

A. Mix Long and Short Sentences

One of the basic ways to achieve sentence variety is to use both long and short sentences. Beginning writers tend to overuse short, simple sentences, which quickly become monotonous. Notice the length of the sentences in the following paragraph:

PRACTICE 1

Revise and rewrite the following paragraph in a variety of sentence lengths. Recombine sentences in any way you wish. You may add connecting words or drop words, but do not alter the meaning of the paragraph. Compare your work with a fellow student's.

The park is alive with motion today. Joggers pound up and down the boardwalk. Old folks watch them from the benches. Couples row boats across the lake. The boats are green and wooden. Two teenagers hurl a Frisbee back and forth. They yell and leap. A shaggy white dog dashes in from nowhere. He snatches the red disk in his mouth. He bounds away. The teenagers run after him.



B. Use a Question, a Command, or an Exclamation

The most commonly used sentence is the **declarative sentence**, which is a statement. However, an occasional carefully placed **question, command, or exclamation** is an effective way to achieve sentence variety.

The Question

The previous paragraph begins and ends with **commands**, or **imperative sentences**. Sentences 1, 2, and 9 address the reader directly and have as the implied subject *you*. They tell the reader to do something: (*You try to imagine . . . (you) consider . . . (you) apply. . .*) Commands are most frequently used in giving directions,* but they can be used occasionally, as in the previous paragraph, to add sentence variety.

Sentences 3 and 8 in the Dyer paragraph are **exclamations**, sentences that express strong emotion and end with an exclamation point. These should be used very sparingly. In fact, some writers avoid them altogether, striving for words that convey strong emotion instead.

Be careful with the question, the command, and the exclamation as options in your writing. Try them out, but use them—especially the exclamation—sparingly.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT

Write a paragraph that begins with a rhetorical question. Choose one of the questions below or compose your own. Be sure that the body of the paragraph really does answer the question.

1. How has college (or anything else) changed me?
2. Should people pamper their pets?
3. Is marriage worth the risks?

C. Vary the Beginnings of Sentences

Begin with an Adverb

Since the first word of many sentences is the subject, one way to achieve sentence variety is by occasionally starting a sentence with a word or words other than the subject.

For instance, you can begin with an **adverb**†

1. He *laboriously* dragged the large crate up the stairs.
2. *Laboriously*, he dragged the large crate up the stairs.
3. The contents of the beaker *suddenly* began to foam.
4. *Suddenly*, the contents of the beaker began to foam.

- In sentences 2 and 4, the adverbs *laboriously* and *suddenly* are shifted to the first position. Notice the difference in rhythm that this creates, as well as the slight change in meaning: Sentence 2 emphasizes *how* he dragged the crate—*laboriously*; sentence 4 emphasizes the *suddenness* of what happened.
- A comma usually follows an adverb that introduces a sentence; however, adverbs of time—*often*, *now*, *always*—do not always require a comma. As a general rule, use a comma if you want the reader to pause briefly.

* For more work on giving directions, see Chapter 8, "Process."

† For more work on adverbs, see Chapter 35, "Adjectives and Adverbs."

PRACTICE 2

Rewrite the following sentences by shifting the adverbs to the beginning. Punctuate correctly.

EXAMPLE He skillfully prepared the engine for the race.

Skillfully, he prepared the engine for the race.

1. Two deer moved silently across the clearing.

2. The chief of the research division occasionally visits the lab.

3. Proofread your writing always.

4. Children of alcoholics often marry alcoholics.

5. Jake foolishly lied to his supervisor.

PRACTICE 3

Begin each of the following sentences with an appropriate adverb. Punctuate correctly.

1. _____ the detective approached the ticking suitcase.

2. _____ Maria Sharapova powered a forehand past her opponent.

3. _____ she received her check for \$25,000 from the state lottery.

4. _____ he left the beach.

5. _____ the submarine sank out of sight.

PRACTICE 4

Write three sentences of your own that begin with adverbs. Use different adverbs from those in Practices 2 and 3; if you wish, use *graciously*, *furiously*, *sometimes*. Punctuate correctly.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Begin with a Prepositional Phrase

A **prepositional phrase** is a group of words containing a **preposition** and its **object** (a noun or pronoun). *To you, in the evening, and under the old bridge* are prepositional phrases.*

Preposition	Object
to	you
in	the evening
under	the old bridge

Prepositional phrases are not always movable; rely on the meaning of the sentence to determine whether they are movable:

9. The dress *in the picture* is the one I want.
10. Joelle bought a bottle of *white wine* for dinner.

- *In the picture* in sentence 9 is a part of the subject and cannot be moved. *In the picture the dress is the one I want* makes no sense.
- Sentence 10 has two prepositional phrases. Which one *cannot* be moved to the beginning of the sentence? Why?

PRACTICE 5

Underline the prepositional phrases in each sentence. Some sentences contain more than one prepositional phrase. Rewrite each sentence by shifting a prepositional phrase to the beginning. Punctuate correctly.

EXAMPLE A large owl with gray feathers watched us from the oak tree.

From the oak tree, a large owl with gray feathers watched us.

1. The coffee maker turned itself on at seven o'clock sharp.

2. A growling Doberman paced behind the chainlink fence.

3. A man and a woman held hands under the street lamp.

4. They have sold nothing except athletic shoes for years.

5. A group of men played checkers and drank iced tea beside the small shop.

Join Ideas with an *-ing* Modifier

An excellent way to achieve sentence variety is by occasionally combining two sentences with an *-ing* modifier.

10. He peered through the microscope.
11. He discovered a squiggly creature.
12. *Peering through the microscope*, he discovered a squiggly creature.

- Sentence 10 has been converted to an *-ing* modifier by changing the verb *peered* to *peering* and dropping the subject *he*. *Peering through the microscope* now introduces the main clause, *he discovered a squiggly creature*.
- A comma sets off the *-ing* modifier from the word it refers to, *he*. To avoid confusion, the word referred to must appear in the immediately following clause.

An *-ing* modifier indicates that two actions are occurring at the same time. The main idea of the sentence should be contained in the main clause, not in the *-ing* modifier. In the preceding example, the discovery of the creature is the main idea, not the fact that someone peered through a microscope.

Be careful; misplaced *-ing* modifiers can result in confusing sentences: *He discovered a squiggly creature peering through the microscope*. (Was the creature looking through the microscope?)*

Convert sentence 13 into an *-ing* modifier and write it in the blank:

3. They conducted a survey of Jackson Heights residents.
They found that most opposed construction of the airport.

4. Three flares spiraled upward from the little boat.
They exploded against the night sky.

5. Virgil danced in the Pennsylvania Ballet.
Virgil learned discipline and self-control.

6. The hen squawked loudly.
The hen fluttered out of our path.

7. The engineer made a routine check of the blueprints.
He discovered a flaw in the design.

8. Dr. Salazar opened commencement exercises with a humorous story.
He put everyone at ease.

PRACTICE 12

Add either an introductory *-ing* modifier or a main clause to each sentence. Make sure that each *-ing* modifier refers clearly to the subject of the main clause.

EXAMPLE Reading a book a week, Jeff increased his vocabulary.

Exercising every day, I lost five pounds.

1. _____, she felt a sense of accomplishment.

2. Growing up in Hollywood, _____

3. _____, the father and son were
reconciled.
4. Interviewing his relatives, _____

5. _____, the wrecking ball swung
through the air and smashed into the brick wall.

PRACTICE 13

Write three sentences of your own that begin with *-ing* modifiers. Make sure that the subject of the sentence follows the modifier and be careful of the punctuation.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Join Ideas with a Past Participial Modifier

Some sentences can be joined with a **past participial modifier**. A sentence that contains a *to be* verb and a **past participle*** can be changed into a past participial modifier:

16. Judith *is trapped* in a dead-end job.
17. Judith decided to enroll at the local community college.
18. *Trapped in a dead-end job*, Judith decided to enroll at the local community college.

- In sentence 18, sentence 16 has been made into a past participial modifier by dropping the helping verb *is* and the subject *Judith*. The past participle *trapped* now introduces the new sentence.

* For more work on past participles, see Chapter 31, "The Past Participle."

Join Ideas with an Appositive

A fine way to add variety to your writing is to combine two choppy sentences with an appositive. An **appositive** is a word or group of words that renames or describes a noun or pronoun:

22. Carlos is the new wrestling champion.
23. He is a native of Argentina.
24. Carlos, *a native of Argentina*, is the new wrestling champion.

- *A native of Argentina* in sentence 24 is an appositive. It renames the noun *Carlos*.
- An appositive must be placed either directly *after* the word it refers to, as in sentence 24, or directly *before* it, as follows:

- Note that an appositive is set off by commas.

Appositives can add versatility to your writing because they can be placed at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of a sentence. When you join two ideas with an appositive, place the idea you wish to stress in the main clause and make the less important idea the appositive:

8. At the intersection stood a hitchhiker.
He was a young man dressed in a tuxedo.

9. We met for pancakes at the Cosmic Cafe.
It was a greasy diner on the corner of 10th and Vine.

PRACTICE 18

Write three sentences using appositives. In one sentence, place the appositive at the *beginning*; in one sentence, place the appositive in the *middle*; and in one sentence, place it at the *end*.

1.

2.

3.

Join Ideas with a Relative Clause

Relative clauses can add sophistication to your writing. A **relative clause** begins with *who*, *which*, or *that* and describes a noun or pronoun. It can join two simple sentences in a longer, more complex sentence:

35. Jack just won a scholarship from the Arts Council.
36. He makes wire sculpture.
37. Jack, *who makes wire sculpture*, just won a scholarship from the Arts Council.

- In sentence 37, *who makes wire sculpture* is a relative clause, created by replacing the subject *he* of sentence 36 with the relative pronoun *who*.
- *Who* now introduces the subordinate relative clause and connects it to the rest of the sentence. Note that *who* directly follows the word it refers to, *Jack*.

The idea that the writer wishes to stress is placed in the main clause, and the subordinate idea is placed in the relative clause. Study the combinations in sentences 38 through 40 and 41 through 43.

- 5. Drilling for oil in Alaska, acres of wilderness were destroyed.
- 6. Tired and proud, the website was completed at midnight.

- In sentence 5, who or what was *drilling for oil*? The sentence doesn't tell us.
- *Drilling for oil* is a dangling modifier. It can be corrected only by rewording the sentence:

- 7. Drilling for oil in Alaska, the EndRun Company destroyed acres of wilderness.

- In sentence 6, *tired and proud* is a dangling modifier. Surely the website isn't tired and proud, so who is? Rewrite the sentence to say what the writer probably intended.
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PRACTICE 21

Correct any confusing, misplaced, or dangling modifiers. Rearrange words or rewrite as necessary.

- 1. Plump sausages, the dinner guests looked forward to the main course.
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- 2. Soaring over the treetops in a hot air balloon, the view was spectacular.
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-

- 3. Powered by hydrogen, the engineers designed a new kind of car.
-
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- 4. I introduced my boyfriend to my father, who wanted to marry me.
-
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5. Revised to highlight his computer expertise, Marcelo was proud of his new résumé.

6. Jim, who loved to lick car windows, drove his dog to the vet.

7. Banging inside the dryer, Carla heard the lost keys.

8. We complained about the proposed building to the mayor, which we found ugly and too large for the neighborhood.

F. Review and Practice

Before practicing some of the techniques of sentence variety discussed in this chapter, review them briefly:

1. Mix long and short sentences.
2. Add an occasional question, command, or exclamation.
3. Begin with an adverb: *Unfortunately*, the outfielder dropped the fly ball.
4. Begin with a prepositional phrase: *With great style*, the pitcher delivered a curve.
5. Join ideas with a compound predicate: The fans *roared and banged* their seats.
6. Join ideas with an -ing modifier: *Leaping down-first onto the grass*, Beltran caught the ball.
7. Join ideas with a past participial modifier: *Frustrated by the call*, the batter kicked dirt onto home plate.
8. Join ideas with an appositive: *Beer, the cause of much rowdiness*, should not be sold at games.
9. Join ideas with a relative clause: *Box seats, which are hard to get for important games*, are frequently bought up by corporations.