

Sentence Style: Ways of Strengthening Meaning

Compare the following sentences:

The theater was packed. Gustave and I found our seats.

Although the theater was packed, Gustave and I managed to find our seats.

The sentences convey the same message, but there is an obvious difference in style between them. **Style** is the way a writer uses language to express ideas and adapt language to suit the occasion. Style involves both the kinds of words a writer chooses (**diction**) and the way the writer joins those words to form sentences.

If your writing sounds dull, you may need to vary the beginnings and the structures of some of your sentences to make your writing smooth and effective. Study the following approaches to learn how to vary writing style.

- Vary sentence beginnings. Most beginning writers use sentences that begin with a plain subject. You can improve your writing style if you begin some sentences with introductory words, phrases, and clauses.

EXAMPLES: **People approach** mourning in different ways. [Sentence begins with a plain subject.]

Ironically, Thomas Hardy overturns the speaker's expectations about why the little dog comes to its master's grave. [Sentence begins with a single-word modifier.]

In Great Britain, a widow may dress in black for the rest of her life. [Sentence begins with a prepositional phrase.]

- Vary sentence structure. Too many simple sentences make writing dull. Enrich your writing by mixing simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences.

EXAMPLES: Matthew Arnold's most famous poem is "Dover Beach." [simple sentence]

Housman's outlook on life was pessimistic, and his poems express his feelings of emptiness. [compound sentence]

After Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo, he was exiled to Saint Helena. [complex sentence]

When the potato blight caused a famine in Ireland, many people were forced to emigrate, and some went to English cities. [compound-complex sentence]

Exercise A Varying Sentence Beginnings

Revise each sentence so that it begins with an introductory word, phrase, or clause modifier. You may add, delete, or change words if necessary.

EXAMPLE: Stonehenge, a mysterious, ancient monument, is a series of stones set in circles.

A mysterious, ancient monument, Stonehenge is a series of stones set in circles.

1. Many theories about the origins of the stones exist today.

2. Neolithic people created Stonehenge in about 3100 B.C., using deer antlers to dig a circular ditch.

3. The structure may have been used to determine when important astronomical events would occur, according to several British scholars.

4. Many of the large stones have fallen during the centuries since Stonehenge was built.

5. The British government began to restore Stonehenge in 1922.

Exercise B Revising a Paragraph by Varying Sentence Structure

On a separate sheet of paper, revise the following paragraph by varying the structure of the sentences. Use simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences.

Some people compare modern cities unfavorably to cities of the eighteenth century. These people decry the toll of progress on the modern world. The cities of two hundred years ago had problems, too. In many cities, crime was rampant. Poverty was rampant. Public sanitation was practically nonexistent. Old fruit and vegetables lay in the street and rotted. Public parks as we know them did not exist. Open space was used for grazing animals. The animals were awaiting the butcher's knife. Traffic jams were constant. There were no traffic lights. The streets were narrow and crowded. There were no automobiles, of course. There were horse-drawn carts and wagons. Uncovered waste was a problem.

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