

Some techniques for

COMBINING SENTENCES



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An Introduction to Sentence Combining



This is your new handout.

The handout is on sentence combining.

Sentence combining is a very important skill.

The skill will help you enhance your written expression.

You will become a better writer.

You will increase your understanding of how sentence variety influences style.

You will soon become an expert on this skill.

Your English teacher will be pleased.

Sentence combining, simply stated, is the strategy of joining short sentences into longer, more complex sentences. As you engage in sentence-combining activities, you will learn how to vary sentence structure in order to change the meaning and style of what you write. At a more technical level, sentence combining is concerned with the systematic knowledge of syntactic possibilities and allows writers to sort through alternatives in their heads as well as on paper and to choose those which are most apt.

This new handout on sentence combining, a very important skill that will help enhance your written expression, will allow you, who will soon become an expert and please your teacher, to increase your understanding of how sentence variety influences style.

The following topics and combining techniques will be studied in this unit:

- Verbals
 - gerunds
 - participles
 - infinitives

- Phrases
 - prepositional
 - gerund
 - participle
 - infinitive
 - absolute
 - appositive

- Clauses (Independent & Dependent)
 - adjective
 - adverb
 - noun

- Sentence Combining exercises and practice

Verbals

The English language has a group of words which resembles verbs and are formed from verbs but are used as other parts of speech. (remember parts of speech from grade 8?) These words are called *verbals*.

consider the following sentences:

- *Skiing* is a winter sport. (verb = is)
- *Skiing* carefully, I avoided the tree. (verb = avoided)
- We want *to ski* this weekend. (verb = want)

In each of these examples, words formed from the verb *to ski* may look like verbs but are working as other parts of speech.

Types of Verbals

***Gerund*: a gerund looks like a verb, always ends in 'ing', and acts as a noun**

A noun can function the following ways:

- subject: *Skiing* is fun.
- object of transitive verb: He likes *skiing*.
- object of a preposition: The equipment for *skiing* is on the table.
- predicate noun: His hobby is *skiing*.

***Participle*: a participle looks like a verb but acts as an adjective (modifies a noun / pronoun)**

- *Smiling*, he accepted his award.
- The *broken* toy was thrown away.
- *Frightened*, the child cried for help.

***Infinitive*: an infinitive is made up of the root of a verb plus the preposition 'to'**

- He likes *to play* basketball; *to be* or not *to be*.

Verbal worksheet

Underline the verbals in the following sentences and identify the type: G, P, or I.

1. A smiling face is better than a discontented one; to smile is one way to win friends.
2. The man buying the ticket is a local merchant going to Gastown.
3. Having written with more than usual care, I was surprised when my teacher said my writing was illegible.
4. As it flowed down the grey rock wall, the swiftly flowing water seemed to have lost its liquid quality; it looked like a smoothly solidified pillar of green.
5. Finding a needle in a haystack is as much fun as listening to your teacher babbling away about verbals.
6. The police arrested him for speeding; to get a warning was what he hoped to receive.
7. The Canuck's passing and forechecking are good, but I don't believe they will ever be strong enough to win Stanley's cup.
8. Mr. Land noticed the student walking alone down the hallway; he was laughing out loud and making strange noises.
9. Mr. Neu enjoys cooking and to eat one of his meals is a delight.
10. Spoken words are naturally kept in mind with much more difficulty than those one reads, but a trained person can retain amazing amounts of conversation.
11. Waking, showering, and dressing are preliminaries to eating breakfast.
12. Guess what? You have a test to write next day on verbals.

Verbal Quiz

Name: _____

I: Underline the GERUNDS in the following sentences and tell how each is used (subject - object of verb - object of preposition - predicate noun)

Eg. Painting can be very enjoyable. subject

1. The grade 11s won for collecting the most Christmas cans. _____
2. Their favourite pastime is reading. _____
3. John and Zac were congratulated for winning. _____
4. Swimming requires a lot of energy. _____
5. His idea of relaxing was a day at the beach. _____
6. We were nearly sick from laughing. _____
7. This class enjoys talking. _____

II: Underline the PARTICIPLE in each sentence and draw an arrow to the noun or pronoun that it modifies.

8. Waving, Rudy fell of his bike.
9. Did you find the stolen English paper yet?
10. The drowning fish gasped for air.
11. Fascinated by the new toy, the baby stopped crying.

III: Underline the INFINITIVE in the following sentences.

12. This question is easy to understand.
13. To do well on the test requires hours of study.
14. On the way to school, I decided to take a shortcut.

Phrases

A PHRASE is a group of related words that has no subject or predicate and is used as a single part of speech. Phrases are usually classified as *prepositional, gerund, participle, infinitive, absolute, or appositive*.

Prepositional Phrase: consists of a preposition, its object, and any modifiers of the object. Prepositional phrases usually function as adjectives or adverbs.

*He is a man **of action**.*
*The plane arrived **on time**.*

Gerund Phrase: consists of a gerund, its modifiers, and/or its object. Gerund phrases always function as nouns.

***Collecting stained glass** was her hobby.*
*She hated **going to school on Saturdays**.*

Participle Phrase: consists of a participle, its modifiers, and/or its object. Participle phrases always act as adjectives.

*The dog **running in the yard** is mine.*
***Covered with ice**, the road was very dangerous.*

Infinitive Phrase: consists of an infinitive, its modifiers, and/or its object. Infinitive phrases function as nouns, adjectives, or adverbs.

*I wanted **to buy that new phone**.*
*It is now time **to go to bed**.*

Absolute Phrase: consists of a noun followed by a participle. They do not modify any individual word or word group, but modify the entire remainder of the sentence to which they belong.

***His arm badly broken**, we took Ken to the hospital.*
***Her shoulders slumped, her eyes looking down**, Crystal slid into her seat.*

Appositive Phrase: describes a noun or pronoun. In form, appositives are noun or noun equivalents.

*Mr. Land, **our principal**, believes in hard work.*
*The Canucks, **that frustrating hockey team**, just might be better this year.*

Exercise: Underline the phrases in the following sentences and identify the type of phrase.

1. Landing in a graceful manner, the gymnast completed her routine.
participle phrase
2. Making a profit was his only thought.
3. Her eyes tired from reading, Denise, an avid reader, fell asleep.
4. *The Province*, not my favourite paper, arrived early in the morning.
5. The man walking the dog is my great grandfather.
6. Slipping on the fresh ice, the sports car crashed into the new building.
7. Being loyal to the team is more important than gaining approval from friends.
8. Watching football on TV is a favourite sport of millions of fans.
9. The tornado struck the town, ripping roofs from houses, tearing trees from the earth.
10. Seeing that the rain had stopped, we got out of the car and helped the young bear cub, his paw badly injured.

Underline the phrases in the following sentences and identify the type of phrase.

1. Laughter is a tranquilizer with no side effects. *Prepositional*
2. Do not use a hatchet to remove a fly from your friend's forehead.
3. Once awakened, thought does not again slumber.
4. The great enemy of clear language is vagueness and lack of precision.
5. Fate tried to conceal him by naming him Mr. Smith.
6. Beware of friends bearing gifts.
7. Genius is the ability to reduce the complicated to the simple.
8. I have no objection to you turning in well-written essays for me to assess.
9. In spring, according to poets, a young man's desire turns to thoughts of love.
10. Being pretty well exhausted, Jay asked to come out of the game.
11. To get along with people, you must learn to share their interests.
12. Having reached the age of eighteen, Steven had no desire to fall in love again.
13. The trouble with being punctual is that nobody is there to appreciate it.
14. By a private door, good thoughts enter into every individual.
15. A motion was made at the meeting, no other names being proposed.

Clauses

A **CLAUSE** is a group of words having a subject and a predicate and forming a part of a sentence. There are two main kinds of clauses -- *Independent (or Main)* -- makes sense by itself, and *Dependent (or Subordinate)* -- does not make sense by itself. Subordinate clauses must be joined to independent clauses. There are three types of subordinate clauses.

Adjective Clauses: Adjective clauses modify nouns or pronouns and usually answer the question Which one? What kind of? They begin with a relative pronoun (*who, which, that, whoever, whomever, whose*).

*The people **who saw the robbery** are willing to testify.*

*The new Port Mann Bridge, **which cost a lot of money**, does save time.*

**** Comma rule **** Why are there no commas in the first example but two in the second example? Hint: consider *essential* and/or *non-essential* information.

Adverb Clauses: Adverb clauses modify verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs and usually answer one of these questions When? Where? How? Under what conditions? To what degree? Adverb clauses begin with a subordinate conjunction (*because, after, before, since, as, if, even though, although, while, when, unless, ...*)

*He went home **as soon as he could**.*

***Although he was quite short**, Spud Webb played in the NBA.*

*You may not pass the test **unless you study really hard**.*

**** Comma rule **** If you begin with a subordinate conjunction, there is a comma after the dependent clause. Do not use a comma if the subordinate conjunction comes after the independent clause.

Noun Clauses: Noun clauses function as nouns, that is, as subjects, objects, or complements. They usually begin with *who, what, that, whomever, where*.

***Whoever gossips to you** will gossip of you.*

*Did you see **where they went**?*

*They were pleased with **what they had won**.*

***Who came to the party** is no concern of yours.*

Exercise: Underline the dependent clauses and identify the type (adjective, adverb, noun)

1. He gave me what I had asked for.
2. Where is the lady whom you love?
3. She advised all her teachers that she was intelligent.
4. The store where you buy flowers is owned by his father.
5. When the leaves fall, the rain begins.
6. Tell the principal why you are late again.
7. This proves that you do understand what I am trying to teach.
8. Since she received only 12% on her test, she might not pass.
9. He sings as if his voice is hurting him.
10. Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are.
11. Venice would be a fine city if it were only drained.
12. The arrow that has left the bow never returns.
13. The movie that we saw contained memorable scenes.
14. We found a little lake where the fishing is great.
15. When you finish this question, you are finished the worksheet.

Underline the dependent clauses in the following and identify the type.

1. What is whispered is heard all over town.
2. What history teaches us is that we have never learned anything from it.
3. Dig a well before you are thirsty.
4. Whoever named it necking was a poor judge of anatomy.
5. If you are born lucky, even your rooster will lay eggs.
6. She gave him a look that you could have poured on a waffle.
7. A fraud is not perfect unless it is practised on a clever person.
8. Modern poverty is not the poverty that was experienced long ago.
9. Do not insult the mother alligator until you have crossed the river.
10. When people ask how you feel, I always feel that they mean something else.
11. If you continue to write poetry, you just might find love.
12. The poem, which was not very well written, still was successful.
13. What matters most is the thought behind the words.
14. The strong help those who cannot help themselves.
15. You should not be late because you live across the street from the school.

I. Please underline the verbal(s) in each sentence and identify the type.

Example: Mike dislikes sweeping the floors in his house.
gerund

1. The falling leaves were yellow and red.
2. To avoid hurting someone, we removed the broken toy.
3. Acting in a play is hard work.
4. Bored by their English teacher, the students left the room.

II. Identify the type of phrase underlined in each sentence.

Example: Please take a picture with your new camera.
prepositional phrase

5. Her eyes tired from reading, Sarah fell asleep.
6. Selected for the basketball team, Jennifer was thrilled.
7. The umpire stopped to clean home plate.
8. Lying in the sun can be harmful to your skin.
9. The quarterback, seeing an opening, scored a touchdown.
10. Raj, the star player, sunk the winning basket to win the game.
11. His heart beating quickly, he summoned up the courage to ask her out.

III. Underline the dependent clause in each sentence and identify as being adjective, adverb, or noun.

Example: The fifty people who waited in line were rewarded with good seats.
adjective clause

12. Did you decide what excuse you were going to give for being late?
13. This test is more difficult than the last one.
14. The shed which we found shelter in was sweet and cozy.
15. We will meet wherever the class decides.
16. The teacher came to the conclusion that Fred was not failing.

Sentence Combining (strategies and practice)

There are a number of techniques that can be employed when combining short, choppy, simple sentences into more mature, complex ones. Some strategies are simple:

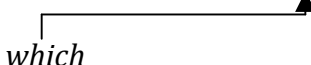
- use co-ordination: *She likes to sing. She likes to dance.*
She likes to sing and dance.
- use a series (parallelism): *He is kind. He is creative. He is smart.*
He is kind, creative, and smart.

The following exercises will take you through sentence combining, using phrases and clauses as a strategy for turning simple and repetitive structures into ones that have better flow, rhythm, and maturity.

sample question:

- The theatre was crowded. (*adverb clause*)
- The theatre was playing *Macbeth*. (*adjective clause*)
- We found two good seats.
- The seats were in the lower balcony. (*prepositional phrase*)

following the directions in each bracket, we now have:

- Even though* the theatre was crowded (adverb clause)

which
- ~~The theatre~~ was playing *Macbeth* (adjective clause)
- We found two good seats (no directions, therefore, main subject & predicate)
- ~~The seats were~~ in the lower balcony (prepositional phrase)

Sample answer:

Even though the theatre, which was playing Macbeth, was crowded, we found two good seats in the lower balcony.

**** a total of 3/3 is given to this sentence as it follows the instructions and is punctuated properly.**

Now it's your turn. Following the directions provided, please combine into one sentence. You will receive one mark for following each technique properly (for example, #1 is out of three marks; #6 out of 5 marks). You will have a half mark deducted for each comma error, and a full mark deducted for any grammatical error created. Be aware of misplaced modifiers, dangling modifiers, faulty parallelism and run-on sentences. (a run-on sentence is not good and will result in a one and a half mark deduction.)

1.
 - a) Tiffany found English very difficult. (*adverb clause*)
 - b) She had not passed her last nine tests. (*adjective clause*)
 - c) She decided to skip out the rest of the year.
 - d) Vivian and Emma advised her to stay with it. (*adverb clause*)

2.
 - a) The administration could not find any suspects for the prank.
 - b) They had been working hard on the case. (*adjective clause*)
 - c) The prank was committed in E-Wing. (*participle phrase*)
 - d) It occurred during block 1-1. (*prepositional phrase*)

3.
 - a) John was not a great cook. (*adverb clause*)
 - b) He prepared a terrific Japanese dinner.
 - c) The dinner was for his best friends. (*prepositional phrase*)
 - d) His friends became ill the next day. (*adjective clause*)

4.
 - a) Her lips were puckered from the sour taste. (*absolute phrase*)
 - b) Kim continued to eat the lime.
 - c) Kim did not like the lime. (*adverb clause*)

5.
 - a) James watched his favourite cartoon distractedly.
 - b) His thoughts were on his up-coming English test. (*absolute phrase*)
 - c) James was a conscientious student. (*appositive*)

6. a) Lisa was agitated beyond endurance. (*participle phrase*)
b) She was utterly frustrated. (*participle phrase; join a & b with coordinate conjunction*)
c) Lisa ran around the yard.
d) Lisa was an avid gardener. (*appositive*)
e) She was chasing the neighbour's cat. (*participle phrase*)
f) The cat had just eaten her spring daffodils. (*adverb clause*)
7. a) Paul is a new student at Happyrock. (*appositive*)
b) He needed a date badly. (*participle phrase*)
c) He wanted to ask Gertrude out on a date.
d) Gertrude was the prettiest girl in the grade. (*appositive*)
e) Paul never did ask her out. (*join c & e with a coordinate conjunction*)
f) Gertrude already had a boyfriend. (*adverb clause*)
8. a) His body was zooming down the ice. (*absolute phrase*)
b) Pavel shot the puck and scored a goal.
c) Pavel was the star player. (*appositive*)
d) Pavel won the game with his shot. (*infinitive phrase*)
9. a) Mr. Guraliuk yelled at the student. (*adverb clause*)
b) He is a gentle person by nature. (*appositive*)
c) He felt terrible for days.
d) He had never done such a thing before. (*adverb clause*)

Sentence Combining – some more practice

1.
 - a) David was lonely and disillusioned. (*adjective clause*)
 - b) David shuffled into the cafeteria.
 - c) His shoulders were slumped. (*absolute phrase*)
 - d) David's lunch was heavy in his hand. (*absolute phrase*)
 - e) His girlfriend had just dumped him. (*adverb clause*)

2.
 - a) The infant slept peacefully.
 - b) The infant's name is Billy. (*appositive*)
 - c) His head was resting on his stuffed puppy. (*absolute phrase*)
 - d) His puppy's name is Mutsy. (*appositive*)
 - e) His parents watched TV. (*adverb clause*)
 - f) They watched TV in the other room. (*prepositional phrase*)

3.
 - a) Mr. Steudel is a talented writer. (*appositive*)
 - b) He submitted his latest collection of poetry.
 - c) This collection concerns the habitats of the Fraser River. (*participle*)
 - d) He submitted his poems to *Canadian Literature*. (*prepositional phr.*)
 - e) *Canadian Literature* is one of my favourite journals. (*appositive*)

The following have no directions. Combine any effective way to create one good sentence.

4. The deer sensed danger.
 The deer lifted its head.
 Its ears were stiff and straight.
 Its body was tense.
 It was ready to explode into motion at the slightest sound.

5. The old mad stumbled out of the shack.
 The shack was nearly falling over.
 He was a frail looking fellow.
 The fellow had white hair and wrinkled skin.
 He stood scowling at us.
 His chin was thrust forward.
 His eyes were bulging.
 He reached into his pocket.
 The old man pulled out his glasses.

6. Skytrain was running late.
 Shirley feared she would be late for work.
 She feared she would lose her job.
 She loved her job as an English teacher.
 She caught a ride on a helicopter.
 The helicopter was owned by Global TV.
 They were filming for the six o'clock news.

7. The Gladstone Robotics team is competing next month.
They are past world champions.
With careful planning, they are eager to begin the competition.
They would like to be the best again.

8. The weather was hot.
The weather was dry.
Joe Dhillon headed for a small irrigation pond.
Joe is a farmer.
At the pond he cranked a small motor.
The motor spread water to his fields.
The fields were filled with corn.
The fields were filled with potatoes.

9. It snowed heavily last night.
Skytrain was not working.
Busses were late.
The busses were just painted white.
They could not be seen in the blizzard.
People began to panic.
Some people were driving in the snow.
Cars were sliding all over the place.
The roads were icy.
The roads had not yet been plowed.
There were many accidents.

Okay, so why is all this sentence combining stuff important?

As suggested at the start of this unit, understanding how sentence structures affect the over-all impact of a piece of writing is important. Sentence combining, then, is an effective technique to demonstrate sentence level maturity. Younger writers rely heavily on short sentences; more experienced writers often take into account the *feel* or *flow* of their writing through the syntax employed.

Consider the following passage based on Carrie Snyder's *The Juliet Stories*, (a novel I recently finished reading):

Because the girl is untidy, feet shod in dirty flip flops, hair tangled and straggling, her body neither fat nor thin, Juliet does not recognize her but there are many clues as to whom the girl is, so she stands. Juliet does not hesitate. She takes the girl by the hand and walks to the street's edge. She waits for a break in traffic. They cross.

Can you recognize the use of an adverb clause, a series of absolute phrases and coordination employed in the first sentence? What effect is created by the use of shorter, simple sentences towards the end?

As you read the works of others, be aware of sentence structures. Try to imitate structures you find effective. Learn from good writers. Be aware of *how* one writes. As you write your own compositions and stories, be aware of your own sentence structures.

As you develop your ability to compose sentences of varying lengths, be aware of the common grammatical errors that may surface. Incorrectly combined sentences often contain one (or more) of the following errors:

- misplaced modifier
- dangling modifier
- faulty parallelism
- run-on sentence (comma splice)
- comma error

Refer to your past class work concerning these (and other) grammatical and usage errors. Check out the *On-line Writing Lab (Owl)* at *Purdue University* for further review if needed.