

The 4 Sentence Structures and Flow

By nature, most of our writing will be comprised of declarative sentences. All of the following sentences in the example below are declarative. Notice how the flow (how easily the reader can read it) gets a bit choppy in sections.

“I want you to arrest him,” the prince said to the queen. After a pause, he added, “Now.” Charles wondered what would happen if the prince destroyed Robert. Charles wondered who would replace him. Charles hardly breathed. The prince hadn’t ordered the arrest himself, though he could have, but he had directed the queen to do so, in public. The prince sure had a lot of disrespect, daring to tell the queen what to do. Now they would see if the queen could protect her own or not.

Writing that uses only declarative sentences is like a song with only one note. Boring! Please throw in the occasional imperative, interrogative, or exclamatory sentence for reader enjoyment. I can completely change the flow (readability) of the exact same paragraph:

“Arrest him,” the prince said to the queen. After a pause, he added, “Now.” What would happen if the prince destroyed Robert? Who would replace him? Charles hardly breathed. The prince hadn’t ordered the arrest himself, though he could have, but he had directed the queen to do so, in public. How disrespectful, daring to tell the queen what to do! Now they would see if the queen could protect her own or not.

By adding an imperative sentence (*“Arrest him.”*), two interrogative sentences (*What would happen if the king destroyed Robert?* and *Who would replace him?*) and one exclamatory (*How disrespectful, daring to tell the queen what to do!*) the rhythm of the sentences completely changes to one with more interest. The song has 4 notes now instead of one, so it’s definitely more interesting.

Here’s an example similar to the one we used before. Notice all the sentences are declarative.

Sample A

(1) The phone rang. (2) The noise woke up Jorge. (3) He wondered why someone was calling at two o’clock in the morning. (4) He turned over in bed. (5) He reached for his cellphone. (6) The phone quit ringing. (7) Jorge rolled back over. (8) He was so tired. (9) He went to sleep instantly.

In other lessons, we changed some of the writing to help Sample A flow better by adding participial phrases (-ing verbs used as adjective phrases such as *stepping through the door*) and by adding dependent clauses (starting with subordinating conjunctions like *as*, *after*, *although*, *before*, or *when*). When we did that, we got a paragraph with better flow:

Sample B

(1) The phone rang, the noise waking up Jorge. (2) He wondered why someone was calling at 2 o'clock in the morning. (3) He turned over in bed, reaching for his cellphone. (4) After the phone quit ringing, Jorge rolled back over. (5) He was so tired. (6) He went to sleep instantly.

What I did: To make the writing flow better, I combined sentences 1 and 2 in Sample A by using a participial phrase. I also combined sentences 4 and 5 of Sample A the same way. Then I combined 6 and 7 of Sample A by turning sentence 6 into a dependent clause and attaching it to number 7.

The flow is a lot better. Next, let's change some of the sentence types in Sample B (our better version) and include at least one question and one exclamatory sentence.

Sample C

(1) The phone rang, the noise waking up Jorge. (2) Why in the world was someone calling at two o'clock in the morning? (3) He turned over in bed, reaching for his cellphone. (4) After the phone quit ringing, Jorge rolled back over. (5) How tired he was! (6) He went to sleep instantly.

I changed sentence 2 in Sample B into an interrogative (question). Then I changed sentence 5 of Sample B into an exclamatory sentence.

Your turn:

Improve the following paragraph by

1. combining sentences using participial phrases (*-ing* verbs used as adjective phrases like *stepping through the door*). Do this at least one time.
2. combining sentences using dependent clauses (starting with subordinating conjunctions like *as*, *after*, *although*, *before*, *while*, or *when*). Do this at least one time.
3. including at least one exclamatory and one interrogative (question) sentence.

Esperanza was eating her cookie. She stepped into the road. She wondered why a car blared its horn. A car rushed by. She jumped back. She had been distracted by the cookie. She had not noticed the car coming. It almost hit her.

Teacher Answer Key

Improve the following paragraph by

1. combining sentences using participial phrases (--ing verbs used as adjective phrases like *stepping through the door*). Do this at least one time.
2. combining sentences using dependent clauses (starting with subordinating conjunctions like *as, after, although, before, while, or when*). Do this at least one time.
3. including at least one exclamatory and one interrogative (question) sentence.

Esperanza was eating her cookie. She stepped into the road. She wondered why a car blared its horn. A car rushed by. She jumped back. She had been distracted by the cookie. She had not noticed the car coming. It almost hit her.

Possible answers vary greatly but something like:

As Esperanza was eating her cookie, she stepped into the road. Why did a car blare its horn? A car rushed by. She jumped back. Distracted by the cookie, she had noticed the car coming. Good heavens, it almost hit her!

1. Past participial phrase “distracted by the cookie” combines 2 sentences into one.
2. Subordinating clause “as Esperanza was eating her cookie” joins 2 sentences into one.
3. Why did a car blare it’s horn? = interrogative sentence and “Good heavens, it almost hit her!” = exclamatory.