Awkward Phrasing

What makes a sentence or phrase awkward? This is a difficult error to define because it can encompass multiple errors and widely varying solutions. However, we can pinpoint a few common characteristics in awkward writing:

- The sentence or phrase contains missing, misused, or redundant words.
- The sentence structure itself is incorrect or confusing.

Obviously, this overlaps with a number of other grammatical errors, such as misplaced or dangling modifiers, redundancies, faulty parallel structure, or wordiness. Read the following paragraph to see how awkward phrasing makes it difficult for readers to understand what the author is trying to say.

Sandra Sophomoric
Professor Puerile
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Emotional Intelligence

1In order for students to succeed in college and afterward in the workplace, emotional intelligence is necessary for them to attain. 2What is emotional intelligence? 3According to John Mayer, Peter Salovey, and David R. Caruso in their article “Emotional Intelligence: Theory, Findings, and Implications,” define EI as “the capacity to reason about emotions, and of emotions to enhance thinking” (197). 4From the way we evaluate the emotions we experience to the way we allow emotions to influence our thinking, are all a part of emotional intelligence. 5For example, a person in which there is emotional intelligence will take the time to “cool off” before addressing a situation that makes him or her angry. 6A person with less emotional intelligence might respond out of anger instead of rationally, in which it makes the situation worse. 7This is why it is important to be emotionally intelligent. 8Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso describe that the emotionally intelligent individual is more likely to succeed because he or she tends “to have more positive social interactions” (210). 9Therefore, there should be great attention paid in terms of the emotional intelligence of college students, how it affects their ability to succeed.

Whoa! Wasn’t that difficult to understand? The paragraph above demonstrates the pitfalls of awkward, unclear writing. But here’s the challenge: Identify each of the 9 sentences as either correct (C) or awkward (AWK) and then rewrite the awkward ones. You can rewrite the whole sentence, but try to stick to what you think the author is trying to say. You may want to break up some ideas into more than one sentence. (You may type or handwrite this, but make sure to number the sentences.)

Once you’ve completed this, discussion your corrections AND the questions on the back side of this sheet with a WRC tutor or instructor.

Continued...
A) Have I sufficiently corrected the awkward phrasing in this paragraph? (i.e. Is it still awkward? Did I misinterpret what the author was probably trying to say?)

B) What is the difference between a sentence that is complex and challenging to understand, and one that is awkward?

C) When am I most likely to write awkward phrases?

D) How can I identify awkward phrasing in my own writing?

After answering the four questions above, attach a confirmation sheet or get a signature below:

Instructor/Tutor Signature __________________________ Date __________