

SENTENCE COMBINING AND SUBORDINATION

Sentence combining is an effective way for writers to vary the length and types of sentences they create. By using a variety of sentence constructions, writers can add sophistication and interest to their writings. Probably the most basic type of sentence combining uses coordination, joining equal sentences or equal sentence parts with coordinating conjunctions such as *and*, *but*, *or*, *nor*, *so*, *for*, and *yet*. However, not all sentences carry equal importance. For those situations sentence combining occurs by subordinating or weakening one or more sentences into modifying dependent clauses or phrases and attaching them to a sentence that contains the major emphasis. Modification is either with adjectives modifying nouns or pronouns or adverbs modifying verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs.

In our house there is a painting *that was created by a famous painter*.
(See explanation 1 below)

In our house there is a painting *created by a famous painter*.
(See explanation 2 below)

Note: These examples are the result of combining two sentences:

In our house there is a painting. + The painting was created by a famous painter.

When a writer combines two sentences such as those above, he/she must determine which sentence contains the major emphasis. Then the writer must weigh the relationships between the two sentences. In cases such as the ones above, the second sentence serves as a description of the major sentence. There are two ways in which the descriptive sentence can be connected to the major sentence..

Painting is repeated in the second sentence enabling the writer to change the repeated word to a relative pronoun (see box below), attach that construction immediately after the word it is repeating, and then maintain the rest of the sentence as it is. This construction creates a descriptive clause.

Since the word *painting* is repeated, it can be dropped. Then if the *to be* verb is used, it can also be dropped. If there is no *to be* verb, the existing verbs should be changed to the *ing* form. This construction creates a descriptive phrase.

Whether the writer chooses to use a phrase or a clause, he/she must also decide whether the description is essential or non-essential. Essential constructions modify general nouns or pronouns that need more information to explain which one and, therefore, do not need commas. Non-essential constructions modify specific nouns, often proper nouns, that need no further explanation; thus commas are used to signify that the explanation is unnecessary and could be removed..

If a writer determines that the relationship involves time, place, condition, or manner, he/she would probably choose to use subordinate conjunctions as weakeners for one of the sentences.

When the whistle blew, the workers changed their shifts.

The workers changed their shifts *when the whistle blew*.

This construction originates from the following two sentences where there is a time relationship:

The whistle blew. + The workers changed their shifts.

Note: All the writer needs to do is add the weakener *when* to the sentence containing the minor idea and attach it to the major idea... Notice how the change in the position of the weakened sentence influences the punctuation.

When there are only two ideas of unequal rank to be considered, the writer usually has no difficulty choosing the more important one. However, occasionally an inexperienced writer might fail to recognize which sentence is the more important. When that occurs, upside-down subordination takes place and an illogical sentence results.

Faulty: When I saw the terrible accident, I was driving to class.

Correct: When I was driving to class, I saw the terrible accident.

These examples illustrate that seeing the accident was the critical event. Therefore, the logical sentence to weaken is *I was driving to class*. That sentence also expresses *when* I saw the accident and thus gives a time for the accident..

EXERCISE

Now try to combine the following sentences, reducing the italicized sentence to either a phrase or a dependent clause (weakened sentence). Remember to punctuate correctly.

1. Loch Ness is in north central Scotland. *It is a lake twenty-two miles long and 700 feet deep. It is the home of the legendary sea monster.*
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2. Joseph Priestley discovered oxygen. *He was a theologian by training. He performed experiments with gases which led to the discovery of oxygen.*
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3. There was a revolution in biology in the mid 1960s. *It was pioneered primarily by two men, George Williams and William Hamilton.*
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4. A climbing orangutan grasps a branch with one hand. *It holds on tightly until the other hand has found the next branch.*
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5. The major pollutant released from stoves, heaters, fireplaces, and chimneys is carbon monoxide. *Carbon monoxide can cause fatigue, headaches, dizziness, nausea, and disorientation.*
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6. Children risk suffering nerve and brain damage and some blood disorders. *Children eat paint chips containing lead.*
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7. Researchers have recently discovered something interesting. *As Australia drifted north, it carried out an almost miraculous balancing act.*
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8. The eustachian tube can moderate changing air-pressure conditions. *The eustachian tube can open wide enough.*
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