



STRATEGIES FOR VARIATION IN SENTENCE STRUCTURES

This resource presents methods for **adding sentence variety and complexity** to writing that may sound repetitive or boring. Sections are divided into general tips for varying structure, a discussion of sentence types, and specific parts of speech which can aid in sentence variety.

Adding sentence variety to prose can give it life and rhythm. Too many sentences with the same structure and length can grow monotonous for readers. Varying sentence style and structure can also reduce repetition and add emphasis. Long sentences work well for incorporating a lot of information, and short sentences can often maximize crucial points. These general tips may help add variety to similar sentences.

1. Vary the Rhythm by Alternating Short and 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.

2. Vary Sentence Openings.

If too many sentences start with the same word, especially *The*, *It*, *This*, or *I*, prose can grow tedious for readers, so changing opening words and phrases can be refreshing. Below are alternative openings for a fairly standard sentence. Notice that different beginnings can alter not only the structure but also the emphasis of the sentence. They may also require rephrasing in sentences before or after this one, meaning that one change could lead to an abundance of sentence variety.

Begin with Adverbs

The ornithologist cautiously approached the eagle's nest.

Change to: *Cautiously*, the ornithologist approached the eagle's nest.

Begin with Adjectives

Jason, exhausted and dirty, collapsed in the armchair.

Change to: *Exhausted and dirty*, Jason collapsed in the armchair.

Begin with Prepositional Phrases

The pope did not restrict his travel after the attempt on his life.

Change to: *After the attempt on his life*, the pope did not restrict his travel.

Begin with Verbal Phrases (Past Participial Phrases)

The monks, worried that the manuscript might be stolen, placed it in a secret vault.

Change to: *Worried that* the manuscript might be stolen, the monks placed it in a secret vault.

Begin with a Subordinate Clause: a dependent clause that begins with a subordinator (e.g. when, although, if, etc.)

My brother went to the store to buy **bread because** yesterday my sister forgot to go grocery shopping.

Change to: *Because my sister* forgot to go grocery shopping **yesterday, my** brother went to the store to buy bread.

Begin with an Appositive

My sister, a busy person, forgot to go grocery shopping yesterday, so my brother went to the store to buy bread.

Change to: *A busy person*, my sister forgot to go grocery shopping yesterday, so my brother went to the store to buy bread.

Begin with a Present Participle Phrase ("-ing"): a phrase that functions as a modifier of a noun or pronoun (begins with an "-ing" suffix)

1) The horse trotting up to the fence hopes that you have an apple or carrot.

Change to: *Trotting up to the fence*, the horse hopes that you have an apple or carrot.

2) Delores, walking on the beach, dodged jellyfish that had washed ashore.

Change to: *Walking on the beach*, Delores dodged jellyfish that had washed ashore.

3) Freddie, waking to the buzz of the alarm clock, cursed the arrival of another Monday.

Change to: *Waking to the buzz of the alarm clock*, Freddie cursed the arrival of another Monday.