

OK, let's keep this short and simple:

- Sentences should be concise and clear
- Use a variety of sentence patterns
- Sentence elements should be parallel

### Step 1: Vary sentence types

Use the following suggestions to vary your sentence types:

1. **Use simple sentences for emphasis and clarity.** A simple sentence contains only one independent clause, but it is not necessarily short. It can have more than one subject, more than one verb, and several modifiers.

- Both retailers [subject] and consumers [subject] have [verb] and must exercise [verb] the responsibility to curtail fraud by reporting suspicious use of credit cards [modifiers].

⇒ **Important point: Use a short, simple sentence to emphasize an important point or to make a dramatic statement.**

- Credit card fraud runs rampant.

⇒ **Important point: If you use too many simple sentences, however, your writing will sound choppy and disjointed.**

- It was a cold drizzly spring morning. I was driving to school. A teenage hitchhiker stood alongside the road. He seemed upset.

2. **Use compound sentences to clarify relationships.** A compound sentence consists of two or more independent clauses joined in one of the following ways.

- With a common and a coordinating conjunction: and, but, or, nor, so, for, yet  
Leon asked a questions, and the whole class was surprised.
- With a semicolon:  
Graffiti had been scrawled on the subway walls; passersby ignored it.
- With a semicolon and a conjunctive adverb: consequently, however, on the other hand, nevertheless  
Each year thousands of children are adopted; consequently, adoption services have increased in number.
- With a correlative conjunction: either...or, neither...nor, whether...or, both...and, not only...but also  
Either the jury will reach a verdict tonight, or they will recess until Monday morning.

⇒ **Important point: Use compound sentences to join ideas of equal importance and equal emphasis.**

3. **Use complex sentences to show subordinate (dependent) relationships.** A complex sentence consists of one independent clause and at least one dependent clause; either type may come first. When the dependent clause comes first, it is followed by a comma. When the independent clause comes first, a comma is not needed.

- Because the dam broke, the village flooded.
- The village flooded because the dam broke.

⇒ **Important point: Use complex sentence to show that one or more ideas are less important than (or subordinate to) another idea. Dependent clauses often begin with a subordinating conjunction [occasion/position words] that indicate how the less important [dependent] idea is related to the more important [independent] idea.**

Here is a list of some subordinating conjunctions and the relationships they suggest:

<b>Sentence Type:</b>	<b>Clauses that comprise it:</b>	<b>Example:</b>
Simple	One independent clause	Credit card fraud is increasing in the United States.
Compound	Two or more independent clauses	Credit card fraud is increasing in the United States; it is a violation of financial privacy.
Complex	One or more dependent clauses joint to one independent clause	Because credit card fraud is increasing in America, consumers must become more cautious.
Compound-complex	One or more dependent clauses and two or more independent clauses	Because credit card fraud is increasing in America, consumers must be cautious, and retailers must take steps to protect consumers.

☞ **Important point: Dependent clauses can also begin with a relative pronoun (who , whose, whom, which, and that)**

- Many medical doctors who are affiliated with a teaching hospital use interns in their practice.

Compare the following two paragraphs: The first consists primarily of simple and compound sentences. The revised paragraph uses sentences with dependent (subordinate) clauses that show relationships.

Original:

Are you one of the many people who has tried to quit smoking? Don't give up trying. Help is now here in the form of a nonprescription drug. The new nicotine patch has been developed. This patch will help you to quit gradually. That way, you will experience less severe withdrawal symptoms. Quitting will be easier than ever before. You need to be psychologically ready to quit smoking. Otherwise you may not be successful.

Revised:

If you are one of the many people who has tried to quit smoking, don't give up trying. Help is now here in the form of a nonprescription nicotine patch, which has been developed to help you quit gradually. Because you experience less severe withdrawal symptoms, quitting is easier than ever before. However, for this patch to be successful, you need to be psychologically ready to quit.

☞ **Important point: Use compound-complex sentences sparingly; when overused, they tend to make your writing sound wordy and labored.**

## **Step 2: Vary Sentence Length**

Varying sentence type usually results in varying sentence length.

☞ **Important point: Use sentence length for specific effects:**

Short sentences tend to be sharp and emphatic. They move ideas forward quickly, creating a fast-paced essay:

- The jury had little to debate. The incriminating evidence was clear and incontrovertible. The jury announced its verdict with astonishing speed.



Disney World and Disney land. They serve as models for other, smaller parks. Theme parks always have amusement rides. Theme parks can offer other activities such as swimming. Theme parks will probably continue to be popular.

Revised: Theme parks are growing in number and popularity. Offering high action activities, theme parks fulfill a single purpose—to provide family entertainment. The most famous parks, Disney World and Disneyland, serve as models for other, smaller parks. Parks always offer amusement rides, which appeal to both children and adults. Added attractions such as swimming, water slides, and boat rides provide thrills and recreation. Because of their family focus, theme parks are likely to grow in popularity.

#### **Step 4: Make sentences parallel**

Parallelism means that similar ideas in a sentence are expressed in similar grammatical forms or structures. It means balancing words with words, phrases with phrases, and clauses with clauses. Parallelism is used to make your sentences flow smoothly and your ideas easy to follow. It creates emphasis on the parallel structures and develops a rhythmic sound to your writing.

Which sentence in each pair below is easier to read?

- The horse was large, had a bony frame, and it was friendly.
- The horse was large, bony, and friendly.
  
- Maria enjoys swimming and drag races cars.
- Maria enjoys swimming and drag racing.

► **Important point: Some of the world's most famous documents and speeches derive their power from parallel structure. In his famous 1963 speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, Dr. Martin Luther King created an enduring statement with these parallel phrases:**

"I have a dream that that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plains, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together."

The moral of the lesson:

- Sentence coordination links ideas of equal importance
- Sentence subordination connects two unequal but related clauses with a subordinating conjunction to form a complex sentence.
- Parallel structure means putting ideas of the same rank in the same grammatical structure for equality of ideas, balance, and rhythm.
- Use them all to create logical, concise, and graceful writing.

Sources: Successful College Writing. Kathleen T. McWhorter. Bedford/St. Martins, 2000.  
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English: Writing and Skills. W. Ross Winterowd and Patricia Y. Murray. Holt Rhinehart and Winston, 1988.  
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