

Effective sentences in writings

Main topics

I. Sentence types (basic knowledge)

1. Long vs. short
2. Simple vs. complex and compound
3. Balanced vs. periodic

II. Effective Sentences (for rhetorical effects)

1. Unity
2. Coherence
3. Conciseness

III. Emphasis in sentences

IV. Variation in Sentence Structures (help to produce better writings)

Sentence Combining Skills

I.

Types of sentences categorized according to their uses:

1. Declarative/affirmative—making an assertion
2. Interrogative—asking a question
3. Imperative—expressing a command
4. Exclamatory—expressing a strong feeling

Categories in grammar with the focus on information structure:

1. Simple
2. Compound
3. Complex
4. Compound-complex

1. Simple sentences—recognize them

e.g. After arriving at Peking University, I find it is not what I expected.

(*) In addition to enrolling in the compulsory and optional courses, I attend several academic lectures given by distinguished professors and scholars.

But I cannot help thinking how much I will miss the freedom and the friends that I have made here in college.

The effect of simple sentences

Analyze the para.

“Our city is on the threshold of a great era. Of this we can be sure. But in order to fulfill the promise of the future, we must be willing to work—and to spend. // We need a larger police force for public protection. We need an enlarged library. We need to increase the pay scale of teachers in the public schools. We need to improve our water supply. // Of all these needs there is but one solution. We must see that the bond issue is approved by the voters in the November election.”

Simple sentences in the sample, you can suppose, it is a part of a speech made by mayor of a city
Each simple sentence puts forward an important suggestion, with force and clarity.
The same type of sentences is also applicable in your writing

Simple sentences in information structure

- 1)One subject
- 2)One predicate-verb

Its functions in communication

- 4)Be emphatic;
- 5)Have special clarity;
- 6)Provide variety; together with long complicated sentences...

2. Compound Sentences

e.g.

We think every young couple should set up a home of their own, and we pity the couple who must share their home with a parent, let alone with other relatives.

(Here are some tips to help ease your transition.) Accept that things will be different, but being different isn't bad or wrong.

College is a test on your passion; it can take you far and make you very well-off.

"Life isn't about finding yourself; Life is about creating yourself." (Bernard Shaw)

Compound Sentences in information structure

Two or more independent clauses, related to each other in meaning, linked by coordinate conjunctions (and, but, or) or by a semicolon (;)

Its functions in communication:

- 1)Express ideas compatible;
- 2)Be roughly equal in importance;
- 3)Take shape one by one in orderly sequence...

3. Complex Sentences

e.g.

But I cannot help thinking //how much I will miss the freedom and the friends /that I have made here in college.

In high school, most people have someone //who encourages success, like parents, teachers, coaches, and counselors.

Complex Sentences in information structure

- 1)One main/principal clause,
- 2)One or more dependent/subordinate clauses,
- 3)With connective words (what, which, that, who...) denoting the relation between the two parts.

Its functions in communication:

They can play the role of

- 1)Subject
- 2)Object
- 3)Predicative
- 4)Attributive
- 5)Adverbial in the main clause

4. Compound-Complex Sentences

a combination structure containing two main clauses, at least one dependent clause.

e.g. The stone-cutter, however, had never seen this spirit, and only shook his head with an unbelieving air /when anyone spoke of it.

(A dependent clause + adverbial clause of time)

A sample para. with short and long sentences:

"We live in an age of easy access to the rest of the world. Cheap flights mean / that millions of people are able to visit places their parents could only dream about, while the Internet enables us to communicate with the remotest places and the traditional postal services are now referred to almost mockingly as "snail mail." When students go off back-packing, they can email their parents from Internet cafes in the Himalayas or from a desert oasis. And as for mobile phones—the clicking of text messaging at any hour of the day or night has become familiar to us all. Everyone, it seems, provided, of course, they can afford to do so, need never be out of touch."

Variety in sentence types is quite necessary in writing.

Simple short ones—make emphatic or important statements

(the first and the last sentences of a passage)

Long complex ones—express complex ideas clearly and accurately

(illustration, elaboration, persuasion)

II. Effective sentences from a rhetorical perspective

- 1.loose
- 2.periodic
- 3.balanced

1. Loose

e.g. She decides to study the history of wars /though she was interested in music.

(the first part independent and complete + dependent adverbial)

2. Periodic

e.g. Although she was interested in music, she decides to study the history of wars.

(Neither in syntax nor in meaning is it complete until the last word)

The sentence follows a climactic order, the last word being the most important.

Effects of loose sentences

“He was an inch, perhaps two, under six feet, powerfully built, and he advanced straight at you with a slight stoop of the shoulders, head forward, and a fixed-from-under stare which make you think of a charging bull. His voice was deep, loud, and his manner displayed a kind of dogged self-assertion which had nothing aggressive in it”... (fr. Joseph Conrad’s Lord Jim)

Effects:

- 1) Loose in structure;
- 2) No suspense or climax;
- 3) The tone is easy, relaxed and informal;
- 4) The author enumerates facts or ideas of equal importance;
- 5) The presentation is natural, orderly.

Effects of periodic sentences—from a rhetorical perspective

e.g.

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.

...and in the various Eastern ports where he got his living as ship-chandler’s water-clerk he was very popular. (from Lord Jim)

Features of periodic sentences (compared to loose sentences which are easier, simpler, more natural and direct)

- 1) more complex,
- 2) emphatic,
- 3) formal,
- 4) literary

3. Balanced

e.g.

“Let us be ruthless in our criticism, cruel to personal vanities, indifferent to age, rank to experience if these stand in our way”.

—Norman Bethune

A sentence contains two or more parts; of the same form and grammatical function.

(the one with parallel constructions)

Balanced—from rhetorical point of view

e.g. 1

“It does not do to live in memories, in regrets for the good old days, or in sadness about friends who are dead. One’s thoughts must be directed to the future, and to things about which there is something to be done”.

—Bertrand Russell

e.g.

“It does not do to live in memories, in regrets for the good old days, or in sadness about friends who are dead. // One’s thoughts must be directed to the future, and to things about which there is something to be done”.

(A balanced sentence contains two groups of parallel constructions, of the same form or grammatical function.)

Exercise—Try to make your own balanced sentences

On hearing the news, he ..., and I ...

The politician is ..., whereas the statesman is ...

...man ... philosophy...

For your reference:

e.g.

On hearing the news, he was angered, and I was saddened.

The politician is concerned with successful elections, whereas the statesman is interested in the future of his people.

A politician: one who is actively involved in politics, especially party politics; one who seeks personal or partisan gain, often by scheming and maneuvering

** A statesman: a political leader whose wisdom, integrity, etc., win great respect; a male political leader regarded as a disinterested promoter of the public good.*

“In Plato’s opinion man was made for philosophy; in Bacons opinion philosophy was made for man”. —Thomas Babington Macaulay

Effects of balanced sentences

- 1) Impressive
- 2) Emphatic and forceful with the parallel structures
- 3) Similar in structure but contrast in meaning
- 4) Pleasing to hear because of the rhythm (the rhythmic effects)
- 5) Useful in formal writings (e.g. expository, argumentative proses and speeches)

Effects of Short sentences

Short sentences are emphatic; suitable for the presentation of important facts and ideas;

Effects of long sentences

Long sentences contain many modifiers; capable of expressing complex ideas with precision; suitable for the explanation of views and theories; or the description of things with many details;

A sample essay about a great scientist

Jane Goodall (a scientist)

By Judith Burgdorfer

She did not look like what I had expected a popular world-renowned scientist would look like. In spite of having been born in Britain in April 1934, she had nothing of a typical British behaviour about her. She wore blue jeans, trainers and a cotton blouse.

She looked like a common and modest woman, one that you would meet in a supermarket. And she did not even look like a woman over 50, though her long hair tied in a ponytail was grey. Her face was smooth and in a very mysterious way looked carefree like a child’s face does.

Jane Goodall (a scientist)

There was a very lively as well as wise expression in her eyes, but most impressive was the deep

love and peace they transmitted to everybody when she spoke to the audience. She had lived over 30 years next to chimpanzees in the rainforest, studying and learning from them as she said. You could see the marks of that life, as her whole body seemed to talk with peace and wisdom and was as fit as that of a young woman in her mid-twenties.

Jane Goodall (a scientist)

And even though she has been back to the civilized world for many years now, where she has taught at many universities and fought battles against politicians, businesses and other strong opponents to get protection for chimpanzees and other apes, she must have done this with those very calm gestures that are more convincing than any powerful and eloquent talk.

I guess that has made her so successful, because when you watch her you cannot help but agree with her. And her most important message to us was that the love of creatures can be more powerful than all the weapons in the world, if we will just let it.

Insights:

Active vocabulary in descriptions

- Try to use very descriptive adjectives;
- Possibly look up some in either a dictionary or translator;

Preview the basic qualities of effective sentences:

- 1.Unity
- 2.Coherence
- 3.Conciseness