



Writing Effective Sentences

Exercise 26: Modifiers

Choose five of these bare-bones sentences and flesh them out with various kinds of modifiers. Compose several expanded sentences for each. Use some single-word modifiers, but try to work mainly with phrases and clauses, including some noun clauses. Identify each modifier. Keep the sentences simple or complex, not compound or compound-complex (see 12z). (If you don't like these core sentences, make up some of your own.)

1. *For most people*, [adverbial, prepositional phrase modifying the sentence] *air* [adjective modifying “travel”] travel can be *quite* [adverb modifying “time-consuming”, “aggravating”] a *time-consuming* and *aggravating* [adjectives modifying “ordeal”] ordeal.
2. Recycling paper *in our offices* [adverbial, prepositional phrase modifying “recycling”] requires *some* [adjective modifying “planning”, “cooperation”] planning and cooperation *among the employees* [adjectival, prepositional phrase modifying “planning” and “cooperation”].
3. *Recently*, [adverb, modifying sentence] *large budget Hollywood* [adjectives modifying “movies”; “Hollywood” is a noun adjective] movies have been following trends *that include over-the-top special effects and superficial plots* [adjectival, relative clause modifying “trends”].
4. *In today's newspaper*, [adverbial, prepositional phrase modifying the sentence] a *highly circulated one*, [adjectival, noun clause modifying “newspaper”] *the new French* [adjectives modifying “restaurant”] restaurant was reviewed by the *popular* and *discriminating food* [adjectives modifying “journalist”; “food” is a noun adjective] journalist.
5. *Despite the resistance from the multinational corporation*, [adverbial, prepositional phrase modifying the sentence] we are *in what one might call* [adjectival—“what one might call”—noun clause modifying “process”] *the delicate process* [adverbial—“in the delicate process”—prepositional phrase modifying the verb “are”] [*delicate*, adjective modifying “process”] *of investigating the tragic incident*. [adjectival, prepositional phrase modifying “process”]

Exercise 27–29: Sentence Length, Variety, and Emphasis

Below are four paragraphs from draft versions of student essays. For practice, revise each one to improve the effectiveness of sentence length, variety and emphasis. Try not to change the basic sense in any important way, but make whatever changes that will make the paragraphs effective.

1. Driving up to the campsite, my father chose an empty spot up against the thickly covered mountainside and close to the lake. We were unpacking our equipment and setting up our tent, when an elderly man walked up our path. Introducing himself, he told us that he was camped farther up the mountain, about a hundred yards away and that walking to his campsite, he saw a huge black bear running away from his campsite. When he got to his campsite, he discovered his tent knocked down and his food scattered all over the ground. With concern for our welfare, he suggested that we may want to move our camp away from this bear's haunts.
2. The sky promised hot and sunny weather. Closing our side-pockets and adjusting our pack straps, we quickly prepared for our hike up Black Tusk in Garibaldi Park. With great enthusiasm for a hike that I had never before travelled, we set off in the early morning light on our first leg of the journey. We would be at the top in a few hours.
3. Our sense of time can change in dramatic circumstances. When I was nine I was hit by a car while I was on my bike. I didn't even see the car, but I heard the screeching brakes. As I flew through the air, I had this odd sensation of floating above the ground which seemed to come up slowly. Time stopped. Then I hit the ground and time sped up. I was taken to the hospital and although the whole incident must have taken 20 or 30 minutes, it seemed as though only a minute or two had passed.
4. Repotting a house plant is not so difficult. Assuming it will be too time-consuming and messy, plant-owners procrastinate about repotting. Actually, it takes very little time and effort if you follow a simple set of instructions. Once repotted, your plant, receiving fresh minerals and oxygen from the soil, will grow into a healthier plant. And you will love looking at your thriving plants.
5. The popularity of the fictional character, Sherlock Holmes, began in 1887 when Arthur Conan Doyle introduced Holmes to readers in *A Study in Scarlet*. By 1893, Doyle wanted to stop writing about Holmes and to write more important fiction. He wrote "The Final Problem" in which Holmes fell off a cliff into a dangerous waterfall and died. Doyle did not anticipate the reaction of his fans. Around the world people mourned the passing of Holmes and wrote to Doyle begging him to write more stories. Finally, in 1903, Doyle brought Holmes back to life again in the story, "The Empty House." Doyle wrote his last Holmes' story in 1927.

Exercise 30: Analyzing Sentences

A. Try analyzing the following sentences by each of the three suggested methods. Doing so should give you a sense of the advantages and disadvantages of each: you can then use or adapt the one you prefer, or use different methods for different kinds of sentences. You may even want to invent your own method.

1. Children danced to the music of the piper.

The Chart Method

Subject	Finite Verb	Object or Complement	Adjectival Modifier
Children	dance	to the music	of the piper

The Vertical Method

Sentence Type	Clauses/Phrases	Sentence	Parts of Speech	Function
Simple sentence	Independent clause	Children	noun	Subject of independent clause
		danced	verb	Finite verb of independent clause
	Prepositional phrase	to	prep	
		the	article	
		music	noun	Object of the preposition
	Prepositional phrase	of	prep	
		the	article	
		piper	noun	Object of the preposition

2. A chinook is a warm wind blowing eastward off the Rocky Mountains.

The Chart Method

Subject	Verb	Object or Complement	Adjectival modifier	Adverb modifier
chinook	is	wind	a (modifies “chinook”) a warm (modifies “wind”) blowing eastward (participle phrase modifying “wind”)	off the Rocky Mountains (modifying the participle “blowing”)

The Vertical Method

Sentence Type	Clauses/Phrases	Sentence	Parts of Speech	Function
Simple	Independent clause	A	article	
		chinook	noun	Subject
		is	finite verb	
		a	article	
		warm	adjective	
		wind	noun	Subject complement
		blowing	verb	Verbal-present participle
		eastward	adjective	
		off	prep	
		the	article	
		Rocky	noun	Proper noun
		Mountains	noun	Proper noun—object of the preposition “off”

3. Many potentially good films are spoiled by sensationalism.

The Chart Method

Subject	Finite Verb	Object or complement	Adjectival modifier	Adverbial modifier
films	are	spoiled	many, good (modifies “films”)	potentially (modifies “good”) by sensationalism (modifies “spoiled”)

The Vertical Method

Sentence Type	Clauses/Phrases	Sentence	Parts of Speech	Function
Simple	Independent	Many	adjective	
Passive Voice		potentially	adverb	
		good	adjective	
		films	noun	Subject
		are	finite verb	
		spoiled	finite verb	
		by	prep	
		sensationalism	noun	Object of the preposition

4. Both the beaver and the maple leaf are Canadian emblems.

The Chart Method

Subject	Verb	Object or Complement	Adjectival modifier	Adverbial Modifier
beaver, maple leaf	are	emblems	both, maple, Canadian	

The Vertical Method

Sentence Type	Phrases/clauses	Sentence	Parts of speech	function
Simple sentence		Both	adjective	
		the	article	
		beaver	noun	subject
		and	conjunction	coordinating
		the	article	
		maple	adjective	
		leaf	noun	subject
		are	finite verb	
		Canadian	adjective	
		emblems	noun	

5. Although she was discouraged, Suki persevered, and after a few more tries she succeeded in clearing the two-metre bar.

The Chart Method

Subject	Verb	Object or Complement	Adjectival modifier	Adverbial modifier
she, Suki, she	was, persevered, succeeded	discouraged	“few more” modifying “tries” “two-metre” modifying bar	after a few more tries – prepositional phrase modifying “she succeeded in clearing the two-metre bar.”

The Vertical Method

Sentence Type	Clauses/phrases	Sentence	Parts of Speech	Function
Compound-complex	Sub clause	Although	conjunction	subordinating
		she	noun	
		was	verb	
Independent clause		discouraged	adjective	Subject complement
		Suki	noun	proper
		persevered	verb	
		and	conjunction	
		after	prep	
Prep phrase		a	article	
		few	adjective	
		more	adjective	
		tries	noun	Object of the preposition

	Independent clause	she	pronoun	
		succeeded	verb	
	Prep phrase	in	prep	
		clearing	gerund	
		the	article	
		two-metre	adjective	
		bar	noun	Object of the preposition

B. Here is a longer, more complicated sentence. For such sentences, the “vertical” method is probably the most convenient. Try it. (You may want to challenge a classmate: see which of you can write down the greatest number of grammatical facts about the sentence.)

Constructed of stone and cedar, the large house that the Smiths built on the brow of Murphy’s Bluff—an exposed promontory—was so sturdy that even the icy blasts of the continual north wind in December and January made no impression on it.

The Vertical Method

Sentence type	Clauses, Phrases	Sentence	Parts of Speech	Function
	Past participle phrase	constructed	verb	Verbal-past participle
		of	prep	
		stone	noun	
		and	conjunction	
		cedar	noun	
		the	article	
	Independent clause	large	adjective	
		house	noun	
	Embedded subordinate	that	conjunction	

	clause			
		the	article	
		Smiths	noun	proper noun
		built	verb	finite
	Prepositional phrase	on	prep	
		the	article	
		brow	noun	Object of the preposition
		of	prep	
		Murphy's	noun	proper
		Bluff	noun	proper
	Noun clause	an	article	
		exposed	adjective	
		promontory	noun	
		was	verb	finite
		so	adverb	
		sturdy	adjective	
	Subordinate clause	that	conjunction	
		even	adverb	
		the	article	
		icy	adjective	
		blasts	noun	
	Prepositional phrase	of	prep	
		the	article	
		continual	adjective	
		north	adjective	
		wind	noun	Object of the preposition
		in	prep	
		December	noun	proper

		and	conjunction	
		January	noun	proper
		made	verb	finite
		no	adjective	
		impression	noun	
	Prepositional phrase	on	prep	
		it	pronoun	

Exercise 35: Correcting Misplaced Modifiers

Revise the following sentences to eliminate awkwardness resulting from misplaced modifiers.

1. Our submissions were accepted only if they were postmarked by midnight.
2. I pledged when I became a parent always to listen to my children.
3. In the morning, she decided on this day she would skip dinner entirely.
4. Through the window, I could see my grandmother coming.
5. For two days, they discussed booking a trip around the world but decided against it.
6. A piano stood in the centre of the stage with only its outline visible to the audience in the darkness.
7. The newspaper published only three letters to the editor yesterday.
8. It seemed merely a few days before he returned from his journey to Nepal.
9. The students decided to work on their project for four days and then hand it in.
10. The discounts were available only to those who had completed their applications before the deadline.

Exercise 36: Dangling Modifiers

Revise the following to eliminate dangling modifiers.

1. Sitting quiet and fascinated, the baby in her playpen gazed at the hyperactive hummingbird.
2. By using first-person narration, the author leads the readers to wonder about the reliability of the story.
3. Being adept at substituting one ingredient for another, one must be creative in order to cook.
4. Looked at in this light, Hamlet is very much like other people.
5. Reamur introduced the idea of testing small sample rods and then studying their structure when they are fractured.
6. Being the youngest member of the community, I find it hard to convince the elders of my experience.

7. My activities, when I am not going to school or working, range from playing tennis to surfing the Internet.
8. By using this style, the author added more tension to the dialogue.
9. The colonel began to send groups of reinforcements to the weakened position, reinforcements who were only to be ambushed in the mountain passes.
10. Whispering in the darkened theatre, we spilled our popcorn onto the floor.
11. When I entered the room, I saw that the desk was full of open textbooks, paper, and used coffee cups.
12. When completely cooled, the brownies are ready to eat.
13. After teaching us the correct way to clean our hiking boots, our instructors showed us the route for next day's hike.

Exercise 37: Mixed Constructions

Revise the following to eliminate mixed constructions.

1. The decrease in tourism was due to the fear of terrorism.
2. Soccer happens to be a sport that is very popular in Brazil.
3. I found the children's literature website to be very useful.
4. The new styles were popular with both men and women.
5. Since, for most of us, our earliest recollections are mere fragments of things that made up our childhoods, we must rely on the objects or ideas around us to trigger the past.
6. The popularity of reality television programs is not a sign of a decadent society.
7. The lessons to be learned from the game were focus and teamwork.
8. When I was looking for my dropped car keys in the grass beside the driveway I found a lucky, four-leaf clover.

Exercise 38: Faulty Alignment

Revise the following sentences to remove illogical or incongruous alignment.

1. I decided not to buy it, for it was too expensive.
2. Despite the upheaval, people were undergoing spiritual enlightenment during this period.
3. Clearly, his ability is greatly underestimated.
4. The only light in the house came through the windows.
5. It is a rectangle.
6. The poem expresses the meaninglessness of war.
7. The speaker in the poem is euphoric and energetic.
8. The effort required in reading the text indicates a weakness in the writing.
9. The idea of life and death was constantly in the pioneers' minds.
10. She was very young when she started university.
11. The amount of food that could be brought to the picnic had to fit in two small baskets.

Exercise 40: Faulty Parallelism

Revise the following in order to repair faulty parallelism.

1. Disagreements over the war were not only apparent between elected officials and voters, but were also apparent between various elements of the armed forces as well.
2. People adopt roles in life that they are most comfortable with or that they will benefit from the most.
3. Not only was our trip like an adventure, but it was also very much like a marathon.
4. It is significant that the prosecutor ignored the jury and tried to address his comments to the judge.
5. Part of the report is not only concerned with the present situation but it also prepares the way for the important reforms that are ahead.
6. We are told that we should eat more fibre, eat less fat, and exercise regularly.
7. The homeless are a neglected group in our society and in our own lives.
8. About 1750, it became clear to the French that the arrival of the few English traders was only the beginning and that soon masses of settlers would follow and overwhelm the French empire in North America.
9. He says that when he graduates he wants to be a teacher, a home owner, and a traveller.
10. A pet not only gives an older person something to care for, but also gives this person a sense of companionship.
11. Today, newspapers from across the world can be read on the same day of publication via the Internet rather than read several days later in the magazine shop.
12. The mountaineers had to cope with obsolete or old equipment.
13. The speaker narrates the poem as if he has walked along the streets at night more than once before and as if he is acquainted with what goes on around him during his walks.
14. There are many kinds of smiles. For example, there are smiles that indicate pleasure, compassion, humour, contempt, shared secrets, gloating, recognition, friendliness, gratification, spontaneity, suppressed courtesy, anger, humility, rebellion, embarrassment, and surprise.
15. Everything the fortune teller told me was happy and exciting: I would marry an intelligent man, I would have two children, one who will become a famous author and the other will become a doctor, I would travel all over the world, and I would live until I'm ninety-five as healthy as a young woman.
16. The music at the concert captured the child's imagination. While he listened, he imagined fighting pirates at sea, flying like an eagle, riding on a carousel, and watching giants dance.

Exercise 41 (1): Faulty Coordination: Logic, Emphasis, and Unity

Convert each of the following pairs of sentences into a complex sentence by subordinating one or the other.

1. Although the book was well written, I did not find it rewarding.
2. She wore a heavy sweater because the wind was very cold.
3. When it stopped snowing, we shovelled the driveway.
4. While she read a good book, he played solitaire.
5. Even though the meeting was contentious, a consensus was reached.
6. Though the opposing team played very well, our team won a close victory.
7. When it started to rain, we moved the party indoors.

Exercise 41 (2): Faulty Coordination: Logic, Emphasis, and Unity

Revise the following sentences to eliminate faulty or loose coordination; aim for good subordination, unity, emphasis, and logic. You may also find that you can reduce wordiness.

1. Because there are no windows in the room, all lighting is from fluorescent fixtures.
2. At this point, Ophelia's confusion becomes evident when she speaks her next line.
3. *In the Skin of a Lion*, a great novel about twentieth-century Toronto, features a compelling character, Patrick Lewis.
4. The last appearance of the ghost, occurring in the "closet" scene, prevents Hamlet from diverging from his "blunted purpose."
5. Her experiments with chimpanzees were unusual and interesting.
6. Older people, having already been through what others are experiencing, are able to help.
7. Experts may not always be right, but they are seldom wrong.
8. Although some of them badly need repair, the city's streets for the most part are well paved.
9. He is a genius; however, some people claim that he is an impostor.
10. The stores are usually the first to remind us that Christmas is coming by setting the mood with decorations, music, and advertising.
11. Before the character of Macbeth appears on stage, the audience learns that he is a brave soldier and that he is going to be met by three witches.

Exercise 42: Faulty Logic

Revise the following sentences to eliminate errors in logic.

1. As he approached the shore, he felt that the sea was challenging him.
2. Subsequent poets were greatly influenced by Milton.
3. Some auto accidents can be avoided by proper car maintenance.
4. Love is the theme of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The characters, situations, and variety of comic devices develop this theme in the best possible way.
5. The structure of plot can be seen in the imagery, diction, symbolism, and sound.
6. Visually enforcing the lesson, it projected images on a screen and played a corresponding taped conversation.
7. Throughout history, philosophers, who can be divided into three general camps, have been discussing and purposing theories about our purpose on earth.
8. Too much abstract language, jargon, and clichés have destroyed the clarity and effectiveness of this article.
9. I remember we had a lot of fun together when we were teenagers.
10. After his wife died, his paintings changed from energetic forms to subdued ones.
11. Exercise, as a part your daily routine, will relieve stress and increase stamina.
12. As Linda reviewed her study notes for the third time, she realized that she was well prepared.

Review Exercise Parts II–IV: Sentence Errors and Weaknesses

The following sentences contain various kinds of errors and weaknesses discussed in the preceding chapters. Decide what is wrong with each sentence, label it with the appropriate correction symbol, and then revise the sentence in order to eliminate the problem. Some of the sentences have more than one thing wrong with them.

1. Our coach is overbearing, overpaid, and over forty. [Faulty logic and parallelism]
2. The colour of the picture makes this impression. [Passive voice and wordiness]
3. Many organic diseases have similar symptoms to autism. [Wordy]
4. Great distances now separate him and his father. [Incorrect pronoun usage]
5. The writer was skilful. [Logic—it is the skill that makes the writer good.]
6. Love and romance come when you least expect them. [Wordy]
7. No player in our school has scored as many points as Schmidt did this year. [Incorrect modifier]
8. The poem is separated into two parts: his memories and his reaction to his father's death. [Emphasis needed]
9. It has a keyhole shape. [Wordy]
10. I pulled over to the side of the road in my roommate's green truck; because of the heat, I was wearing only a bathing suit and a head bandana. [Emphasis and variety needy]
11. Borelli supposed that the tendency for celestial bodies to attract each other was prevented by fluid pressure. [Weak expletive]
12. Shakespeare's *Othello* is a brilliant and tragic story of the betrayal of the Moor of Venice, Othello, by his most trusted lieutenant, Iago. [Logic and alignment]
13. Housman's poem tells us that it is better to die young with honour and glory intact than to have them taken away. [Wordy]
14. We are both a creative and destructive species due to the evolution of the digits of our hands. [Wordy]
15. He says he would like to have another chance of being premier; but if he couldn't run the government effectively the first time, how can anyone think he can run it effectively this time? [Word choice and logic can be questioned—faulty generalization]
16. On first reading, the reader understands that Smitty is eager for Michael's friendship. [Emphasis needed through clause combination]
17. Those involved in this holiday frenzy may find themselves enjoying the company of others by getting in touch with old friends, making peace with people, giving to loved ones and strangers. [Logical grouping]
18. They preferred to go out with friends to movies and parties rather than stay at home watching television with their families. [Faulty parallelism]
19. We are more open to the message of the story because the writer engages our sympathy for the main character. [Dangling modifier]
20. A university is an institution where people further their education. [Inclusive language]
21. He does not have the money or inclination to alter his big old worn coat. [Faulty parallelism]
22. I feel faint because I am hungry. [Mixed construction]
23. She is successful because her slyness and wit prevails over her daughter's weakness. [Wordy]
24. Any physical activity benefits the individual. [Wordy]
25. Currently, the fees are too high. [Wordy-overuse of modifiers]