

(last updated 5/18/16)¹

In writing, it is important to vary the way you form your sentences. Too many short or complex sentences in a row can make the writing feel monotonous. In this tip sheet, you will find suggestions for varying the way you construct your sentences.

<p>Basic sentences are constructed in the traditional order: Subject + verb + (object/complement). This order can be varied to give your sentences freshness.</p>	<p><i>Basic order:</i> A magazine stand sits next to my coffee table.</p> <p><i>Inverted order:</i> Next to my coffee table sits a magazine stand.</p>
<p>A conjunction is useful in joining two sentences with similar ideas, thus creating a “compound sentence.” Conjunctions (<i>for, as, nor, but, or, yet, so</i>) are preceded by a comma when they join two complete sentences.</p>	<p><i>Two sentences:</i> The movie was much longer than Kara anticipated. She fell asleep twice.</p> <p><i>Compound sentence with a conjunction:</i> The movie was much longer than Kara anticipated, she fell asleep twice.</p>
<p>Adding a subordinator to a sentence makes it a dependent clause. Joining two related ideas with a subordinator (<i>after, although, as, because, before, if, since, that, though, unless, etc.</i>) will help you create varied sentences. Subordinators allow you to move the clause around from the beginning to the end of the sentence—or insert it into the middle. Follow the clause with a comma if it starts the sentence. If it comes at the end, you can delete the comma if the clause is short or if it is nonessential. If the clause is in the middle, use commas before and after.</p>	<p><i>Two complete sentences:</i> My alkaline batteries would not work in my digital camera. My camera needs lithium batteries.</p> <p><i>A sentence with a subordinate clause:</i> My alkaline batteries would not work in the digital camera it needs the lithium type. OR my camera needs lithium batteries, the alkaline type would not work. OR Alkaline batteries, my camera needs the lithium type, would not work.</p>
<p>To write in a more concise style, try condensing sentences into descriptive phrases beginning with <i>-ing</i> verbs. Just make sure the doer of the <i>-ing</i> action appears as the subject in the sentence. This sort of phrase can be placed before or after the noun it describes.</p>	<p><i>Two complete sentences:</i> The pen was leaking blue ink. The pen ruined Marcus’s essay on William Butler Yeats.</p> <p><i>A sentence with an -ing participial phrase:</i> Leaking blue ink, the pen ruined Marcus’s essay on William Butler Yeats.</p>

¹ Most of the information included in this tip sheet has been suggested by the following sources:

“Sentence Variety.” [Online Writing Lab \(OWL\)](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/general/gl_sentvar.html). Purdue University. 7 June 2004

http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/general/gl_sentvar.html and

Hairston, Maxine, et al. *The Scott Foresman Handbook for Writers*. 7th ed. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2004. 295-364.

<p>Prepositional phrases follow nouns to describe them, or move around a sentence to describe verbs. Prepositional phrases include a preposition (<i>on, around, up, by, through etc.</i>) and an object. By including a prepositional phrase in the sentence, or by rearranging the position of the prepositional phrase, you can vary the rhythm and structure of your sentences.</p>	<p><i>A sentence with no prepositional phrase:</i> We sat drinking lemonade.</p> <p><i>A sentence including a prepositional phrase:</i> We sat</p>