Revising to emphasize important points exercise

Choose a six to nine paragraph section (or two related sections) of a draft you have composed. This could be any piece of scientific writing—part of a dissertation, a critique of a paper, whatever—but it should be planned or revised for paragraph organization, so that each paragraph makes one point.

1) Evaluate the clarity of each of the sentences that state the main idea of each paragraph and section. How much effort would it require of your target audience to understand and remember them? Revise the two or three most difficult sentences. (If the main idea isn’t stated, write a sentence that does.) Explain how your revisions improve the understandability of each sentence.

2) Find a colleague outside your lab within (or similar to) your target audience. Ask this person to identify the overall message of each section and paragraph, and to explain how difficult this task was. How do his or her answers compare to yours? How surprising are the differences? Why do you think he or she chose those messages?

3) How well does the amount of text on each topic correlate with its importance? Why do you think you wrote too little or too much on some topics? How could you revise so that the amount of text better indicates how necessary each part is to the whole story?

4) Evaluate the placement of the key sentences—what position would best emphasize each one, and how does that compare to its actual position? How would you need to revise each paragraph to better emphasize the key idea?