**SENTENCE CONSTRUCTION**

Clarity is essential in conveying information. One of the best ways to bring clarity to your writing is to show the appropriate relationships between ideas. To do this, you must adjust and revise the structure of each sentence until it accurately communicates your message. Coordinating and subordinating ideas are two ways to sharpen and clarify your writing.

**1/ Coordinating Ideas**

Ideas that are equally important—or that carry the same weight—in a sentence are called coordinate ideas. To show that ideas are coordinate, you link them with a coordinating conjunction, such as and or but or another connective. Sometimes the connective may simply be a punctuation mark, such as the semicolon in the second example that follows.

EXAMPLES: The Pathfinder lander was sending back its first images of the surface of Mars, and everyone was focused on the television screens.

**2/ Subordinating Ideas**

Not all ideas are created equal. Sometimes, one idea in a sentence is more important than another, and you will want to downplay, or subordinate, the less important idea. One way to subordinate an idea is to place it in a subordinate clause. Used as part of a sentence, the subordinate clause elaborates on the thought expressed in an independent clause.

EXAMPLES: Petra, who is learning how to scuba dive, took a trip to the coast.

Michael likes going to the coast because the beaches are clean and uncrowded.

The kinds of subordinate clauses you will use most often are adverb clauses and adjective clauses.

**3/ The Elliptical Clause**

An important aid to economy in writing English is the elliptical clause. In many cases, it is possible to leave out a relative pronoun that normally would join a dependent clause to an independent one.

EXAMPLE: The movie I wanted to see was not playing. (which or that unexpressed)

- We couldn’t understand the point he was making. (which is unexpressed)

Sometimes a dependent clause contains neither subject nor verb:

EXAMPLE: When in Barcelona, try to find a quiet hotel room. (for when in Barcelona)

- While working in the store, I met many interesting people. (for while I was working)

Whenever such words are left out of a dependent clause, it is known as an elliptical clause.

Another kind of elliptical construction occurs most commonly after the words than and as. To avoid repetition in both speaking and writing, we usually drop the final verb in sentences such as these

- The chairman spoke longer than he. (spoke is not repeated)

- Are you as old as he? (is is omitted)

- We danced longer than they. (danced is not repeated)

After thanand as introducing an incomplete construction, use the form of the pronoun you would use if the construction were completed. The pronoun chosen in such a construction depends upon the intent of the writer:

EXAMPLE: I like George better than he. (better than he likes George)

- I like George better than him. (Better than I like him)

Although the nominative case pronouns (I, he, she, they, we) are preferred usage in than and as constructions for formal writing and speaking, the objective case (me, him, her, them, us) is generally accepted colloquial usage:

Formal: - They worked harder than we

- Are you as hungry as I ?

-Ann is older than she.

Colloquial: - They worked harder than us.

- Are you as hungry as me?

-Ann is older than her.

**4/ The Parallel Structure**

To create clarity and rhythm in a sentence, it is important to express similar ideas in similar grammatical forms. For example, pair an adjective with an adjective, a prepositional phrase with a prepositional phrase, and a noun clause with a noun clause. When you use the same grammatical form for similar ideas, you create parallel structure.

EXAMPLE: He had come to tell his brother that power corrupts, that a man who fights for justice must himself be cleansed and purified, that love is greater than force.

This is just a simple example. There are many types of parallelism and the important point to

remember is that both forms must be the same. In other words, if I have two parallel verb structures

the tenses must be the same.

1. **Singles Words**

Here is an overview of single word parallel structures:

**Nouns**: Jack eats fish and chicken.

Sarah writes poetry and short stories.

**Verbs**: Our neighbours have moved and have sold their house.

My sister walks or rides her bike to work.

**Adjectives**: The class is not only fun but also helpful.

She is not only strong but also fast.

**Adverbs**: Peter drives quickly and aggressively.

They work carefully and effectively.

1. **Phrases**

Parallelism can also take place with phrases. This type of parallel structure can be more difficult to recognize as the sentences are more complex. Here are some examples:

Having fun is as important as working hard.

She advised me to get some sleep and take some time off work.

Here are phrase parallel structures. Each type of structure includes a note about important points /

problems to take into consideration.

**Noun Phrases**: Work in group is as necessary as play in team.

An apple is as good for you as an orange.

**Verb Phrases:** As soon as I arrive home, I put on my shoes and go for a run.

Before she leaves for work, she usually eats breakfast and has a cup of coffee.

**NOTE**: All verbs in a verb phrase with parallel structure have the same tense.

**Prepositional Phrases:** Peter and Tim will probably arrive in less than an hour and in time for the meeting.

They want more time off in the summer and at weekends.

**Gerund Phrases:** He enjoys playing tennis and working out.

They don't mind waiting and talking while you get ready.

**NOTE**: Make sure not to mix the infinitive (to do) and the gerund (doing) in parallel structures!

**Infinitive Phrases:** Jackson hopes to visit his parents and see his old friends when he goes home.

She advised me to find some new friends and forget about the event.

NOTE: Make sure not to mix the infinitive (to do) and the gerund (doing) in parallel structures!

**Participial Phrases:** Discovering her financial losses and not knowing enough about the current market, she decided to stop investing.

Driving through the countryside and speaking to the people, she began to understand the Algerian culture better.

1. **Clauses**

Finally, clauses can also be used to make parallel structures. In this case, remember that you must

use full clause structure (subject + verb + objects) and that the subjects of BOTH clauses will be the

same. This causes the verb conjugation to remain the same in both clauses.

**Noun Clauses:** She said that she was having fun but not that she was meeting people.

Peter felt that he had made an excellent deal and that he had bought a masterpiece.

**Adjective Clauses:** She is a woman who is intelligent and, at the same time, who seems distracted.

This is a product that is easy to use and that is simple to clean.

**Adverb Clauses:** As he didn't understand and because he refused to try, they let him go.

Since it was easy to use and because it was cheap, it sold very well.

**5/ Variety**

Have you ever found your mind drifting while reading, despite real efforts to concentrate? Choppy sentences can make it hard to concentrate. Of course, a short, simple sentence is sometimes just the thing you want; short sentences can be used to create emphasis. If you use only short sentences, however, you probably will not hold your reader’s attention for very long. Take a look at the following passage. Does its style help hold your attention, or do you find it hard to focus on the paragraph’s meaning?

*The sinking of the Titanic was one of the worst maritime disasters in history. The Titanic was the largest ship of its time. It was the most luxurious ship of its time. The Titanic was on its maiden voyage. The ship struck an iceberg. The iceberg was located off the Grand Banks of Newfoundland. The accident happened on the night of April 14, 1912. The night was clear and cold. The Titanic’s hull had sixteen watertight compartments. The iceberg punctured five compartments. The ship sank in less than three hours.*

When some of the sentences are combined to create longer, more varied ones, the passage sounds smoother and more interesting.

*The sinking of the Titanic, the largest and most luxurious ship of its time, was one of the worst maritime disasters in history. On the clear, cold night of April 14, 1912, the ship, which was on its maiden voyage, struck an iceberg off the Grand Banks of Newfoundland. The iceberg punctured five of the sixteen watertight compartments in the ship’s hull, and the ship sank in less than three hours.*

Sentence-combining techniques can help you create balance, rhythm, and precision in your writing. There are several techniques for combining sentences to improve variety and style.

1. **Reduce Repetition**

Sometimes, a sentence adds only a little information to a more important idea that appears before or after it. Instead of giving a small detail a sentence of its own, you can insert that detail into another sentence as a word or phrase. By combining the sentences, you eliminate extra words and repeated ideas. (Notice, for example, how many words are repeated in the four sentences printed below.)

FOUR SENTENCES The surgeon considered doing the operation. The operation would be simple. The surgeon was experienced. She thought the operation would go smoothly.

ONE SENTENCE Thinking it would go smoothly, the experienced surgeon considered doing the simple operation.

or

The experienced surgeon considered doing the simple operation, as she thought it would go smoothly.

ORIGINAL Constance set out to conquer the wilds of Alaska. She set out armed with only a backpack and a strong will.

COMBINED Constance, armed with only a backpack and a strong will, set out to conquer the wilds of Alaska.

ORIGINAL The wind started gusting. Constance returned home.

COMBINED The wind gusting, Constance returned home.

TWO SENTENCES Isabella d’Este was a ruler of the Italian city-state Mantua during the Renaissance. She actively supported many great artists and writers of the time.

ONE SENTENCE A ruler of the Italian city-state Mantua during the Renaissance, Isabella d’Este actively supported many great artists and writers of the time.

ORIGINAL Many people who have fibromyalgia experience great pain. However, they lead active, productive lives.

COMBINED Many people who have fibromyalgia experience great pain yet lead active, productive lives. [compound verb]

ORIGINAL Mammals alone possess hair. Hair is really filaments made mainly of dead cells filled with protein.

COMBINED Hair, which mammals alone possess, is really filaments made mainly of dead cells filled with protein.

ORIGINAL Carlos left the store. He could not find the CD he wanted.

COMBINED Carlos left the store because he could not find the CD he wanted.

1. **Variety of Sentence structures**

When you revise your writing for style, it is not always enough to vary your sentence beginnings. It is also important to vary sentence structures by using a mix of simple, compound, complex, and sometimes compound-complex sentences.