

Starting from the Right Place

The following revision is taken from a report by a Thai-speaking postgraduate student of Occupational Health:

Original	Revision
<p>Results</p> <p>¹There were 115 reported cases from 121 reporting forms (6 cases were notified from two different health services). ²Seventy-seven reporting forms (63.6%) came from BCC and the rest from other health services (Table 2.1.4). ³All of those 6 cases notified from two different health service were reported from BCC. ⁴The others included MCC (3 cases), other hospitals (2 cases), and HSE (1 case).</p>	<p>Results</p> <p>¹Seventy-seven reporting forms came from BCC, and forty-four from other health services (Table 2.1.4). ²The forms related to 115 cases, six being reported both by BCC and another health service (MCC 3 cases, other hospitals 2 cases, and HSE 1 case).</p>

To assist discussion of these texts I have numbered the sentences 1-4 (red) in the original, and 1-2 (blue) in the revision.

When I first read this paragraph I was not sure exactly what it meant. A way into the problem was provided by considering the **cross-references** in the text:

- *those six cases* in sentence 3 cross-refers, not to anything in the second sentence (77 forms from BCC and 44 from other health services) but to the first sentence (121 forms for 115 patients).
- *The others* in sentence 4 cross-refers in sentence 3 not, as one might at first suppose, to *the (other) cases*, but to *the (other) health services*.

Cross-reference problems such as these often point to the need to re-order the ideas in the paragraph. Here, the awkwardness of the original disappeared once we had decided to start from the more **general** point (so many forms from BCC and so many from elsewhere) and then to move to the more **particular** (overlap between forms from BCC and from elsewhere). Finding the more logical ordering also allowed us to reduce the length of the original paragraph considerably, usually a sign that one is on the right track.

It is said that there was once an English motorist in Ireland who stopped his car to ask the way to Kilkenny.
"Sure and to goodness," replied the Irishman., "If I wanted to go to Kilkenny, I wouldn't be starting from here."

