

The Twenty Sentence Patterns adapted from *The Art of Styling Sentences*

COMPOUND CONSTRUCTIONS

Pattern 1: SV;SV

Examples: He who knows others is wise; he who knows himself is enlightened. –Lao-tzu

*** Note: no conjunction joining the two clauses

Pattern 1A: SV;however,SV

Examples: She exercised every day and cut back on her food; however, she didn't lose any weight.

Pattern 1B: SV;SV, and SV or SV, but SV; SV

Examples: The rain kept falling; Joan saw the roof begin to leak, and she put out a bucket to catch the water. I didn't do it; John said he didn't do it, but the vase was certainly broken.

Pattern 1C: SV;SV;SV

Examples: John got an A; Jennie also got an A; unfortunately George got a C.

Dad is a skinflint; when I ask for a loan, he doesn't listen; Mom isn't any help either.

Pattern 2: SV DO or SC; S omitted verb, DO or SC.

Examples: The mother and son each had a goal; hers, educational; his, recreational.

Lou Williams was in for adultery; John Jones for gambling.

Pattern 3: General statement (idea) : specific statement (example).

(an independent clause)

(an independent clause)

***** Note: Some writers capitalize the first word after the colon in this pattern, but this is a matter of personal taste.

Examples: A lizard never worries about losing its tail: It can always grow another.

Weekdays are very similar to identical suitcases: They are all the same size, but some people can pack more into them than others.

SENTENCES WITH SERIES

Pattern 4: A,B,C

Examples: The United States has a government of the people, by the people, for the people.

It took courage, skill, knowledge—and he had them all.

I like big burgers with everything on 'em: pickles, onions, tomato, lettuce, plenty of mustard.

Pattern 4A: A or B or C. (in any place in the sentence)

A and B and C. (in any place in the sentence)

Examples: Looking down from the Empire State Building, Jeannie felt thrilled and amazed—and scared.

As long as rivers shall run down to the sea, or shadows touch the mountains, or stars graze in the vault of heaven, so long shall your honor, your name, your praises endure.—Virgil (*using pattern 4a for 1st series, pattern 54 for 2nd series*)

Pattern 5: A and B, C and D, E and F.

(May be in any slot in the sentence)

Examples: The textbook clearly showed the distinctions between prose and poetry, denotation and connotation, deduction and induction.

Pattern 6: Appositive, appositive, appositive—summary word SV.

(Key summary words may be—such, all, those, this, many, each, which, what, these, something, someone.

Sometimes this summary word will be the subject but other times it will merely modify the subject.)

Examples: The depressed, the stressed, the lonely, the fearful—all have trouble coping with problems. What it comes down to is this: the butcher, the baker, the merchant, the landlord, the druggist, the liquor dealer, the policeman, the doctor, the city father and the politician—these are the people who make money out of prostitution, these are the real reapers of sin. –Polly Adler

Pattern 7: S –or (appositive, appositive, appositive –or) VS—or(modifier, modifier, modifier—or) V

Examples: My favorite red wines—Zinfandel, Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir—blend well in making California rose wines. The basic writing skills (good vocabulary, knowledge of grammar, sense of style) can be learned by almost everyone.

Pattern 7A: S -- or (or , appositive – or) or , V

Examples: The sudden burst of light—a camera flash—startled me. Many people (especially ecologists) say that we need to do something about global warming. The first man to walk on the moon, Neil Alden Armstrong, is a man the world will never forget.

Pattern 8: If . . . , if . . . , if . . . , then SV.

When . . . , when . . . , when . . . , SV.

SV that . . . , that . . . , that

(omit the 3rd clause and have just 2, if you wish)

Examples: Because it may seem difficult at first, because it may sound awkward or forced, because it often creates lengthy sentences where the thought “gets lost,” this pattern seems forbidding to some writers, but it isn’t all that hard; try it.

REPETITIONS

Pattern 9: SV key term – or , repeated key term. (use dash or comma before repetition)

Examples: We live in an uncertain world—the inner world, the world of the mind.

The tree of knowledge will remain forever, as it was in the beginning, a tree to be desired to make one wise. --A.E. Houseman

Note*** the repetition must be a phrase not a clause!!!!

Wrong: He was part of the older generation, his generation was born before the Depression.

Right: He was part of the older generation, a generation born before the Depression.

Pattern 9A: SV repeated key word in same position of the sentence.

Examples: Rodin’s *The Thinker* presents the perfect figure in the perfect pose.

His greatest discoveries, his greatest successes, his greatest influence upon the world’s daily life came to Edison only after repeated failure.

Pattern 10: SV word: the appositive (the second naming). (with or without modifiers)

Examples: Her room contained a collection of trash: old clothes, soda cans, McDonald's wrappers. Airport thieves have a common target: unwary travelers.

****Note: Check the words before the colon; be sure they make a complete sentence.

Pattern 10A: SV word – the appositive. (echoed idea or second naming)

Examples: Many traditional philosophies echo the ideas of one man—Plato.

E-mail is wonderful and so easy to send but also represents a major problem—answering it.

****Note: A second naming must be a true appositive; don't just stick in a dash or a colon before you get to the end of the sentence. If you do, you may create an error in punctuation, not a true appositive.

Example:

Wrong: One class of teenagers can be labeled—students.

Correct: One label would fit almost any teenager—student.

****Also note: A dash cannot separate two complete thoughts.

Wrong: Mary Shelly spent a full year at Marlow writing *Frankenstein*—her monster has survived better than some of her husband's poems.

Correct: Mary Shelley spent a full year at Marlow writing *Frankenstein*—creating a monster that has survived better than some of her husband's poem.

MODIFIERS

Pattern 11: S, modifier, V.

S – modifier – V.

S (modifier that whispers) V.

Examples: A small drop of ink, falling (as Byron said) like dew upon a thought, can make millions think. Donuts and Danish pastries, popular breakfast foods, contain little nutrition.

Pattern 11A: S – a full sentence—V.

S (a full sentence) V.

Examples: Juliet's famous question—early in the balcony scene she asks, "Wherefore art thou Romeo?"—is often misunderstood; she meant not "where" but "why."

He leaped at the chance (too impetuously, I thought) to go whitewater rafting.

Pattern 12: Participial phrase, SV.

SV, Participial phrase.

Examples: Expecting a spectacular display, the crowd eagerly awaited the fireworks.

***Note: Do not dangle participles!

Wrong: Walking onto the stage, the spotlight followed the singer.

Pattern 13: Modifier, SV. (modifier may be in other positions)

Examples: Below, the traffic looked like a necklace of ants.

INVERSIONS

Note: Be careful when using inversions. It may lead to awkwardness. Inverting the natural order should always result in a graceful sentence, not one that seems forced or looks like a gimmick.

Pattern 14: Prepositional phrase SV (or VS).

Examples: After a long pause, the teacher continued. From the mist emerged a figure playing a flute.

****Note: sometimes a comma is necessary after the prep. Phrase, sometimes not. The sound and meaning of your sentence will guide you.

Pattern 15: Object or Subject complement SV.

Examples: His kind of sarcasm I do not like.

Pattern 15A: Object or Complement or Modifier VS.

Examples: Down the field and through the weeds pranced the little puppy.
Never before have we had so little time to do so much. –FDR

ASSORTMENT OF PATTERNS

Pattern 16: Not only SV, but also SV. (also may be omitted)
Just as SV, so too SV. (may be so also or simply so)
The more SV, the more SV. (may also be less)
The former SV, the latter SV.
If not , at least .

Examples: Reluctantly, every dieter looks for a favorable verdict from the bathroom scale; if not a pound less, at least not an ounce more.

****Note: Remember these constructions come in pairs and that means “two.” Don’t give the reader a signal suggesting two items and then provide only one.

***Caution: Put both conjunctions of a pair in logical places so that what follows each one will be parallel.

Wrong: The prisoner was not only found guilty of murder but also of robbery.
(NO parallel verb here)

Correct: The prisoner was found guilty not only of robbery but also of murder.

Pattern 16A: A “this, not that” or “not this, but that” construction.

Examples: For some hummingbirds, migration involves a much smaller range, measured in hundreds, not thousands, of miles. I believe that man will not merely endure; he will prevail. –William Faulkner

Pattern 17: S (dependent clause as subject) V.

SV [dependent clause as object or complement].

Examples: How he did that is still amazing to me.

He finally finished what he had started over a year ago.

*****Note: The dependent (or subordinate) clause can NEVER stand alone—it is only a portion of your sentence.

Pattern 18: Absolute construction, SV.

S, or – or (absolute construction, or – or) V.

Examples: The snow having stopped, we were able to continue our journey.

I want to go away to college (my parents willing) as soon as I graduate from high school.

****Note: An absolute construction uses a noun or pronoun plus a participle and has no grammatical connection to the rest of the sentence.

Pattern 19: SV.

Examples: Jesus wept. –The Bible
 Make my day. Clint Eastwood

Note: This pattern can provide intense clarity, but being brief alone will not make it dramatic.
 This pattern will be effective only when you use it after several long sentences.

Pattern 19A: (Interrogative word) auxiliary verb SV?

(Interrogative word standing alone) ?

(Question based solely on intonation) ?

Auxiliary verb SV ?

Examples: Can we change?
 What if E.T. calls?

****Note: Avoid scattering these around because they are easy; make them serve some purpose.

Pattern 20: Merely a part of a sentence

Examples: Fair enough.
 Absolute power corrupting once more.

****Note: If you are in the habit of writing fragments, don't think you have mastered this pattern!
Use it only as a deliberate styling device. Use sparingly & precisely.