Revise a Paragraph for Clarity and Coherence

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In this estimated 40-minute lesson, learners revise original sample paragraphs so readers can follow the ideas. They clarify vague references, connect and order related ideas, and preserve the draft's intended meaning unless a task explicitly asks for a content change.

Revise for a clear path through ideas

Revision helps a reader follow what a paragraph means. First identify the draft's main point and the facts it includes. Keep those facts and that meaning unless a task asks you to change content. If a word such as "it" names a person or thing from an earlier sentence and the reference is vague, name that person or thing. Some sentences begin with "it" without using it to name a thing, as in "It was hard to find the shelf." You can recast such a sentence when it helps the reader; for example, "The shelf was hard to find." A sentence beginning with "It was hard/easy…" may also use "it" for an earlier thing, so read the whole sentence and its context. Put related ideas together and arrange them in an order that makes sense. Add a transition only when it shows a real connection. Remove repeated wording without cutting information a reader needs. Reread the whole paragraph: can you tell what each sentence refers to, how the ideas connect, and whether the revision still says what the draft meant? More than one revision can meet these goals.

Model draft: The Garden Map

Original fictional instructional draft.

The garden club made a map of the garden paths and added new symbols. They put it by the door. It was hard for visitors to follow because it had no key. The club made a key on a card. It went next to it. This helped visitors match symbols to paths.

Modeled revision

Read the draft. In “They put it by the door,” “It was hard for visitors to follow,” and “because it had no key,” “it” refers to the map. In “It went next to it,” the first word means the key card and the second means the map. Study the possible revision and its notes. Which changes make the meaning easier to follow? Which details and main idea stay the same? This is one possible version, not a sentence pattern to copy.

> Possible revision: The garden club made a map of the garden paths and added new symbols. The club placed the map by the door. At first, visitors had trouble following the map because it had no key. The club wrote a key on a card and placed the card beside the map. With the key nearby, visitors could match each symbol to a path.
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> [Clarify] “The club,” “the map,” and “the card” name the people and things. “Visitors had trouble following the map” names the map directly instead of referring to it with “It.” [Sequence] The revision puts the map in place before explaining the missing key and the added card. [Connect] “At first” and “With the key nearby” show the time and cause-and-result relationships. [Preserve meaning] The revision keeps the same map, symbols, location, key card, and visitor action; it does not add a new event.

Guided draft: The Library Sign

Original fictional instructional draft.

The art club made a sign for the new-books shelf and tested it outside the library. It was hard to find the new-books shelf. The sign had a blue arrow. The students turned it toward the shelf and wrote “New Books” under it. It was easier to find.

Guided revision

With a partner or on your own, revise “The Library Sign” so a reader can follow what the words name and how the changes connect. Some “it” words name an earlier thing, such as the sign in “tested it.” In “It was hard to find the new-books shelf,” opening “It” does not stand for the shelf; the shelf is named later in the sentence. In “It was easier to find,” “It” refers to the shelf under this task’s stated meaning. You can recast both sentences to name the shelf clearly. Keep the same information: the sign was outside the library, students turned its blue arrow toward the new-books shelf, they wrote “New Books” under the arrow, and the draft says the shelf was easier to find after those changes. You may combine, reorder, or recast sentences. Mark one confusing spot in the draft. Use the lines below to revise it, then check that you kept the same information. Do not add a new reason or result.

Guided revision

Independent draft: The Club Page

Original fictional instructional draft.

The newsletter has a page about clubs. It comes first. Readers looked for meeting days. They were in the middle. Some readers missed it. The class moved them to the top. It was easier to find them. The page still had club descriptions.

Independent revision

Independently revise “The Club Page” into a paragraph a reader can follow. When “it,” “they,” or “them” names a person or thing, make its referent clear. Also recast “It was easier to find them” so the sentence names what was easier to find. Keep the same meaning: the newsletter begins with a club page; meeting days were in the middle and some readers missed them; the class moved the meeting days to the top; the draft says the meeting days were easier to find after the move; the page still included club descriptions. You may change sentence order and wording, and you may combine or split sentences. Do not add new reasons, events, or results. After revising, underline one change that improved clarity or coherence and briefly name what it helps a reader understand.

Revision check

Use this check while revising the independent draft. The task gives the intended meaning. Keep it in view, then reread your whole paragraph.

What meaning and information must stay?

Which reference or connection may confuse a reader?

Revised paragraph

One change I made and what it helps a reader understand

Original fictional sample draft “The Garden Map.”

Original fictional sample draft “The Library Sign.”

Original fictional sample draft “The Club Page.”

Teacher directions

Grade 6 ELA. Adapt the reading and response demands to your students and curriculum.

Prerequisites: Learners can read or listen to a short paragraph and make a written, typed, or dictated change to it. No particular grammar label or editing code is required.

Materials: Learner pages in print or editable DOCX.; Pencil or a way to type, dictate, or mark a possible revision.; A display or board for the modeled draft is optional.

Estimated preparation: 5 minutes. Basis: Estimate to read the samples and answer guidance and prepare printed or editable learner pages.

Estimated teaching: 40 minutes. Basis: Planning estimate: opening 3 minutes, strategy 5, model 8, guided revision 10, independent revision 12, closure 2.

Before teaching — about 5 minutes (estimate): review the three fictional drafts, the intended meanings, answer guidance, and learner revision check. Prepare the PDF or editable DOCX. No outside reading, internet access, or special materials are required.

Opening — 3 minutes (estimate): show “The students turned it toward the shelf” and “It was hard to find the new-books shelf.” Using the draft’s stated meaning, explain that the first “it” refers to the arrow. The second sentence’s opening “It” does not refer to the shelf; the shelf is named later in the sentence. Recasting it as “The new-books shelf was hard to find” is one option. Read the whole sentence and context rather than classifying a use from its opening words alone.

Strategy — 5 minutes (estimate): identify the draft’s intended point and information; check whether a pronoun names an earlier person or thing and name it when the reference is unclear; where helpful, recast a sentence such as “It was hard to find the shelf” as “The shelf was hard to find”; put connected details in a sensible order; use transitions only when the relationship is accurate; remove repetition without losing necessary meaning; then reread the whole paragraph.

Model — 8 minutes (estimate): read “The Garden Map.” Ask what each “it” means, then make every use explicit: “They put it by the door,” “It was hard for visitors to follow,” and “because it had no key” use “it” for the map; in “It went next to it,” the first “It” is the key card and the second “it” is the map. Explain that “Visitors had trouble following the map” is a possible recast that names the map directly; it is not a repair of a nonreferential “It.” Think aloud while putting the map placement before the key card and visitor action. Use the bracketed annotations to explain the revision choices. Check that the same events and main idea remain. Emphasize that this is one possible revision.

Guided revision — 10 minutes (estimate): learners mark unclear references in “The Library Sign,” identify “tested it” as referring to the sign, and compare “It was hard to find the new-books shelf” (opening “It” does not name an earlier thing) with “It was easier to find” (“It” refers to the shelf under the stated meaning). They can recast both sentences to name the shelf clearly. They revise with a partner or independently on the learner page. Have them preserve the listed events and the draft’s stated easier-to-find outcome; do not add a new reason or result. Accept a different clear order or sentence structure.

Independent revision — 12 minutes (estimate): learners revise “The Club Page” without a partner. The task states all of the meaning to preserve, including the draft’s stated outcome that meeting days were easier to find after the move. Ask learners to distinguish pronouns that name earlier things from the complete sentence “It was easier to find them”, revise to name the meeting days, and underline one clarity or coherence change. Allow varied sentence-level solutions that keep all stated information.

Closure — 2 minutes (estimate): ask learners to name one place where a revision made a reference or connection clearer and state one fact they kept unchanged.

Shortened 30-minute option (estimate): opening 2 minutes; strategy 4; model 6; guided revision 7; independent revision 9; closure 2. Keep the independent task and meaning-preservation check; shorten discussion and model share-out.

Support: read drafts aloud or use available text-to-speech; point to each “it” and ask whether it names an earlier person or thing; for “It was hard to find the shelf,” help learners name the shelf directly if it improves clarity. Provide oral rehearsal, larger print, or dictation/typing when handwriting is not the target. Keep the meaning-to-preserve prompt visible. Confirm access needs locally; these general suggestions do not replace an individual access plan.

Extension: offer learners two different clear revisions of the independent draft and ask them to compare sentence order or transitions. Ask what each version emphasizes and whether both preserve the same stated information. Learners may then make one deliberate content change, label it, and explain how the task’s meaning changed.

Common confusions: a sentence opening alone does not tell whether “it” has a referent. In this task’s stated meaning, “It was easier to find” uses “It” for the shelf. In “It was easier to find them,” opening “It” does not stand for an earlier thing, while “them” refers to the meeting days. Recast when it improves clarity; a clear pronoun need not be removed. A transition does not automatically improve coherence; shorter is not always clearer if a needed fact disappears; and “better” does not mean the teacher’s wording must be copied. Preserve results already stated in the draft; do not add a new reason or result. Score clarity, relationships, meaning preservation, and explanation of one revision separately. Do not score handwriting or spelling unless meaning is difficult to understand.

Model — intended evidence: Learner notices that the revision names the map and card, makes their order and location easier to follow, and keeps the same events and meaning: a garden club made a symbol map, placed it by the door, added a nearby key card, and visitors could match symbols to paths.

Guided practice — intended evidence: Learner produces or discusses a clearer version that names the sign, arrow, shelf, and wording; connects the sign test to the adjustment; and does not add unsupported events or a new claim about what happened after the change.

Independent response — intended evidence: Learner revises the paragraph so readers can identify the club page and meeting days, follow why/where the meeting days were moved, and understand that the club descriptions remained. The revision preserves the stated meaning without unsupported added content; multiple sentence-level solutions are acceptable.

Answer keys

— key for Model

The possible revision names the map and key card instead of leaving their references unclear. It recasts the opening “It was hard for visitors to follow” as “visitors had trouble following the map,” then names the key card and map in the sentence about where the card went. It puts the map by the door before describing the missing key and added card. The sequence and connections are clearer, while the original events and main idea remain.

This is one defensible edit. In the original, “it” in “They put it by the door,” “It was hard for visitors to follow,” and “because it had no key” refers to the map; in “It went next to it,” the first word means the key card and the second means the map. The revision says directly that visitors had trouble following the map rather than using the referential “It.” Other wording and sentence arrangements can work if they clarify the same relationships and preserve the draft’s stated details.

The garden club made a map of its paths and added new symbols. The club put the map by the door. Visitors found the map hard to follow at first because no key explained the symbols. The club wrote a key on a card and set it beside the map, so visitors could match the symbols to paths.

The bracket notes point out possible strategies, not required labels. Accept a different revision that identifies the map/card clearly, makes event order and connection understandable, and retains the same meaning.

Scoring criteria: Criterion 1, Criterion 2, Criterion 3, Criterion 4

— key for Guided practice

The art club made a sign for the new-books shelf and tested it outside the library. At first, the shelf was hard to find. Students turned the sign’s blue arrow toward the shelf and wrote “New Books” under it. After the changes, the shelf was easier to find.

The opening “It” in “It was hard to find the new-books shelf” does not refer to an earlier thing; “It” in “It was easier to find” refers to the shelf under the stated meaning. The revision names the shelf in both places and keeps the draft’s initial difficulty and later result. The task asks for no new reason or result.

The art club tested its new-books sign outside the library. The shelf was hard to find at first. Students turned the blue arrow toward the shelf and put “New Books” under it. The shelf was easier to find afterward.

Accept varied clear sentences and pronouns with obvious referents. Recast wording where it makes the intended meaning clearer; not every sentence beginning with “it” has an unclear reference. Keep both the initial difficulty and stated outcome; do not add a new reason or result.

Scoring criteria: Criterion 1, Criterion 2, Criterion 3, Criterion 4

— key for Independent response

The newsletter begins with its club page. Meeting days were in the middle, where some readers missed them. The class moved the days to the top; they were easier to find there. The page still included club descriptions. Naming the page and days, then rewriting “It was easier to find them” to name the days, improves clarity.

The response names the page and meeting days, preserves the stated difficulty and later outcome, and keeps the club descriptions. Other sentence orders are valid if these facts stay clear.

The first newsletter page is about clubs. Its meeting days were in the middle, so some readers missed them. The class moved the days to the top, making them easier to find. The page kept its club descriptions.

Accept varied wording and order when all stated information, including the easier-to-find result, stays clear. Do not add a new event, reason, or result.

Scoring criteria: Criterion 1, Criterion 2, Criterion 3, Criterion 4

Scoring criteria and extensions

Criterion 1 — scoring criterion

Makes unclear references specific so readers can tell who or what each sentence names. Example: Replaces “them” with “meeting days” and names the “club page” when needed. Alternatives: Pronouns work when their referents are clear; do not require every noun to be repeated.

Criterion 2 — scoring criterion

Orders and connects related ideas so the paragraph reads smoothly. Example: Gives the problem before the change; uses “so” only for a supported link. Alternatives: Accept different orders, transitions, and sentence boundaries.

Criterion 3 — scoring criterion

Preserves each stated fact and result unless a task asks for a content change. Example: Keeps the move and easier-to-find result without claiming everyone found the days. Alternatives: Do not add an event, reason, or result; no exact model wording is required.

Criterion 4 — scoring criterion

Uses readable wording and explains at least one revision. Example: Names the meeting days so readers know what moved. Alternatives: Do not score spelling or handwriting unless it obscures meaning.