



# Sentence Variety

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Sentence variety is important because it reflects sophistication in your writing. Your essay can be full of great ideas and solid arguments, but it won't receive the best possible grade unless your writing is sophisticated. This handout discusses some common problems and solutions to enhance sentence variety.

## For short, choppy sentences

### 1. Coordination:

and, but, or, nor, yet, for, so

Join complete sentences, clauses, and phrases with coordinators:

**example:** Doonesbury cartoons satirize contemporary politics. The victims of political corruption pay no attention. They prefer to demand that newspapers not carry the strip.

**revision:** Doonesbury cartoons laugh at contemporary politicians, **but** the victims of political corruption pay no attention **and** prefer to demand that newspapers not carry the strip.

### 2. Subordination:

after, although, as, as if, because, before, even if, even though, if, if only, rather than, since, that, though, unless, until, when, where, whereas, wherever, whether, which, while

Link two related sentences to each other so that one carries the main idea and the other is no longer a complete sentence (subordination). Use connectors such as the ones listed above to show the relationship.

**example:** The campus parking problem is getting worse. The university is not building any new garages.

**revision:** The campus parking problem is getting worse **because** the university is not building any new garages.

**example:** The US has been overly dependent on foreign oil for many years. Alternate sources of energy are only now being sought.

**revision: Although** the US has been overly dependent on foreign oil for many years, alternate sources are only now being sought.

Notice in these examples that the location of the clause beginning with the dependent marker (the connector word) is flexible. This flexibility can be useful in creating varied rhythmic patterns over the course of a paragraph. See the section below called "**For the same pattern or rhythm in a series of sentences.**"

## For the same subject or topic repeated in consecutive sentences

### 1. Relative pronouns

which, who, whoever, whom, that, whose

Embed one sentence inside the other using a clause starting with one of the relative pronouns listed above.

**example:** Indiana used to be mainly an agricultural state. It has recently attracted more industry.

**revision:** Indiana, **which** used to be mainly an agricultural state, has recently attracted more industry.

**example:** One of the cameras was not packed very well. It was damaged during the move.

**revision:** The camera **that** was not packed very well was damaged during the move.

**example:** The experiment failed because of Murphy's Law. This law states that if something can go wrong, it will.

**revision:** The experiment failed because of Murphy's Law, **which** states that if something can go wrong, it will.

**example:** Doctor Ramirez specializes in sports medicine. She helped my cousin recover from a basketball injury.

**revision 1:** Doctor Ramirez, **who** specializes in sports medicine, helped my cousin recover from a basketball injury.

**revision 2:** Doctor Ramirez, **whose** specialty is sports medicine, helped my cousin recover from a basketball injury.

### 2. Participles

Present participles end in *-ing*, for example: speaking, carrying, wearing, dreaming.

Past participles usually end in *-ed*, *-en*, *-d*, *-n*, or *-t* but can be irregular, for example: worried, eaten, saved, seen, dealt, taught.

For more on participles, see our handout on verbals at [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g\\_verbals.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g_verbals.html).

Eliminate a **be** verb (am, is, was, were, are) and substitute a participle.

**example:** Wei Xie was surprised to get a phone call from his sister. He was happy to hear her voice again.

**revision 1:** Wei Xie, surprised to get a phone call from his sister, was happy to hear her voice again.

**revision 2:** Surprised to get a phone call from her, Wei Xie was happy to hear his sister's voice again.

### 3. Prepositions

about, above, across, after, against, along, among, around, as, behind, below, beneath, beside, between, by, despite, down, during, except, for, from, in, inside, near, next to, of, off, on, out, over, past, to, under, until, up, with

Turn a clause into a prepositional phrase (a phrase beginning with a preposition, such as the ones listed above).

**example 1:** The university has been facing pressure to cut its budget. It has eliminated funding for important programs. (two independent clauses)

**example 2:** The university, which has been facing pressure to cut its budget, has eliminated funding for important programs. (subject, relative clause, predicate)

**example 3:** Because it has been facing pressure to cut its budget, the university has eliminated funding for important programs. (dependent clause, independent clause)

**revised:** Under pressure to cut its budget, the university has eliminated funding for important programs. (prepositional phrase, independent clause: the most concise version of the four)

## For the same pattern or rhythm in a series of sentences

### 1. Dependent markers

See the list of dependent markers above called "**Subordination.**"

Put clauses and phrases with dependent markers at the beginning of some sentences instead of starting each sentence with the subject. In this example the structure and content of the sentences remains the same, but some elements are moved around to vary the rhythm.

**example:** The room fell silent when the TV newscaster reported the story of the earthquake. We all stopped what we were doing. The pictures of the quake shocked us. We could see that large sections of the city had been completely destroyed.

**revised:** When the TV newscaster reported the story of the earthquake, the room fell silent. We all stopped what we were doing. The pictures of the quake shocked us because we could see that large sections of the city had been completely destroyed.

## 2. Transitional words and phrases

accordingly, after all, afterward, also, although, and, but, consequently, despite, earlier, even though, for example, for instance, however, in conclusion, in contrast, in fact, in the meantime, in the same way, indeed, just as... so, meanwhile, moreover, nevertheless, not only... but also, now, on the contrary, on the other hand, on the whole, otherwise, regardless, shortly, similarly, specifically, still, that is, then, therefore, though, thus, yet

Vary the rhythm by adding transitional words at the beginning of some sentences.

**example:** Fast food corporations are producing and advertising bigger items and high-fat combination meals. The American population faces a growing epidemic of obesity.

**revised:** Fast food corporations are producing and advertising bigger items and high-fat combination meals. Meanwhile, the American population faces a growing epidemic of obesity.

Vary the rhythm by alternating short and long sentences.

**example:** They visited Canada and Alaska last summer to find some native American art. In Anchorage stores they found some excellent examples of soapstone carvings. But they couldn't find a dealer selling any of the woven wall hangings they wanted.

**revised:** They visited Canada and Alaska last summer to find some native American art, such as soapstone carvings and wall hangings. Anchorage stores had many soapstone items available. Still, they were disappointed to learn that wall hangings, which they had especially wanted, were difficult to find.

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