

JOHNSON COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

REVISING THE ROUGH DRAFT: WRITING EFFECTIVE SENTENCES

RESTRUCTURE SENTENCES WHENEVER NECESSARY TO AVOID WORDINESS.

Often you can combine sentences through subordination to avoid wordiness.

WORDY: The expression "Make no bones about it" once painted a vivid mental picture of a man eager to swallow his soup. The fact that he was eager kept him from objecting to any bones he might find in his soup.

CONCISE: The expression "Make no bones about it" once painted a vivid mental picture of a man so eager to swallow his soup that he would not object to any bones he might find in it.

WORDY: Alexander Pope was a poet of the eighteenth century, and he wrote many famous lines. One of these lines was "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread."

CONCISE: Alexander Pope, a poet of the eighteenth century, wrote such famous lines as "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread."

ELIMINATE CARELESS OR NEEDLESS REPETITION OF WORDS AND IDEAS.

The repetition of the same word or idea in several sentences results in monotonous writing. Use pronouns to avoid the overuse of a noun, and use subordination or write a sentence with a colon to eliminate repetition of a large part of any given sentence.

REPETITIOUS: Shakespeare was responsible for two of the expressions we hear today. Shakespeare was responsible for the expressions "milk of human kindness" and "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark."

CONCISE: Shakespeare was responsible for two of the expressions we hear today: "Milk of human kindness" and "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark."

BE CAREFUL TO INCLUDE ALL NECESSARY ARTICLES, PRONOUNS, CONJUNCTIONS, AND PREPOSITIONS.

That is one of the most common words omitted in student writing.

The world will never forget **that** Socrates died rather than give up his right to speak freely. [Without a *that* to introduce the subordinate clause, the reader at first thinks that "Socrates" is the direct object of *forget*.]

That may be omitted when the meaning of the sentence would be clear without it.

Socrates felt he could not give in to the jury.

Remember that indirect quotations are usually introduced by *that*.

DIRECT QUOTATION: My instructor pointed out, "Socrates was the teacher of Plato."

INDIRECT QUOTATION: My instructor pointed out **that** Socrates was the teacher of Plato.

Remember also that words like *so*, *such*, and *too* used as intensifiers are usually completed by a *that* clause.

Socrates was so convinced of the rightness of his position **that** he drank the hemlock rather than agree to the demands of the jury.

Omitted prepositions can lead to unidiomatic phrasing.

Socrates believed **in** and died for free speech. [*Believed for* free speech is not idiomatic.]

The type **of** stand taken by Socrates has served as a model for many people of the twentieth century. [*Type* is not an adjective.]

An omitted article often results in disagreement with the noun modified.

Socrates believed in a free and **an** open society. [*A* should not precede a word beginning with a vowel--in this case *open*.]

INCLUDE NECESSARY VERBS AND AUXILIARIES.

Free people have always **admired** and will continue to admire Socrates' stand. [*Have admire* would be an error in tense.]

INCLUDE ALL WORDS NECESSARY TO COMPLETE A COMPARISON.

Most students know more about Plato than **they do about** Socrates.

Plato was as brilliant **as**, if not more brilliant, than any **other** philosopher.

Practice Exercise A

Underline needless words in each of the following sentences. For sentences that need changes (other than punctuation or capitalization), make the needed revision.

EXAMPLES:

1) There are various and sundry examples of "doomsday" literature.

2) "Doomsday literature" has always been popular. The popularity of doomsday literature results from human beings' innate fear of the end of the world.

"Doomsday" literature has always been popular because of human beings' innate fear of the end of the world.

1. There is a famous children's story called "Chicken Little," and the story sets forth one of people's real fears.

2. Chicken Little calls out to one of his animal friends, saying, "The sky is falling!"

3. The reason that Chicken Little thinks the sky is falling is because an acorn has hit him on the head.

4. One after another the barnyard animals naively accepts Chicken Little's observation about what he has seen and does not question the truth of his report.

5. In the story it tells about the disastrous fate that befalls Chicken Little and his friends.

6. The disaster he has predicted and foretold does not come to pass, but a disaster does come to pass.

7. Chicken Little and his friends enter a fox's lair. Chicken Little and his friends are never seen or heard of again.

8. The part of the story which most people remember is the warning which Chicken Little says which is that the sky is falling.

9. In this writer's humble opinion, people have an almost instinctual fear of the ultimate catastrophe.

10. Each and every person is fascinated by "doomsday" literature.

11. Even the great conqueror Alexander the Great, who conquered most of the known world, could not arouse as much fear as the possibility of the world's ending.

12. Alexander the Great met a group of Celts for the first time, and he asked the Celts what they feared most.

13. Unexpectedly, the Celts replied, to Alexander's surprise, that the thing they feared most and were most afraid of was that the sky might crack and fall on their heads.

14. In this day and age the fear of the end of the world is heightened by technological developments like nuclear weapons.

Practice Exercise B

In the following sentences insert the word(s) that are needed to complete the sentence.

EXAMPLE:

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse are more famous than any **other** figures of destruction.

1. The Four Horsemen--Death, Famine, Pestilence, and War--have and still ride across the motion-picture screen.

2. The Four Horsemen are as awe inspiring now as the Middle Ages when a famous woodcut was made of the riders.

3. Depictions of the Four Horsemen are especially common times of world disorders.

4. During World War I influenza killed as many people as war.

5. Thus it could be said the Horseman Pestilence was on the rampage.

6. Today many the world's people are so hungry that they see Famine riding boldly across the sky.

7. Since World War II people have lived daily with the fear of a hideous and almost instant annihilation.

8. It is not surprising that the disaster film has been the most popular type motion picture in modern times.

9. More money has been made at the box office off the annihilation of people than any theme.

10. Annihilation by flooding has and still is a common method of destruction.

11. The fear of being trapped and exposed to massive flooding can be traced to the first great Biblical catastrophe.

12. From *Noah's Ark*, a film produced 1928, to *The Poseidon Adventure* of the 1970s, the motion-picture industry has exploited the human fear of drowning.

13. San Francisco was destroyed by an earthquake and fire in 1906, and many films have made use of that disaster.

14. People are terrified but attracted to films that depict great numbers of people being swallowed up by the Earth or being burned by massive fires.

15. The film *Earthquake* made use of a sound track of low-frequency electronic impulses in order the audience could feel as well as see the disaster.

16. Disaster films are as popular in other countries as the United States.

LEARN TO WRITE SENTENCES IN WHICH THE MAIN PARTS--THE SUBJECTS AND THE PREDICATES--ARE CLEARLY AND LOGICALLY RELATED.

Make the subjects and predicates of your sentences fit together logically. You make a mistake in unity or in logic when you write a sentence that has an inappropriate structure for its subject or its predicate.

ILLOGICAL: An early example of astrology is the Babylonians, who studied the entrails of freshly slaughtered animals. [The example of astrology is not *the Babylonians*.]

LOGICAL: An early example of astrology is the Babylonian practice of studying the entrails of freshly slaughtered animals. [The example is *the practice*.]

ILLOGICAL: Because the priest had asked the gods to write messages on the entrails of animals to be sacrificed was the source of the interpretation of coming events. [A *because* clause cannot function as the subject of a sentence.]

LOGICAL: The Babylonian priest was able to interpret coming events because he asked the gods to write messages on the entrails of animals to be sacrificed.

The use of a linking verb--*is, are, was, can be, etc.*--can sometimes lead to faulty predication, particularly when the linking verb is followed by *when* or *where*. By substituting a nonlinking verb, like *occur* or *is found*, you can frequently eliminate the error in unity or logic.

ILLOGICAL: Evidence of the Babylonian practice was when hundreds of clay tablets that set forth detailed instructions for entrail interpretation were found. [A *when* clause cannot function as a subject complement.]

LOGICAL Evidence of the Babylonian practice is found in the hundreds of clay tablets that set forth detailed instructions for entrail interpretation.

Keep the central focus of your sentence clear. The addition of too much subordination or detail, even if it is relevant, will obscure the central focus of a sentence.

In the *Enuma Elish*, the Babylonian creation myth, we find evidence that the Babylonians, the earliest practitioners of astrology, believed that the stars and the planets were symbols of divine power, or were even the gods themselves, and thus were observed carefully by the priests, who kept detailed records of their movements.

Even though all the material in the example is relevant, it is difficult for the reader to keep in mind the main ideas of the sentence because of the number of details included and the amount of subordination used. For the sake of clarity, two or more sentences should be written to communicate the information.

The *Enuma Elish*, the Babylonian creation myth, sets forth the importance of the stars and the planets to the Babylonians, the earliest practitioners of astrology. The Babylonian priests kept detailed records of the movements of the celestial bodies because they were viewed as symbols of divine power or even as the gods themselves.

Establish a clear relationship between the clauses in a sentence; develop unrelated ideas in separate sentences. When you write a compound sentence, you suggest that the ideas in the two independent clauses are closely related. In the same way, when you write a complex sentence, you make your reader expect a relationship between the ideas in the independent and the subordinate clauses. If the relationship between the ideas is not clear--or if the ideas in fact are not related--you confuse your reader.

UNCLEAR: The Babylonians lived in what is now Iraq, and by 450 B.C. a cosmic system was developed to explain the influence of the stars and the planets on human life.

CLEAR: By 450 B.C. the Babylonians, who lived in what is now Iraq, developed a cosmic system to explain the influence of the stars and the planets on human life.

UNCLEAR: When the Babylonians developed the first horoscopes, by 400 B.C. Greek scientists were traveling throughout the Mediterranean world.

CLEAR: The Babylonians developed the first horoscopes. [Somewhere later in the composition the second idea is found.] By 400 B.C. Greek scientists were traveling throughout the Mediterranean world.

OR

By 400 B.C. Greek scientists traveling throughout the Mediterranean world were influenced by the Babylonian practice of drawing horoscopes. [Material may be added or rearranged to show the relationship between the ideas.]

Practice Exercise C

In the blanks indicate whether the chief difficulty in each sentence is (1) illogical construction, (2) use of excessive subordination or detail, or (3) lack of clear relationship between clauses. Then revise the sentences to make them effective.

EXAMPLE:

In films, the world has been terrorized by many things, and King Kong was a gigantic ape that threatened New York City.

Lack of clear relationship between clauses

In films, the world has been terrorized by many things, such as King Kong, a gigantic ape that threatened New York City.

1. *King Kong*, first filmed in 1933, showed a mighty ape rampaging across the screen and terrorizing all of New York, the largest city in the United States, only to be subdued by a young woman, whom Kong fell in love with.

2. Since *King Kong* was very popular caused many sequels to be made.

3. The public's appetite for violent monsters was not to be quelled by one gigantic ape.

4. Since Kong, many other monsters have stalked the screen, and Godzilla's original territory was Tokyo.

5. Godzilla, whose fiery breath and big feet ravaged Tokyo in a series of movies, eventually teamed up with three other Japanese monsters--Rodan, Mothra, and Manda--to threaten New York City in a film entitled *Destroy All Monsters*, produced in 1968.

6. The monsters were not self-controlled, however, and there were transmitters in their necks.

7. The monsters, directed by alien powers from the planet Killaak, who had set up a subterranean base in Japan, were reprogrammed by Earth's scientists to attack their overseers, who used every device, including another monster, to try to counter the Big Four.

8. Because the Earth was secure, Godzilla and the other three monsters destroyed the last of the invaders.

9. Because he helped to save the Earth resulted in a new image for Godzilla.

10. Many of the most frightening screen monsters have come from outer space, and the 1950s and 1960s produced unforgettable creatures like *The Thing*, *The Blob*, and *The Green Slime*.

11. In an allegorical interpretation of a monster like *The Blob* is where evil is seen as endless and inescapable.

12. Many ordinary creatures--like frogs, crabs, and bees--have been made into monsters, and radiation has caused them to grow unbelievably large and powerful.

13. In a series of films following the bombing of Hiroshima, people frequently became monsters because of exposure to radiation, as seen in the Japanese horror film *The H-Man*, in which human beings changed into radioactive, cannibalistic water which dissolved other human beings.

14. An example of our destruction by our own or someone else's invention is when the *Blob* or some other abnormal creature menaces the Earth.

USE SUBORDINATION TO SHOW EXACT RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN IDEAS.

Subordination is the chief method that good writers use to extend their sentences and to vary the beginnings of their sentences. When writers learn to effectively use subordination as well as coordination, their style reads something like this (subordinated parts are bold):

Adopting Babylonian astrology, the Greeks retained many of the Babylonian names for the astrological signs but gave new names to others. They organized the astrological signs into a complex system **that was best explained by Ptolemy in *The Tetrabiblos*, a work which became the handbook for all future writings about astrology.**

An understanding of subordination, then, is necessary to the development of a varied style. **Instead of writing a series of short, choppy sentences, choose one idea for the sentence base, or independent clause, and subordinate other ideas.**

A short sentence is often used for emphasis, since it stands apart from the other sentences in the paragraph. But if the paragraph contains a number of short, choppy sentences, no one idea stands out, and the primary effect is monotony. To avoid a series of short, choppy sentences, learn to use subordinated elements--subordinate clauses, verbal phrases, appositives, and prepositional phrases--to extend a sentence base, or independent clause.

SHORT AND CHOPPY: Hawaii became the fiftieth state. It is a series of islands. The islands include many small stepping-stone islands and eight major islands.

SUBORDINATION: Hawaii, **the fiftieth state**, is a series of islands **that include many small stepping-stone islands and eight major islands**. [The subordinated elements are an appositive and a subordinate clause.]

SHORT AND CHOPPY: One may travel southeastward through the chain of islands. The first major island one would come to is Kawai. It is the result of volcanic eruptions. The other islands are, too.

SUBORDINATION: **Traveling southeastward through the chain of islands**, one would come to Kawai, **the first major island, which resulted, as did the other islands, from volcanic eruptions**. [The subordinated elements are a verbal phrase, an appositive, and two subordinate clauses.]

Instead of linking sentences primarily with the conjunctions *and*, *so*, *or*, *but*, *for*, *nor* or with conjunctive adverbs like *however* and *therefore*, extend most sentences through subordination.

Coordination is helpful in developing a varied style because it allows you to give equal emphasis to two ideas.

On the island of Hawaii there are some beaches with pearl-white sand, but there are others with jet-black sand.

But when ideas have a time, place, or cause relationship, you should use subordination to indicate the connection.

STRINGY: The largest island is named Hawaii, and the state is also named Hawaii; therefore many people confuse the two.

RELATED: Since both the largest island and the state itself are named Hawaii, many people confuse the two.

STRINGY: Scuba diving is a popular pastime for tourists in many of Hawaii's bays, and highly trained diver-guides are available, so even small children can scuba-dive. -

RELATED: In many of Hawaii's bays, where highly trained diver-guides are available, scuba diving is a popular pastime for tourists, even the small children.

Excessive or overlapping subordination is not effective. If you overdo or overlap subordination, your reader will have difficulty determining what the sentence base, or independent clause, is.

UNCLEAR: An added attraction on the island of Hawaii, the "Big Island," where the Volcano Pele, which erupted violently in 1960, still stirs, is a volcanic eruption which, although seldom dangerous, may shoot lava fountains as high as 1900 feet.

CLEAR: An added attraction on the island of Hawaii is a volcanic eruption which, although seldom dangerous, may shoot lava fountains as high as 1900 feet.

UNCLEAR: My grandfather took great pleasure throughout his life in the craft of carving wooden figures, which he learned to do when he was young, which was a time when people did not have the great number of amusements which we have today.

CLEAR: My grandfather, who lived in a time when people did not have the great number of amusements of today, learned when young to carve wooden figures. He took great pleasure in the craft throughout his life.

Be sure the relationship between the subordinate clause and the independent clause or clauses is logical.

ILLOGICAL Because volcanic activity is an added tourist attraction, the Volcano Pele may shoot a lava fountain as high as 1900 feet. [*The Volcano Pele* does not discharge lava because volcanic activity is a tourist attraction.]

LOGICAL The Volcano Pele, an added tourist attraction, may shoot a lava fountain as high as 1900 feet.

Practice Exercise D

Combine each of the following groups of short, choppy sentences into one effective sentence. Express the most important idea in the independent clause and put lesser ideas in subordinate clauses, phrases, or words. Use coordination only for ideas of equal importance.

EXAMPLE:

Science fiction has had its great monsters. It has also had its superheroes. The superheroes have fought the greatest villains imaginable. They have always won.

In addition to its great monsters, science fiction has had its superheroes, who have fought the greatest villains imaginable and have always won.

1. Buck Rogers first appeared in 1929. He was the earliest superhero of the comics. He battled space monsters in the twenty-fifth century.
2. Buck Rogers was so popular. A rival hero was introduced in 1934. His name was Flash Gordon.
3. There was a series of films about Flash Gordon. Flash battled Ming the Merciless. Ming was the Emperor of the Universe. He threatened the Earth from the alien planet Mongo.
4. Flash had to fight all kinds of monsters. He had to fight the Fang Men. He also had to stop an oncoming planet from smashing into the Earth.
5. Flash finally destroyed Ming. He became the Conqueror of the Universe. He also became the savior of his own beautiful girlfriend. Her name was Dale Arden. All of this happened in the final Flash Gordon film in 1940.

Practice Exercise E

Rewrite each of the following stringy sentences to make one effective sentence. Express the most important idea in the independent clause, and put lesser ideas in subordinate clauses, phrases, and words. Use coordination only for ideas of equal importance.

EXAMPLE:

Flash Gordon was a phenomenal success, and other comic-strip superheroes moved to the screen, and some of these were Superman and Batman.

Because Flash Gordon was a phenomenal success, other comic-strip superheroes, such as Superman and Batman, moved to the screen.

1. In everyday life Superman was Clark Kent, and Clark Kent was a mild-mannered newspaper reporter, and he tried to win the favor of Lois Lane, a fellow reporter.
2. The Earth would be threatened in some way, and Clark Kent would step into a telephone booth, and he would emerge as the Man of Steel.
3. Superman came from the planet Krypton, so he could not be destroyed by any known weapon, and he had at his command superhuman powers, and some of these were x-ray vision and ultrasensitive hearing.
4. In real life Batman was millionaire Bruce Wayne, and he lacked the spectacular powers of Superman, so he had to rely on a variety of technological gadgets to battle the evil forces of the universe.
5. Batman fought a host of Earth's fascinating supercriminals, and some of these were the Joker, Mr. Freeze, and Catwoman, and he also had to confront supervillains from outer space, but he was always victorious regardless of how powerful his adversaries were.

Practice Exercise F

The following is an exercise in thinking and relationships, designed to point out differences in meaning that result from subordination. Read the pairs of sentences carefully and answer the questions by writing A or B.

1. A. Although the drought is severe, the nation will avoid food shortages through imports.
B. Although the nation will avoid food shortages through imports, the drought is severe.

Which of these sentences best expresses the nation's determination to avoid food shortages?

2. A. Whereas natural childbirth is not completely painless, many parents find it both rewarding and exciting.
B. Whereas many parents find natural childbirth both rewarding and exciting, it is not completely painless.

Which of these sentences would be written by an advocate of natural childbirth?

3. A. Although some people consider shoplifting to be little more than an innocent game, it is really a serious crime.
B. Although it is really a serious crime, some people consider shoplifting to be little more than an innocent game.

Which sentence stresses the criminality of a shoplifter?

4. A. While maneuvering the ship into the harbor, the lonely captain thought of the comforts of home.
B. While thinking of the comforts of hornet the lonely captain maneuvered the ship into the harbor.

Which of these sentences stresses the captain's homesickness?

5. A. Ignoring the essential beauty of the cypress tree, the early Greeks dedicated it to Pluto, their infernal deity.

B. Dedicating the cypress tree to Pluto, their infernal deity, the early Greeks ignored the essential beauty of this tree.

Which sentence better emphasizes the beauty of the cypress tree?

Practice Exercise G

Revise the following sentences to avoid excessive or overlapping subordination or excessive qualification.

EXAMPLE:

In the ancient mythology of the European tradition, the swallow, a bird sacred to Iris and Venus, is usually an allegorical figure of spring.

Sacred to Iris and Venus in ancient European mythology, the swallow is usually an allegorical figure of spring.

1. The book was about the 1960s which was a turbulent period which brought with it great changes that affected the country.
2. A rose hip, which resembles a berry and which has a very bright color, is really a seed receptacle which is an excellent source of ascorbic acid which is better known as vitamin C.
3. Iseult was a figure in Arthurian legend who was an Irish princess who married the king of Cornwall and who had a hopeless love affair with Tristan, who was the king's knight.
4. Mayonnaise is a dressing which is made from beaten raw egg yolk and from butter and from vinegar, or it may be made with olive oil and lemon juice in place of butter and vinegar.

5. The dam needs a wooden flashboard with a height of three feet above the top which will increase the reservoir capacity by 10 percent and which, in turn, will provide badly needed water for irrigation.

6. Flamingoes are large birds which wade in search of food and which have red or pink plumage and which have long legs, long necks, and a bill which turns downward at the tip.

7. A justice of the peace is a magistrate of the lowest level of a state court system who performs marriages, who administers oaths, and who usually acts upon minor offenses which would only further crowd the dockets of higher courts which may, however, eventually receive such cases on appeal.

8. In spring after the annual floods and before the dry months of summer, many people decide to take early vacations in the temperate climate of mountain resorts.

9. The Hudson's Bay Company was a British joint-stock venture which was chartered in 1670 to compete with the French in the St. Lawrence River area in fur trading with the Indian tribes.

Practice Exercise H

Rewrite the following paragraph using subordination to eliminate the short, choppy sentences and the stringy compound sentences. You will notice the improvement in style that subordination achieves if you read aloud first the original version of the paragraph and then your revision.

We look back over the history of literature, and we find superheroes in abundance, and the superheroes fought villains endowed with fantastic powers. One of the earliest heroes in the history of Western literature was Ulysses, and he had to overcome many supernatural beings, and one of these was Polyphemus, and he was a giant with one eye. Then there was Perseus. He fought the Medusa. The Medusa was a frightening Gorgon. She had hissing snakes for hair. She turned anyone who looked directly at her into stone. Another superhero of mythology was Jason. He went in search of the Golden Fleece. He had to yoke two fire-breathing bulls. He had to yoke them to plow a field. He had to sow dragon's teeth in the field. A crop of armed men sprang up from the planted teeth, so Jason had to destroy them, but he finally defeated all the evil forces set against him, and so did all the other superheroes of mythology.

AWKWARDNESS AND OBSCURITY

Sometimes sentences are clumsy, meaningless, or, in some instances, absurd. Often it is difficult to determine exactly which violations of grammar are involved. The reason may be a combination of violations or simply a heavy-handed or vague and illogical manner of saying something.

One common cause of awkwardness is the improper use of *when*, *where*, *what*, or *because* after *is* in definitions and explanations. A substantive may be introduced as the subject of a sentence and then described as a time, a place, or a thing by means of *is when*, *is where*, *is what*, or *is because*. Remember that the linking verb *is* functions as an equal sign between the subject and the words that rename or define it.

ILLOGICAL: Embarrassment is when your face turns red.

LOGICAL: Embarrassment has occurred when your face turns red.

ILLOGICAL: Skydiving is where people jump from airplanes into free-fall.

LOGICAL: Skydiving is jumping from an airplane into free-fall.

ILLOGICAL: The direct object is what receives the action of the verb.

LOGICAL: The direct object receives the action of the verb.

ILLOGICAL: The reason she laughed is because the joke was funny.

LOGICAL: The reason she laughed is that the joke was funny.

The best way to avoid writing awkward or illogical sentences is to evaluate each statement critically. Is it clear? Is it precise? Is it sensible? Is it to the point?

Practice Exercise I

Rewrite the following statements to remove awkwardness and obscurity of expression. If a sentence is correct as given, write correct.

EXAMPLE:

A good football team may look the same but it is better.

A good football team may look the same as a poor team, but the good team plays better.

1. Vocational schools is where you can learn a trade that you can get a job with.

2. To write legibly is that you get a better grade on a paper that is neat.

3. In the autumn there is nice weather which one enjoys the crisp tang of and the scenery is beautiful.

4. A *faux pas* is where somebody does something and the rules of etiquette are violated.

5. She was noteworthy in that her eyes were expressive and she had an effective manner of speaking and in any discussion she was listened to.

6. Although George didn't understand the reasoning at the time, it was because Marge wasn't at a place when she could stop her work and go with him.

7. The worst thing about learning to swim is one swallows water because of a desire to get air when your mouth is in the water.

8. What we failed to notice was we were at a time where time was running out for us and we kept on trying to restart the car and the train kept coming closer.

9. A soldier is a hero in wartime but civilians look down on the military when danger appears not to be threatening the country.