

Known-New Contract

The “known-new contract” is a linguistic concept used to describe how writers achieve cohesion between sentences by first presenting what readers already **know** (information previously presented) before introducing new information. Whether building an argument, describing a scene, or analyzing a concept, it is important to logically progress from one sentence to the next. Clear sentence-to-sentence progression keeps readers focused and allows them to easily follow the pattern of reasoning.

1. Begin by writing a sentence

- Start with something the reader **knows** in the first part of the sentence
- Tell the reader something new toward the end of the sentence

Sentence 1: Medical ethics is a complicated field of inquiry.
Medical ethics (**Known Info**) → is a complicated field of inquiry (New Info)

2. Write another sentence

- Begin with the **new** information from the previous sentence because this information is now **known**
- Tell the reader something new toward the end of the sentence

Sentence 1: Medical ethics is a complicated field of inquiry.
Sentence 2: Fields such as this...
Sentence 2: This field involves...
Sentence 2: Inquiry into ethical...
Sentence 2: It requires understanding...

3. Use pronouns to connect the first and second sentence

- Personal Pronouns: I, we, you, he, she, it, they
- Possessive Pronouns: mine, yours, his, hers, its, ours, theirs
- Demonstrative Pronouns: this, that, these, those
 - This and These imply closeness (in a text, in time, ideologically, etc.)
 - That and Those imply distance (in a text, in time, ideologically, etc.)

Caution: Beware of “broad reference” or “naked” pronouns, which occur when a pronoun is used by itself with either a very broad or no clear referent/antecedent.

For example: In the following sentences, the **known** information is bolded and the new information is underlined. The Known-New contract is established and coherence is created by either (1) repeating a main phrase or (2) using a pronoun (with a clear antecedent).

Recent outreach programs to the homeless community in Denver have focused on meeting basic needs. **Once these needs are met,** many programs develop life and job-related workshops designed to get the homeless off the streets. **These workshops** have been met with increasing resistance from Denver’s homeless because they fail to achieve a balance between current situations and realistic goals.

4. Invert sentence structure to maintain coherence

- Shifting a sentence's construction from active to passive can help maintain the order of known and new information (from one sentence to the next) by switching the positions of the subject and object.

For example:

Active Voice: The Dean signed all of the contracts.

Passive Voice: The contracts were signed by the Dean.

Introductory clauses can also create this inversion.

For example:

After completing a review of the budget, the Dean signed all of the contracts.

The contracts were signed by the Dean after he completed a review of the budget.

5. Simple Sentence Example

The underlined parts of the following sentences represent the information that either does or needs to follow the Known-New Contract. Revision 1 changes the second sentence, while Revision 2 changes the first sentence.

Weak: Youth counselors do not expect underprivileged youth to graduate from college. The programs they participate in during high school are not effective.

Notice in this example that the second sentence has no underline. That's because the second sentence is purely new information and does not follow a logical progression of ideas.

Revision 1: Youth counselors do not expect underprivileged youth to graduate from college. In order to graduate from college, high school students need more effective college prep courses.

In this example, the second sentence continues to add new information to the idea of graduation. The repeated words signal that the second sentence is building on known information.

Revision 2: Underprivileged youth struggle to graduate from college even though they participate in college bound programs. The programs they participate in during high school are not effective.

The important thing to note here is that either the first or the second sentence can be changed or revised to follow the Known-New Contract depending on what the writer wants to emphasize.

6. Complex Sentence Example

Weak: Youth counselors do not expect underprivileged youth to graduate from college; the many financial and social challenges they face pose insurmountable hurdles to responsible study habits, which studies show have a direct correlation to graduation rates. Most working class families make under \$19,000 a year or less with two working parents often holding down two jobs.

In this example, the first sentence ends with (and thus emphasizes) graduation rates, but the second sentence, which discusses financial challenges, does not follow through. The writer could decide to focus on graduation rates, in which case Revision 1 below would work, or the writer could maintain a discussion of financial challenges, in which case Revision 2 works.

Revision 1: Youth counselors do not expect underprivileged youth to graduate from college; the many financial and social challenges they face pose insurmountable hurdles to their study habits, which studies show have a direct correlation to graduation rates. To get more kids in caps and gowns each year, Superintendent of Denver Public Schools, Franklin R. Jones, has begun looking for youth counselors to propose innovative college-prep programs.

In this option, the writer changed the second sentence to begin with the idea of graduation (“kids in caps and gowns”) and then added new information to further the concept of graduation.

Revision 2: Youth counselors do not expect underprivileged youth to graduate from college; insurmountable hurdles to their study habits spawn from the social and financial challenges they face. Most working class families make under \$19,000 a year or less with two working parents often holding down two jobs.

In this option, the writer changed the first sentence to end with information about financial challenges, which leads logically into the next sentence about working-class families only making \$19,000 a year or less.