

## Writing Center Handouts

### Sentence Variety

*Having varied sentences keeps your reader interested, presents information in a new way, and enhances your writing skill. When you work on varying the style of your sentences, the point is not to be random and chaotic. Variety does not mean having no strategy. Sentence structures should reflect and enhance content. If a thought is simple, its sentence structure can also be simple. There is no need to fluff up a sentence just to make it seem longer and more complex. The best strategy here is to practice matching your sentence structure to your content.*

#### Problematic Examples and How to Fix Them:

- Example of Redundancy
  - John and I went to the store because we needed charcoal for the barbeque. John and I are having a barbeque because it is the first week of summer. At the barbeque, we are going to make hamburgers. After the barbeque, we are going to have a water balloon fight.
- How to Fix It
  - John and I went to the store because we needed charcoal for the barbeque. Since it is the first week of summer, we thought taking out the grill was good idea. The plan is to serve hamburgers and then, after everyone is done eating, have a water balloon fight.

Using commas, switching how the sentences begin, and adding details without repeating the same ideas all help to keep the reader engaged.

- Example of Length
  - The grass was soaking wet after the storm and the fact that it was wet made it really hard to walk the dog without him getting water all over the floor after we brought him inside.
- How to Fix It
  - The dog got water all over the floor after his walk because it had just rained.

Being concise and only saying the most necessary details helps keep sentences short. Keep in mind that things are implied and do not always require explanation.

#### Consider This:

“This sentence has five words. Here are five more words. Five-word sentences are fine. But several together become monotonous. Listen to what is happening. The writing is getting boring. The sound of it drones. It’s like a stuck record. The ear demands some variety.

Now listen. I vary the sentence length, and I create music. Music. The writing sings. It has a pleasant rhythm, a lilt, a harmony. I use short sentences. And I use sentences of medium length. And sometimes when I am certain the reader is rested, I will engage him with a sentence of considerable length, a sentence that burns with energy and builds with all the impetus of a crescendo, the roll of the drums, the crash of the cymbals- sounds that say listen to this, it is important.” – Gary Provost

### **Ways to Alter Your Sentences:**

- A Simple Sentence contains a subject and a verb, and it may also have an object and modifiers. However, it contains only one independent clause.
  - Ex: She completed her literature review.
  
- A Compound Sentence contains at least two independent clauses. These two independent clauses can be combined with a comma and a coordinating conjunction or with a semicolon.
  - Ex: She completed her literature review, and she completed her reference list.
  
- A Complex Sentence contains at least one independent clause and at least one dependent clause. Dependent clauses can refer to the subject (who, which) the sequence/time (since, while), or the causal elements (because, if) of the independent clause.
  - Ex: Although she completed her literature review, she still needed to work on her methods section.
  
- Sentence types can also be combined. A Compound-Complex Sentence contains at least two independent clauses and at least one dependent clause.
  - Ex: She completed her literature review, but she still needs to work on her methods section even though she finished her methods course last semester.