

Sentence Variety: Part One

No. 5 in the Writing Center Handout Series

Paragraph after paragraph of sentences that are all the same can be very boring. To avoid a boring writing style, try altering your sentence structures. There are several aspects of the sentence which you can use to make your writing more varied and interesting.

Sentence Length

- Short sentences can be used to emphasize an idea. They are powerful.
- Longer sentences are best used to convey complex ideas. When an idea contains many interlocking parts, the relationship between the parts is better conveyed through the use of a longer sentence.

Varying Sentence Openings

Try not to begin all your sentences with the subject. A sentence's opening can consist of various elements other than the subject.

- **Transitional expressions:** Transitional expressions can be used to show chronological order, comparison and contrast, cause and effect, place, etc. These expressions help connect the sentences to each other. They include words like *first, next, finally, in addition, etc.* Phrases can also be used.

Example: On Friday morning she woke up early.

The phrase "On Friday morning" can go at the beginning of the sentence and set the time period for the action. Using transitional expressions shows the relationship between sentences.

- **Phrases:** There are several types of phrases which can be placed at the beginning of the sentence.

Prepositional Phrases – A preposition connects a noun or pronoun with the rest of the sentence; prepositions include words like *at, in, for, above, below, etc.* A prepositional phrase contains a preposition and the noun it connects to the rest of the sentence.

Example: Instead of saying She wrote her paper at the computer, you could say At the computer, she wrote her paper.

Verbal Phrases – A verbal is a verb form that functions as participle, an infinitive or a gerund. In other words, a form of the verb which does not act like a verb. A verbal phrase is made up of a verbal and a modifier, object or complement.

Example: Instead of writing She came to the Writing Center because she wanted to perfect her paper, you could write, Wanting to perfect her paper, she came to the Writing Center.

Absolute Phrases – They include a noun or pronoun and a participle. They modify the whole sentence instead of one word.

Example: Instead of writing She left the Writing Center happy because she finished her paper, you could write, Her paper written, she left the Writing Center happy.

- **Dependent Clauses:** A dependent clause has a subject and a predicate but cannot stand on its own as a sentence.

Example: Instead of writing I whistled a jaunty tune while I was waiting at the Writing Center, try writing While I was waiting at the Writing Center, I whistled a jaunty tune.

For more information on improving sentence variety, see
Writing Center Handout No. 6. "Sentence Variety: Part Two"
<http://www.asu.edu/duas/wcenter/variety.html>



AGNES SCOTT COLLEGE

MCCAIN G-13
(404) 471 6242