

## Writing Problems: Symptoms and Possible Causes

<b>Symptom</b>	<b>Cause</b>
Difficult to get into: have to re-read first paragraph	Weak or vague thesis; language too abstract <b>Ideas and/or word choice</b>
Hard to follow; seems to ramble; is confusing	Thesis again; or essay gradually changes focus and direction; watch ideas curve away from thesis <b>Organization and/or Ideas</b>
Seems okay on thesis level, but hard to follow in spots	Look to topic sentences; think about levels of generality; could be false or misleading transitions <b>Organization</b>
Collapses in the middle	Middle paragraphs are themselves poorly constructed (very common) <b>Ideas and/or Organization</b>
Have to re-read sentences	Danglers; lack of parallelism; which clauses; poor subordination <b>Sentence Fluency</b>
Dull and boring	Passive voice; overuse of verb to be; too many abstract words; jargon; no images <b>Ideas, Word Choice and/or Voice</b>
Sounds phony	Pompous diction; jargon; over-subordination; probably poorly envisioned audience <b>Voice</b>
Little, short paragraphs	Writer hasn't engaged topic; unfelt ideas merely stated; avoids difficult part of argument <b>Ideas and/or Voice</b>
Feels windy—hard to stay focused on it	Too much generalization; not enough concrete evidence <b>Ideas, Word Choice and/or Voice</b>
Seems childish	Look to the thesis (too small and obvious or look to sentences (lack of variety, too many simple or compound sentences) <b>Ideas, Sentence Fluency and/or Voice</b>
Ends with a whimper	Conclusion is only a summary of whole or recapitulation of opening paragraph; no reassessment; doesn't follow <b>Organization</b>