



COMMUNITY COLLEGE
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Sentence Variety

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Unvaried Sentences

Unvaried sentence structures make ideas sound simplistic and repetitious:

- The pencil was yellow.
- The pencil was new.
- The pencil was rolling off the table.
- I picked up the pencil.

Varied Sentences

Varied sentence structures sound better because they are connecting ideas together into more interesting, creative, logical, and professional structures:

- A new yellow pencil, which I quickly picked up, was no longer able to roll off the table.
- I picked up the new yellow pencil before it could roll off the table.

How Do You Want People to React to Your Writing?



Readers dislike unvaried sentences.
Without variety, writing is boring,
uncreative, illogical, and simplistic.



Readers like varied sentences.
With variety, writing is interesting,
creative, logical, and professional.

Structures for Varied Sentences

- Prepositional and verbal phrases
- Conjunctive adverbs and transitional phrases
- Coordinating conjunctions
- Correlative conjunctive pairs
- Subordinating conjunctions
- Relative pronouns

Prepositional Phrases

A Prepositional Phrase = a preposition + sometimes one or more adjectives + a noun or a pronoun

Prepositions include: about, across, after, among, as, at, before, behind, beside, besides, between, by, during, except, for, from, in, inside, of, on, onto, outside, over, than, through, toward, under, until, upon, with, without

A comma will usually follow an introductory prepositional phrase:

Near the computer, the desk was visible.

A comma is generally not used for phrases at the end of a sentence:

The desk was visible **near the computer.**

Verbal Phrases

A Verbal Phrase = a present participle, a past participle, or an infinitive verb form + modifying words

A comma will usually follow an introductory verbal phrase:

Walking up the hill,
the students quickly
arrived at the front door.

Commas often are not used after a phrase at the beginning of a sentence that has a subject following the verb:

Walking down the hill were
the college's graduating
students.

A comma is usually not used with phrases at the end of a sentence:

The students arrived
early **by walking up
the hill.**

Conjunctive Adverbs and Transitional Phrases

Conjunctive adverbs and transitional phrases can be placed between two independent clauses or within a clause. The punctuation depends on where the adverb or the phrase is placed.

consequently finally
for example however
in fact moreover
on the other hand
then therefore thus . . .

Here is a joining word between two independent clauses:

People like to write their essays on computers; **then**, the essays can be more easily revised.

Here is a joining word between the subject and verb of the second clause:

People like to write their essays on computers; the essays, **then**, can be more easily revised.

Coordinating Conjunctions

Two words, phrases, or clauses can be joined by using one of the **coordinating conjunctions (the fanboys)**.

f o r
a n d
n o r
b u t
o r
y e t
s o

Two **clauses** joined with one of the **FANBOYS** will have a comma: **Writing can be fun, but many people call it hard work.**

Punctuation of FANBOYS with Words/Phrases or Clauses

Punctuation for **coordinating conjunctions (fanboys)** is different for words/phrases and clauses.

- **Two words or phrases** joined with one of the **FANBOYS** will have no commas: **Writing can be a fun activity and hard work.**
- **Three words or phrases** joined with one of the **FANBOYS** will have commas: **Writing can be fun, exciting, and interesting.**
- **Two clauses** joined with one of the **FANBOYS** will have a comma: **Writing can be fun, and it can also be hard work.**

Correlative Conjunctive Pairs

Two words, phrases, or clauses can be joined by using **correlative conjunctive pairs**.

both ___ and ___
either ___ or ___
neither ___ nor ___
whether ___ or ___
not only ___ but ___
not only ___ but also ___

Correlative conjunctive pairs join together parallel items:

- **Both** the computer **and** the pencil were on the table.
- **Whether** the computer was new **or** the computer was old, we still loved using it.

Subordinating Conjunctions

Subordinating conjunction
+ **dependent (subordinate)**
clause, independent clause.

after although as as if
because before even
even though if since
though unless until what
when where while ...

A subordinate clause can be placed at the beginning, middle, or ending of a sentence.

Because writers love communication activities, they also love to read.

Writers, **because they love communication activities,** also love to read.

Writers also love to read **because they love communication activities.**

Punctuation with Subordinating Conjunctions

When a subordinate clause is at the end of a sentence, most of the time, there is no punctuation.

People like to read poetry out loud **because the sounds will be more noticeable.**

When the subordinate clause is at the beginning of the sentence, then a comma is needed to separate the two clauses from each other.

Because the sounds will be more noticeable, people like to read poetry out loud.



Relative Pronouns

Relative pronoun + verb(s) and other parts of a dependent (subordinate) clause, independent clause.

**who whoever
whom whomever
which that**

A subordinate clause that begins with a relative pronoun can be put into different places in a sentence:

- Anyone **who likes to write** should also like to read.
- One of my ancestors met Shakespeare, **who was a great writer.**

Punctuation with Relative Pronouns

A **relative pronoun** “relates” an idea in a clause to the noun or pronoun that immediately precedes it.

If the **relative pronoun and the rest of its subordinate clause** restrict the meaning of the preceding noun or pronoun, then no comma is used:

Anyone **who likes to write** should also like to read.



If there is no restriction, then the items must be separated by commas:

One of my ancestors met Shakespeare, **who was a great writer**.

Emily Dickinson, **who was also a great writer**, wrote that poem.

More Information

The Writing Center at the Community College of Rhode Island has more online resources.



Contact Information

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