

The focus in this lesson is on writing **clear sentences**. Students will learn how to link ideas by **coordinating** and **subordinating** clauses and phrases. They will also learn to convey thoughts clearly by recognizing and correcting sentence **fragments**, **run-ons**, and faulty **parallelism**. Because sentence clarity is the backbone of good writing, it will be useful later when students are working on paragraph structure.

Style Through Sentence Combining

- One approach that has worked for millions of students is sentence-combining practice. This approach helps you learn revising skills such as adding, deleting, and rearranging ideas, which can help you transform sentences into more readable structures. Sentence combining is a writing strategy that enables students to explore options, make choices, and develop style. This process of combining short sentences into more complex ones is the focus of this lesson. Your goal, however, is not to make long sentences, but to make good ones. Sometimes you will find that longer, more complex sentences, enable you to express your ideas with precision and clarity. At other times, a shorter one is better. The point is that **sentence combining helps you understand your stylistic options**. Instead of being locked into one type of sentence with a short and choppy style, you can make choices as a writer.

In sentence combining, you express the same information in different ways by using four combining strategies: (1) deleting repeated words; (2) using connecting words; (3) rearranging words; and (4) changing the form of words.

Explore Your Own Style

Sentence-combining practice helps when you revise your real writing. You know that sentences are flexible instruments of thought, not rigid structures cast in concrete. The simple fact that you feel confident in moving sentence parts around increases your control of the writing process.

To acquire this competence in combining and revising sentences, you can try strategies like those described below.

1. **Vary the length of your sentences.** Work for a rhythmic, interesting balance of long and short sentences, remembering that brevity often has dramatic force.
2. **Vary the structure of your sentences.** By using introductory clauses on occasion—and by sometimes tucking information in the middle of a sentence—you can create stylistic variety.
3. **Use parallelism for emphasis.** Experiment with repeated items in a series—words, phrases, and clauses—to understand how structural patterns work and how you can use them to advantage.
4. **Use interruption for emphasis.** Colons, semicolons, dashes, commas, parentheses—all of these are useful tools in your stylistic tool kit; knowing how to use them well matters.
5. **Use unusual patterns for emphasis.** It may never have occurred to you to sometimes reverse normal sentence patterns. Such a strategy can work—if you know how to use it.

Of course, the whole point of sentence-combining practice is **to improve your revising and editing skills**.

Ways to Achieve Clarity

Clarity is essential in conveying information, whether your purpose is to explain the steam engine or to describe your new neighborhood. One of the best ways to bring clarity to your writing is to show the appropriate relationships between ideas. To do this, you must adjust and revise the structure of each sentence until it accurately communicates your message. *Coordinating* and *subordinating* ideas are two ways to sharpen and clarify your writing.

Coordinating Ideas

Ideas that are equally important—or that carry the same weight—in a sentence are called *coordinate* ideas. To show that ideas are coordinate, you **link them with a coordinating conjunction**, such as *and* or *but* or another connective (FANBOYS). Sometimes the connective may simply be a punctuation mark, such as the semicolon in the second example that follows.

EXAMPLES The Pathfinder lander was sending back its first images of the surface of Mars, **and** everyone was focused on the television screens.

Crisp foods have to be loud in the upper register; foods which generate low-frequency rumblings are crunchy, or slurpy, but not crisp.

The connective you use shows the relationship between the ideas. For example, **and** links **similar ideas**, while **but** links **contrasting ideas**. The following chart lists connecting words you can use to show *addition*, *contrast*, *choice*, and *result*.

Addition	Contrast	Choice	Result
also	but	either ... or	accordingly
and	however	neither ... nor	consequently
as well as	nevertheless		for
besides	still	nor	hence
both ... and	yet	or otherwise	so thus, therefore

When you use connectives to join words, phrases, or subordinate clauses (clauses that do not express complete thoughts), the result is a compound element in your sentence; these compound elements may be subjects, verbs, modifiers, or complements. When you use coordination to join complete thoughts, or independent clauses, the result is a compound sentence.

CONTRAST Elijah **slurped** his soup **but wiped** his mouth neatly afterward. [compound verb]
 CHOICE **Either Regina or Bookie** will go to the movie with me. [compound subject]
 ADDITION Basketball players are generally **tall, fit, and quick**. [compound predicate adjective]
 RESULT **Mack's hair was uncombed**; consequently, **he looked too messy for the photo**.
 [compound sentence]

Be sure to choose a connective that shows the correct relationship between the linked ideas. Otherwise, your meaning will not be clear to your readers.

UNCLEAR Nell looked for her wallet, and she couldn't find it anywhere.
 CLEAR Nell looked for her wallet, **but** she couldn't find it anywhere. [contrast]
 UNCLEAR Floss your teeth, yet you might get gum disease.
 CLEAR Floss your teeth; **otherwise**, you might get gum disease. [choice]

When you use a coordinating conjunction to link independent clauses, put a comma before the conjunction unless the clauses are very short.

EXAMPLES Vikram made peach cobbler, and he brought it to the picnic.
 Carly drove and Sandra slept.

When you use a conjunctive adverb to join independent clauses, put a semicolon before the adverb and a comma after it.

EXAMPLE Francine studied hard for the driving exam; however, she overslept on the day of the test.

Subordinating Ideas

Not all ideas are created equal. Sometimes, one idea in a sentence is more important than another, and you will want to downplay, or **subordinate**, the less important idea.

One way to subordinate an idea is to place it in a **subordinate clause**. Used as part of a sentence, the subordinate clause elaborates on the thought expressed in an independent clause.

EXAMPLES Petra, **who is learning how to scuba dive**, took a trip to the coast.
 Michael likes going to the coast **because the beaches are clean and uncrowded**.

The kinds of subordinate clauses you will use most often are *adverb clauses* and *adjective clauses*.

• Adverb Clauses

An **adverb clause** modifies a verb, an adjective, or another adverb in a sentence. You introduce an adverb clause with a subordinating conjunction such as *although*, *after*, *because*, *if*, *when*, or *while*. The conjunction shows how the adverb clause relates to the main clause. Usually, the conjunction shows a relationship of *time*, *cause or reason*, *purpose or result*, or *condition*.

TIME At Bonanza Creek, **while our socks dried by the fire**, we fished for arctic grayling.

CAUSE OR REASON **Because it is a direct reflection of the pressure and movement of the artist's hand across the surface of the painting**, brushwork is one of the most intimate links that we, as viewers, have with the artist's mind at work.

PURPOSE OR RESULT A synergy kicks in, **so that when you're finished, you drag yourself to the locker room in a state of euphoria, amazed at what you've done, completely drained.**

CONDITION He ran so hard that he could feel the sweat fly from his head and arms, **though it was winter and the air was filled with snow.**

The following chart lists subordinating conjunctions you can use to show each kind of relationship.

Time	Cause	Purpose	Condition
after	as	in order that	although
as	because	so that	despite
before	even though	such that	if
since	since	that	provided that
until	whereas		unless
when	while		though
whenever			
while			

- **Adjective Clauses**

You can also subordinate an idea by placing it in an **adjective clause**, a subordinate clause that modifies a noun or a pronoun in a sentence. An adjective clause usually begins with *who, whom, whose, which, that, or where*.

EXAMPLE I propped myself against the brick wall of the schoolhouse, **where the school delinquent found me.**

Before you use an adjective clause in a sentence, you need to decide which idea in the sentence you want to subordinate. Suppose you wanted to combine these two ideas in one sentence:

Albert Einstein was born in 1879. He is considered one of the greatest scientists of the twentieth century.

If you wanted to emphasize that Einstein was born in 1879, you would put that information in an independent clause and the other information in an adjective clause.

Albert Einstein, **who is considered one of the greatest scientists of the twentieth century**, was born in 1879.

To emphasize that Einstein is considered one of the greatest scientists of the twentieth century, put his birth information in an adjective clause.

Albert Einstein, **who was born in 1879**, is considered one of the greatest scientists of the twentieth century.

- **Correcting Faulty Coordination**

In writing, it is essential to show clearly the relationships among ideas. If you use a coordinating conjunction to join ideas that are not coordinate, or equal, you end up with **faulty coordination**. To avoid faulty coordination, check each compound sentence to see if the ideas are really equal in importance. If they are not, subordinate the less-important idea by placing it in a subordinate clause or a phrase. You may need to add, delete, or rearrange words in the sentence.

FAULTY This male butterfly is distinguishable from females of its species, and its wings reflect ultraviolet light.

REVISED **Because its wings reflect ultraviolet light**, this male butterfly is distinguishable from females of its species. [adverb clause]

FAULTY Malaria is a serious infectious disease, and it can be transmitted to humans through mosquito bites.

REVISED Malaria, **which can be transmitted to humans through mosquito bites**, is a serious infectious disease. [adjective clause]

FAULTY The light was at the end of the pier, and it showed us how far we had walked.

REVISED The light **at the end of the pier** showed us how far we had walked. [prepositional phrase]

FAULTY Tama was the lifeguard on duty that day, and she saved the drowning child.

REVISED Tama, **the lifeguard on duty that day**, saved the drowning child. [appositive phrase]

- **Using Parallel Structure**

To create clarity and rhythm in a sentence, it is important to express similar ideas in similar grammatical forms. For example, pair an **adjective with an adjective**, a **prepositional phrase with a prepositional phrase**, and a **noun clause with a noun clause**. When you use the same grammatical form for similar ideas, you create **parallel structure**.

EXAMPLES He had come to tell his brother **that power corrupts, that a man who fights for justice must himself be cleansed and purified, that love is greater than force.**

Scribes were needed **to send messages, to convey news, to take down the king's orders, to register the laws...**

He was the **weather-beaten, brown-faced, black-eyed** Cupid of the community.

Remember to use parallel structure when you link coordinate ideas, as the following examples show.

FAULTY Amanda's favorite forms of exercise are swimming and to run. [gerund paired with infinitive]

PARALLEL Amanda's favorite forms of exercise are **swimming** and **running**. [gerund paired with gerund]

FAULTY Derrick's editorial shows his knowledge and that he is passionate about the subject. [noun paired with noun clause]

PARALLEL Derrick's editorial shows **that he is knowledgeable about the subject** and **that he is passionate about it**. [noun clause paired with noun clause]

Use parallel structure when you compare or contrast ideas.

FAULTY Reading novels no longer interests me as much as to read poems. [gerund contrasted with infinitive]

PARALLEL **Reading novels** no longer interests me as much as **reading poems**. [gerund contrasted with gerund]

FAULTY In sports, enthusiasm is as important as that you have skill. [noun paired with noun clause]

PARALLEL In sports, **enthusiasm** is as important as **skill**. [noun paired with noun]

Use parallel structure when you link ideas with correlative conjunctions

(*both . . . and, either . . . or, neither . . . nor, and not only . . . but also*).

FAULTY The medicine woman was revered not only for her healing abilities but also because she possessed wisdom. [prepositional phrase correlated with adverb clause]

PARALLEL The medicine woman was revered not only **for her healing abilities** but also **for her wisdom**. [prepositional phrase correlated with prepositional phrase]

To avoid awkwardness and confusion, place correlative conjunctions directly before the parallel terms.

UNCLEAR Shawna considered both pursuing careers in law and in journalism.

BETTER Shawna considered pursuing careers **both** in law **and** in journalism.

UNCLEAR Our choice of eight o'clock movies either was *Slime* or *Return of the Insect People*.

BETTER Our choice of eight o'clock movies was **either** *Slime* **or** *Return of the Insect People*.

UNCLEAR I asked Chi to not only join our band but also to be the lead vocalist.

BETTER I asked Chi **not only** to join our band **but also** to be the lead vocalist.

When you create parallel structure, you often need to repeat an **article**, a **preposition**, or a **pronoun** before each of the parallel terms to make your meaning clear. Notice how the first version of each of the following sentences might be misread.

UNCLEAR Before leaving the store, I talked with the clerk and manager.

BETTER Before leaving the store, I talked with **the** clerk and **the** manager.

UNCLEAR This Elvis biography reveals more about the era of the 1950s than the singer himself.

BETTER This Elvis biography reveals more **about** the era of the 1950s than **about** the singer himself.

To clarify your meaning, you will often need to add a few words to the second part of a sentence that uses parallel structure.

UNCLEAR I enjoyed the singing of the opera's soprano more than the tenor.

BETTER I enjoyed the singing of the opera's soprano more than **that of** the tenor.

Obstacles to Clarity

Some common obstacles to clarity are *sentence fragments*, *run-on sentences*, and *unnecessary shifts*.

1. Sentence Fragments

A sentence expresses a complete thought. If you punctuate a part of a sentence as if it were a whole sentence, you create a **sentence fragment**. Fragments are usually confusing because the reader has to puzzle out the missing information.

FRAGMENT	In 1929, the global economy into a worldwide depression. [missing verb]
SENTENCE	In 1929, the global economy collapsed into a worldwide depression.
FRAGMENT	We observing the bacteria through a powerful microscope. [missing helping verb]
SENTENCE	We were observing the bacteria through a powerful microscope.
FRAGMENT	Photographed families who were victims of the Great Depression. [missing subject]
SENTENCE	Dorothea Lange photographed families who were victims of the Great Depression.
FRAGMENT	By closing the park to bicycle riders and skateboarders. [not a complete thought—missing subject and verb]
SENTENCE	The city tried to cut down on accidents by closing the park to bicycle riders and skateboarders.

a. Phrase Fragments

A **phrase** is a group of words that does not have a subject and a verb. When a phrase **is separated** from the sentence it belongs with, it becomes a **phrase fragment**.

FRAGMENT	I found my sister in the den. Making origami swans out of blue and green paper.
SENTENCE	I found my sister in the den making origami swans out of blue and green paper.
FRAGMENT	My sister is good at figuring out how to do things. With very little instruction.
SENTENCE	My sister is good at figuring out how to do things with very little instruction.
FRAGMENT	She just sits down and gives herself enough time. To ensure her success.
SENTENCE	She just sits down and gives herself enough time to ensure her success.
FRAGMENT	Later, my sister made me two beautiful objects. An origami snail and a fish.
SENTENCE	Later, my sister made me two beautiful objects, an origami snail and a fish.

b. Subordinate Clause Fragments

A **subordinate clause** has a subject and a verb but does not express a complete thought. Unlike an independent clause, a subordinate clause cannot stand on its own as a sentence.

FRAGMENT	Sea urchins have long, moveable spines. Which they use to push themselves across the ocean floor.
SENTENCE	Sea urchins have long, moveable spines, which they use to push themselves across the ocean floor.
FRAGMENT	Sea urchins can also be eaten in sushi. After they have been harvested from the sea and properly prepared.
SENTENCE	Sea urchins can also be eaten in sushi, after they have been harvested from the sea and properly prepared.

2. Run-on Sentences

A **run-on sentence** is just the opposite of a fragment. It is made up of two complete sentences run together as if they were one sentence. Most run-ons are **comma splices**—two complete thoughts that have only a comma between them. Other run-ons, called **fused sentences**, have no punctuation between the two thoughts.

The following examples show four ways to correct run-ons.

RUN-ON	Naomi longed to make the basketball team, to achieve her goal, she practiced every afternoon.
CORRECT	Naomi longed make the basketball team. To achieve her goal, she practiced every afternoon.
RUN-ON	She tried several exercises, her skills showed no improvement.
CORRECT	She tried several exercises, but her skills showed no improvement.
RUN-ON	Naomi worked hard, she was persistent.
CORRECT	Naomi worked hard; she was persistent.
RUN-ON	Her hard work paid off later she made the team.
CORRECT	Her hard work paid off; later , she made the team.

3. Unnecessary Shifts in Sentences

For clarity, it is usually best to keep the same subject and the same verb form throughout a sentence. Unnecessary shifts in **subject**, **tense**, or **voice** can make a sentence awkward to read.

a. Shifts in Subject

Note that sometimes, especially in short compound sentences, a shift in subject is necessary to express your intended meaning. In the following sentences, the shift in subject is natural.

NATURAL SHIFT Jessica jumped off the high diving board, but no one saw **her**. I'll paint the background, and **you** can paint the bird sand trees.

Most often, though, a shift in subject is awkward and unnecessary.

In the following examples, notice that each sentence is much clearer when it has the same subject throughout.

AWKWARD The Mullaney's have a new puppy, and the shelter is where they found it.

BETTER **The Mullaney's** have a new puppy, and **they** found it at the shelter.

AWKWARD All runners should be at the track by 7:00 so that you can pick up your registration forms.

BETTER **All runners** should be at the track by 7:00 so that **they** can pick up their registration forms.

b. Shifts in Verb Tense and Voice

Unnecessarily changing verb tense or voice in mid-sentence can also create awkwardness and confusion. Stick to the tense and voice you start with unless you have a good reason for changing.

AWKWARD Aldo talked about going to the North Pole, but then he goes to the Antarctic.

BETTER Aldo **talked** about going to the North Pole, but then he **went** to the Antarctic.

AWKWARD The cat asks to go out, and then it always wanted to come back in.

BETTER The cat asks to go out, and then it always wants to come back in.

AWKWARD Volunteers made the dangerous journey after dark, but no wolves were encountered.

BETTER Volunteers **made** the dangerous journey after dark, but they **encountered** no wolves.

A shift in voice usually causes a shift in subject, too. Notice that in the awkward sentence in the last pair, the shift from active to passive voice results in a shift from the subject *volunteers* to the subject *wolves*.