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Chapter 6

Refining Your Writing: How Do I Improve My Writing Technique?

6.1 Sentence Variety

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify ways to vary sentence structure.
2. Write and revise sentence structure at the beginning of sentences.
3. Write and revise sentence structure by connecting ideas.

Have you ever ordered a dish in a restaurant and been not happy with its taste, even though it contained most of your favorite ingredients? Just as a meal might lack the finishing touches needed to spice it up, so too might a paragraph contain all the basic components but still lack the stylistic finesse required to engage a reader. Sometimes writers have a tendency to reuse the same sentence pattern throughout their writing. Like any repetitive task, reading text that contains too many sentences with the same length and structure can become monotonous and boring. Experienced writers mix it up by using an assortment of sentence patterns, rhythms, and lengths.

In this chapter, you will follow a student named Naomi who has written a draft of an essay but needs to refine her writing. This section discusses how to introduce sentence variety into writing, how to open sentences using a variety of techniques, and how to use different types of sentence structure when connecting ideas. You can use these techniques when revising a paper to bring life and rhythm to your work. They will also make reading your work more enjoyable.

Incorporating Sentence Variety

Experienced writers incorporate **sentence variety**¹ into their writing by varying sentence style and structure. Using a mixture of different sentence structures reduces repetition and adds emphasis to important points in the text. Read the following example:

1. Use of an assortment of sentence patterns, rhythms, and lengths to reduce repetition and emphasize important points in a text.

During my time in office I have achieved several goals. I have helped increase funding for local schools. I have reduced crime rates in the neighborhood. I have encouraged young people to get involved in their community. My competitor argues that she is the better choice in the upcoming election. I argue that it is ridiculous to fix something that isn't broken. If you reelect me this year, I promise to continue to serve this community.

In this extract from an election campaign, the writer uses short, simple sentences of a similar length and style. Writers often mistakenly believe that this technique makes the text more clear for the reader, but the result is a choppy, unsophisticated paragraph that does not grab the audience's attention. Now read the revised paragraph with sentence variety:

During my time in office, I have helped increase funding for local schools, reduced crime rates in the neighborhood, and encouraged young people to get involved in their community. Why fix what isn't broken? If you reelect me this year, I will continue to achieve great things for this community. Don't take a chance on an unknown contender; vote for the proven success.

Notice how introducing a short rhetorical question among the longer sentences in the paragraph is an effective means of keeping the reader's attention. In the revised version, the writer combines the choppy sentences at the beginning into one longer sentence, which adds rhythm and interest to the paragraph.

Tip

Effective writers often implement the "rule of three," which is basically the thought that things that contain three elements are more memorable and more satisfying to readers than any other number. Try to use a series of three when providing examples, grouping adjectives, or generating a list.

EXERCISE 1

Combine each set of simple sentences into a compound or a complex sentence. Write the combined sentence on your own sheet of paper.

1. Heroin is an extremely addictive drug. Thousands of heroin addicts die each year.
2. Shakespeare's writing is still relevant today. He wrote about timeless themes. These themes include love, hate, jealousy, death, and destiny.
3. Gay marriage is now legal in six states. Iowa, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine all permit same-sex marriage. Other states are likely to follow their example.
4. Prewriting is a vital stage of the writing process. Prewriting helps you organize your ideas. Types of prewriting include outlining, brainstorming, and idea mapping.
5. Mitch Bancroft is a famous writer. He also serves as a governor on the local school board. Mitch's two children attend the school.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Using Sentence Variety at the Beginning of Sentences

Read the following sentences and consider what they all have in common:

John and Amanda will be analyzing this week's financial report.

The car screeched to a halt just a few inches away from the young boy.

Students rarely come to the exam adequately prepared.

If you are having trouble figuring out why these sentences are similar, try underlining the subject in each. You will notice that the subject is positioned at the beginning of each sentence—*John and Amanda*, *the car*, *students*. Since the subject-verb-object pattern is the simplest sentence structure, many writers tend to

overuse this technique, which can result in repetitive paragraphs with little sentence variety.

Naomi wrote an essay about the 2008 government bailout. Read this excerpt from Naomi's essay:

The subprime mortgage crisis left many financial institutions in jeopardy. Some economists argued that the banks were too big to fail. Other economists argued that an infusion of credit and debt would exacerbate the problem. The government finally opted to bail out the banks. It acquired \$700 billion worth of mortgage-backed securities in 2008. The government optimistically expects these assets will rise in value. This will profit both the banks and the government itself.

This section examines several ways to introduce sentence variety at the beginning of sentences, using Naomi's essay as an example.

Starting a Sentence with an Adverb

One technique you can use so as to avoid beginning a sentence with the subject is to use an adverb. An **adverb**² is a word that describes a verb, adjective, or other adverb and often ends in *-ly*. Examples of adverbs include *quickly*, *softly*, *quietly*, *angrily*, and *timidly*. Read the following sentences:

She slowly turned the corner and peered into the murky basement.

Slowly, she turned the corner and peered into the murky basement.

In the second sentence, the adverb *slowly* is placed at the beginning of the sentence. If you read the two sentences aloud, you will notice that moving the adverb changes the rhythm of the sentence and slightly alters its meaning. The second sentence emphasizes how the subject moves—slowly—creating a buildup of tension. This technique is effective in fictional writing.

2. A word that describes a verb, adjective, or other adverb and often ends in *-ly*.

Note that an adverb used at the beginning of a sentence is usually followed by a comma. A comma indicates that the reader should pause briefly, which creates a useful rhetorical device. Read the following sentences aloud and consider the effect of pausing after the adverb:

Cautiously, he unlocked the kennel and waited for the dog's reaction.

Solemnly, the policeman approached the mayor and placed him under arrest.

Suddenly, he slammed the door shut and sprinted across the street.

In an academic essay, moving an adverb to the beginning of a sentence serves to vary the rhythm of a paragraph and increase sentence variety.

The subprime mortgage crisis left many financial institutions in jeopardy. Some economists argued that the banks were too big to fail. Other economists argued that an infusion of credit and debt would exacerbate the problem. The government finally opted to bail out the banks. It acquired \$700 billion worth of mortgage-backed securities in 2008. The government optimistically expects these assets will rise in value. This will profit both the banks and the government itself.

Naomi has used two adverbs in her essay that could be moved to the beginning of their respective sentences. Notice how the following revised version creates a more varied paragraph:

The subprime mortgage crisis left many financial institutions in jeopardy. Some economists argued that the banks were too big to fail. Other economists argued that an infusion of credit and debt would exacerbate the problem. Finally, the government opted to bail out the banks. It acquired \$700 billion worth of mortgage-backed securities in 2008. Optimistically, the government expects these assets will rise in value. This will profit both the banks and the government itself.

Tip

Adverbs of time—adverbs that indicate *when* an action takes place—do not always require a comma when used at the beginning of a sentence. Adverbs of time include words such as *yesterday, today, later, sometimes, often, and now.*

EXERCISE 2

On your own sheet of paper, rewrite the following sentences by moving the adverbs to the beginning.

1. The red truck sped furiously past the camper van, blaring its horn.
2. Jeff snatched at the bread hungrily, polishing off three slices in under a minute.
3. Underage drinking typically results from peer pressure and lack of parental attention.
4. The firefighters bravely tackled the blaze, but they were beaten back by flames.
5. Mayor Johnson privately acknowledged that the budget was excessive and that further discussion was needed.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Starting a Sentence with a Prepositional Phrase

A **prepositional phrase**³ is a group of words that behaves as an adjective or an adverb, modifying a noun or a verb. Prepositional phrases contain a **preposition**⁴ (a word that specifies place, direction, or time) and an **object of the preposition**⁵ (a noun phrase or pronoun that follows the preposition).

Table 6.1 Common Prepositions

above	beneath	into	till
across	beside	like	toward
against	between	near	under
after	beyond	off	underneath
among	by	on	until
around	despite	over	up
at	except	past	with
before	for	since	without
behind	from	through	
below	inside	throughout	

Read the following sentence:

The terrified child hid **underneath the table**.

In this sentence, the prepositional phrase is *underneath the table*. The preposition *underneath* relates to the object that follows the preposition—*the table*. Adjectives may be placed between the preposition and the object in a prepositional phrase.

The terrified child hid **underneath the heavy wooden table**.

3. A group of words that begins with a preposition.
4. A word that connects a noun, pronoun, or verb to another word that describes or modifies it. Common prepositions include *in, on, under, near, by, with,* and *about*.
5. A noun phrase or pronoun that follows a preposition and completes its meaning.

Some prepositional phrases can be moved to the beginning of a sentence in order to create variety in a piece of writing. Look at the following revised sentence:

Underneath the heavy wooden table, the terrified child hid.

Notice that when the prepositional phrase is moved to the beginning of the sentence, the emphasis shifts from the subject—the terrified child—to the location in which the child is hiding. Words that are placed at the beginning or end of a sentence generally receive the greatest emphasis. Take a look at the following examples. The prepositional phrase is underlined in each:

The bandaged man waited **in the doctor's office**.

In the doctor's office, the bandaged man waited.

My train leaves the station **at 6:45 a.m.**

At 6:45 a.m., my train leaves the station.

Teenagers exchange drugs and money **under the railway bridge**.

Under the railway bridge, teenagers exchange drugs and money.

Prepositional phrases are useful in any type of writing. Take another look at Naomi's essay on the government bailout.

The subprime mortgage crisis left many financial institutions in jeopardy. Some economists argued that the banks were too big to fail. Other economists argued that an infusion of credit and debt would exacerbate the problem. The government finally opted to bail out the banks. It acquired \$700 billion worth of mortgage-backed securities in 2008. The government optimistically expects these assets will rise in value. This will profit both the banks and the government itself.

Now read the revised version.

Throughout 2007 and 2008, the subprime mortgage crisis worsened, leaving many financial institutions in jeopardy. According to some economists, the banks were too big to fail. Other economists argued that an infusion of credit and debt would exacerbate the problem. Despite public objections, the government finally opted to bail out the banks. Since the 2008 bill passed, it has acquired \$700 billion worth of mortgage-backed securities. The government optimistically expects these assets will rise in value. This will profit both the banks and the government itself.

The underlined words are all prepositional phrases. Notice how they add additional information to the text and provide a sense of flow to the essay, making it less choppy and more pleasurable to read.

Unmovable Prepositional Phrases

Not all prepositional phrases can be placed at the beginning of a sentence. Read the following sentence:

I would like a chocolate sundae **without whipped cream**.

In this sentence, *without whipped cream* is the prepositional phrase. Because it describes the chocolate sundae, it cannot be moved to the beginning of the sentence. “Without whipped cream I would like a chocolate sundae” does not make as much (if any) sense. To determine whether a prepositional phrase can be moved, we must determine the meaning of the sentence.

Overuse of Prepositional Phrases

Experienced writers often include more than one prepositional phrase in a sentence; however, it is important not to overload your writing. Using too many modifiers in a paragraph may create an unintentionally comical effect as the following example shows:

The treasure lay buried under the old oak tree, behind the crumbling fifteenth-century wall, near the schoolyard, where children played merrily during their lunch hour, unaware of the riches that remained hidden beneath their feet.

A sentence is not necessarily effective just because it is long and complex. If your sentence appears cluttered with prepositional phrases, divide it into two shorter sentences. The previous sentence is far more effective when written as two simpler sentences:

The treasure lay buried under the old oak tree, behind the crumbling fifteenth-century wall. In the nearby schoolyard, children played merrily during their lunch hour, unaware of the riches that remained hidden beneath their feet.

Writing at Work

The overuse of prepositional phrases often occurs when our thoughts are jumbled and we are unsure how concepts or ideas relate to one another. If you are preparing a report or a proposal, take the time to organize your thoughts in an outline before writing a rough draft. Read the draft aloud, either to yourself or to a colleague, and identify areas that are rambling or unclear. If you notice that a particular part of your report contains several sentences over twenty words, you should double check that particular section to make certain that it is coherent and does not contain unnecessary prepositional phrases. Reading aloud sometimes helps detect unclear and wordy sentences. You can also ask a colleague to paraphrase your main points to ensure that the meaning is clear.

Starting a Sentence by Inverting Subject and Verb

As we noted earlier, most writers follow the subject-verb-object sentence structure. In an **inverted sentence**⁶, the order is reversed so that the subject follows the verb. Read the following sentence pairs:

1. A truck was parked in the driveway.
2. Parked in the driveway was a truck.

1. A copy of the file is attached.
2. Attached is a copy of the file.

Notice how the second sentence in each pair places more emphasis on the subject—*a truck* in the first example and *the file* in the second. This technique is useful for drawing the reader's attention to your primary area of focus. We can apply this method to an academic essay. Take another look at Naomi's paragraph.

6. A sentence that inverts the traditional subject-verb-object structure so that the verb follows the subject.

The subprime mortgage crisis left many financial institutions in jeopardy. Some economists argued that the banks were too big to fail. Other economists argued that an infusion of credit and debt would exacerbate the problem. The government finally opted to bail out the banks. It acquired \$700 billion worth of mortgage-backed securities in 2008. The government optimistically expects these assets will rise in value. This will profit both the banks and the government itself.

To emphasize the subject in certain sentences, Naomi can invert the traditional sentence structure. Read her revised paragraph:

The subprime mortgage crisis left many financial institutions in jeopardy. The banks were too big to fail, argued some economists. Other economists argued that an infusion of credit and debt would exacerbate the problem. The government finally opted to bail out the banks. It acquired \$700 billion worth of mortgage-backed securities in 2008. These assets will rise in value, expects the government optimistically. This will profit both the banks and the government itself.

Notice that in the first underlined sentence, the subject (*some economists*) is placed after the verb (*argued*). In the second underlined sentence, the subject (*the government*) is placed after the verb (*expects*).

EXERCISE 3

On your own sheet of paper, rewrite the following sentences as inverted sentences.

1. Teresa will never attempt to run another marathon.
2. A detailed job description is enclosed with this letter.
3. Bathroom facilities are across the hall to the left of the water cooler.
4. The well-dressed stranger stumbled through the doorway.
5. My colleagues remain unconvinced about the proposed merger.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Connecting Ideas to Increase Sentence Variety

Reviewing and rewriting the beginning of sentences is a good way of introducing sentence variety into your writing. Another useful technique is to connect two sentences using a modifier, a relative clause, or an appositive. This section examines how to connect ideas across several sentences in order to increase sentence variety and improve writing.

Joining Ideas Using an *-ing* Modifier

Sometimes it is possible to combine two sentences by converting one of them into a modifier using the *-ing* verb form—*singing*, *dancing*, *swimming*. A **modifier**⁷ is a word or phrase that qualifies the meaning of another element in the sentence. Read the following example:

Original sentences: Steve checked the computer system. He discovered a virus.

Revised sentence: Checking the computer system, Steve discovered a virus.

7. A word or phrase that qualifies the meaning of another element in a sentence.

To connect two sentences using an *-ing* modifier, add *-ing* to one of the verbs in the sentences (*checking*) and delete the subject (*Steve*). Use a comma to separate the modifier from the subject of the sentence. It is important to make sure that the

main idea in your revised sentence is contained in the main clause, not in the modifier. In this example, the main idea is that Steve discovered a virus, not that he checked the computer system.

In the following example, an *-ing* modifier indicates that two actions are occurring at the same time:

1. Noticing the police car, she shifted gears and slowed down.

This means that she slowed down at the same time she noticed the police car.

2. Barking loudly, the dog ran across the driveway.

This means that the dog barked as it ran across the driveway.

You can add an *-ing* modifier to the beginning or the end of a sentence, depending on which fits best.

Beginning: **Conducting a survey among her friends**, Amanda found that few were happy in their jobs.

End: Maria filed the final report, **meeting her deadline**.

Dangling Modifiers

A common mistake when combining sentences using the *-ing* verb form is to misplace the modifier so that it is not logically connected to the rest of the sentence. This creates a **dangling modifier**⁸. Look at the following example:

Jogging across the parking lot, my breath grew ragged and shallow.

8. A modifier that is not logically connected to the rest of the sentence.

In this sentence, *jogging across the parking lot* seems to modify *my breath*. Since breath cannot jog, the sentence should be rewritten so that the subject is placed immediately after the modifier or added to the dangling phrase.

Jogging across the parking lot, I felt my breath grow ragged and shallow.

For more information on dangling modifiers, see [Chapter 1 "Writing Basics: What Makes a Good Sentence?"](#).

Joining Ideas Using an *-ed* Modifier

Some sentences can be combined using an *-ed* verb form—*stopped*, *finished*, *played*. To use this method, one of the sentences must contain a form of *be* as a helping verb in addition to the *-ed* verb form. Take a look at the following example:

Original sentences: The Jones family was delayed by a traffic jam. They arrived several hours after the party started.

Revised sentence: Delayed by a traffic jam, the Jones family arrived several hours after the party started.

In the original version, *was* acts as a **helping verb**⁹—it has no meaning by itself, but it serves a grammatical function by placing the main verb (*delayed*) in the perfect tense.

To connect two sentences using an *-ed* modifier, drop the helping verb (*was*) and the subject (*the Jones family*) from the sentence with an *-ed* verb form. This forms a modifying phrase (*delayed by a traffic jam*) that can be added to the beginning or end of the other sentence according to which fits best. As with the *-ing* modifier, be careful to place the word that the phrase modifies immediately after the phrase in order to avoid a dangling modifier.

9. A verb that is used with a main verb to describe mood or tense. The helping verb is usually a form of *be*, *do*, or *have*.

Using *-ing* or *-ed* modifiers can help streamline your writing by drawing obvious connections between two sentences. Take a look at how Naomi might use modifiers in her paragraph.

The subprime mortgage crisis left many financial institutions in jeopardy. Some economists argued that the banks were too big to fail. Other economists argued that an infusion of credit and debt would exacerbate the problem. Opting to bail out the banks, the government acquired \$700 billion worth of mortgage-backed securities in 2008. It optimistically expects these assets will rise in value. This will profit both the banks and the government itself.

The revised version of the essay uses the *-ing* modifier *opting* to draw a connection between the government's decision to bail out the banks and the result of that decision—the acquisition of the mortgage-backed securities.

Joining Ideas Using a Relative Clause

Another technique that writers use to combine sentences is to join them using a relative clause. A **relative clause**¹⁰ is a group of words that contains a subject and a verb and describes a noun. Relative clauses function as adjectives by answering questions such as *which one?* or *what kind?* Relative clauses begin with a relative pronoun, such as *who*, *which*, *where*, *why*, or *when*. Read the following examples:

Original sentences: The managing director is visiting the company next week. He lives in Seattle.

Revised sentence: The managing director, who lives in Seattle, is visiting the company next week.

10. A group of words that contains a subject and a verb and describes a noun. A relative clause functions as an adjective in a sentence.

To connect two sentences using a relative clause, substitute the subject of one of the sentences (*he*) for a relative pronoun (*who*). This gives you a relative clause (*who lives in Seattle*) that can be placed next to the noun it describes (*the managing director*). Make sure to keep the sentence you want to emphasize as the main clause.

For example, reversing the main clause and subordinate clause in the preceding sentence emphasizes where the managing director lives, not the fact that he is visiting the company.

Revised sentence: The managing director, who is visiting the company next week, lives in Seattle.

Relative clauses are a useful way of providing additional, nonessential information in a sentence. Take a look at how Naomi might incorporate relative clauses into her essay.

The subprime mortgage crisis, which had been steadily building throughout 2007 and 2008, left many financial institutions in jeopardy. Some economists, who favored the bailout, argued that the banks were too big to fail. Other economists, who opposed the bailout, argued that an infusion of credit and debt would exacerbate the problem. The government finally opted to bail out the banks. It acquired \$700 billion worth of mortgage-backed securities in 2008. The government optimistically expects these assets will rise in value. This will profit both the banks and the government itself.

Notice how the underlined relative clauses can be removed from Naomi's essay without changing the meaning of the sentence.

Tip

To check the punctuation of relative clauses, assess whether or not the clause can be taken out of the sentence without changing its meaning. If the relative clause is not essential to the meaning of the sentence, it should be placed in commas. If the relative clause is essential to the meaning of the sentence, it does not require commas around it.

Joining Ideas Using an Appositive

An **appositive**¹¹ is a word or group of words that describes or renames a noun or pronoun. Incorporating appositives into your writing is a useful way of combining sentences that are too short and choppy. Take a look at the following example:

Original sentences: Harland Sanders began serving food for hungry travelers in 1930. He is Colonel Sanders or “the Colonel.”

Revised sentence: Harland Sanders, “the Colonel,” began serving food for hungry travelers in 1930.

In the revised sentence, “*the Colonel*” is an appositive because it renames Harland Sanders. To combine two sentences using an appositive, drop the subject and verb from the sentence that renames the noun and turn it into a phrase. Note that in the previous example, the appositive is positioned immediately after the noun it describes. An appositive may be placed anywhere in a sentence, but it must come directly before or after the noun to which it refers:

Appositive after noun: Scott, a poorly trained athlete, was not expected to win the race.

Appositive before noun: A poorly trained athlete, Scott was not expected to win the race.

Unlike relative clauses, appositives are always punctuated by a comma or a set commas. Take a look at the way Naomi uses appositives to include additional facts in her essay.

11. A word or group of words that describes or renames a noun or pronoun.

The subprime mortgage crisis, the biggest financial disaster since the 1929 Wall Street crash, left many financial institutions in jeopardy. Some economists argued that the banks were too big to fail. Other economists argued that an infusion of credit and debt would exacerbate the problem. The government, the institution that would decide the fate of the banks, finally opted to bail them out. It acquired \$700 billion worth of mortgage-backed securities in 2008. The government optimistically expects these assets will rise in value. This will profit both the banks and the government itself.

EXERCISE 4

On your own sheet of paper, rewrite the following sentence pairs as one sentence using the techniques you have learned in this section.

1. Baby sharks are called pups. Pups can be born in one of three ways.
2. The Pacific Ocean is the world's largest ocean. It extends from the Arctic in the north to the Southern Ocean in the south.
3. Michael Phelps won eight gold medals in the 2008 Olympics. He is a champion swimmer.
4. Ashley introduced her colleague Dan to her husband, Jim. She speculated that the two of them would have a lot in common.
5. Cacao is harvested by hand. It is then sold to chocolate-processing companies at the Coffee, Sugar, and Cocoa Exchange.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Writing at Work

In addition to varying sentence structure, consider varying the types of sentences you are using in a report or other workplace document. Most sentences are declarative, but a carefully placed question, exclamation, or command can pique colleagues' interest, even if the subject material is fairly dry. Imagine that you are writing a budget analysis. Beginning your report with a rhetorical question, such as "Where is our money going?" or "How can we increase sales?" encourages people to continue reading to find out the answers. Although they should be used sparingly in academic and professional writing, questions or commands are effective rhetorical devices.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Sentence variety reduces repetition in a piece of writing and adds emphasis to important points in the text.
- Sentence variety can be introduced to the beginning of sentences by starting a sentence with an adverb, starting a sentence with a prepositional phrase, or by inverting the subject and verb.
- Combine ideas, using modifiers, relative clauses, or appositives, to achieve sentence variety.

6.2 Coordination and Subordination

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify coordination and subordination in writing.
2. Combine sentences and ideas using coordination.
3. Combine sentences and ideas using subordination.

In the previous section, we learned how to use different patterns to create sentence variety and to add emphasis to important points in our writing. Next, we will examine two ways in which we can join sentences with related ideas:

- **Coordination**¹². Joining two related ideas of equal importance.
- **Subordination**¹³. Joining two related ideas of unequal importance.

Connecting sentences with coordinate or subordinate clauses creates more coherent paragraphs, and in turn, produces more effective writing. In this section, you will read excerpts from Naomi's classmate named Joshua, who drafted an essay about wine production. Read this excerpt from Joshua's essay.

When the red grapes arrive at the winery, they are destemmed and crushed. The liquid that is left is made up of skins, seeds, and juice. The stems are removed. They contain harsh-tasting tannins. Once the grapes are destemmed and crushed, the liquid is pumped into a fermentation container. Here, sulfur dioxide is added. It prevents the liquid from becoming oxidized. It also destroys bacteria. Some winemakers carry out the fermenting process by using yeast that is naturally present on the grapes. Many add a yeast that is cultivated in a laboratory.

12. It joins two related ideas of equal importance.

13. It joins two related ideas of unequal importance.

This section examines several ways to combine sentences with coordination and subordination, using Joshua's essay as an example.

Coordination

Coordination joins two independent clauses that contain related ideas of equal importance.

Original sentences: I spent my entire paycheck last week. I am staying home this weekend.

In their current form, these sentences contain two separate ideas that may or may not be related. Am I staying home this week *because* I spent my paycheck, or is there another reason for my lack of enthusiasm to leave the house? To indicate a relationship between the two ideas, we can use the coordinating conjunction *so*:

Revised sentence: I spent my entire paycheck last week, *so* I am staying home this weekend.

The revised sentence illustrates that the two ideas are connected. Notice that the sentence retains two independent clauses (*I spent my entire paycheck; I am staying home this weekend*) because each can stand alone as a complete idea.

Coordinating Conjunctions

A **coordinating conjunction**¹⁴ is a word that joins two independent clauses. The most common coordinating conjunctions are *for*, *and*, *nor*, *but*, *or*, *yet*, and *so*. Note that a comma precedes the coordinating conjunction when joining two clauses.

Independent Clause	Coordinating Conjunction	Independent Clause	Revised Sentence
I will not be attending the dance.	for (indicates a reason or cause)	I have no one to go with.	I will not be attending the dance, for I have no one to go with.
I plan to stay home.	and (joins two ideas)	I will complete an essay for class.	I plan to stay home, and I will complete an essay for class.

14. A linking word that joins two independent clauses. The seven common coordinating conjunctions are *for*, *and*, *nor*, *but*, *or*, *yet*, and *so*.

Independent Clause	Coordinating Conjunction	Independent Clause	Revised Sentence
Jessie isn't going to be at the dance.	nor (indicates a negative)	Tom won't be there either.	Jessie isn't going to be at the dance, nor will Tom be there.
The fundraisers are hoping for a record-breaking attendance.	but (indicates a contrast)	I don't think many people are going.	The fundraisers are hoping for a record-breaking attendance, but I don't think many people are going.
I might go to the next fundraising event.	or (offers an alternative)	I might donate some money to the cause.	I might go to the next fundraising event, or I might donate some money to the cause.
My parents are worried that I am antisocial.	yet (indicates a reason)	I have many friends at school.	My parents are worried that I am antisocial, yet I have many friends at school.
Buying a new dress is expensive.	so (indicates a result)	By staying home I will save money.	Buying a new dress is expensive, so by staying home I will save money.

Tip

To help you remember the seven coordinating conjunctions, think of the acronym FANBOYS: *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*. Remember that when you use a coordinating conjunction in a sentence, a comma should precede it.

Conjunctive Adverbs

Another method of joining two independent clauses with related and equal ideas is to use a conjunctive adverb and a semicolon (see [Chapter 1 "Writing Basics: What Makes a Good Sentence?"](#) for information on semicolon usage). A **conjunctive adverb**¹⁵ is a linking word that demonstrates a relationship between two clauses. Read the following sentences:

15. An adverb that connects two clauses by describing the relationship between them.

Original sentences: Bridget wants to take part in the next Olympics. She trains every day.

Since these sentences contain two equal and related ideas, they may be joined using a conjunctive adverb. Now, read the revised sentence:

Revised sentence: Bridget wants to take part in the next Olympics; therefore, she trains every day.

The revised sentence explains the relationship between Bridget’s desire to take part in the next Olympics and her daily training. Notice that the conjunctive adverb comes after a semicolon that separates the two clauses and is followed by a comma.

Review the following chart of some common conjunctive adverbs with examples of how they are used:

Function	Conjunctive Adverb	Example
Addition	also, furthermore, moreover, besides	Alicia was late for class and stuck in traffic; furthermore, her shoe heel had broken and she had forgotten her lunch.
Comparison	similarly, likewise	Recycling aluminum cans is beneficial to the environment; similarly, reusing plastic bags and switching off lights reduces waste.
Contrast	instead, however, conversely	Most people do not walk to work; instead, they drive or take the train.
Emphasis	namely, certainly, indeed	The Siberian tiger is a rare creature; indeed, there are fewer than five hundred left in the wild.
Cause and Effect	accordingly, consequently, hence, thus	I missed my train this morning; consequently, I was late for my meeting.

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Function	Conjunctive Adverb	Example
Time	finally, next, subsequently, then	Tim crossed the barrier, jumped over the wall, and pushed through the hole in the fence; finally, he made it to the station.

Take a look at Joshua's essay on wine production and identify some areas in which he might use coordination.

When the red grapes arrive at the winery, they are destemmed and crushed. The liquid that is left is made up of skins, seeds, and juice. The stems are removed. They contain harsh-tasting tannins. Once the grapes are destemmed and crushed, the liquid is pumped into a fermentation container. Here, sulfur dioxide is added. It prevents the liquid from becoming oxidized. It also destroys bacteria. Some winemakers carry out the fermenting process by using yeast that is naturally present on the grapes. Many add a yeast that is cultivated in a laboratory.

Now look at Joshua's revised essay. Did you coordinate the same sentences? You may find that your answers are different because there are usually several ways to join two independent clauses.

When the red grapes arrive at the winery, they are destemmed and crushed. The liquid that is left is made up of skins, seeds, and juice. The stems are removed, for they contain harsh-tasting tannins. Once the grapes are destemmed and crushed, the liquid is pumped into a fermentation container. Here, sulfur dioxide is added. It prevents the liquid from becoming oxidized and also destroys bacteria. Some winemakers carry out the fermenting process by using yeast that is naturally present on the grapes; however, many add a yeast that is cultivated in a laboratory.

EXERCISE 1

Combine each sentence pair into a single sentence using either a coordinating conjunction or a conjunctive adverb. Then copy the combined sentence onto your own sheet of paper.

1. Pets are not allowed in Mr. Taylor's building. He owns several cats and a parrot.
2. New legislation prevents drivers from sending or reading text messages while driving. Many people continue to use their phones illegally.
3. The coroner concluded that the young man had taken a lethal concoction of drugs. By the time his relatives found him, nothing could be done.
4. Amphibians are vertebrates that live on land and in the water. Flatworms are invertebrates that live only in water.
5. Ashley carefully fed and watered her tomato plants all summer. The tomatoes grew juicy and ripe.
6. When he lost his car key, Simon attempted to open the door with a wire hanger, a credit card, and a paper clip. He called the manufacturer for advice.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Writing at Work

When writing an essay or a report, it is important that you do not use excessive coordination. Workplace documents should be clear and concise, so only join two clauses that are logically connected and can work together to make one main point. If you repeat the same coordinating conjunction several times in a sentence, you are probably including more than one idea. This may make it difficult for readers to pick out the most important information in each sentence.

Subordination

Subordination joins two sentences with related ideas by merging them into a **main clause**¹⁶ (a complete sentence) and a **dependent clause**¹⁷ (a construction that relies on the main clause to complete its meaning). Coordination allows a writer to give equal weight to the two ideas that are being combined, and subordination enables a writer to emphasize one idea over the other. Take a look at the following sentences:

Original sentences: Tracy stopped to help the injured man. She would be late for work.

To illustrate that these two ideas are related, we can rewrite them as a single sentence using the subordinating conjunction *even though*.

Revised sentence: Even though Tracy would be late for work, she stopped to help the injured man.

In the revised version, we now have an independent clause (*she stopped to help the injured man*) that stands as a complete sentence and a dependent clause (*even though Tracy would be late for work*) that is subordinate to the main clause. Notice that the revised sentence emphasizes the fact that Tracy stopped to help the injured man, rather than the fact she would be late for work. We could also write the sentence this way:

Revised sentence: Tracy stopped to help the injured man even though she would be late for work.

16. A group of words that contain a subject and a verb and can stand alone as a complete thought.

17. A group of words that contain a subject and verb but cannot stand alone as a complete thought.

The meaning remains the same in both sentences, with the subordinating conjunction *even though* introducing the dependent clause.

Tip

To punctuate sentences correctly, look at the position of the main clause and the subordinate clause. If a subordinate clause precedes the main clause, use a comma. If the subordinate clause follows the main clause, no punctuation is required.

Subordinating Conjunctions

A **subordinating conjunction**¹⁸ is a word that joins a subordinate (dependent) clause to a main (independent) clause. Review the following chart of some common subordinating conjunctions and examples of how they are used:

Function	Subordinating Conjunction	Example
Concession	although, while, though, whereas, even though	Sarah completed her report even though she had to stay late to get it done.
Condition	if, unless, until	Until we know what is causing the problem, we will not be able to fix it.
Manner	as if, as, though	Everyone in the conference room stopped talking at once, as though they had been stunned into silence.
Place	where, wherever	Rita is in San Jose where she has several important client meetings.
Reason	because, since, so that, in order that	Because the air conditioning was turned up so high, everyone in the office wore sweaters.
Time	after, before, while, once, when	After the meeting had finished, we all went to lunch.

Take a look at the excerpt from Joshua's essay and identify some areas in which he might use subordination.

18. A word that connects a subordinate (dependent) clause to an independent (main) clause.

When the red grapes arrive at the winery, they are destemmed and crushed. The liquid that is left is made up of skins, seeds, and juice. The stems are removed. They contain harsh-tasting tannins. Once the grapes are destemmed and crushed, the liquid is pumped into a fermentation container. Here, sulfur dioxide is added. It prevents the liquid from becoming oxidized. It also destroys bacteria. Some winemakers carry out the fermenting process by using yeast that is naturally present on the grapes. Many add a yeast that is cultivated in a laboratory.

Now look at Joshua's revised essay and compare your answers. You will probably notice that there are many different ways to subordinate sentences.

When the red grapes arrive at the winery, they are destemmed and crushed. The liquid that is left is made up of skins, seeds, and juice. Because the stems contain harsh-tasting tannins, they are removed. Once the grapes are destemmed and crushed, the liquid is pumped into a fermentation container. Here, sulfur dioxide is added in order to prevent the liquid from becoming oxidized. Sulfur dioxide also destroys bacteria. Although some winemakers carry out the fermenting process by using yeast that is naturally present on the grapes, many add a yeast that is cultivated in a laboratory.

EXERCISE 2

Combine each sentence pair into a single sentence using a subordinating conjunction and then copy the combined sentence onto your own sheet of paper.

1. Jake is going to Mexico. There are beautiful beaches in Mexico.
2. A snowstorm disrupted traffic all over the east coast. There will be long delivery delays this week.
3. My neighbor had his television volume turned up too high. I banged on his door and asked him to keep the noise down.
4. Jessica prepared the potato salad and the sautéed vegetables. Ashley marinated the chicken.
5. Romeo poisons himself. Juliet awakes to find Romeo dead and stabs herself with a dagger.

EXERCISE 3

Copy the paragraph from Joshua's essay onto your own sheet of paper. Then edit using the techniques you have learned in this section. Join the underlined sentences using coordination or subordination. Check your revised sentences for punctuation.

The yeast is added to the must. Alcoholic fermentation then begins. Here, the red wine production process differs from the method used in white wine production. Red wine is fermented for a shorter time. It is fermented at a higher temperature. Whereas white wines may ferment for over a month, red wines typically ferment for less than two weeks. During fermentation, contact between the skins and the juice releases tannins and flavor compounds into the must. This process is known as maceration. Maceration may occur before, during, or after fermentation. The fermentation process is completed. The next stage is pressing. Many methods are used for pressing, the most common of which is basket pressing.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Coordination and subordination join two sentences with related ideas.
- Coordination joins sentences with related and equal ideas, whereas subordination joins sentences with related but unequal ideas.
- Sentences can be coordinated using either a coordinating conjunction and a comma or a conjunctive adverb and a semicolon.
- Subordinate sentences are characterized by the use of a subordinate conjunction.
- In a subordinate sentence, a comma is used to separate the main clause from the dependent clause if the dependent clause is placed at the beginning of the sentence.

6.3 Parallelism

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify sentences that are parallel and not parallel.
2. Identify ways to create parallelism in writing.
3. Write and revise sentences using parallelism.

Earlier in this chapter, we learned that increasing sentence variety adds interest to a piece of writing and makes the reading process more enjoyable for others. Using a mixture of sentence lengths and patterns throughout an essay is an important writing technique. However, it is equally important to avoid introducing variation within individual sentences. A strong sentence is composed of balanced parts that all have the same structure. In this section, we will examine how to create a balanced sentence structure by using **parallelism**¹⁹.

Using Parallelism

Parallelism is the use of similar structure in related words, clauses, or phrases. It creates a sense of rhythm and balance within a sentence. As readers, we often correct **faulty parallelism**²⁰—a lack of parallel structure—intuitively because an unbalanced sentence sounds awkward and poorly constructed. Read the following sentences aloud:

Faulty parallelism: Kelly had to iron, do the washing, and shopping before her parents arrived.

Faulty parallelism: Driving a car requires coordination, patience, and to have good eyesight.

Faulty parallelism: Ali prefers jeans to wearing a suit.

19. Using the same grammatical structure to express equal ideas in a sentence. Parallelism may occur at the word, phrase, or clause level.

20. A failure to create grammatically parallel structures in a sentence.

All of these sentences contain faulty parallelism. Although they are factually correct, the construction is clunky and confusing. In the first example, three different verb forms are used. In the second and third examples, the writer begins

each sentence by using a noun (*coordination, jeans*), but ends with a phrase (*to have good eyesight, wearing a suit*). Now read the same three sentences that have correct parallelism.

Correct parallelism: Kelly had to do the ironing, washing, and shopping before her parents arrived.

Correct parallelism: Driving a car requires coordination, patience, and good eyesight.

Correct parallelism: Ali prefers wearing jeans to wearing a suit.

When these sentences are written using a parallel structure, they sound more aesthetically pleasing because they are balanced. Repetition of grammatical construction also minimizes the amount of work the reader has to do to decode the sentence. This enables the reader to focus on the main idea in the sentence and not on how the sentence is put together.

Tip

A simple way to check for parallelism in your writing is to make sure you have paired nouns with nouns, verbs with verbs, prepositional phrases with prepositional phrases, and so on. Underline each element in a sentence and check that the corresponding element uses the same grammatical form.

Creating Parallelism Using Coordinating Conjunctions

When you connect two clauses using a coordinating conjunction (*for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*), make sure that the same grammatical structure is used on each side of the conjunction. Take a look at the following example:

Faulty parallelism: When I walk the dog, I like **to listen to music** and **talking to friends** on the phone.

Correct parallelism: When I walk the dog, I like **listening to music** and **talking to friends** on the phone.

The first sentence uses two different verb forms (*to listen, talking*). In the second sentence, the grammatical construction on each side of the coordinating conjunction (*and*) is the same, creating a parallel sentence.

The same technique should be used for joining items or lists in a series:

Faulty parallelism: This committee needs to decide whether the company should **reduce its workforce, cut its benefits, or lowering workers' wages**.

Correct parallelism: This committee needs to decide whether the company should **reduce its workforce, cut its benefits, or lower workers' wages**.

The first sentence contains two items that use the same verb construction (*reduce, cut*) and a third item that uses a different verb form (*lowering*). The second sentence uses the same verb construction in all three items, creating a parallel structure.

EXERCISE 1

On your own sheet of paper, revise each of the following sentences to create parallel structure using coordinating conjunctions.

1. Mr. Holloway enjoys reading and to play his guitar at weekends.
2. The doctor told Mrs. Franklin that she should either eat less or should exercise more.
3. Breaking out of the prison compound, the escapees moved carefully, quietly, and were quick on their feet.
4. I have read the book, but I have not watched the movie version.
5. Deal with a full inbox first thing in the morning, or by setting aside short periods of time in which to answer e-mail queries.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Creating Parallelism Using *Than* or *As*

When you are making a comparison, the two items being compared should have a parallel structure. Comparing two items without using parallel structure can lead to confusion about what is being compared. Comparisons frequently use the words *than* or *as*, and the items on each side of these comparison words should be parallel. Take a look at the following example:

Faulty parallelism: *Swimming in the ocean* is much tougher than **a pool**.

Correct parallelism: *Swimming in the ocean* is much tougher than *swimming in a pool*.

In the first sentence, the elements before the comparison word (*than*) are not equal to the elements after the comparison word. It appears that the writer is comparing an action (*swimming*) with a noun (*a pool*). In the second sentence, the writer uses the same grammatical construction to create a parallel structure. This clarifies that an action is being compared with another action.

To correct some instances of faulty parallelism, it may be necessary to add or delete words in a sentence.

Faulty parallelism: A brisk walk is as beneficial to your health as **going for a run**.

Correct parallelism: **Going for a brisk walk** is as beneficial to your health as **going for a run**.

In this example, it is necessary to add the verb phrase *going for* to the sentence in order to clarify that the act of walking is being compared to the act of running.

EXERCISE 2

On your own sheet of paper, revise each of the following sentences to create parallel structure using *than* or *as*.

1. I would rather work at a second job to pay for a new car than a loan.
2. How you look in the workplace is just as important as your behavior.
3. The firefighter spoke more of his childhood than he talked about his job.
4. Indian cuisine is far tastier than the food of Great Britain.
5. Jim's opponent was as tall as Jim and he carried far more weight.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

Creating Parallelism Using Correlative Conjunctions

A **correlative conjunction**²¹ is a paired conjunction that connects two equal parts of a sentence and shows the relationship between them. Common correlative conjunctions include the following:

- either...or
- not only...but also
- neither...nor

21. A paired conjunction that connects two equal parts of a sentence and shows the relationship between them. Common correlative conjunctions include *both...and*, *neither...nor*, and *either...or*.

- whether...or
- rather...than
- both...and

Correlative conjunctions should follow the same grammatical structure to create a parallel sentence. Take a look at the following example:

Faulty parallelism: We can neither **wait** for something to happen nor **can we take** evasive action.

Correct parallelism: We can neither **wait** for something to happen nor **take** evasive action.

When using a correlative conjunction, the words, phrases, or clauses following each part should be parallel. In the first sentence, the construction of the second part of the sentence does not match the construction of the first part. In the second sentence, omitting needless words and matching verb constructions create a parallel structure. Sometimes, rearranging a sentence corrects faulty parallelism.

Faulty parallelism: It was both a long movie and poorly written.

Correct parallelism: The movie was both long and poorly written.

Tip

To see examples of parallelism in use, read some of the great historical speeches by rhetoricians such as Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King Jr. Notice how they use parallel structures to emphasize important points and to create a smooth, easily understandable oration.

Here is a link to text, audio, video, and the music of Martin Luther King's speech "I Have a Dream": <http://www.mlkonline.net/dream.html>.

Writing at Work

Speechwriters use parallelism not only within sentences but also throughout paragraphs and beyond. Repeating particular key phrases throughout a speech is an effective way of tying a paragraph together as a cohesive whole and creating a sense of importance. This technique can be adapted to any piece of writing, but it may be especially useful for creating a proposal or other type of persuasive workplace document.

Note that the spelling and grammar checker on most word processors will not draw attention to faulty parallelism. When proofreading a document, read it aloud and listen for sentences that sound awkward or poorly phrased.

EXERCISE 3

On your own sheet of paper, revise each of the following sentences to create parallel structure using correlative conjunctions.

1. The cyclist owns both a mountain bike and has a racing bike.
2. The movie not only contained lots of action, but also it offered an important lesson.
3. My current job is neither exciting nor is it meaningful.
4. Jason would rather listen to his father than be taking advice from me.
5. We are neither interested in buying a vacuum cleaner nor do we want to utilize your carpet cleaning service.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

EXERCISE 4

Read through the following excerpt from Alex's essay and revise any instances of faulty parallelism. Rewrite the sentences to create a parallel structure.

Owning a pet has proven to be extremely beneficial to people's health. Pets help lower blood pressure, boost immunity, and are lessening anxiety. Studies indicate that children who grow up in a household with cats or dogs are at a lower risk of developing allergies or suffer from asthma. Owning a dog offers an additional bonus; it makes people more sociable. Dogs are natural conversation starters and this not only helps to draw people out of social isolation but also they are more likely to find a romantic partner.

Benefits of pet ownership for elderly people include less anxiety, lower insurance costs, and they also gain peace of mind. A study of Alzheimer's patients showed that patients have fewer anxious outbursts if there is an animal in the home. Some doctors even keep dogs in the office to act as on-site therapists. In short, owning a pet keeps you healthy, happy, and is a great way to help you relax.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Parallelism creates a sense of rhythm and balance in writing by using the same grammatical structure to express equal ideas.
- Faulty parallelism occurs when elements of a sentence are not balanced, causing the sentence to sound clunky and awkward.
- Parallelism may be created by connecting two clauses or making a list using coordinating conjunctions; by comparing two items using *than* or *as*; or by connecting two parts of a sentence using correlative conjunctions.

6.4 Refining Your Writing: End-of-Chapter Exercises

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Use the skills you have learned in the chapter.
2. Work collaboratively with other students.
3. Work with a variety of academic and on-the-job, real-world examples.

EXERCISES

1. Children's stories are deliberately written in short, simple sentences to avoid confusion. Most sentences are constructed using the standard subject-verb-object format. Choose a children's story that is suitable for eight- to ten-year-olds. Rewrite a chapter of the story so that it appeals to a slightly older age group, by editing for sentence variety. Experiment with the techniques you learned in [Section 6.1 "Sentence Variety"](#), including the three different ways to vary sentence structure at the beginning of a sentence and the three different ways to connect ideas between sentences. Compare the revised chapter with the original version and consider how sentence variety can be used to target a particular audience.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

2. Compile a selection of real-life writing samples from the workplace or around the home. You might like to choose one of the following: e-mail, junk mail, personal letter, company report, social networking page, local newspaper, bulletin-board posting, or public notice. Choose two samples that lack sentence variety. Highlight areas of each writing sample that you would edit for sentence variety and explain why. Replace any recognizable name with a pseudonym, or a fictitious name.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.

3. **Group activity.** Choose a well-known speech, such as Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech, Winston Churchill's "Blood, Toil, Tears, and Sweat" speech, or Barack Obama's inaugural address. Make a copy of the speech and, as a group, underline examples of parallelism. Discuss the effects of using parallelism and consider whether it is always used to achieve the same result or whether the writer manipulates parallelism to create a variety of responses among his or her audience.
4. **Group activity.** Working in a small group, select a workplace document or academic essay. Examine each paragraph and

identify examples of sentence variety, coordination and subordination, and parallelism. Then, choose one particular paragraph and discuss the following questions:

- Does the writer use sentence variety effectively?
- Does the writer connect his or her ideas effectively?
- Does the writer use subordination and coordination correctly?
- Does the writer use parallelism to emphasize his or her points?

As a group, identify the weaker areas of the paragraph and rewrite them. Focus on sentence structure and sentence variation. Use coordinating conjunctions and subordinating conjunctions to join sentences.

5. Choose a college essay or a recent piece of writing from your work or everyday life. Use the techniques you have learned throughout this chapter to edit your writing for sentence variety, appropriate coordination and subordination, and parallelism. When you have finished, compare the two versions and write a brief analysis of how sentence variety, coordination and subordination, and parallelism help refine a piece of writing.

Collaboration

Please share with a classmate and compare your answers.