

HAPPY

The Sentence

Effective Sentence

Effective Sentence

- A correct sentence may not express the idea it intends to express very clearly or forcefully.
- Correctness alone cannot make a good sentence. It has to be effective at the same time.
- Effective sentences have some or all of the following qualities: **unity, coherence, conciseness, emphasis, and variety.**

Unity

Unity refers to two qualities: there is **only one main idea** in a sentence, and **that idea is complete**.

- This does not mean that all sentences have to be short and simple. It is often necessary to write a long sentence with many parts in it. Such a sentence expresses **a central idea** supported or modified by various subordinate ideas, or two or more related parallel ideas.

In other words, ideas that are **closely connected** can be expressed in one sentence, while ideas that are not closely connected should not be put into one sentence.

Unity

What about this?

We paid a porter two dollars for taking our luggage to our rooms, and the hotel lobby was very elegant.

How can it be related?

Unrelated

We paid a porter two dollars for taking our luggage to our rooms. We found the hotel lobby was very elegant.

Related

Unity

What about this?

Dream of the Red Mansions is the best-known novel.

This seems to be a correct sentence, but its meaning is not complete. “ the best-known novel” should have been modified.

The two sentences that follow are clearer:

- Dream of the Red Mansions is one of the best-known classical Chinese novels.
- Of all the Chinese novels written before the 20th century Dream of the Red Mansions is perhaps the most popular.

Never Too Late

- 不要将不同的概念混在一起：
- My trouble is that I can not write English compositions well and ~~I like English very much.~~
- 表达概念不要含糊不清
- ~~I also don't know how to change it.~~ I also don't know how to improve my writing skills .
- 不要忘记交代背景情况：
- It seems too late to learn it now but it is worth trying. However, I'll try my best to solve this problem.
- It seems too late **for me** to learn it now. However, **as a college student**, I won't stop trying my best to solve this problem. It is never too late to learn.

Never Too Late

- My trouble is that I can not write English compositions well. I also don't know how to improve my writing skills. It seems **too late for me** to learn it now. However, **as a college student**, I won't stop trying my best to solve this problem. It is never too late to learn.

Coherence

Coherence means **clear and correct arrangement** of the parts of a sentence.

Since the meaning of English sentences mainly depends on word order, the arrangement of the parts of a sentence is especially important to accurate expression of ideas.

A coherent sentence is easy to understand and its meaning cannot be mistaken, because the connection between its words conforms to grammar rules and usage. An incoherent sentence is often hard to understand, and may be interpreted in different ways.

Coherence

Here are a few rules which may help to prevent incoherence:

- a. Do not use a misplaced or dangling modifier.
- b. Do not use different forms to express parallel ideas.
- c. Do not make unnecessary or confusing shifts in person, number, voice, tense or mood.
- d. Do not use a pronoun with ambiguous reference.

Coherence

What is a misplaced modifier?

- A modifier must be placed as close to the word it modifies as possible so that there is no misunderstanding about what it modifies. If **a modifier is placed in an awkward position—far away from what it modifies**, it is called a misplaced modifier.

A misplaced modifier often confuses the reader because it can modify either of the two words and can thus cause misunderstanding and absurdity about what it modifies.

Misplaced Modifiers

- a. That cat belongs to my neighbor with five kittens.
(Obviously, with five kittens modifies cat, not my neighbor. it should be placed between cat and belong.)
- b. The boy threw rock at the horse in the raincoat.
(In the raincoat describes boy, not horse.)
- c. Everyone is studying English in this school.
(This sentence may imply that the school mentioned is the only place where people can study English. Perhaps the speaker means that everyone in this school is studying English. So in this school is an attribute modifying the subject instead of an adverbial modifying the verb. The phrase should have been placed immediately after the subject. Its position determines its function.)

Coherence

Misplaced Modifiers

- Place modifiers where they will clearly modify the words intended.
- Place limiting modifiers carefully.
- Make each modifier refer to only one grammatical element.
- Keep subjects, verbs, and objects together.
- Keep parts of infinitives or verb phrases together.
- Position adverbs with care.
- Arrange adjectives appropriately.

Coherence

What is a dangling modifier?

Modifiers must have a word or word group that they can logically modify. If a modifier has nothing to logically modify in a sentence, it is called a dangling modifier.

A dangling modifier can make your sentence absurd because there is nothing in the sentence that it can logically modify.

Coherence

Dangling Modifiers

Examples:

a. When bathing the baby, the water should be warm, not hot.

Revised: When bathing the baby, you should make sure that the ...

b. Having played basketball for five hours, my dinner was cold.

Revised: Having played basketball for five hours, I found that my dinner had become cold.

Coherence

Dangling Modifiers

Examples:

c. When trying to lose weight, all snacks are best avoided.

Revised:

When trying to lose weight, you should avoid all snacks.

Note:

In order to avoid misplaced and dangling modifiers, you must be sure that either your modifiers **have a word to modify** or they are placed **as close to the word they modify as possible**.

Coherence

Faulty Parallelism (=)

What Is Faulty Parallelism?

- Parallelism means that two or more similar ideas are expressed by similar grammatical forms. If these similar ideas are not expressed in **identical grammatical forms**, they are regarded as faulty parallelism.

Coherence

Faulty Parallelism (=)

Examples:

Parallel Sentence

- Knowing how to study and learning how to budget time are important for college students.

Unparallel Sentence

- Knowing how to study and to learn to budget time are important for college students.

In the first parallel sentence above, two similar ideas "knowing how to study and learning how to budget time" are also made similar in structures. However, in the second unparallel sentence, these two similar ideas are not expressed similarly in grammatical forms; therefore, we say this sentence has faulty parallelism.

Coherence

Three Types of Parallel Structures

- In parallel structures, the items being joined must be balanced **word for word, phrase for phrase or clause for clause**.

Parallel ideas can be linked by coordinate conjunctions like and, but, for, or, yet, and nor.

Parallel ideas can also be joined by correlative conjunctions (coordinate conjunctions used in pairs) like both... and, not only... but also, either... or, neither... nor, and whether... or.

Coherence

1. Parallel words

- a. The fans **clapped and screamed** for more.
(Verbs)
- b. People begin to feel **faceless and insignificant**.
(Adjectives)
- c. Late for the dance, Ruth dressed **hastily and carelessly**. (Adverbs)

Coherence

2. Parallel phrases

- a. **To walk in the rain and to smell bread baking** are two of my greatest pleasures. (Infinitive Phrases)
- b. She has traveled **by land, by sea, and by air.** (Prepositional Phrases)
- c. She had **no time to be human, no time to be happy.** (Noun Phrases)

Coherence

3. Parallel clauses

- a. A father who spends time with his son and who thoughtfully answers his son's questions will be respected and loved.
(Dependent Clauses)
- b. The danger of the past was that men became slaves; the danger of the future is that men may become robots.
(Independent Clauses)

Coherence

Faulty Parallelism

• Faulty parallelism usually occurs when the items that are similar in idea are not made similar in structure.

a. Faulty: We judge our friends both by what they say and actions.

Revised: We judge our friends both by their words and by their actions

OR: We judge our friends both by what they say and by how they act.

b. Faulty: I enjoy watering the grass and to work in the garden

Revised: I enjoy watering the grass and working in the garden.

Coherence

Faulty Parallelism

c. Faulty: James is a man of great creativity and who is considerate.

Revised: James is a man of creativity and consideration.

OR: James is creative and considerate.

d. Faulty: The boy denied that he had entered the house and he had taken the money.

Revised: The boy denied that he had entered the house and that he had taken the money.

Obviously, sentences with parallel items are smoother, clearer, and more effective than those without parallel items.

Coherence

Faulty Parallelism

How can faulty parallelism be avoided?

1. To make the parallel clear, **repeat** a preposition, an article, the “to” of the infinitive, or the introductory word of a phrase a phrase or a clause.

Examples:

- It's easier to love humanity as a whole than to love one's neighbour.
- It is the things we think we know---because they are so elementary or because they surround us --- that often present the greatest difficulties when we are actually challenged to explain them.

Coherence

Faulty Parallelism

How can faulty parallelism be avoided?

2. Be sure that a *who*, *whom*, or *which* clause precedes *and who*, *and whom*, or *and which*.
- Faulty: Lisa is a woman with an open mind and who is seeking office.
 - Revised: Lisa is a woman who has an open mind and who is seeking office.

Coherence

Shifts

- Shift for no reason from past to present, from singular to plural, formal to informal, from one perspective to another, from indirect to direct, tends to obscure a writer's meaning and thus will cause needless difficulty in reading.

Coherence

Shifts

1. Avoid needless shifts between the present tense and the past tense.

- Shift: She invited me for lunch together, but I **did** not accept it because I **have** to go home at noon. (shift from past to present tense)
- Better: She because I **had** to go home at noon. (The verbs must be consistently in the past tense)

Coherence

Shifts

2. Shifts between the active voice and the passive voice.

- Shift; A group of ants is called a colony, but you refer to a group of bees as a swarm. (The voice shifts from passive to active)
- Better: A group of ants is called a colony, but a group of bees is referred to as a swarm.

Coherence

Shifts

3. Shifts among the indicative, imperative and subjunctive moods.

- Shift: First proofread your paper and make any necessary changes. Next you should retype it. (shift from imperative to indicative mood)
- Better: First proofread your paper and make any necessary changes. Next **retype** it. (verbs in imperative mood)
- Shift: It is therefore an important part of the park ranger's duty to watch the tourists and above all don't let anyone try to feed the tigers. (shift from indicative to imperative mood)
- Better: It is therefore an important part of the ranger's duty to watch the tourists and above all **not to** let any one try to feed the tigers (verbs in indicative mood)

Coherence

Shifts

4. Inconsistent shifts between the singular and the plural.

Many shifts in number are actually problems with pronoun— antecedent. A pronoun must agree in number with the word or words it replaces. If the word a pronoun refers to is singular, the pronoun must be singular; if the word is plural, the pronoun must be plural. (Note that the word a pronoun refers to is known as the antecedent)

- a. Just before a person speaks in public, they should do several relaxation exercises.
- Better: Just before a person speaks in public, he or she should do several relaxation exercises. **OR:** Just before speaking in public, a person should do several relaxation exercises.
- b. Anyone who travels to Xi'an will see many historic sites about which they have read.
- Better: People who travel to Xi'an will see many historic sites about which they have read. **OR:** Travelers to Xi'an will see many historic sites about which they have read.

Coherence

Shifts

5. shifts between the first, second, and third persons.

•If you start writing in the first person I, don't jump suddenly to the second person you. Or if you're writing in the third person they, don't shift unexpectedly to

- a. Shift: One reason that I like living in the city is that you can easily get what I want in big department stores.
 - Better: One reason that I like living in the city is that I can easily get what I want in big department stores.
- b. A man has to expect criticism when you succeed.
 - Better: A man has to expect criticism when he succeeds.
You have to expect criticism when you succeed.
One has to expect criticism when he succeeds.

Coherence

Shifts

6. Inconsistent shifts from indirect to direct discourse.

- Shift: The secretary said that he was sick and would I please read the minutes.
- Better: The secretary said that he was sick and asked me to read the minutes.

Coherence

Shifts

7. Needless shifts in perspective or viewpoint throughout the sentence (as well as throughout the larger elements of the composition).

- Faulty: The outside of the building looks like a fortress; the comfortable furnishings seem out of place.
- Better: The outside of the building looks like a fortress; inside, the comfortable furnishings seem out of place.



Homework

Coherence

Ambiguous Pronoun References

- A pronoun such as it or they derives its meaning from its antecedent, the noun it substitutes for. Therefore, a pronoun must refer clearly and unmistakably to its antecedent in order for the meaning to be clear.
- Ambiguous pronoun reference, however, causes the reader to be unsure of the meaning of a pronoun because it could refer to one antecedent or to the other.

Coherence

Ambiguous Pronoun References

How to avoid Ambiguous Pronoun References

1. Make a pronoun refer clearly to one antecedent.

when either of two nouns can be a pronoun's antecedent, the reference will not be clear.

Confusing: Emily Dickinson is sometimes compared with Jane Austen, but **she** was quite different.

Coherence

Ambiguous Pronoun References

- Revise such a sentence in one of two ways:

1) Replace the pronoun with the appropriate noun.

Clear: Emily Dickinson is sometimes compared with Jane Austen, but Dickinson [or Austen] was quite different.

2) Avoid repetition by rewriting the sentence.

Clear: Despite occasional comparison, Emily Dickinson and Jane Austen were quite different.

Clear: Though sometimes compared with her, Emily Dickinson was quite different from Jane Austen.

Coherence

Ambiguous Pronoun References

2. Place a pronoun close enough to its antecedent to ensure clarity.

A clause beginning **who**, **which**, or **that** generally should fall immediately after the word it refers to.

Confusing: Jody found a dress in the attic that her aunt had worn.

Clear: In the attic Jody found a dress that her aunt had worn.

Coherence

Ambiguous Pronoun References

3. Make a pronoun refer to a specific antecedent, not an implied one.

A pronoun should refer to a specific noun or other pronouns. The reader can only guess at the meaning of a pronoun when its antecedent is implied by the context, not stated outright.

Coherence

Ambiguous Pronoun References

3. Make a pronoun refer to a specific antecedent, not an implied one.

1) Use **this**, **that**, **which**, and **it** cautiously.

The most common kind of implied reference occurs when the pronoun **this**, **that**, or **it** refers to a whole idea or situation described in the preceding clause, sentence, or even paragraph. Such reference, often called **broad reference**, is acceptable only when the pronoun refers clearly to the entire preceding clause. For example:

I can be kind and civil to people, **which** is more than you can.

Here **which** could not possibly refer to anything but the whole preceding clause.

Coherence

Ambiguous Pronoun References

1) Use this, that, which, and it cautiously.

But if a pronoun might confuse a reader, you should avoid using it or provide an appropriate noun.

Confusing: The faculty agreed on changing the requirements, but it takes time.

Clear: The faculty agreed on changing the requirements, but **the change** took time.

Coherence

Ambiguous Pronoun References

1) Use this, that, which, and it cautiously.

Confusing: The British knew little of the American countryside, and they had no experience with the colonists' guerrilla tactics. **This** gave the colonists an advantage.

Clear: The British knew little of the American countryside, and they had no experience with the colonists' guerrilla tactics. **This ignorance and inexperience** gave the colonists an advantage.

Coherence

Ambiguous Pronoun References

2) Implied nouns are not clear antecedents.

A noun may be implied in some other word or phrases, such as an adjective (happiness implied in happy), a verb (driver implied in drive), or a possessive (mother implied in mother's). But a pronoun cannot refer clearly to an implied noun, only to a specific, stated one.

Confusing: Cohen's report brought her a lawsuit.

Clear: Cohen was sued over her report.

Confusing: Her reports on psychological development are generally unnoticed outside it.

Clear: Her reports on psychological development are generally unnoticed outside **the field**.

Coherence

Ambiguous Pronoun References

3) Titles of papers are not clear antecedents.

The title of a paper is entirely separate from the paper itself, so a pronoun should not be used in the opening sentence of a paper to refer to the title.

Title: How to Row a Boat

Not: This is not as easy as it looks.

But: Rowing a boat is not as easy as it looks.

Coherence

Ambiguous Pronoun References

4) Use *it* and *they* to refer to definite antecedents.

Use *you* only to mean “you, the reader.”

In conversation we commonly use expressions such as *It says in the paper* or *In Shandong they say*. But such indefinite use of *it* and *they* is inappropriate in writing. The constructions are not only unclear but wordy.

Confusing: In Chapter 4 of this book, it describes the early flights of the Wright brothers.

Clear: Chapter 4 of this book describes the early flights of the Wright brothers.

Confusing: In the average television drama, they present a false picture of life.

Clear: the average television drama presents a false picture of life.

Coherence

Ambiguous Pronoun References

5) Use the pronoun *it* only one way in a sentence.

We use *it* idiomatically in expressions such as *It is raining*. We use *it* to postpone the subject in sentences such as *It is true that more jobs are available to women today*. And we use *it* as a personal pronoun in sentences such as *Joan wanted the book but she couldn't find it*. All these uses are standard, but two of them in the same passage can confuse the reader.

Confusing: It is true that the Constitution sets limits, but it is also flexible.

Clear: The Constitution does set limits, but it is also flexible.

Coherence

Ambiguous Pronoun References

6) Use who, which and that for appropriate antecedents.

The relative pronouns **who**, **which**, and **that** commonly refer to persons, animals, or things. **Who** refers most often to persons but may also refer to animals that have names. **Which** refers to animals or things. **That** refers to animals and things and occasionally to persons when they are collective or anonymous. The possessive **whose** generally refers to people but may refer to animals and things to avoid awkward and wordy of which constructions.

Her dog, Toto, **who** accompanies her, gives her courage.

The Yangtze River, **which** is the longest river in China, flows into the East China Sea.

The infants **that** walk need constant tending.

The book **whose** binding broke was rare.



Homework

Conciseness

- We write sentences to express ideas. The use of words in a sentence, therefore, is decided by the idea it expresses. Needless words do not help express ideas; on the contrary, they obscure the meaning and confuse the reader. So one of the rules of sentence making is to use only the necessary words, or as few words as possible so long as the meaning is fully expressed.
- But often we tend to put a superfluous word here and there in a sentence. This habit may come from the way we talk. It is common in speaking to repeat a word, use words of similar meaning together, and change words we have said and even the structure of a sentence in the middle of it. But we should not do so in writing.

Conciseness

Ways to achieve conciseness

- a. Use a pronoun instead of repeating a noun;
- b. Use a word instead of a phrase with the same meaning, and use a phrase instead of a clause with the same meaning;
- c. Do not repeat words or phrases, if possible, in a sentence or in one that follows;
- d. Do not use different words or phrases with similar meanings in the same sentence;
- e. Do not repeat the same idea in different sentences except for emphasis.
- f. Rewrite passive sentences as active;
- g. Avoid constructions beginning with **there is** or **it is**.

Conciseness

The following sentence is wordy and can be simplified:

In the month of May people of different professions from all circles in this city will hold meetings to elect representatives, and these representatives will go to Beijing, the capital, in October to attend a national congress of model workers from the whole country.

A simpler version would be:

In May people of different professions in this city will elect representatives, who will attend a national congress of model workers in Beijing in October.

Conciseness

Here is another example:

There are trees on all sides of the house, and the trees hide the house. People can hardly see the house from the outside.

A simpler version would be:

Surrounded by trees, the house can hardly be seen from the outside;

or The house, hidden behind trees, can hardly be seen from the outside.



Homework

Emphasis

- As everyone knows that ideas differ in importance. If you need to show one idea is more important than the other, the expression of them should change in emphasis. You may emphasize ideas in many different **ways**—by word order, by periodic sentences, by the use of active voice or by repetition.

Emphasis

Ways to emphasize ideas

- Put the important ideas in the beginnings or endings of sentences (opposite). / Change a loose sentence into a periodic sentence.
- Use an occasional balanced sentence.
- Arrange series items in order of increasing importance (climax).
- Put a word or phrase out of its usual order.
- Carefully repeat key words and phrases.
- Set off important ideas with punctuation.
- Use the active voice.
- Write concisely.

Emphasis

Arranging ideas effectively

1. Using sentence beginnings and endings

- Readers automatically seek a writer's principal meaning in the main clauses of a sentence--- that is, in the subject that names a topic and the predicate that comments on the topic. Thus you can help readers understand your intended meaning by controlling the relation of the main clause and any modifiers attached to it.
- The most effective way to call attention to information is to place it first or last in the sentence, reserving the middle for incidentals 附帶事件.

Emphasis

1. Using sentence beginnings and endings

- Unemphatic: Education remains the most important single means of economic advancement, in spite of its shortcomings. [Emphasizes shortcomings.]
- Revised: In spite of its shortcomings, education remains the most important single means of economic advancement. [Emphasizes importance more than shortcomings.]
- Revised: Education remains, in spite of its shortcomings, the most important single means of economic advancement. [De-emphasizes shortcomings.]

Emphasis

1. Using sentence beginnings and endings

- Loose sentences begin with the subject and predicate plus their modifiers and then add more modifiers.
- Periodic sentences save the main clause until just before the end. (A variation of the periodic sentence names the subject at the beginning, follows it with a modifier, and then finishes with the predicate.)
- The periodic sentence creates suspense for the reader by reserving important information for the end. But it requires careful planning so that the reader can remember all the information leading up to the main clause, and the effort should pay off. Most writers save periodic sentences for when their purpose demands climatic emphasis.

Emphasis

2. Arranging parallel elements effectively

Series

- With parallelism, you use similar grammatical structures for ideas linked by **and**, **but**, and similar words. In addition, you should arrange the parallel ideas in order of their importance.

Unemphatic: The storm ripped the roofs off several buildings, killed ten people, and knocked down many trees in town.

Emphatic: The storm knocked down many trees in town, ripped the roofs off several buildings, and killed ten people.

Emphasis

2. Arranging parallel elements effectively

Balanced sentences

- A sentence is balanced when its clauses are parallel--- that is, matched in grammatical structure. Read the following aloud to hear their rhythm.
- If thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought. ---George Orwell
- I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I do something.— Helen Keller
- Balanced sentences are heavily emphatic but require thoughtful planning. When used carefully, they can be especially effective way to alert readers to a strong contrast between two sides.

Emphasis

Repeating ideas

- Careless repetition often clutters and weakens sentences. But planned repetition of key words and phrases can be an effective means of emphasis. Such repetition often combines with parallelism. It may occur in a series of sentences within a paragraph. Or it may occur in a series of words, phrases, or clauses within a sentence, as in the following examples:
- We have the tools, all the tools---we are suffocating in tools---but we cannot find the actual wood to work or even the actual hand to work it. --- Archibald Macleish

Emphasis

Seperating ideas

- When you save important information for the end of a sentence, you can emphasize it even more by setting it off from the rest of the sentence.

Look at the following:

- Mothers and housewives are the only workers who do not have regular time off, so they are the great vacationless class.
- Mothers and housewives are the only workers who do not have regular time off. They are the great vacationless class.

Emphasis

Seperating ideas

- You can vary the degree of emphasis by varying the extent to which you separate one idea from the others. A semicolon provides more separation than a comma, and a period provides still more separation.

Compare the following:

- Most of the reading which is praised for itself is neither literary nor intellectual, but narcotic.
- Most of the reading which is praised for itself is neither literary nor intellectual; it is narcotic.
- Most of the reading which is praised for itself is neither literary nor intellectual. It is narcotic.

Emphasis

Seperating ideas

- Sometimes a dash or a pair of dashes will isolate and thus emphasize a part of a statement.

For example:

- His schemes were always elaborate, ingenious, and exciting—and wholly impractical.

Emphasis

Preferring the active voice

- In the active voice of the verb, the subject acts. In the passive voice the subject is acted upon.
- The passive voice is indirect because it obscures or removes the actor. The active voice is more direct, vigorous, and emphatic. Further, all sentences turn on their verbs, which give sentences their motion, pushing them along. And active verbs push harder than passive ones.
- **Passive:** The new outpatient clinic was opened by the hospital administration and thus ensured that the costs of nonemergency medical care would be reduced.
- **Active:** The hospital administration opened the new outpatient clinic and reduced the costs of nonemergency medical.

Emphasis

Being concise

- **Conciseness---** brevity of expression--- aids emphasis no matter what the sentence structure. Unnecessary words detract from necessary word. They clutter sentences and obscure ideas.
- **Weak:** In my opinion the competition in the area of grades is distracting. It distracts many students from their goal, which is to obtain an education that is good. There seems to be a belief among a few students that grades are more important what is measured by them.
- **Emphatic:** the competition for grades distracts many students from their goal of obtaining a good education. A few students seem to believe that grades are more important that what they measure.



Homework

Variety

- In a paragraph or an essay, your sentences do not stand one by one. Rather, each stands in relation to those before and after it. To make sentences work together effectively, you need to vary their length, structure, and word order to reflect the importance and complexity of ideas. Variety sometimes takes care of itself, but you can practice techniques for achieving varied sentences.

Variety

•Ways to achieve variety among sentences

- Vary the length and structure of sentences so that important ideas stand out.
- Vary the beginnings of sentences with modifiers, transitional words and expressions, and occasional expletive (虚词) constructions.
- Occasionally, invert the normal order of subject, predicate, and object or complement.
- Use an occasional command, question, or exclamation.

Variety

I. Varying sentence length and structure

1. Varying length

In most contemporary writing, sentences vary from about 10 to about 40 words, with an average of 15 to 25 words.

If your sentences are all at one extreme or the other, your readers may have difficulty focusing on main ideas and seeing the relations among them.

a. If most of your sentences contain 35 words or more, you probably need to break some up into shorter, simpler sentences.

b. If most of your sentences contain fewer than 10 or 15 words, you probably need to add details to them or combine them through coordination and subordination.

Variety

I. Varying sentence length and structure

2. Rewriting strings of brief and simple sentences

A series of brief and simple sentences is both monotonous and hard to understand because it forces the reader to sort out relations among ideas. If you find that you depend on brief, simple sentences, work to increase variety by combining some of them into longer units that emphasize and link new and important ideas while de-emphasizing old or incidental information.

Variety

Compare the following:

Monotonous

In the revision italics indicate subordinate structures that were simple sentences in the original. With five sentences instead of the original nine, the revision emphasizes the moon's movement, our lengthening days, and the enormous span of time involved.

Every century, a month will someday be forty-seven of our present days long. We might eventually lose the moon altogether. Such great planetary movement rightly concerns astronomers. It need not worry us. The movement will take 50 million years.

- The moon is drifting away from the earth *at the rate of about one inch a year. At the rate of a thousandth of a second every century*, our days on earth are getting longer. A month will someday be forty-seven of our present days long, *if we don't eventually lose the moon altogether*. Such great planetary movement rightly concerns astronomers, but *it* need not worry us. It will take 50 million years.

Varied

Variety

I. Varying sentence length and structure

3. Rewrite strings of compound sentences

Because compound sentences are usually just simple sentences linked with conjunctions, a series of them will be as weak as a series of simple sentences, especially if the clauses of the compound sentences are all about the same length.

Variety

Compare the following:

Monotonous

- Physical illness may involve more than the body, for the mind may also be affected. Disorientation is common among sick people, but they are often unaware of it. They may reason abnormally, or they may behave immaturely.
- Physical illness may involve the mind *as well as the body. Though often unaware of it,* sick people are commonly disoriented. They may reason abnormally or *behave immaturely.*

Varied

The first passage creates a seesaw effect. The revision, with some main clauses shortened or changed into modifiers (italics), is both clearer and more emphatic.

Variety

II. Varying sentence beginnings

Most English sentences begin with their subjects. However, an unbroken sequence of sentences beginning with the subject quickly becomes monotonous. Your final arrangement of sentence elements should always depend on two concerns: the relation of a sentence to those preceding and following it and the emphasis required by your meaning. When you do choose to vary the subject-first pattern, you have several options.

Variety

II. Varying sentence beginnings

1. Adverb modifiers

Adverbs modify verbs, adjectives, other adverbs, and whole clauses. They can often fall in a variety of spots in a sentence.

For two successive weeks, the defendant's lawyer *relentlessly* cross-examined the stubborn witness.

Relentlessly, the defendant's lawyer cross-examined the stubborn witness *for two successive weeks*.

Relentlessly, *for two successive weeks* the defendant's lawyer cross-examined the stubborn witness for two successive weeks.

Variety

II. Varying sentence beginnings

2. Adjective modifiers

Adjectives, modifying nouns and pronouns, may include participles and participial phrases. These modifiers may sometimes fall at the beginning of a sentence to postpone the subject.

The witness was exhausted from his testimony, and he did not cooperate.

Exhausted from his testimony, the witness did not cooperate.

II. Varying sentence beginnings

3. Coordinating conjunctions and transitional expressions

When the relation between two successive sentences demands, you may begin the second with a connecting word or phrase: a coordinating conjunction such as *and* or *but* or a transitional expression such as *first*, *for instance*, *however*, or *therefore*.

The witness had expected to be dismissed after his first long day of cross-examination. He was not.

The witness had expected to be dismissed after his first long day of cross-examination. *But* he was not.

The price of clothes has risen astronomically in recent years. A cheap cotton shirt that once cost \$6.00 now costs \$25.00.

The price of clothes has risen astronomically in recent years. *For example*, a cheap cotton shirt that once cost \$6.00 now costs \$25.00.

Variety

II. Varying sentence beginnings

4. Occasional expletive constructions

An expletive construction---***it*** or ***there*** plus a form of ***be***---may occasionally be useful to delay and thus emphasize the subject of the sentence.

His judgement seems questionable, not his desire.

It is his judgement *that* seems questionable, not his desire.

Variety

III. Inverting the normal word order

- The word order of subject, verb, and object or complement is strongly fixed in English. Thus an inverted sentence can be emphatic.
- Inverted sentences used without need are artificial. Avoid descriptive sentences such as *Up came Larry and down went Cindy's spirits.*
- “Coming!” Away she skimmed **over** the lawn, **up** the path, **up** the steps, **across** the veranda, and **into** the porch.
“来啊!”她转身蹦着跳着地跑了,越过草地,跑上小径,跨上台阶,穿过凉台,进了门廊。

Variety

IV. Mixing types of sentences

- Most written sentences make statement. Occasionally, however, questions, commands, or exclamations may enhance variety.
- Questions may set the direction of a paragraph, as in *What does a detective do?* or *How is the percentage of unemployed workers calculated?* More often, though, the questions used in exposition or argument do not require answers but simply emphasize ideas that readers can be expected to agree with.
Commands occur frequently in and explanation of a process, particularly in directions.



Homework