

Skills for Effective Writing

4



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Discrete writing skills, such as creating topic sentences and recognizing irrelevant information, are critical for good writers. This 4-level series teaches these skills and offers extensive practice opportunities.

CONNECTING TO THE THEME

Former U.S. president Bill Clinton said, "When we make college more affordable, we make the American Dream more achievable." Do you agree that the American Dream is easier to achieve if the cost of college is lower?

A Yes, I do. The American Dream is only possible if you go to college.
 B No, I think you can achieve the American Dream without going to college.
 C Yes, I agree that it would make the American Dream easier.

A. Skill Presentation

Good writers use a variety of sentence types to add impact to their writing and to help keep readers interested. There are a number of techniques for adding variety to your sentences.

Don't start every sentence the same way. Look at these sentences from a paragraph about a boy named Freddy Adu. Both begin with time clauses that start with *when*. However, moving the time clause when he was very young to the end of the sentence creates variety.

When he was a boy, Freddy Adu dreamed of being a soccer star. **When he was very young**, he started playing soccer. ✗
 When he was a boy, Freddy Adu dreamed of being a soccer star. He started playing soccer **when he was very young**. ✓

Use different words to convey the same meaning. For example, these sentences both include \$500,000. Changing \$500,000 to a half a million dollars makes the sentences more varied.

Freddy was offered **\$500,000** to play professional soccer. A team in Washington, D.C., offered him \$500,000 in 2003.
 Freddy was offered a **half a million dollars** to play professional soccer. A team in Washington, D.C., offered him \$500,000 in 2003. ✓

Use different sentence types. Use a mix of *simple*, *compound*, and *complex* sentences.

Freddy's mother wanted a better life. She entered the visa lottery. "Not many people win this lottery, but the Adu family did." Freddy became a successful soccer player after the family moved to the United States.

SKILL PRESENTATION

Each unit teaches a single discrete writing skill, helping students focus their attention on developing the skill fully.

OVER TO YOU

Following instruction, students are eased into the skill's application, facilitating their understanding of exactly how each skill works.

B. Over to You

1 Read the original sentences and the sentences with more variety. Check (✓) the two techniques the writer uses to add variety to the sentences.

Original Sentences: While living in Ghana, Freddy Adu played soccer often. Before moving to the United States, he often played without shoes.

Sentences with More Variety: Freddy Adu played soccer every day while living in Ghana. Before moving to the United States, he often played without shoes.

☐ a. change the order of phrases and clauses
☐ b. use different words to express the same meaning
☐ c. change the sentence type

2 Read the pairs of sentences and decide which technique was used to change the original sentences. Write *NO* for New Order, *DW* for Different Words, or *AST* for New Sentence Type.

1 A common belief in the United States is that individuals' dreams are achievable if they work hard.
 — **Revised Sentence:** A common belief in the United States is that if individuals work hard, their dreams are achievable.

2 A sense of optimism can have remarkable effects on people's success during challenging times.
 — **Revised Sentence:** A positive outlook can have remarkable effects on people's success during difficult times.

3 Ana Soto overcame great challenges in her lifetime, so she was a role model for her children.
 — **Revised Sentence:** Because Ana Soto overcame great challenges in her lifetime, she was a role model for her children.

4 People typically feel more secure when the economy is strong in their region.
 — **Revised Sentence:** When the economy is strong in their region, people typically feel more secure.

5 The nurses work very hard, and they are greatly appreciated by their patients as a result.
 — **Revised Sentence:** Working very hard, the nurses are greatly appreciated by their patients.

6 In contemporary society, the definition of "family" is changing.
 — **Revised Sentence:** In modern society, the meaning of the word "family" is changing.

Check!

Three techniques to increase the sentence variety in your writing are:

1 to _____ the order of phrases and clauses
 2 to use _____ words to express the same meaning
 3 to include a _____ of sentence types (simple, compound, and complex)

When students master these skills, all of their writing improves. This allows teachers to focus their time and feedback on the content of student work.

C. Practice

1 Read the paragraph from an essay about the American Dream. For each numbered blank, decide which additional sentence, A or B, should come next to add the most variety.

The American Dream means different things to different people. It means buying a house for many people. _____. For other people, the American Dream has more to do with the type of car they drive. An expensive car is important to them. _____. When some people are asked to define the American Dream, they talk about happiness more than physical possessions. _____. Quite a few people want to be their own boss, and for them, the American Dream is about owning a business. _____. Some people dream about fame. They want to be a famous athlete or a respected actor. The American Dream can have a variety of meanings. In addition, it can be challenging to attain. _____.

1 A Buying a house is a goal. Many Americans pursue this goal.
B Home ownership is a goal that a large number of Americans pursue.

2 A When they drive a luxury automobile, they have a feeling of success.
B They may drive a luxury car. They feel successful as a result.

3 A If they try to define the American Dream, they do not talk about material possessions.
B Material possessions are not cited as an important part of the American Dream.

4 A While they like the freedom of working for themselves, they know it can be risky.
B Many people want to be their own boss, but they know it can be risky.

5 A While it is nice to dream, real success comes from hard work.
B Dreams are nice. Working hard is also important.

2 Match the original sentences (1–6) with the correct alternative sentences (a–f) that would add more variety to a piece of writing.

_____ 1 People who live with fewer material possessions tend to more fully appreciate simple pleasures.

_____ 2 Having many possessions does not guarantee happiness.

_____ 3 It can be difficult for many people to maintain a positive outlook when necessities become more expensive.

_____ 4 Some people lose hope during a weak economy. Other people feel that it presents an exciting challenge.

_____ 5 Purchasing a home is not for everyone because it usually costs a great deal of money.

_____ 6 Working hard does not always ensure that employees will be able to keep their jobs.

a As the cost of living rises, it can be hard to have a sense of optimism.
b When they own less, people often have a greater appreciation for simplicity.
c Employees may work hard, but this will not necessarily increase their job security.
d Homeownership can be expensive, so it is not the right choice for every person.
e Joy does not necessarily come from owning material objects.
f While some feel hopeless during hard economic times, others are inspired.

D. Skill Quiz

Check (✓) the correct answer for each item.

1 Good writers use a variety of sentences

☐ a. to add length and complexity.
☐ b. to add impact and interest.
☐ c. to add additional facts and examples.

2 Which of these is not a technique for adding sentence variety?

☐ a. including new information
☐ b. using different words to express the same idea
☐ c. including different sentence types

3 By using a mix of _____ sentences, writers add variety to their work.

☐ a. dependent and independent
☐ b. long, medium, and short
☐ c. simple, compound, and complex

4 People think of homeownership when they think of the American Dream. Which revision of this sentence uses the technique of moving a phrase or a clause?

☐ a. When they think of the American Dream, people think of homeownership.
☐ b. People think of owning a home when they think of the American Dream.
☐ c. People want to buy a house, but they cannot afford the American Dream of homeownership.

5 While we were living in poverty, we still felt a sense of optimism about the future. Which revision of this sentence uses different words that mean the same thing?

☐ a. While we were poor, we continued to feel hopeful.
☐ b. We were living in poverty. However, we still felt a sense of optimism.
☐ c. We were living in poverty, but we still felt a sense of optimism.

6 The cost of living continues to rise, and job security is not always achievable. Which revision of this sentence uses a different sentence type?

☐ a. Prices continue to increase, and not everyone has job security.
☐ b. The cost of living continues to rise; in addition, job security is not always achievable.
☐ c. Necessary items are becoming more expensive to buy, and people are at risk of losing their jobs.

7 When he was a young boy, Freddy Adu dreamed of being a soccer player. He did not know that his dream would come true. Which option adds the least variety as a continuation of this paragraph?

☐ a. Freddy Adu became the youngest professional soccer player in the United States at age 14, and this was considered remarkable.
☐ b. Remarkably, Freddy Adu became the youngest professional soccer player in the United States when he was just 14.
☐ c. Fourteen-year-old Freddy Adu played professional soccer. He was the youngest player. This accomplishment was remarkable.

8 Ellen's mother was successful and content. Ellen strived to be more like her. Which option adds the most variety as a continuation of this paragraph?

☐ a. Because she had a positive role model, Ellen was inspired to achieve her dreams.
☐ b. She had a good role model. This inspired her to achieve her dreams.
☐ c. Her mother was a positive role model. She provided great inspiration.

SKILL QUIZ

Each unit ends with a quiz, giving teachers a quick snapshot of how well the students learned the skill.

PRACTICE

The units include extensive practice so that students can truly master each skill.

9 Sentence Variety 37

THE ENVIRONMENT AND YOU

CONNECTING TO THE THEME

How “environmentally friendly” are you?

How do you get to school or work each day?

A I take the subway.

B I always drive.

C I ride my bike.

What do you use to take notes on in class?

A I use a notebook made from 100 percent recycled paper.

B I use expensive, white, lined paper.

C I use my laptop.

What kinds of bags do you use at the grocery store?

A I use paper bags that I recycle.

B I use plastic bags that I throw away.

C I use a canvas bag that I re-use each day.

Mostly As: there's room for improvement! Mostly Bs: you're not environmentally friendly at all. Mostly Cs: you're very environmentally friendly.

A. Skill Presentation

Some of the most common mistakes in writing are using sentence fragments, run-on sentences, and comma splices.

A **sentence fragment** is the result of

- a sentence missing either a subject or a verb.
- a sentence not expressing a complete idea.
- a dependent clause being used on its own without an independent clause.

Look at these sentence fragments and how they can be corrected.

Is a major problem. ✗ (missing a subject)

Water pollution is a major problem. ✓

Environmentalists work the effects of pollution. ✗ (doesn't express a complete idea)

Environmentalists work **to decrease** the effects of pollution. ✓

Because it affects the whole world. ✗ (missing an independent clause)

Pollution is a global problem because it affects the whole world. ✓

A **run-on sentence** has two or more independent clauses that are connected without a comma or a conjunction. Look at this sentence and how it can be corrected.

Air pollution can cause health problems it can make existing problems worse. ✗

Air pollution can cause health problems. **It** can make existing problems worse. ✓

Air pollution can cause health problems, **and** it can make existing problems worse. ✓

A **comma splice** has two or more independent clauses that are connected with a comma, but without a conjunction. Look at this sentence and how it can be corrected.

People may have access to water, this water may not be clean. ✗

People may have access to water, **but** this water may not be clean. ✓