

Sentence Variation Using Sentence Length

The goal of sentence variation is to give the paper style and flow. By avoiding repetition of sentence lengths, a writer can develop a paper's natural rhythm.

Identification: Long and Short Sentences

Knowing whether a sentence is long or short will help you to determine how well you make your points. This exercise will help you identify the length of a sentence. Go through each of the paragraphs below and mark where the sentences end to emphasize their length. See if the argument or point made in the paragraphs comes through effectively.

Long Sentences: Pie is a dessert that has many different kinds of variations, and those variations lend certain clues as to who the bakers are. These variations, usually in simple baking decisions like what fruit to use, can reflect the baker's region, nationality, or ideals. Pie can contain with many different types of fruit like strawberry, rhubarb, and blueberry. A baker can also combine these flavors to create pies like strawberry rhubarb or mixed berry pie.

Short Sentences: Pie has many variations. These variations allow bakers to express themselves. Pie can contain with many different fruits. These fruits can be strawberry, rhubarb, and blueberry. A baker can make pie with combinations of fruit.

Overusing long sentences makes the paragraph hard to understand. While the paragraph with short sentences is easier to read, the main idea of the paragraph remains unclear.

Techniques for Identification

Below is a list of techniques and strategies that you can use to identify the lengths of your sentences.

- **End marking strategy:** The end marking strategy, as used in the previous section, is a good visual technique that clearly identifies the beginnings and ends of sentences.
- **Word count strategy:** If the number of words per sentence varies greatly (e.g. 11, 22, 5) throughout the paper, that is a good indication of variety. If the numbers are closer together (11, 14, 16, 13), consider revising so that sentences that make points are shorter and sentences that elaborate or provide details are longer.
- **Highlighting strategy:** The highlighting strategy is another visual technique to determining sentence length. Once you know the sentence lengths, try highlighting short sentences in one color and long sentences in another. If there are too many or too few of either one, rewrite some of the sentences to be longer or shorter.

These are just a few examples; get creative and find out what strategy helps you best!

Main Points versus Explanations

The paragraph below highlights the main points and provides detailed explanation by utilizing varying sentence lengths.

Pie has many variations. Pies can tell a story about their baker, and the decisions that go into making a pie can indicate the baker's taste in fruit, the time of the year, or their nationality. A baker can make pie using different types and combinations of fruits.

Using short sentences to emphasize important points and long sentences to illustrate examples is a winning combination. However, too much of a good thing can turn into a bad thing: recall the paragraph of predominantly short sentences and the obscurity of its main idea. To keep the reader focused on your points as they progress, it is wise to sandwich main points between examples. In other words, try making a pattern of sandwiching short sentences between long sentences. That way, you can fully develop each idea before moving on to the next one.

Revision Strategy

You can break up long sentences into short sentences or clauses or make short sentences longer by adding elaboration. Look at the example below:

Long Sentence: A baker can make pie with many different types of fruit like strawberry, rhubarb, and blueberry.

Broken into clauses: A baker can make pie with many different fruits. These fruits can be strawberry, rhubarb, and blueberry.

Short Sentence: These variations allow bakers to express themselves.

Elaborated on: These variations, usually in simple baking decisions like what fruit to use, can reflect a baker's region, nationality, or ideals.

Now that you know how to identify your sentence lengths, the purpose for each type of sentence, and a method of altering sentence length, try going through the sections of your paper that lack variety and applying the above method. If you find that your paper flows better, you have achieved the goal of sentence variation!

Contact

Want to talk about how to revise sentence variation in a paper? Come work with a tutor at the Writing Center! Drop by or use the information below to contact us and set up an appointment.

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