

STYLING SENTENCES: TWENTY BASIC PATTERNS

(Marie Wadell, *The Art of Styling Sentences*, New York: Barron's 1983)

PATTERN 1

Simple sentence: one subject and one verb.

"I set out with high hope and a fixed purpose...to learn how to read." Frederick Douglass

Simple sentence: compound subject & compound verb.

Frederick Douglass and Martin R. Delaney founded and edited *The North Star* Newspaper.

PATTERN 2

Compound sentence: semicolon, no conjunction.

"Success has many fathers; failure is an orphan."

J. F. Kennedy

Man is related to the monkey; only a monkey, however, would ever admit the relationship.

Compound sentence with elliptical construction.

A red light means stop; a green light, go.

In Mexico, a quetzal symbolizes wisdom; a snake, power.

PATTERN 3

Compound sentence with explanatory statement.

The students in Freshman English 002 do what they are supposed to do: they learn through intense involvement.

A spider never worries that the wind will destroy her web: she can always spin another.

PATTERN 4

A series without a conjunction--anywhere in the sentence.

The gardener was enticed, caught, humiliated.

The U.S. has a government of the people, by the people, for the people.

Design, graphics, reproduction are the main topics of course.

A series with conjunctions between all items.

We have never seen the Dean troubled or sad or irate.

Drunken driving often ends in damages: broken bones or a damaged nervous system or loss of limb or death.

PATTERN 5

A series of balanced pairs.

Romeo and Juliet, Eros and Psyche, Paul D. and Sethe found the path of true love rocky.
Smart or dumb, rich or poor, beautiful or ugly—every sort benefits from a liberal education.

PATTERN 6

An introductory series of appositives.

Vanity, greed, corruption—these vices have brought down whole governments.
The smell of mentholatum, the wheeze of the vaporizer, the clicking of electric blankets—all signal flu season at my house.

PATTERN 7

An internal series of appositives or modifiers.

Which African American celebrity—Colin Powell or Clarence Thomas or Oprah Winfrey— will most affect the course of history?

The branches of government—the executive, the legislative, and the judicial—are meant to check each other's powers.

The goals of this program (measurable academic impact, unequalled cost effectiveness, and record student retention) are clearly not modest.

A single appositive or a pair.

One clue—fresh blood—sent shivers up his spine.

Two of the senators, Metzenbaum and Kennedy, made self-defensive speeches.

PATTERN 8

Dependent clauses in a pair or in a series.

When all Americans have heard of Chinua Achebe, when all Americans can identify Lesotho, when all Americans know what kente cloth is, only then will Molefi Asante put aside his campaign for Afrocentrism.

The president will fund the proposal if it is sensible, if it is cheap, if it is virtuous, if it is compatible with the mission of the college.

No one insists that a new vitamin be discovered, that a new skin-color be developed, that a new sport be invented; people are busy enough arguing about the ones that already exist.

PATTERN 9

Repetition of a key term.

The company was totally bankrupt, bankrupt financially and bankrupt morally.

He had acquired a marvelous computer, a computer of the future.

The hurricane that swept through Charleston was devastating, devastating to real estate, devastating also to the natural shoreline and the old growth flora.

PATTERN 10

Emphatic appositive at end, after a colon.

Only one grade is worth all the trouble I have taken: an A.

The cure for acute post-exam hysteria has been found: a foreign film with subtitles.

PATTERN 11

Interrupting modifier between subject and verb.

The fungus (retrieved from outer space) grew spectacularly.

Sparrows—while they look small—can cause costly damage.

PATTERN 12

Introductory or concluding participles.

Overtumed by the rampaging mob, the truck spilled its radioactive waste over the roadway and into the city sewage system.

Seeking the approval of black voters, appealing to the instincts of the commercial sector, buying the approval of the media with favored bits of financial information, the candidate kicked off his senatorial campaign in a series of speeches across Boston on May 3, 1877.

PATTERN 13

A single modifier out of place for emphasis.

As a whole, students at Howard are a happy lot.

The members of the jury waved their arms and shook their heads, frantic.

PATTERN 14

Prepositional phrase before subject and verb.

With slow and deliberate steps the agent approached the open warehouse door.

Into the bubbling cauldron of melted steel, the lethal cyborg fell.

PATTERN 15

Object or complement before subject and verb.

A famous painter he'll never be.

The miniskirt may have been popular, but warm it certainly was not.

PATTERN 16

Paired constructions.

Not only subject verb, but also subject verb.

Just as, so too.

If not, at least.

The more, the more.

The former, the latter.

Paired constructions for contrast.

Aspirin—not Advil—is an antidote for cholesterol.

The judge asked for endorsement, not approval.

The actions of the tribe, not of the governor, ended the war.

PATTERN 17

Dependent clauses as subject or object or complement.

How the uprising could fail no historian has adequately explained.

The dangers of the warheads became *whatever we imagined them to be*.

PATTERN 18

Absolute construction anywhere in the sentence.

Caesar continued his march through Gaul, his army tattered, exhausted, hardened—but victorious.

All things considered, the situation was still favorable.

PATTERN 19

The short sentence for relief or dramatic effect.

Paragraph * * * * All efforts failed.

Paragraph * * * * Then it happened.

PATTERN 20

The deliberate fragment for strong effect.

Finished.