

# Using the SOS

Directions: Review the following instructions for completing a Sentence Opening Sheet (SOS). The information gleaned from this process will allow for a more effective revision of your paper.

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## SOS Left Column

### **Step 1**

Write the first four or five words of each sentence in the first column, one line per sentence.

### **Step 2**

Ask yourself the following questions.

Do most of my sentences begin with similar words such as *the, there, they*?

Does the main subject come near the beginning of most sentences?

### **Step 3**

If you answered “yes” to one or both of the questions in Step 2, you need to rearrange some sentences so that sentence beginnings are varied.

Now Re-Write the Rough Draft!

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## SOS Center Column (See *Special Instructions*)

### **Step 4**

Write all verbs in each sentence in the second column, one line per sentence. Be sure to include main and helping verbs.

### **Step 5**

Ask yourself the following questions.

Are the same verbs used frequently?

Are the verbs dull and uninteresting?

Do verbs vary in tense?

### **Step 6**

If you answered “yes” to any of the questions in Step 5, you need to substitute interesting, active verbs and vary them from sentence to sentence. Look for other words in the existing sentence that can become the verbs. All verbs in your paper conform to present tense active form.

Now, Re-Write the Rough Draft!

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SOS Right Column (See *Special Instructions*)

**Step 7**

Count the number of words in each sentence, and write the numbers in the third column, one line per sentence. Then add the column and divide by the number of sentences to determine your average sentence length.

**Step 8**

Ask yourself the following questions.

Do adjoining sentences tend to be the same length?

Does the average length of sentences exceed your age?

**Step 9**

Sentence length, including the ability to compose long sentences, is one indicator of mature writing style. As a rule of thumb, you should have a few very short sentences (four to eight words—especially good for punch line effect), many medium-length sentences (fourteen to eighteen words), and some long sentences (twenty plus words). If you have used too many short or short-to-medium length sentences, you will need to try a different way of combining ideas so that sentence length varies. Also, for most writing you do, the average length of your sentences should exceed your age up until your early twenties.

Now, Re-Write the Rough Draft!

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***Special Instructions***

After Step 6

Include in your paper at least one each of the following:

- a. a list of three adjectives for one noun
- b. a list of three noun phrases

After Step 9

Include in your paper at least one each of the following:

- c. a simile
- d. a metaphor
- e. a personification