Sentence Sense
Writing Center Workshop
September 2 and 4, 2014

We writers rarely get the perfect combination of words on the first try. It is necessary to edit, combine, and rearrange words and phrases to make our sentences as clear, concise, and interesting as possible. One way to improve our writing is in varying the structure and length of our sentences.

Guideposts for Effective Writing

1. Be aware of sentence structure as you read.
2. Be aware of sentence structure as you write.
3. Look carefully at all marks and commentary on prose graded by an instructor.
4. Practice writing, rewriting, and editing sentences.
5. Follow instructions for using McGraw-Hill Connect, an online handbook and service that has diagnostic tests and practice exercises.
6. As a rule, avoid a series of short, simple sentences. Vary the length.
7. Avoid long, rambling sentences.
8. Vary the conventional subject and verb sequence by occasionally separating subject and verb with words and phrases.
9. Intersperse your usual declarative sentences with a question, an exclamation, or a command.
10. Learn to avoid comma splices, fragments, and run-ons.
11.

Practicing Sentence Variety

Coordination
Correct example: You are a good friend, and I know you are also a good student.
Correct example: The woman was tired, but she managed to complete the work as planned.

Your example:

________________________________________________________

Subordination
Correct: When you finish your work, we will arrange to have lunch together.
Correct: If you are happy with the program, I am sure you will do well.

Your example:

________________________________________________________
Semicolons and Adverbial Conjunctions
Correct example: She is a fine student; however, she often does not use her time wisely.

Your example:

Dealing with Comma Splices, Fragments, and Run-ons

ERROR—Comma splice: She is here, she is doing her work.
Correction:

ERROR—Fragment: Doing her work.
Correction:

ERROR—Run-on: I love to hear you play the piano you play so well.
Correction:

Considering an Additional Activity

Revise the following fragments, comma splices, and run-ons. You may add missing elements, separate independent clauses, or reword the sentences for clarity and emphasis.

1. The first computers were large machines they filled the entire rooms.

2. They contained thousands of tubes, the tubes blew out constantly.

3. Graduate students ran up and down the computer room they pushed shopping carts filled with replacement tubes.

4. These monstrous computers were marvels they had less power than today’s handheld calculators.

5. Today’s cell phones will allow their users to Google the web. An awesome power held in the hand.

6. An early computer expert predicted the United States would need only five computers he could not anticipate the revolution to come.
Meeting the Challenge of Another Practice

Directions: Begin by combining and writing one good sentence for each section of simple sentences. Write in the white space to the right of the simple sentences.

Parable 1

A Fox saw a Crow.
The Crow was flying.
The Crow had some cheese.
Her beak held the cheese.

The Crow settled on a branch.
The branch was on a tree.
Fox wanted the cheese.
Fox approached the tree.
Fox spoke to Crow.
Fox called her Mistress Crow.

Fox paid her compliments.
Crow looked well.
Crow’s feathers were glossy.
Crow’s eyes were bright.

Fox considered her voice superior.
Fox asked Crow to sing.
Fox would hear one song.
Fox would call her Queen of the Birds.

Crow lifted her head.
Crow cawed.
Crow opened her mouth.
Crow dropped the cheese.

Fox snapped it up.
Fox wanted one thing.
That thing was the cheese.

Fox gave Crow some advice.
“Flatterers can’t be trusted.”