Varying Sentence Types & Starters

Why is sentence pattern variation important in writing?

There are 4 basic types of sentences ranging from simple sentences to sentences containing multiple types of clauses. Sentence pattern refers to the use of these different types of sentences and the ways in which they are arranged in a piece of writing. It is important to vary the types of sentences used and their arrangements in writing because doing so can make your writing more appealing to your audience. If there is little variation to be found in your sentence pattern, your writing may become boring or repetitive to your reader.

4 Main Types of Sentences

1. Simple Sentence
   Simple sentences consist of one independent clause and express one idea.
   Ex: The company plans to market the product overseas. Kelly attended East Carolina University to study biology.

2. Compound Sentence
   Compound sentences contain two or more independent clauses that are conjoined together by a conjunction or a connecting word (i.e. for, and, nor, but, or, yet, and so). There should be no dependent clauses in a compound sentence.
   Ex: The councilman proposed a ordinance, but the city council did not agree with the idea. Should we start eating or should we wait for everyone else to arrive first?

3. Complex Sentence
   Complex sentences contain one independent clause with one or more dependent clauses. The dependent clause should follow a connecting word similar to those use in compound sentences.
   Ex: Since she was so good at geometry, no one expected her to fail algebra. The actress was happy that she got a part in the play even though it was a small one.

4. Compound-Complex Sentence
   Compound-complex sentences contain two independent clauses with one or more dependent clauses. The two independent clauses should be conjoined by a conjunction.
   Ex: Since it rained so much during the summer that year, the air was very humid and the grass grew very tall.
How to Vary Sentence Types in Your Writing

**Tip 1**

**VARY RHYTHM BY ALTERNATING SHORT & LONG SENTENCES**

Several sentences of the same length can make for bland writing. To enliven paragraphs, write sentences of different lengths. This will also allow for effective emphasis.

**Example:** I went to the show. I was early. I was the only one there. No one else was there. I waited for half an hour. I had a lot of time. I thought a lot. Then more people came. Two more people came. We went in. We went in together. We took our seats. We sat in the balcony.

**Revision:** I went to the show, but I was early. I was the only one there. As I waited for half an hour, I had a lot of time to think. Then two others came and we went in and took seats in the balcony.

**Tip 2**

**REVIEW YOUR PAPER & COLOR CODE SENTENCE TYPES**

To ensure that you include a variety of sentence types in your writing, first assign each of the 4 sentence types a different color. Then go back through your piece of writing (or even just a few paragraphs) and highlight or underline each sentence according to its type and assigned color. Once you’ve done this, take a look at the balance of the 4 colors used. Does one color stand out or is one entirely missing? If so, consider these tips:

- Combine some of the shorter, simple sentences into compound sentences
- Break down some of the more complex sentences into simpler, shorter ones.
- Consider using a different arrangement of the 4 sentence types used
- Incorporate the use of different connector words

**Tip 3**

**USE CONNECTOR WORDS**

Using a variety of connector words to create compound, complex and compound-complex sentences will help with incorporating more sentence variety throughout your work. Consider using some of the following connector words:

**Connectors with a comma, the FANBOYS:** for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so

**Connectors with a semicolon and comma:** however, moreover, nevertheless, nonetheless, therefore

**Cause/Effect:** because, since, so that

**Comparison/Contrast:** although, even though, though, whereas, while

**Place/Manner:** where, wherever, how, however

**Possibility/Conditions:** if, whether, unless

**Relation:** that, which, who, whom

**Time:** after, as, before, since, when, whenever, while, until
How to Vary Sentence Starters in Your Writing

Tip 1

Read Your Writing Aloud

Read your writing aloud. Reading aloud allows one to easily pick up on dull, monotonous prose in need of revision. When the flow from sentence to sentence doesn't seem to be smooth or if you notice that your sentences start with the same word or structure, try to incorporate more variety of sentence starters and types.

Example:

This sentence has five words. This is five words too. 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, and sounds that say listen to this, it is important.

Tip 2

Vary Sentence Starters

Too many sentences starting with the same word (e.g. "The," "It," "This," or "I") can grow tedious for your audience. If you notice that many of your sentences start the same way, try varying the opening words and phrases, so that your writing is not tasking on your audience. Also, it is important to note that different beginnings can alter not only the structure, but also the emphasis of a sentence.

Example: She brushed her teeth meticulously. Then she brushed her hair quickly. Then she washed her face. Then she washed her hands.

Revision: Meticulously, she brushed her teeth, and then she brushed her hair. Her hands and face were washed afterwards.

Additional Tips:

- Think about how each sentence fits with the one before it.

- Does this sentence add information? If so, then use "moreover," "furthermore," or another word that adds to the idea.

- Does this sentence contrast with the previous sentence? If so, then you might use "however" or "on the other hand."

- Is there a time sequence involved? If so, you may use "next," "then," or consider using "first," "second," etc.

- Don’t use the same transition/sentence starter too often.
Sample Paragraph

There are four basic sentence types. Writers should vary their voice and tone. Sentence variety allows writers to represent relationships between their ideas. Paragraphs that contain many sentences of the same type become boring. Readers lose interest. Sentence variety better represents the complexity of our ideas.

In the example paragraph above, all of the sentences used are of the same type (simple sentences). To revise this paragraph, we will use the tips presented in the above pages like combining short, simple sentences into compound sentences, rearranging clauses to create complex and compound-complex sentences and incorporating more connector words.

Sample Revision

There are four basic sentence types. Using a variety of sentence types allows writers to vary their voice and tone and it allows writers to represent relationships between their ideas. Because I am using a variety of sentence types, the tone of this paragraph is better. When we vary our sentence structure, we can vary our voice and tone and we can better represent the complexity of our ideas.

This revised paragraph now has more sentence variety as shown by the various colors that represent each of the 4 sentence types. This paragraph has a much better flow and is not monotonous or dull like the first example paragraph.