walked up to our mother to ask her what was wrong."*

●COMMON MISTAKE #6: WRITING "BIG" INSTEAD OF "SMALL"

EXAMPLE: (These are "big" vague sentences)

1. *My grandpa is really nice.*
2. *I did really great on my report card.*
3. *Jake's mother eats a lot of weird stuff.*

REMEMBER NOT TO:

1. Use "big" general remarks (vague language) instead of "small" specific language to show what you mean.
2. Think only about the big story idea and forget to examine that picture in your mind for details that set the scene or describe the action.

TRY THIS INSTEAD:

1. Find the key word in your vague sentence—words like *nice, fun, stuff, good, great*.
2. Look "underneath" that word in your memory.
3. What's there? Why did you write what you did.
4. Add a sentence or two that shows what you mean after your vague sentence.
5. Or, rewrite the vague sentence. Neatly squeeze in a sentence or two that SHOWS what you meant, instead of telling.

EXAMPLE (REVISED):

1. *My grandpa is really nice. He takes me fishing on Saturday nights. He taught me how to bait my hook and always lets me tell my mom that I caught the biggest fish.*
2. *I did really great on my report card. When I got it, I could hardly believe my eyes. I'd made an A in everything except math.*
3. *Jake's mother eats a lot of weird stuff. He told me that she likes onion and pickle sandwiches and drinks her milk with a lemon in it.*