

Varying Sentence Beginnings

Usually the way to form a sentence in English is to begin with the subject and end with the predicate. However, if all sentences were like this there would be no variety and all sentences would sound the same.

Compare the following versions of the same paragraph. In the first, each sentence begins in the same way. In the second, an attempt has been made to achieve emphasis and clarity by varying sentence beginnings.

NOT VARIED

The trial had been scheduled for two o'clock. The audience was nosily settling itself in the courtroom for the coming show. The lawyers were quietly talking and shuffling piles of papers at the polished tables in the front of the room. The bell in the courthouse tower struck two in resounding tones. Judge Perez, dignified in her long black gown, walked slowly to her bench. The clerk rasped out, "Everyone rise." The room seemed suddenly to lift for a moment, and then it settled back into an eerie silence. The judge opened the case of the People vs. John Strong in a manner, which seemed to imply that such trials happened every day of her life.

VARIED

The trial had been scheduled for two o'clock. In the courtroom, the audience was nosily settling itself for the coming show. At the polished tables in the front of the room, the lawyers were quietly talking and shuffling piles of papers. When the bell in the courthouse tower struck two in resounding tones, Judge Perez, dignified in her long black gown, walked slowly to her bench. "Everybody rise," rasped the clerk. Suddenly the room seemed to lift for a moment, and then it settled back into an eerie silence. In a matter, which seemed to imply that these trials happened every day of her life, the judge opened the case of the People vs. John Strong.

The normal order of sentences needs not to be avoided merely for the sake of variety, but it is often possible to increase the force and clarity of a statement by beginning with an important modifier.

Exercise 1: In the following sentences, find the **modifier** and **rewrite** the sentence, **placing the modifier first**. The sentences are correct; however, you are rewriting them so you will learn a variety of ways of expressing the same idea.

I felt better instantly.
Instantly, I felt better.

Our system of measurements will eventually be changed.
Eventually our system of measurements will be changed.

1. The United States is planning cautiously to introduce the metric system.

2. This system, unfamiliar and different, will change American habits quite a bit.

3. Our vocabulary of measurement will gradually be replaced by a new one.

4. The metric system, tested and refined, has been in use in Europe and most of the rest of the world since the early nineteenth century.

5. The standard unit of measurement until then, surprisingly, was a person's hand or foot.

6. This obviously is not a standard size.

7. The metric system, comprehensive and orderly, includes measurements of length, weight, volume, and temperature.

Exercise 2: Write four sentences of your own beginning with modifiers. Write one starting with each of these phrases: a prepositional phrase, a participle phrase, an appositive phrase, and an infinitive phrase.

At the sound of the bell, the teacher collected the papers.
(prepositional phrase)

Having examined the records, the lawyer prepared a new deed.
(participle phrase)

An excellent example of modern architecture, the new city hall is a favorite tourist site.
(appositive phrase)

To learn to swim better, we took lessons at the pool.
(infinitive phrase)

1. Prepositional Phrase-

2. Participial Phrase-

3. Appositive Phrase-

4. Infinitive Phrase-

Exercise 3: The following sentences, all of which begin with the subject, contain phrase modifiers, which can be placed at the beginning of the sentence. Rephrase the sentences by placing the modifying phrases at the beginning. Place a comma after each introductory phrase.

Pompeii was a well-to-do commercial city at the foot of Mt. Vesuvius.

At the foot of Mt. Vesuvius, Pompeii was a well-to-do commercial city.

1. Its population at the time of its destruction was about 30,000.

2. Archaeologists have discovered many facts about the life and times of ancient Pompeii to add to our knowledge of bygone days.

3. Wealthy Romans, attracted by the beauty of the location and healthfulness of the climate, built many villas there.

4. The streets, paved with blocks of lava, were usually wide and straight.

5. The Forum was a square, completely surrounded by temples and public buildings, near the western edge of the city.

6. Mt. Vesuvius had never given any indication of its volcanic character up to the year A.D. 63.

Exercise 4: Rewrite the following sentences so that each begins with either a word or a phrase modifier. In rearranging the sentences, you may wish to drop some of the words or add others; you may do so provided you keep the original meaning. Hints are given for the first five.

We were tired and decided to leave the party early.

Tired, we decided to leave the party early.

1. Tommy flopped into the nearest chair, kicking off his shoes. (Begin with *kicking*)

2. He looked through the program to find what songs Chita Rivera would sing. (Begin with *to find*)

3. The program about Roberto Clemente and Orlando Cepeda began at seven o'clock sharp. (Begin with *at*)

4. We scraped the old bureau down to the natural wood and discovered that it was real mahogany. (Begin with *scraping*)

5. Our boat, trim and fast, won the race. (Begin with *trim*)

6. My car was greased last week, and now it runs perfectly.

7. The stage crew, working evenings after school for weeks, completed the sets on schedule.

8. The band marched around the field and entertained the spectators during the half.

9. Garden City High School has a good school spirit and always has a large attendance at football games.

10. The light bulb, flickering on and off for several seconds, finally went out.

Adjectives and Adjective Phrases

Exercise 5: An opening adjective may be a single word or the first word in an adjective phrase. An adjective phrase begins with an adjective and then continues the description. Examples: *happy to graduate, angry at not getting the job, glad about winning the spelling bee, smart as Einstein, sneaky at times, polite with both elders and children, disruptive in class, etc.* A comma follows an opening adjective, whether a single word or a phrase.

Single opening adjective: Powerless, I went to my room after I was grounded.

Multiple opening adjectives: Bloodthirsty and brutal, the vampires killed 47 people.

Opening adjective phrase: Scared to death, I ran the whole way home.

Multiple adjective phrases: Numb of feeling, empty as a wheel, he clung to life.

Directions: Rewrite each sentence adding an opening of the sentence identified.

1. **Single opening adjective:** I wanted to run away and be gone from this strange place.

2. **Multiple adjective phrases:** I felt behind me looking for my contact.

3. **Multiple opening adjectives:** The elephant was worth at least a hundred pounds.

4. **Opening adjective phrase:** He rocked his own body back and forth, breathing deeply to release the remembered pain.

5. **Multiple opening adjectives:** He came to our door and eased his heavy pack and asked for refreshments, and Devola brought him a pail of water from our spring.

Delayed Adjectives and Adjective Phrases

Exercise 6: Delayed Adjective- A delayed adjective may be a single word or the first word in an adjective phrase. Commas punctuate a delayed adjective- one comma if it occurs at the end of the sentence, two if earlier in the sentence. Sentences can contain single or multiple delayed adjectives:

Single delayed adjective: People under the helicopter ducked down, afraid, as if they were begin visited by a plague or a god.

Multiple delayed adjectives: Each snowflake was different, Sister Zoe said, like a person, irreplaceable and beautiful.

Delayed adjective phrase: A dog came bounding among us with a loud volley of barks, and leapt round us, wild with glee at finding so many human begins together.

Directions: Insert adjectives as identified on the line provided.

1. Multiple delayed adjectives: Mosquitoes, _____, bite me ten times more than they bite other people.

2. Delayed adjective phrase: It was dreadful to see Harry lying there in agony,

_____.

3. Multiple delayed adjectives: I am an enthusiastic gamer, _____, I think about gaming all day in school and then go straight home to play.

4. Single delayed adjective: They ate like men, _____.

5. Single delayed adjective: Kelly, _____, waited for him to text back for three hours.

Opening Adverbs

Exercise 7: All adverbs give information about an action. Adverbs tell *how* an action happened (quickly, slowly, rapidly). Other adverbs tell *when* an action happened (now, then, yesterday). And they also tell *where* an action happened (overhead, nearby, underneath). A comma follows an opening adverb.

How: Unfairly, we poked fun at him, often in his presence.

When: Then, Harry felt as though an indivisible pillow had been pressed over his mouth.

Where: Outside, I found a taxi for her.

Sentences can contain single or multiple opening adverbs:

Single opening adverb: Incredibly, the man was still chasing after us.

Multiple opening adverbs: Then, slowly, he fell to his knees and began to beg.

Directions: Write a sentence containing the identified adverb.

1. How, single opening adverb: _____

2. When, single opening adverb _____

3. Where, single opening adverb _____

4. How, multiple opening adverbs _____

5. When, multiple opening adverbs _____

6. Where, multiple opening adverbs _____

Delayed Adverbs

Exercise 8: A delayed adverb is placed after the action described.

How: These crazy fans screamed at the players, wildly, like lunatics.

When: I wondered how I could have missed noticing, before, all those bones.

Where: By now the sharks were all around us, above and below, and to all sides.

Sentences can contain single or multiple delayed adverbs:

Single delayed adverb: They smiled, delicately, like weary children remembering a party.

Multiple delayed adverbs: He worked himself to death, finally and precisely, at 3:00 a.m. Sunday morning.

Directions: Insert adverbs as identified on the line provided.

1. Multiple delayed adverbs: He stretched out his hands, _____, waving them in the air to ward off the attack from the oncoming dinosaur.

2. Single delayed adverb: We all had a drink together, native and European alike, quite _____.

3. Multiple delayed adverbs: In hunting season, all kinds of game turn up in dumpsters, some of it, _____, not nearly dead.

4. Single delayed adverb: She watched the children troop in, _____, an ancient nursery rhyme running through her head.

5. Multiple delayed adverbs: His body glided quietly across the room, _____.

Appositive Phrase

Exercise 9: An appositive phrase is a non phrase identifying a person, place, thing, or idea. Appositives often begin with the words *a*, *an*, or *the*. They always answer one of these questions: Who is he, she, or they? (people) or What is it? What are they (Places or things).

Examples:

Identifying people: Harry was small and tough, a boy growing up in a closet with a family who does not love him.

Identifying things: The furniture, a mixture of walnut and oak, included a walnut bed whose ornate headboard rose halfway up the wall toward the high ceiling.

Sentences can contain single or multiple appositive phrases:

Single appositive: A bald slight man, he reminded me of a baby bird.

Multiple appositives: Most of the town's natives did their shopping on King Street, the town's shopping strip, a slice of chain department stores, auto dealerships and fast-food restaurants.

Note: Appositive phrases can be removed without destroying the basic meaning of the sentence, but notice how including them adds detail and style to the sentences.

Appositives build better sentences.

Directions: Insert appositive phrases as identified on the line provided.

1. Single appositive: Once they were in her office, _____,

Professor McGonagall motioned to Harry and Hermione to sit down.

2. Multiple appositives: A gray cat, dragging its belly, crept across the lawn, and a black one, _____,

tried after.

Directions: Write your own appositive phrases as identified on the line provided.

1. Single appositive: _____

2. Multiple appositives: _____

3. Single appositive: _____

4. Multiple appositives: _____

Varying Kinds of Sentences

Exercise 10: Just as it is possible to achieve variety in your writing by varying the beginnings of your sentences, it is also possible to achieve variety by varying the kinds of sentences you use. Using simple or compound sentences all the time tends to make your style monotonous. Vary your sentences using the four kinds of sentence: simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex.

Examples:

Okay: Our school is very crowded this year, and most of the study halls are in the auditorium.

Better: Because our school is very crowded this year, most of the study halls are in the auditorium.

Okay: The Cabinet met in emergency session, and the President consulted his staff.

Better: Before the Cabinet met in the emergency session, the President consulted his staff.

Directions: Changed each of the following compound sentences into a complex sentence.

1. Last week I visited New York City with my parents, and we the Dance Theater of Harlem.

2. Melva Murray-White danced in *Don Quixote*, and I was fascinated with her performance.
