

Improve Grammar and Style: Sentence Pattern Strategies

Element of style	Sentence Strategy
concision	using colons and semicolons
coherence	repetition of key words and phrases parallel and repeating structures
emphasis	moving modifiers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interrupt subject and verb • Move to an unusual place • Start with prepositional phrase • Use a nonrestrictive relative clause
sentence variety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use participial phrases • start with a dependent clause • start with an adverb • vary complex, compound, and simple sentences • use short sentences for emphasis

Strategy 1: Combine sentences with a semicolon to show a connection

- Combine short, related sentences with a semicolon
 - “Perhaps Sentence B is not a logical sequel to Sentence A; The writer, in whose head the connection is clear, hasn’t bothered to provide the missing link (Zissner, *On Writing Well*).

Strategy 2: Combine sentences with a colon to show a connection

- Follow a general idea with an example or more specific explanation using a colon
 - “Thinking clearly is a conscious act that writers must force on themselves as if they were working on any other problem that requires logic: making a shopping list or doing an algebra problem (Zissner, *On Writing Well*).

Strategy 3: Repeat for coherence

- Repeat key words:
 - “The answer is to **clear** our heads of clutter. **Clear** thinking becomes **clear** writing; on can’t exist without the other” (Zissner, *On Writing Well*).
- Use repeating parallel structures:
 - “In China, there was more emphasis **on listening, on asking** questions rather than holding forth, **on putting** others’ needs first (Cain, *Quiet*).

Strategy 4: Move modifiers to change emphasis

- Interrupt the subject and verb with a modifier:
 - “The phrase *sands of Arabia*, **though common in the early nineteenth century**, has plunged in popularity ever since...” (Pinker, “Good Writing”).
- Move a modifier from its usual place for emphasis:
 - “The next sentence restates the contrast, **also in parallel language**, but avoids the tedium of repeating words yet again by juxtaposing familiar idioms what have the same rhythm: *been here in my place...see the light of day*” (Pinker, “Good Writing”).
 - Compare with: The next sentence also restates the contrast in parallel language...
- Put the prepositional phrase before the subject and verb:
 - “**In six sentence** Dawkins has flipped the way we think of death, and has stated the rationalist’s case for an appreciation of life in words so stirring that many humanists I know have asked that it be read at their funerals” (Pinker, “Good Writing”).
- Use a nonrestrictive relative clause:
 - “The classic manuals, (**which were**) **written by starchy Englishmen and rock-ribbed Yankees**, try to take all the fun out of writing, grimly adjuring the writer to avoid offbeat words, figures of speech, and playful alliteration (Pinker, “Good Writing”).

Strategy 5: Move dependent noun clauses to add variety

- Use a noun clause as the subject:
 - “**How we feel about ourselves**, the joy we get from living, ultimately depends directly on how that mind filters and interprets everyday experiences” (Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*).
- Use a noun clause as the object of the verb:
 - “I don’t mean **that some people are born clearheaded and are therefore natural writers**, whereas others are naturally fuzzy and will never write well” (Zissner, *On Writing Well*).

Strategy 6: Use participial phrases to add variety

- Use a participial phrase as an introduction to the sentence:
 - “**Faced with such obstacles**, readers are at first tenacious.” (Zissner, *On Writing Well*).
 - “**Deprived of the customary supports that cultural values had given them**, they flounder in a morass of anxiety and apathy (Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*).
- Use a participial phrase to break up the subject and verb:
 - “If our grandparents, **living in that ridiculously primitive past**, could be content, just imaging how happy we would be! (Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*).
- Use a participial phrase as a conclusion to the sentence:
 - “They renew their efforts, **determined still to achieve the satisfaction that up until then had eluded them**” (Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*).
 - The rain had soaked through my father’s hunting jacket, **leaving me chilled to the bone.**” (Collins, *The Hunger Games*)