

MHCBE

English

Handbook

Junior and Senior High



Composition is for the most part, an effort of slow diligence and steady perseverance, to which the mind is dragged by necessity or resolution.

Samuel Johnson

Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. This requires not that the writer make all sentences short, or avoid all detail and treat subjects only in outline, but that every word tell.

William Strunk, Jr.

ACTIVE AND PASSIVE VOICE

The **voice of a verb** indicates whether the subject of a sentence **performs** the action or **receives** the action.

In the active voice, the subject of a sentence does the action. For example, *the dog ran into the street*. Use the active voice when possible. It uses fewer words and is more precise than the passive voice. A verb is in the active voice when the subject of the verb actually performs the action indicated by the verb.

Example:

The judge	pronounced	the verdict.
<i>Subject</i>	<i>verb</i>	<i>object</i>

We	built	a house	in the country.
<i>Subject</i>	<i>verb</i>	<i>object</i>	<i>prepositional phrase</i>

In each example above, the subject is the performer of the action, and the object is the receiver of the action.

In the passive voice the subject of the verb receives the action: *The fire was extinguished*. A verb is in the passive voice when it expresses an action performed on the subject (the subject receives the action)

Example:

The verdict	was pronounced	by the judge.
<i>Subject</i>	<i>verb phrase</i>	<i>prepositional phrase</i>
A house	was built	in the country by us.
<i>Subject</i>	<i>verb phrase</i>	<i>prepositional phrases</i>

In each example:

- a. the subject is the receiver of the action,
- b. the subject of the active voice sentence is now in a phrase beginning with “by” (it is now object of the preposition),
- c. the verb consists of a form of the verb “to be” followed by the past participle form of the verb.

A verb in the passive voice consists of some form of the verb “to be” followed by a past participle.

Examples: “to be accompanied,” “was given,” “had been given,” “will be charged,” “is shown,” “are legalized,” “is being removed.”

Why Use the Active Voice Rather than the Passive Voice?

1. The active voice is usually better style. It is more simplistic and uses fewer words resulting in conciseness.
2. The active voice is more emphatic (forceful). Using it has more impact upon the reader.
3. Using active voice verbs will strengthen your vocabulary. How often do you use the passive verb “is” in your essays? What active verb substitutes might replace it?

When Is the Passive Voice Desirable?

1. When the agent or doer of the act is not known or indefinite: “It was reported that there were two survivors.”
2. When the agent is not as important as the act itself: “Prisoners who attempt to escape will be shot.”
3. When you want to emphasize either the agent or the act by putting it at the beginning or end of the sentence: “The accident was witnessed by more than thirty people.”

Do not confuse the passive voice with the past tense. Passive constructions can be written in any of the tenses.

TYPES OF SENTENCES

Kinds of Sentences Classified by Clauses

Simple

One main or principal clause containing two key parts: the subject and the predicate. Together the subject and predicate is called a clause.

Example:

- Blinking lights at the control panel flash a signal.

Compound

Consisting of two or more simple sentences joined together by a coordinating conjunction (*and, but, or, so,* or by a semicolon.

Examples:

- They were learning years, and at eighteen, I, Jane Eyre, was ready to strike out on my own.
- Yes, I was still plain, still a lonely orphan, but now I had real responsibilities.
- I told him I could teach his child, or I could look for a position elsewhere.

Complex

A sentence that contains one main clause and one or more subordinating clauses. Subordinate adverb clauses begin with one of the following words: *although, since, when, as, if, because, before, after, until, while, as though, whenever.*

Subordinate adjective clauses begin with a relative pronoun such as: *who, whom, whose, which, that.*

Examples:

- My parents died when I was very young.
- I was left in the hands of my mother's kind brother's wife, who had no love for me.
- Again and again, she reminded me that I was a plain, penniless orphan.
- The woman whom we had seen riding with Mr. Rochester as with him.
- If he had accepted my help, I would have thought no more of him.

Compound – Complex

Consists of two or more main clauses, and one or more subordinate clauses.

Example:

- If he had accepted my help, I would have thought no more of him, but his roughness and his frown appealed to me.

Four Types of Sentences by Grammatical Purpose (Modes of Discourse)

Declarative sentence: is used to make a statement; "I was a plain, penniless orphan."

Interrogative sentence: asks a question; "Where are you from?"

Imperative sentence: gives a command; "Now, get home."

Exclamatory sentence: expresses strong emotion; "Wake up!"

SUCCESSFUL SENTENCES!!!

- A Sentence is a group of words that expresses a complete thought. Six elements of successful sentences are:
 1. **Clarity** - No part of the sentence should be awkward or ambiguous. If you suspect you have an unclear sentence, rewrite it from scratch.
 2. **Completeness**
 - **Sentence Fragments** must be corrected. For example,

Smiling at the camera

is a fragment, and it needs an independent clause to complete it:

Smiling at the camera, he began to walk backward to the car.

- **Run-ons** must be corrected. For example,

If a person does not exercise a muscle, it will get weak, the same advice applies to the brain.

is a run-on sentence with a comma splice. It could be rewritten correctly as:

If a person does not exercise a muscle, it will get weak. The same advice applies to the brain.

- **Consistent Verb Tenses** - For example,

We were running, jumped, and slid down the mountain.

could be changed to one of the following:

We ran, jumped, and slid down the mountain.

We were running, jumping, and sliding down the mountain.

- **Subject agreement/consistency** - For example,

The convict was completely exhausted but kept running because it might still escape.

should be

The convict was completely exhausted but kept running because he might still escape.

- **Parallel Structure in a series** - For example,

She hoped to finish her essay, that she would print it, and she could hand it in the next day.

should be changed to

She hoped to finish her essay, to print it, and to hand it in the next day.

- **Variety in Sentence Types** - It is boring to read a series of sentences that follow the same formula, For example,

My cousin says she prefers classical music to pop. She has a large collection of CDs. She never listens to them.

Try the following ways to avoid writing one simple sentence after another:

- Combine simple sentences to create compound sentences, For example,

This scene shows both Sylvia and Harry hitting each other with pillows. This also shows Sylvia is interested in Harry.

could be changed to

This scene shows Sylvia and Harry hitting each other with pillows, and that Sylvia is interested in Harry.

- Start the sentence with a transitional word. For example,

Certainly, the pillow fight scene shows that Sylvia does find Harry interesting.

- Start the sentence with a clause. For example,

When Sylvia and Harry are hitting each other with pillows, we see that she is obviously interested in Harry.

- Start the sentence with a phrase. For example,

In the pillow-fight scene, it is evident that Sylvia is interested in Harry.

Strategies For Improving Stylistic Devices - SENTENCES!

1. Count the number of words in each sentence, placing the numbers in the margin. If your sentences are all about the same length, combine some of them into complex sentences, and shorten others for emphasis.
2. Underline the words in each sentence that appear before the subject. If you find that you seldom place phrases before the subject, rearrange a few of the sentences.
3. List/highlight all the verbs you have used in the text. If you find that you repeat the same verb frequently or that your verbs do not convey vivid mental images, try replacing half of them.
4. Count the number of sentences that follow various patterns: short, long, active voice, passive voice, exclamatory, interrogative, and declarative. If most sentences follow the same pattern, rewrite *some of them* to achieve variety.

Persuasive Writing: Signal Words

TRANSITIONAL PHRASES

INTRODUCTORY PHRASES

In my opinion
I believe
It is my belief that

There is no doubt that
From my point of view
It seems to me that

I question whether
I (dis) agree with
I maintain that

CONCLUDING PHRASES

For the reasons above
As you can see
As I have noted
In other words
On the whole

In short
To be sure
Without a doubt
Obviously
Unquestionably

In brief
Undoubtedly
In any case
Summarizing
In any event

SUPPORTING OPINIONS

First Furthermore
Second In addition
Third Also
Finally Last

Equally important
In the first place
Likewise

Besides Further
Next Again
Moreover Similarly

INTRODUCING DETAILS

For example
In fact

For instance
As evidence

In support of this

CAUSE AND EFFECT

Since
Because of
Due to
For this reason
Therefore
If...then

Caused by
This results in
Consequently
Accordingly
As a result of
Leads to

In effect
Brought about
Made possible
As might be expected
Give rise to
Was responsible for

COMPARE AND CONTRAST

Similarly
Compared to
In like manner
On the other hand
Although
Even though

Likewise
In the same way
Contrasting
On the contrary
As opposed to
Rather than
Nevertheless

As well as
Have in common
All are
The same as
Conversely
Whether or not
In spite of

COUNTERING

I realize you
I understand you
Even though you
Although you
Some people
It may be that you
Your idea to ____
deserves some merit

Believe
Feel
Maintain
Want
Favour
Support
Argue
State

But
Yet
However
I doubt
I question
Let me explain
On the other hand
Nevertheless

TRANSITIONS

When you want to start an example or illustration:

She loves fine clothes. For example, her prom dress cost nearly two hundred dollars.

Jim sometimes becomes bored easily. For instance, I remember something that happened last summer.

When you want to contrast one thing with another:

Mary is one of my best friends. However, she sometimes makes me angry by being late.

Jack is a good swimmer. Even so, he has never won a trophy,

I saw her once when I felt awful. Nevertheless, we had a wonderful time.

When you want to add another idea:

Tom is crazy about his motorcycle. Furthermore, he does all the maintenance on it himself.

Mr. Johnston is an excellent teacher. Moreover, he is very popular with his students.

Everybody likes Lou. In addition, he seems to like everyone he meets.

When you want to show that one thing causes another:

Sam isn't very organized. Consequently, he sometimes doesn't seem to know what he is doing.

One time he forgot his wife's birthday. As a result, she was very angry.

Al jogs three miles a day. Therefore, he is in good shape. .

When you want to summarize or generalize:

That really bothered me. But on the whole, he is a pretty good guy.

He is sensitive, warm, and considerate. In short, I love him.

Rhetorical Devices for Emphasis and Variety:

Loose sentence: Continues to add details after the main statement is completed. (A period could be placed at one or more places before the end of the sentence.)

Examples:

- I had secured the position(.) of governess(.) to a lively child(.) at Thornfield Hall.
- When Adele begged for a present, he searched my face (.) with dark, piercing eyes.

Periodic sentence: The meaning is not completed until the last word is written. A key word is withheld until the end. (You cannot put a period anywhere except at the end.)

Example:

- When Adele begged for a present, with dark, piercing eyes my face he searched.

Inverted sentence: The sentence begins with something besides the subject. Often a subordinate clause is placed before the main clause.

Example:

- After we are married a year, I will tell you why I keep her in my house.
- If you wish to be a writer, write, write, and re-write. (inverted and repetition)

Position: Arranging the parts of a sentence so that the stress falls on the exact word. Two arrangements are effective:

1. Beginning of the sentence; e.g. Biting and clawing, the woman sprang at Mr. Rochester. Laughing and giggling, the girls quickly hung up the phone.
2. End of the sentence; e.g. The woman sprang at Mr. Rochester biting and clawing. (The end of the sentence is particularly effective because it stays in the reader's mind.)

Climactic order: Place the items of a series in an order of climax, from the weakest to the strongest, or from the least important to the most important.

Examples:

- She was graceful, clever, and self-assured.
- I am married to a nut, an eccentric, a maniac!

Anticlimactic order: Items in a series are arranged from most important to least important, often for the sake of humour.

Balanced Sentence: When two clauses in a sentence express compared or contrasted ideas in the same grammatical order, word for word, they produce a balanced sentence, one with two parts that "mirror" each other. Use clauses of noticeably equal length and movement. Balanced sentences create a very forceful impression.

Examples:

- *Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man.* Francis Bacon (the verb is dropped once the pattern is established)
- The danger of the past was that men became slaves. The danger of the future is that men may become robots.

- He seemed satisfied and I was dismissed. (Two main clauses)
- Reading novels is time-consuming, reading Shakespeare is mind-boggling.

Antithesis: A balanced sentence containing sharply contrasting ideas.

Example: Making good resolutions is easy; keeping them is hard.

Parallelism: Is used within a sentence, usually for items in a series. Each item is written in the same grammatical structure.

Examples: Parallel Predicate Adjectives

- The neighbours were *extremely shiftless, usually noisy, and frequently dishonest.*

Parallel Verbs

- He *read* the letter, *folded* it neatly, and *handed* it back to me without a word.
- The policeman drew his gun, cocked it, and fired (it) at the receding car.

Parallel Verbs in the Passive Voice

- We *were* ushered to the door and (*were*) *asked* to leave.

Parallel Nouns

- That night I lay awake thinking of Mr. Rochester, *his moodiness*, and *his secretiveness*.

Parallel Gerund Phrases

- *Following the trail* was easier than *cutting through the woods*.

Parallel infinitive Phrases

- Mrs. Fairfax told me *to find Adele* and (*to*) *wash her* for supper.

Repetition: Intentional repetition of an important word, or of an important idea in different words.

Examples:

- The drip, drip, drip of the tap made her want to scream.
- To my great embarrassment, I couldn't remember the name of the author – I couldn't even remember the name of the book.
- The tick, tick, tick of the clock unnerved the students writing the exam.