

Strategies for Variation

This resource presents methods for adding sentence variety and complexity to writing that may sound repetitive or boring. Sections are divided into general tips for varying structure, a discussion of sentence types, and specific parts of speech which can aid in sentence variety.

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<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/573/01/> (Accessed: 25 January 2012).

Adding sentence variety to prose can give it life and rhythm. Too many sentences with the same structure and length can grow monotonous for readers. Varying sentence style and structure can also reduce repetition and add emphasis. Long sentences work well for incorporating a lot of information, and short sentences can often maximize crucial points. These general tips may help add variety to similar sentences.

1. Vary the rhythm by alternating short and long sentences.

Several sentences of the same length can make for bland writing. To enliven paragraphs, write sentences of different lengths. This will also allow for effective emphasis.

Example: The Winslow family visited Canada and Alaska last summer to find some native American art. In Anchorage stores they found some excellent examples of soapstone carvings. But they couldn't find a dealer selling any of the woven wall hangings they wanted. They were very disappointed when they left Anchorage empty-handed.

Revision: The Winslow family visited Canada and Alaska last summer to find some native American art, such as soapstone carvings and wall hangings. Anchorage stores had many soapstone items available. Still, they were disappointed to learn that wall hangings, which they had especially wanted, were difficult to find. Sadly, they left empty-handed.

Example: Many really good blues guitarists have all had the last name King. They have been named Freddie King and Albert King and B.B. King. The name King must make a bluesman a really good bluesman. The bluesmen named King have all been very talented and good guitar players. The claim that a name can make a guitarist good may not be that far fetched.

Revision: What makes a good bluesman? Maybe, just maybe, it's all in a stately name. B.B. King. Freddie King. Albert King. It's no coincidence that they're the royalty of their genre. When their fingers dance like court jesters, their guitars gleam like scepters, and their voices bellow like regal trumpets, they seem almost like nobility. Hearing their music is like walking into the throne room. They really are kings.

2. Vary sentence openings.

If too many sentences start with the same word, especially "The," "It," "This," or "I," prose can grow tedious for readers, so changing opening words and phrases can be refreshing. Below are alternative openings for a fairly standard sentence. Notice that different beginnings can alter not only the structure but also the emphasis of the sentence. They may also require rephrasing in sentences before or after this one, meaning that one change could lead to an abundance of sentence variety.

Example: The biggest coincidence that day happened when David and I ended up sitting next to each other at the Super Bowl.

Possible Revisions:

- Coincidentally, David and I ended up sitting right next to each other at the Super Bowl.
- In an amazing coincidence, David and I ended up sitting next to each other at the Super Bowl.
- Sitting next to David at the Super Bowl was a tremendous coincidence.
- But the biggest coincidence that day happened when David and I ended up sitting next to each other at the Super Bowl.
- When I sat down at the Super Bowl, I realized that, by sheer coincidence, I was directly next to David.
- By sheer coincidence, I ended up sitting directly next to David at the Super Bowl.
- With over 50,000 fans at the Super Bowl, it took an incredible coincidence for me to end up sitting right next to David.
- What are the odds that I would have ended up sitting right next to David at the Super Bowl?
- David and I, without any prior planning, ended up sitting right next to each other at the Super Bowl.
- Without any prior planning, David and I ended up sitting right next to each other at the Super Bowl.
- At the crowded Super Bowl, packed with 50,000 screaming fans, David and I ended up sitting right next to each other by sheer coincidence.
- Though I hadn't made any advance arrangements with David, we ended up sitting right next to each other at the Super Bowl.
- Many amazing coincidences occurred that day, but nothing topped sitting right next to David at the Super Bowl.
- Unbelievable, I know, but David and I ended up sitting right next to each other at the Super Bowl.
- Guided by some bizarre coincidence, David and I ended up sitting right next to each other at the Super Bowl.