Organization

Sentence Leveling: This activity helps you determine how cohesive your body paragraphs are. Assign each sentence in each body paragraph a number as follows:

Level 1-a new idea (a topic sentence)
Level 2-further development of this idea
Level 3-further development of level 2
Level 4-further development of level 3
And so on.

Each paragraph should begin with a new idea (level 1) and continue to develop the elements of that idea through a combination of levels of detail. A healthy paragraph, one that is cohesive and varying in detail might look like 1,2,3,2,2,3 or 1,2,3,3,2,3,3 or 1,2,3,4,4,2,3,3 while a paragraph that still needs work might look like 1,2,2,2,2 or 1,2,3,4,5 or 1,2,2,1,2,2 or 1,2,3,3,3,3.

Ex. I share my house with two cats (1). The elder cat is named Biko (2). She is a white, brown, and black Calico who likes to chase invisible mice (3). The other cat is Yerdle (2). She is named Yerdle after Dr. Seuss’s book Yerdle the Turtle because she is a Tortoise shell cat (3). Although she, too, is getting older, she still takes great pleasure in killing birds and bringing them to me as a gift (3). I hate it when she does this (4)!

Style and Sophistication

Sentence Combining: this activity asks you to combine closely related sentences into one more complicated sentence in order to enhance clarity, highlight connections between ideas, and eliminate short, choppy sentences. Sift through your draft looking for simple sentences and use this technique to create longer, more involved sentences to replace these simple sentences.

Ex. Biko is a calico cat. Her colors are white, brown, and black. She likes to chase invisible mice during the late night hours.

(replace with) Biko, who is a white, brown, and black calico, likes to chase invisible mice through my house during the late night hours.

Eliminate Repetition: If your sentence structure tends to be the same (meaning that you have a tendency to begin all of your sentences with “she,” “this article,” “there is,” etc.), this will make your writing repetitive. In order to recognize and eliminate this tendency, circle the first word in every sentence of your essay. If you use the same word repeatedly, this probably suggests that you rely too heavily on certain sentence structures. Rearrange your sentences so that your essay does not feel monotonous to read.

Awkward sentences: Read your essay out loud or have a friend read your essay out loud. Usually if someone stumbles over a sentence, it could benefit from some revision.

Grammar and Mechanics

Eliminate Fragments: If you know or fear that you have a tendency to create sentence fragments, read your essay from the last sentence to the first sentence. This process usually makes fragment sentences easily recognizable.

Passive Voice: Passive voice is a sentence structure that eliminates the agent (the person doing the act) from the sentence or from the focus of the sentence. Although this can be a very effective technique, it should be used sparingly and consciously. Search every sentence to make sure that your reader knows WHO is doing WHAT.

Ex. Policies were made that negatively affected the situation of those who lived downstream from the plant. (Replace with) The plant owners made policies that negatively affected the situation of those who lived downstream from the plant.