

SENTENCE VARIETY

If most of your sentences are the same length and follow the same sentence pattern, your writing will sound monotonous and boring—or “choppy,” if most of your sentences are short. Here are some methods you can use to vary sentence length and sentence pattern.

- **Use coordinating conjunctions (the FANBOYS: *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*) to link independent clauses into one longer compound sentence (a compound sentence consists of independent clauses).** (Note that you need to put a comma before a coordinating conjunction if it introduces an independent clause!)

⊗ *We decided not to go to class. We planned to get the notes. Everyone else had the same plan. Most of us ended up failing the quiz.*

⊙ *We decided not to go to class, but we planned to get the notes. Everyone else had the same plan, so most of us ended up failing the quiz.*

- **Use subordinating conjunctions to establish logical connections between ideas in complex sentences (=sentences that combine independent and dependent clauses).** (Note that, if the dependent clause follows the independent clause, you do not put a comma. If the dependent clause precedes the independent clause, you need to put a comma.)

⊗ *Sandals are worn primarily to protect the sole of the foot. They are also worn for comfort and style. Ornamentation was added to sandals worn by ancient peoples. Footwear became a stylish article of clothing.*

⊙ *Although sandals are worn primarily to protect the sole of the foot, they are also worn for comfort and style. After ornamentation was added to sandals worn by ancient peoples, footwear became a stylish article of clothing.*

- **Use parallel sentence structure to combine parallel ideas into one sentence.**

⊗ *Creative thinking has to do with seizing opportunities. Creative thinking has to do with staying alert. Creative thinking has to do with seeking challenges and pushing boundaries.*

⊙ *Creative thinking has to do with seizing opportunities, staying alert, seeking challenges, and pushing boundaries.*

- **Use modifiers to describe parts of the sentence (appositives are words and phrases following a noun; relative clauses are clauses starting with *who, which, or that*).**

⊗ *Dr. Dutta recently moved to Florida. He was our family dentist.*

⊙ *Dr. Dutta, our family dentist, recently moved to Florida.*

⊗ *Ed takes his job very seriously. He always arrives at his desk at 7:55 a.m.*

⊙ *Ed, who takes his job very seriously, always arrives at his desk at 7:55 a.m.*

- **Put prepositional and verbal phrases at the beginning of the sentence. Make sure that the “doer” implied in these phrases is the same as the grammatical subject of the sentence; you don’t want to create a dangling modifier!**

⊗ *I want to be a journalist. I have to make careful plans if I want to be successful. I know I have no experience. I am afraid of conducting my first interview.*

⊙ *To be a successful journalist, I have to make careful plans. Without experience, I am afraid of conducting my first interview.*