Sentence Variety: Part Two

No. 6 in the Writing Center Handout Series

See "Sentence Variety: Part 1" for instruction on varying sentences according to length or opening statements. This handout explains how to vary sentences according to type.

Varying Sentence Types

- Grammatical Types: There are four grammatical categories of sentences: simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex. These types are determined by the number of clauses in each sentence. For example, a simple sentence has one independent clause and no dependent clauses, while a compound complex sentence has at least two independent clauses and a dependent clause.

  Simple sentence example: *This sentence is an independent clause.*
  Compound-complex sentence example: *This sentence is called compound-complex sentence because of the number of clauses, and it is usually longer than a simple sentence.*

  Basically, you include more complex ideas in sentences with more clauses. By varying the number of clauses, you can vary the sentence structure.

- Functional Types: There are four functional types: declarative (making a statement), interrogative (asking a question), exclamatory (expressing a strong feeling) and imperative (giving a command). Declarative sentences are most common, but the others can be used for variety. Sentence variety is fun! Isn't it?

- Rhetorical Types: You can vary whether the main idea appears at the beginning or the end of the sentence.

Periodic sentences put the main idea at the end of the sentence.
This kind of sentence can be useful in adding suspense or shocking the reader.

> *Example:* Let's say I had this sentence in my paper: *He destroyed the world because he hated his sister and her little dog too.* There's nothing wrong with the sentence grammatically, but I want to emphasize the fact that he destroyed the world. To do this, I rewrite the sentence this way: *Because he hated his sister and her little dog, he destroyed the world.* The emphasis is on the end of the sentence, so the fact I want emphasized gets the emphasis.

Cumulative sentences begin with an independent clause, then add details.
This construction puts the main idea first and supports it with phrases containing details. Cumulative sentences are useful when you want to get your main point out on paper, and then offer your support. Rather than attempting to create suspense or extra emphasis, your goal is clarity.

> *Example:* *He decided to destroy the world and gathered all the materials he would need: a plastic cup, a garden hose, a jelly bean, and a large quantity of fertilizer.* The main idea is that he is going to destroy the world, and that idea is the first thing in the sentence; the sentence also offers detail on what he will use to accomplish his task.

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