

Module 1: How Readers Actually Read

Independent Practice

— ANSWER KEY —

Scenario

You are a science journalist working for an international news agency. A research team has just published findings about a new respiratory virus. The lead scientist has provided you with a heavy and hard to read technical paragraph explaining the discovery.

Your editor needs you to rewrite this text to make it accessible to an intelligent adult, who may not be a scientist. They want the information presented clearly and efficiently so they can see why it matters. They are busy and need the key information immediately.

Your challenge is to adapt your writing to serve the reader.

Source Material

Below is the technical paragraph from the scientist. Read it carefully:

Source Paragraph (Technical):

“The identification of a new respiratory virus that spreads through the air has been made by a research team. The appearance of symptoms in infected individuals takes place following an incubation period of three to seven days, during which the transmission of the virus by people who feel completely healthy to those around them remains possible. The wearing of masks, maintaining a safe distance from others, and to avoid spending time in crowded indoor spaces has been shown by early studies to be effective in the reduction of transmission rates.”

Your Task

Rewrite this information for the reader described above. Work through the four steps below. Each step prepares you for the next. Do not skip ahead.

Step 1: Identify the key terms and key verbs.

Key terms are the precise technical words you will need to keep in your rewrite. Key verbs are the actions — many of them are hiding inside nouns in the source paragraph. Extract them here as verbs.

Key terms:

respiratory virus

incubation period

symptoms
masks / safe distance / crowded indoor spaces
transmission rates
transmission

Key verbs:

spreads through the air
discover / identify → hiding in “the identification”
appear → hiding in “the appearance”
spread / transmit → hiding in “the transmission”
reduce → hiding in “the reduction”

Step 2: Identify where parallelism is missing.

Find the sentence in the source paragraph where a list of three items does not use the same grammatical form. Write the problem below, then write the corrected version.

The problem:

Sentence 3 lists three protective measures in three different grammatical forms: “the wearing of masks” (noun phrase), “maintaining a safe distance” (gerund), and “to avoid spending time” (infinitive). Readers expect the same form for all three.

The solution:

Wearing masks, maintaining a safe distance, and avoiding crowded indoor spaces — all three now use the gerund form.

Step 3: Fix the word order in each sentence.

Each sentence in the source paragraph puts new or unfamiliar information at the beginning, where the reader expects familiar information. Restructure each sentence so that familiar information comes first and new information comes last.

Sentence 1:

“The identification of a new respiratory virus that spreads through the air has been made by a research team.”

Problem: The sentence starts with “the identification” (unfamiliar) and buries the agent (“a research team”) at the end, in the stress position, where the new information should be. The action “identification” is also a noun hiding the verb “identified” (You may wish to change the verb to “discovered”).

Researchers have identified a new respiratory virus that spreads through the air.

Sentence 2:

“The appearance of symptoms in infected individuals takes place following an incubation period of three to seven days, during which the transmission of the virus by people who feel completely healthy to those around them remains possible.”

Problem: The sentence starts with “the appearance of symptoms” (unfamiliar) and is overloaded. The subject (“the transmission”) is separated from its verb (“remains”) by 14 words. Splitting into two sentences is the clearest fix.

Symptoms appear three to seven days after infection. During that time, people who feel completely healthy can still spread the virus.

Sentence 3:

“The wearing of masks, maintaining a safe distance from others, and to avoid spending time in crowded indoor spaces has been shown by early studies to be effective in the reduction of transmission rates.”

Problem: The sentence starts with the three measures (unfamiliar), uses broken parallelism, buries both the agent (“early studies”) and the key verb (“shown” / “reduces”), and ends weakly on “transmission rates” after “effective in the reduction of”. Notice how the revised version makes sure that the list is placed at the end, in the stress position.

Early studies show that transmission rates can be reduced by wearing masks, maintaining a safe distance, and avoiding crowded indoor spaces.

OR

Transmission rates can be reduced by wearing masks, maintaining a safe distance, and avoiding crowded indoor spaces.

Step 4: Check your sentences against the five reader expectations.

- ☒ Are the main actions expressed as verbs, not hidden in nouns? → identified/discovered, appear, spread, show, reduces
- ☒ Does each sentence start with something the reader already knows or could be expected to know from the context? → Researchers / Symptoms / Transmission rates (uses a slightly different word but has the same meaning as “spread the virus”)
- ☒ Does each sentence end with the most important or new information? → spreads through the air / three to seven days after infection / spread the virus / wearing masks, maintaining a safe distance, and avoiding crowded indoor spaces.
- ☒ Are the subject and verb close together in every sentence? → Yes: each subject is followed immediately by its verb.

- ☑ Have you used the same grammatical form wherever items are listed?
→ wearing, maintaining, avoiding

Model Rewrite

This is one strong version. You may have chosen a slightly different rewrite. What matters is that all five expectations are met, not that the wording is identical.

Researchers have discovered a new respiratory virus that spreads through the air. Symptoms appear three to seven days after infection. During that time, people who feel completely healthy can still spread the virus. Transmission rates can be reduced by wearing masks, maintaining a safe distance, and avoiding crowded indoor spaces.

Why the Model Rewrite Works

Verbs show the action: identified/discovered, appear, spread, show, reduces — every main action is a verb.

Familiar information first: “Researchers”, “Symptoms”, and “Transmission rates” are all concepts the reader is already familiar with. (“Transmission rates” is a less direct connection, but here we assume the reader knows that “transmit” and “spread” are synonyms. We cannot keep the same word because “transmission rates” is an established term. You may choose to rewrite the first sentence as “a virus that is transmitted through the air” if you want to keep the terms consistent.)

New information last: Each sentence ends on its key finding: “a new respiratory virus that spreads through the air”, “can still spread the virus”, “can be reduced by wearing masks, maintaining a safe distance, and avoiding crowded indoor spaces”.

Subject and verb close together: In every sentence, the subject is followed immediately by its verb.

Parallelism: The three measures all use the same gerund form: wearing, maintaining, avoiding.