

The ability to create sentences for a purpose -- for variety, rhythm, or emphasis -- is not the province of only feature story writers and novelists. In email, even tweets, these techniques lift the writing and the writer out of the mediocrity that pervades the business world. They create graceful writing that keeps readers on the page.

This is not to under state the importance and the power of the simple declarative sentence. It will remain the dominant structure in your writing, but stretch yourself; look for opportunities to accomplish the following techniques:

### **Create rhythm, variety, and emphasis**

Consider this paragraph from a performance review:

#### ***Original version***

*You were involved in a number of activities this year. You helped develop training. You worked in customer service in the spring. You directed new hires in the warehouse. Your productivity met expectations. Your speed and quality exceeded.*

Not only are the sentences short, but the first three repeat the same subject unnecessarily. Use it once and create what former Wall Street Journal Editor Bill Blundell called the freight-train sentence. The subject is the locomotive, followed by three verbs (the three actions that the subject is performing). It looks like this:

#### ***revised version***

*You were involved in numerous activities: **You** helped develop training, worked in customer service, and directed new hires in the warehouse. Your productivity met expectations; your speed and creativity exceeded them.*

That sentence also illustrates an appropriate use of the semicolon. Not only does it save you a word (*and*), but because the semicolon is a stronger mark of separation than a comma, you place greater emphasis on the last segment of the sentence, which is the writer's intent. *Your speed and creativity exceeded them* is a positive note that the writer wants to highlight.

Here is another example:

#### ***Original version***

*College is many things to Brandon University students. To some, it is a family tradition. To others, it is an opportunity to meet new friends. To still others, it is a four-year party. There are few who come to learn. Some come simply to get a degree.*

Read aloud the sentence above and notice the monotone. All six sentences are short. The middle three have the same structure (introductory phrase followed by main thought), and the last two also have identical patterns. The ending is flat.

Try this:

***revised version***

*To Brandon University students, college is many things: a family tradition, a chance to meet new friends, a four-year party. Some come simply to get a degree; a few even come to learn.*

Here are the changes that make a difference:

- **Vary the sentence structure** - Begin the first sentence with a phrase, and position the main idea after it.
- **A colon is a softer pause than a period**, so it keeps the reader moving into the explanatory information that follows.
- **Create rhythm** - Notice the ba-bum, ba-bum, ba-bum, cadence you hear when you connect the three phrases with just commas: *a family tradition, a chance to meet new friends, a four-year party*. Changing *opportunity* to *chance* reduces the number of syllables and lets you create the cadence.
- **Add emphasis** - The humorous sarcasm contained in *a few even come to learn* gains emphasis when you position it at the end, because the reader stops momentarily at the period, and the last bit of information resonates in the brain.

Syllables, like musical notes, can sometimes dance in your ear. Create a pleasant effect in your writing that keeps the reader moving forward and delivers the impact you want.

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