

# SENTENCE VARIETY & STRUCTURE

Simple, Compound (coordinating), and Complex (subordinating) Sentences

**Simple sentences offer one simple thought. They generally begin with a subject followed by a verb and may end with an object:**

The sun rose this morning.  
The dew glistened on the grass.  
The birds began to sing to each other.  
Small animals awoke and searched for breakfast.

**When several of these sentences follow one another, the writing style becomes very monotonous and does not reflect the variety of complex thinking patterns so common to the human mind.**

- As the sun rose over the horizon, birds began to sing to each other and small animals awoke and searched for breakfast in the glistening, dew-covered grass.  
- The dew glistened on the grass as the sun rose over the horizon. While the birds began to sing to each other, animals awoke and searched for breakfast.

**Varying sentence length and pattern results in a natural, fluid form of writing. Writing should be pleasing to readers. If all of your sentences follow the same pattern, however, the writing and rhythm become boring and dull. Creating a variety of sentence patterns not only holds a reader's interest (which, after all, is the purpose of writing), but it also reflects your mind's ability to think creatively and complexly.**

**Writers have a number of options for transforming simple sentences into more sophisticated sentences.**

- 1. COORDINATION – When we say that someone is coordinated, we mean she/he is well balanced. Athletes and dancers, for example, are considered to be very coordinated because they aren't clumsy or out of balance. A coordinated sentence is also well balanced because it balances two complete thoughts (or clauses: subject + verb combinations) in which the information is of equal value.**  
Grandma lost her eye sight. Her hearing sharpened over time.  
Grandma lost her eye sight, but her hearing sharpened over time.

You can say you're sorry. You can go to your room.  
You can say you're sorry, or you can go to your room.

The tornado hit. The town was leveled.  
The tornado hit, and the town was leveled.

**The key words (coordinating conjunctions) we use to create coordinated sentences are the following:**

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

**Punctuation note: In a coordinated sentence, a comma always precedes the coordinating conjunction. It is not an option; it is a requirement of the sentence structure.**

**Coordination can also be created by joining two complete sentences that are closely related in meaning with a semi-colon (;).**

Many web sites are interesting. Some are inaccurate.

3. **PREPOSITIONAL or PARTICIPIAL PHRASES** at the beginning of sentences create sentence variety.

a. **Prepositional Phrases** provide information of place, time, direction, or relationship:

At yesterday's game, the half-time show was a disaster.  
By tomorrow morning, there will be six inches of snow on the ground.  
Beneath our property, you'll find old and abandoned mine shafts.  
For each one of us, the memory has a different meaning.

**Punctuation note:** When a sentence begins with a prepositional phrase, a comma follows it.

b. **Participial phrases** generally begin with -ing verbs and are used to describe nouns. In each of the following sentences, the opening participial phrase describes something that the subject of the sentence did.

Erin woke early. She dressed quickly and went to feed horses.  
Waking up early, Erin dressed quickly and went to feed horses.

The traffic was getting worse. Adam chose to leave after rush hour.  
Seeing the traffic was getting worse, Adam chose to leave after rush hour.

**Punctuation note:** When a sentence begins with a participial phrase, a comma always follows it.

## Sentence Variety

There are four types of sentences available for your use in writing. Fragments are not included in the four because they are not sentences. To embed your writing with depth, interest, and clarity, use all four types of sentences at varied times.

**1. Simple sentence:** consists of ONE main or independent clause. Example:

There were many people at Comic-Con this year.

**2. Compound sentence:** consists of TWO or more main or independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction (nor, or, so, yet, for, and, but) and/or appropriate punctuation.

Example:

There were many people at Comic-Con this year, so most sellers sold out of some of their items.

**3. Complex sentence:** consists of at least one main or independent clause, AND one or more subordinate or dependent clauses. Example:

Because there were many people at Comic-Con this year, many sellers sold out of some items.

**4. Compound-Complex sentence:** consists of at least TWO main or independent clauses, and at least ONE subordinate or dependent clauses. Example:

Because there were many people at Comic-Con this year, many sellers sold out of some items, and the attendees waited eagerly while shelves were restocked.