VARYING SENTENCE STRUCTURE

with

BOY FANS,

CHIN FAT TO MOM,

and

BE WISE AT WAR

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Have you ever listened to a speaker who talked in a monotone, never varying his or her pitch, vocal inflections, or tone? How did you feel as you listened—perhaps bored, listless, unengaged?

Just as some speakers talk in a monotone, so also do some writers express themselves in a monotonous voice, one that lacks variety in sentence style and length. Readers can quickly lose interest in a paper composed of a string of simple sentences that do not connect related ideas. Examine the short and choppy sentences below:

Mattie loved to drive sports cars. She bought a red Mustang. She had fun driving it.

What do you notice about these sentences? Perhaps they seem to stop and go, stop and go, much as you do while driving your car during rush hour traffic.

When you write, just like when you drive, you do not want your trip to be constantly interrupted by your hitting the brakes and then pressing the accelerator. Rather, you want to travel at a steady and constant speed. You can avoid the pitfall of creating short and simple sentences by learning to use coordinating conjunctions, adverbial conjunctions, and subordinating conjunctions.

Review of a Simple Sentence

To understand these concepts, however, let’s begin by reviewing the definition of a simple sentence. A sentence, which expresses a complete idea, is composed of three parts: a subject, a verb, and a completer. While a subject is who or what the sentence is about, a verb expresses action (read, smile, walk, paint, see) or conveys a state of being that is, it expresses the time, location, or condition of someone or something.] For example, be verbs such as am, is are, was, and were reveal a state of being: “It is late (time).” “The children are at home (location).” “I am ill with the flu (condition).” Finally, a completer finishes the thought begun by the subject and verb. Study the models below. Note that the completers are separated with parentheses.

S V C

The young man sent (his wife a dozen long-stemmed red roses).

S V C

The dog barked (loudly at the neighbors).
I. Coordinating Conjunctions

The first writing strategy is known as coordination. When you use coordination, you join two sentences (also called independent clauses) with a comma plus a coordinating conjunction. Coordination is an effective way to connect related ideas and thus avoid stop-and-go writing. To use this technique in your papers, you need to know the coordinating conjunctions for, and, nor, but, or, yet, plus so. The easiest way to remember the coordinating conjunctions is to memorize the acronym below.

**B**ut  
**O**r  
**Y**et  
**F**or  
**A**nd  
**N**or  
**S**o

Here’s how coordination works. Let’s represent an independent clause (remember, that’s just another name for sentence) with the abbreviation IC. When you use coordination, you add one independent clause to another with a comma plus one of the BOY FANS. You will have the pattern below.

\[
\text{IC} + \text{coordinating conjunction} + \text{IC}
\]

Now, let’s apply coordination to the stop-and-go sentence from page 1:

\[
\text{IC} + \text{coordinating conjunction} + \text{IC}
\]

Mattie love to drive sports car, so she bought a red Mustang.

By joining these two related ideas with a coordinating conjunction, you help the reader understand how Mattie’s passion for cars led her to buy a Mustang. Without the BOY FAN connecting these two ideas, there is no direct relationship between them. The reader must guess at the connection. Why not use coordination to make the reader’s job easier and more enjoyable?
Additional examples:

**IC + coordinating conjunction + IC**

1. Dave likes to watch movies but his sister prefers to read books.
   
   **IC + coordinating conjunction + IC**

2. She bought a Monet print for her apartment, for she loves impressionistic art.

!!!PUNCTUATION ALERT!!!: Did you know that you can also join two independent clauses by placing a semicolon (;) between them? In fact, the semicolon takes the place of a comma and a coordinating conjunction. It is used to connect two closely related ideas of equal importance. See the examples below:

   **IC + Semicolon + IC**

1. Mrs. Nicholson is an excellent employee; she recently received the Employee of the Month award at her office.
   
   **IC + Semicolon ÷ IC**

2. Judy has a dog named Ollie; Christine has a cat named Cranston.

In addition to coordinating ideas with the BOY FANS and the semicolon, you can enhance your sentence construction by experimenting with adverbial conjunctions, another form of coordination.

**II. Adverbial Conjunctions**

Another useful technique for varying sentence style, the adverbial conjunctions are more commonly known as transitions. Any good English handbook will provide a comprehensive list of the transitions, but you can remember some of the most frequently used ones in college writing with yet another acronym, CHIN FAT TO MOM:
Consequently
However
Indeed
Nevertheless
Furthermore
As a result
Therefore
Thus
On the other hand
Moreover
Otherwise
Meanwhile

By using adverbial conjunctions, you can connect closely related ideas and *once again vary your sentence style*. When you use a CHIN FAT TO MOM word to join sentences, follow this pattern for punctuation:

$$IC; \text{ transition, IC}$$

$$IC + \text{ transition} + IC$$

Example: Mattie loved to drive sports cars; *therefore* she bought a red Mustang.

Notice that once you join the simple sentences with a transition, you can see the relationship between them much more easily.

Additional Examples:

$$IC + \text{ transition} + IC$$

1. Katherine majored in English and education, *furthermore* she minored in Spanish.
2. The ardent suitor was intelligent, funny, and romantic; thus the young woman married him.

Just as BOY FANS will help you to avoid stop-and-go sentences, so also will CHIN FAT TO MOM. Lastly, you can improve your writing by using subordination.

### III. Subordinating Conjunctions

To understand subordination, think about the meaning of a subordinate. Do you have a job now? Do you have a boss? If you answered “yes” to these questions, you are already familiar with the term “subordinate” because you yourself are a subordinate. That is, you have to answer to a superior, to your boss. You are not entirely self-sufficient but rather depend on his or her supervision to do your job. Likewise, in a sentence with subordination, one part is dependent on another.

Subordination means that you are connecting a dependent clause (a group of words that cannot stand alone) to an independent clause. In fact, a dependent clause must be joined to an independent one in order to express a complete idea.

!!!WARNING!!!: If you don’t connect a dependent clause to an independent one, you will create a fragment. Look at the models below; note that the fragments have been italicized:

**Fragment:** When you went to the humane shelter. You bought the adorable black and white puppy.

**Fragment:** You bought the adorable black and white puppy. When you went to the humane shelter.

What makes each of these italicized clauses a fragment? The use of the subordinating conjunction “when” is in fact what creates a dependent clause, which by itself, produces a fragment. How can you correct these fragment sentences? If you are thinking of joining the dependent clauses to the independent one, you are already getting the hang of subordination!

**Correct:** When you went to the humane shelter, you bought the adorable black and white puppy.

**Correct:** You bought the adorable black and white puppy when you went to the humane shelter.
Dependent clauses are easy to recognize because they always begin with a subordinating conjunction, such as when, where, while, who, after, before, since, because, etc. Though not a complete list of all the subordinating conjunctions, the acronym, BE WISE AT WAR, will help you remember some of the commonly used ones:

BE
EVEN IF

WHEN
IF
SINCE
EVEN THOUGH

ALTHOUGH
THOUGH

WHILE
AS
WHEREAS

Subordinating conjunctions work in one of three ways. First, they can start a dependent dame at the beginning of a sentence. Secondly, they can lead to a dependent clause in the middle of a sentence. Lastly, they can create a dependent clause at the end of a sentence. Let’s examine these three methods for using BE WISE AT WAR words.

1. If a dependent clause comes before an independent one, place a comma after the dependent clause and before the independent. Follow the pattern below:

DC,+ IC

DC  IC
Example: *Because Mattie loves to drive sports cars*, she bought a red Mustang.

**DC**

Example: *If you diet and exercise regularly*, you will lose weight.

**DC**

!!WARNING!! COMMA ALERT!! Note that the comma goes after the dependent clause, not after the subordinating conjunction.

2. Sometimes a dependent clause will occur in the middle of a sentence. In this pattern, the dependent clause will interrupt one part oldie independent clause front another. When you have this pattern, place a comma both before and after the dependent clause. Note the model below:

Part of IC, **DC**, + Part of IC

Part of IC **DC** Part of IC

Brandon, *after he defended himself against the class bully*, was respected by all his peers.

Part of IC **DC** Part of IC

You do not know, *until you take a risk*, how much success you might achieve.

3. **If a dependent clause comes after an independent one at the end of a sentence, use no punctuation.** Follow the pattern below:

**IC** **DC**

Example: Mattie bought a red Mustang *because she loves to drive sports cars*.

**IC** **DC**

Example: You will lose weight *if you diet and exercise regularly*.

!!WARNING!! COMMA ALERT!! Many college writers make the mistake of placing a comma after an independent clause and before a dependent one. You can avoid this error by remembering that a comma goes after a dependent clause, not before one.
Look at the incorrect use of the comma before the dependent clauses below:

INCORRECT: The young girl struggled to catch the football, after her father threw it.

INCORRECT: Dr. Brantley became an English professor, because he loved sharing his enthusiasm for literature with students.

Remember, though, not to place a comma before a dependent clause that occurs at the end of a sentence. Study the correct sentences below:

CORRECT: The young girl struggled to catch the football after her father threw it.

CORRECT: Dr. Brantley became an English professor because he loved sharing his enthusiasm for literature with students.

!!COMMA REVIEW!! When punctuating dependent clauses, keep these three comma rules in mind:

1. DC, IC
2. Part of IC, DC, Part of IC
3. IC DC

You can avoid writing in a monotonous voice by varying your sentences with coordinating conjunctions (BOY FANS), adverbial conjunctions (CHIN FAT TO MOM), and subordinating conjunctions (BE WISE AT WAR). By doing so, you will produce creative and interesting sentences which are the basis for successful college writing!
Try the following exercises to test your understanding of these three concepts.

Practice One: Coordinating Conjunctions

Directions: Use one of the BOY FANS to join simple sentences below. Be sure to add a comma where needed.

1. Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream was written around 1595 ________ audiences enjoy seeing it performed today.

2. This play is often referred to as a comedy of errors ________ its characters find themselves in one confusing situation after another.

3. Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream refers to the English tradition of “midsummer night,” the day before Saint John the Baptist’s festival, ________ Shakespeare’s audiences associated this night with magic, merrymaking, and witchcraft.

4. This play has four subplots ________ at times it can be challenging to understand.

5. The play begins with a scene between Theseus and Hippolyta, an aristocratic couple engaged to be married, ________ these characters do not appear again until Act IV.

6. Throughout the rest of the play, little supernatural beings known as fairies intervene in the human world ________ no character except Bottom ever gets to see them.

7. The playful fairies are not rational ________ are they responsible.

8. Due to the fairies’ intervention, several strange events occur on a midsummer evening ________ later none of the characters can clearly recall what happened.
9. A Midsummer Night’s Dream portrays love as being inconstant _________ it represents lovers as being fools.

10. A Midsummer Night’s Dream could be read as a play-within-a-play _________ it could be read as a comedy about human folly.

**Practice Two: Adverbial Conjunctions**

Directions: Use one of the CHIN FAT TO MOM words to join the simple sentences below. **Be sure to include correct punctuation.**

1. When preparing for a multiple choice test, find out as much as you can about it from the professor _________ make up questions about the material that you believe the professor might ask.

2. You should study thoroughly for the test by taking notes and reviewing the material _________ you will feel well-prepared on the day of the exam.

3. On a multiple choice test, you should answer all the easy questions first _________ you skip the difficult ones and return to them upon finishing the exam.

4. Consider these hard-to-answer questions closely _________ experience shows that your intuition will often help you make the right choice.

5. Each multiple choice test item has a stem (an incomplete statement) _________ this stem is followed by four or five possible answers.

6. First, study the term _________ read all the options carefully.

7. Next, eliminate any obviously wrong answers by crossing them out _________ you will enhance your chances of making the right choice.

8. Watch for negative or extreme words such as “not” and “except” _________ they are frequently found in incorrect answers.
9. Interestingly, “all of the above” answers are typically correct ________ you should investigate each possible answer carefully.

10. Options that look very strange and unfamiliar on a test are often incorrect: ________ these choices may reflect your need to study the material more closely.

**Practice Three: Subordinating Conjunctions**

Directions: Read these sentences for their meaning. Then fill in the word that best expresses the relationship between the two clauses. **Be sure to add a comma if needed in the space provided.**

1. ________ Emily Dickinson is now regarded as one of the best American poets of the nineteenth century ______ she was virtually unknown to the literary world until after her death.

2. Born on December 10, 1830, Dickinson lived her entire life in Amherst, Massachusetts, ________ she had several romantic interests in her youth ______ she never married.

3. Like other unwed women in nineteenth century New England, she gradually withdrew from society. In fact, she never left home ________ she turned forty.

4. Many literary critics have speculated that Dickinson became a recluse ________ she suffered from a broken heart. Moreover, they often interpret her poetry based on her biography.

5. Yet to read Dickinson’s personal life into her poems does injustice to them ________ she did write many love poems ______ critics will never know if they are products of her experiences or her imagination.

6. ________ she had very little emotional or intellectual contact with the outside world after 1870 ________ many people have wondered what her literary influences were.

7. Dickinson appears to have forged a style all her own ________ she had access to approximately 1,000 books in her family’s library.
8. Her only connection to the literary world of her day was a minor author and critic named T.W. Higginson. ________ he could not understand Dickinson’s poems ______ he encouraged her not to publish them.

9. ________ Dickinson died in 1886 ________ her sister discovered nearly two thousand poems tucked away in her dresser.

10. ________ it were not for this fortunate discovery _____ Emily Dickinson’s poetic insights into life, love, and death would have remained completely unknown to the literary world.

Answer Key

Because some answers may vary, please see an English tutor.

Practice One
1. ,but ,yet
2. ,for
3. ,and
4. ,so
5. ,but ,yet
6. ,but ,yet
7. ,nor
8. ,but ,yet
9. ,and
10. ,or

Practice Two
1. ;in addition, ;moreover, ;furthermore,
2. ;therefore, ;consequently, ;thus,
3. ;in addition, ;moreover, ;furthermore,
4. ;in fact, ;indeed,
5. ;in addition, ;moreover, ;furthermore,
6. ;then (note that a comma does not usually follow “then”)
7. ;therefore, ;consequently, ;thus,
8. ;in fact, ;indeed,
9. ;however, ;nevertheless, ;nonetheless,
10. ;on the other hand, ;however,
- Practice Three
1. Although Even though +,
2. Although Even though +,
3. after
4. because -
5. While Although Even though +,
6. Since Because +
7. although even though
8. Since Because +
9. When +,
10. If+,