

SENTENCE COMBINING/SENTENCE VARIETY

One mark of good writing is sentence variety. Practice the following techniques and try to use them as you revise.

1. One way to vary sentences is by rearranging the words. Descriptive words, for example, can be placed in front of nouns. Instead of writing three sentences--The problem required a solution. The problem was knotty. The solution had to be immediate.--you could write one: The knotty problem required an immediate solution.

Combine the following sentences into one by rearranging and eliminating words (by placing adjectives in front of nouns as above): A breeze floated in from the ocean. The breeze was humid. The ocean was calm.

1a. _____

2. Another approach is to move adverbs or prepositional phrases to the front of the sentence. The adverb at the end of this sentence--He called me yesterday.--could be moved to the front: Yesterday, he called me. The prepositional phrase at the end of this sentence--He called me at noon.--could be moved to the front: At noon, he called me.

In 2a below, write your own sentence with an adverb at the beginning. In 2b below, write your own sentence with a prepositional phrase at the beginning.

2a. _____

2b. _____

3. An easy, but sometimes overused, way to combine sentences is with a comma and conjunction: and, but, or, for, so, yet, nor. This will give you a compound sentence. Instead of two sentences--I could not see any pedestrians. I drove through the intersection. --you could write a compound sentence: I could not see any pedestrians, so I drove through the intersection.

In these sentences--Mary works hard. She always gets high marks.--you could omit the second subject and add the conjunction "and" to form a single sentence with a compound predicate (no comma is needed because you do not have a compound sentence here): Mary works hard and always gets high marks.

In 3a, make the following sentences compound by using a comma and a conjunction: She hardly ever studies. She gets terrible grades. In 3b, combine those two sentences by using a compound predicate.

3a. _____

3b. _____

4. Another way to link sentences is by using a semicolon either alone or with an adverbial conjunction: then, however, nevertheless, consequently, on the other hand, in addition, furthermore, therefore, for example, thus, also, etc. Using this method, the example in #3 could be written like this: I could not see any pedestrians; therefore, I drove through the intersection.

Use a semicolon with an adverbial conjunction to combine the sentences in #3a:

4a. _____

5. You can also combine sentences by making a list. Instead of three sentences--The engine coughed. The engine sputtered. Then it quit altogether.--you could write one: The engine coughed, sputtered, and then quit altogether.

Combine the following into one sentence by reducing repetition with a list: Alan opened the book. Alan took notes for five minutes. Alan returned the book to the shelf.

5a. _____

6. Sentences can be combined by using signal words (subordinating conjunctions) to make dependent clauses that connect ideas. Common signal words include the following: although, even though, though, after, as, as soon as, while, because, since, before, if, unless, until, when, whenever, etc. To illustrate, these two sentences--He studied for two hours. Then he ate dinner.--could be written like this: He ate dinner after he had studied for two hours. Or it could have been written like this: After he had studied for two hours, he ate dinner.

Using one of the signal words above, combine these two sentences into one: Your reasoning seems good. I cannot agree with your conclusion.

6a. _____

7. Another effective way to combine sentences is to omit unnecessary words, especially pronouns, linking verbs, and wordy phrases such as "is because" or "is when." For example, these two sentences--My street never has any heavy traffic. The reason that it never has any heavy traffic is because the pavement is full of potholes.--can be written much more concisely: My street never has any heavy traffic because the pavement is full of potholes.

Here is another example not only of omitting unneeded words but of rearranging the word order so that two sentences--The President doodled in her notebook. She was bored by the endless arguments.--can become one: Bored by the endless arguments, the President doodled in her notebook. (Note: This is an example of a past participle modifier.)

Combine the following sentences by using a past participle modifier: Fred tore up his paper, and he started all over. He was disgusted with the first draft.

7a. _____

8. Changing verbs to the -ing form (present participles) can often help you combine sentences effectively. Two short, repetitious sentences--Jay stepped out of the sauna. Jay glowed with health.-- could become one sentence: Stepping out of the sauna, Jay glowed with health. Or: Glowing with health, Jay stepped out of the sauna.

In 8a, combine the following sentences by using a present participle (-ing): The church dominates the town's center. The church stands tall above the other buildings. In 8b, write a sentence of your own using a present participle.

8a. _____

8b. _____

9. The word "with" is often an effective connector. For example, these four choppy sentences--Manny looks terrible. He has bags under his eyes. His hair is a mess. His clothes are rumpled.--could be one smooth one: Manny looks terrible, with bags under his eyes, messy hair, and rumpled clothes. Or: With bags under his eyes, messy hair, and rumpled clothes, Manny looks terrible.

By using "with" as a connector, combine the following sentences: They ran into a huge collie. The collie had a long coat. The collie had floppy ears. The collie had a ferocious bark.

9a. _____

10. Adjective clauses (also called relative clauses) are word groups which include a verb and are introduced by one of the following signal words (relative pronouns): who, whom, whose, which, that; these clauses can be used to combine sentences. For instance, these two sentences--My friend Sal stopped by yesterday. Sal is a painter--could be written as one: My friend Sal, who is a painter, stopped by yesterday.

An appositive, similar to an adjective clause but without the signal word or the verb, can lead to an even more concise sentence: My friend Sal, a painter, stopped by yesterday.

In 10a, use adjective clauses to combine the following sentences into one sentence: Lead is less valuable than titanium. Titanium is one of the lightest metals. Lead is one of the heaviest metals. In 10b, use appositives to combine those sentences.

10a. _____

10b. _____

Practice: Using any of the techniques above, combine each of the following groups of sentences into one, smooth sentence. (Do not use compound sentences unless directed to do so by your instructor.)

- a. Buster Keaton died penniless. Buster Keaton died alone. Buster Keaton was forgotten by Hollywood. He was perhaps the greatest comedian of the century.

- b. Murph's Diner is getting more popular every day. It has great steaks. It has cheap hamburgers. It has tasty hamburgers. It has French fries that are crisp.

- c. My father went downstairs. My father was alarmed by the strange sound. My father went downstairs to check for burglars.

- d. Her newspaper was late again. She called the paper boy's supervisor. She was angry.

- e. The actress was unpopular. The actress was talented. She walked proudly toward the stage. She accepted the award. She ignored all their hostile looks.

- f. The Super Bowl is on tomorrow. My wife will go shopping. She hates sports.