



Summit Press Publishers

## Tips On Varying Sentence Structure

Writing can become monotonous and boring even when the content is interesting if the sentences are structured the exact same way whether it be subject—verb—object constructions, too many short punchy sentences or long multi-comma phrases. Or they may start the same way every time usually with “It,” “The,” or “I.” Example: I heard a strange noise at the window. I crawled along the floor until I was right under the window. I slowly raised my head up and....

Ways to vary the beginning of your sentences:

### **Start with a prepositional phrase:**

Example: During the next hour, she stared out the window, eyes unfocused.

### **Begin with a participle or participial phrase:**

Screaming at the top of their lungs, the crowd celebrated Ann’s win.

### **Start with an absolute phrase:**

Example: Head high, shoulders back, Ann walked up to the podium to receive her medal.

### **Start with a dependent clause:**

After the ceremony was over, she collapsed in a blubbering heap.

If it hadn’t been for the wind, she would have broken all existing records.

I haven’t included adverbs here because I think they should be avoided.

Ways to vary the length and rhythm of sentences:

Create **compound sentences** out of short sentences by using conjunctions:

and, but, for, or, so.

Remember when you link two independent clauses (two sentences) together, be sure to place a comma before the conjunction.

**Create short punchy statements** all you need is a subject and a verb.

Example: Ann rocks.

Annie Proulx made good enough use of the **detached clause**, punctuated like a sentence, to win a Pulitzer, but writers all copied her and the practice lost some of its clout, so do carefully and not too often. But if you have an image as good as these, feel free.

Example from Proulx: Independent clause comes first, then two detached clauses: "At sixteen he was buried in under a casement of flesh. Head shaped like a Crenshaw, no neck, reddish hair rucked back. Features as bunched as kissed fingertips."

**Compound complex sentences** with multiple independent clauses and at least one dependent clause:

Example: Because running has become a way of life for Ann, she doesn't mind getting up in the cold and dark every morning, which to my mind is certifiable behavior, so that she can slog it out in rain, wind, sleet, snow, just like a postman.

**Embed one sentence into another using relative pronouns:** which who, whoever, whom, that, whose.

Example: According to Sheybani, running, which is one of the oldest Olympic sports, is good for the heart, soul, lungs, abs, flabs, quads, blobs, hams, hocs, and a variety of embarrassing ailments.

Group details into **parallel constructions:** Proulx again: "...a heaving sludge of ice under fog, where air blurred into water, where liquid was solid, where solids dissolved, where the sky froze and light and dark muddled." Note that the verbs all are in agreement.