Repetitive Sentence Structure

**DEFINITION:** Repetitive sentence structure occurs when multiple sentences in the same paragraph are arranged the same. Sometimes students and professors refer to papers with repetitive sentence structure as papers that lack flow because the choppy or redundant style does not effectively illustrate relationships between ideas.

**EXAMPLE:** Every country educates its children differently. Each country can improve its educational system. Studying other countries can help improve countries’ educational systems. In the United States, individual states control their schools. In France, the French Ministry of National Education, Advanced Instruction, and Research, a centralized government institution, controls schools.

To avoid repetitive sentence structure, which can be boring and distracting for readers, writers vary their sentence patterns to most effectively capture their intended meanings.

**REVISION:** Every country educates its children differently, but each country can improve its educational system by studying other countries. In the United States, for example, individual states control their schools’ policies. In contrast, in France, the French Ministry of National Education, Advanced Instruction, and Research, a centralized government institution, controls school policy.

**EXERCISE:** REWRITE THE FOLLOWING PARAGRAPH TO AVOID REPETITIVE SENTENCE STRUCTURE AND TO IMPROVE THE FLOW OF IDEAS.

The author compares the Iraq War to the Vietnam War. She states that both wars were caused by trigger-happy administrations, cultural misunderstandings, and a clashing of political ideology. The text includes examples of both wars. It gives descriptions of the terrain on which the soldiers fought. It also provides cultural and political history of both countries and compares the two on multiple levels. The multiple levels include government, religion, infrastructure, and economic relationship with the United States. The author presents similarities that are hard to argue against.

**HAVING TROUBLE?** In order to understand how to vary sentence structure, you must first understand grammatical structures that act as building blocks for sentences.

**Understanding Clauses**

**DEFINITION:** An independent clause contains a subject and a verb and can stand alone as a sentence.

**EXAMPLE:** Inez had a lovely wedding.

**DEFINITION:** A dependent clause contains a subject and a verb and begins with a subordinating conjunction (although, even though, whenever, before, once, since, etc.). Dependent clauses cannot stand alone and are not complete sentences.

**EXAMPLE:** Even though her flowers arrived late
USE A COMMA TO JOIN A DEPENDENT AND AN INDEPENDENT CLAUSE TOGETHER TO MAKE A COMPLEX SENTENCE.

EXAMPLE: Even though her flowers arrived late, Inez had a lovely wedding.

USE A COMMA AND A COORDINATING CONJUNCTION TO JOIN TWO INDEPENDENT CLAUSES TOGETHER TO MAKE A COMPOUND SENTENCE.

EXAMPLE: The flower girls wore lavender, and the ring bearer wore a violet bowtie.

WHAT IS A COORDINATING CONJUNCTION? Use the acronym FANBOYS to remember the seven coordinating conjunctions – for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so.

EXERCISE: REVIEW THE FOLLOWING COMPLEX AND COMPOUND SENTENCES. IDENTIFY THE DEPENDENT AND INDEPENDENT CLAUSES IN EACH SENTENCE. ARE THE SENTENCES PUNCTUATED CORRECTLY?

1. Anyone ten years old or older can now hunt without first taking a hunting training course but an experienced hunter must accompany the beginner.
2. While Poe's writing generated praise from renowned writers like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, author of Sherlock Holmes, many of his other colleagues found Poe's vulgar.
3. Even though her acceptance speech was long the movie star brought tears to the audience members' eyes as she candidly discussed her own loneliness.

Let's discuss a different component of sentences: phrases.

Exploring Types of Phrases

DEFINITION: A phrase is a word group that lacks a subject, a verb, or both. We will examine three common types of phrases.

PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE: A phrase beginning with a preposition and ending with the noun the preposition modifies.

EXAMPLE: Throughout the winter, the family hoped that her prognosis would improve.

PARTICIPIAL PHRASE: A present participle (a verb form ending in –ing) or past participle (a verb form ending in –ed, -en, -en, -t) and its objects, complements, and modifiers.

EXAMPLE: Winded, the runners took one more lap around the track.

APPOSITIVE PHRASE: A noun or noun phrase that renames a nearby noun or pronoun.

EXAMPLE: Artists at heart, news photographers tell stories in aesthetically pleasing ways.
HAVING TROUBLE? Let’s take a look at punctuation to better understand how to integrate phrases into sentences.

Tackling Punctuation

Phrases are integrated into sentences in numerous ways, and this is why altering sentence patterns is so fun!

NON-RESTRICTIVE ELEMENTS

Non-restrictive elements describe a word whose meaning is already clear. Because it is not essential to the meaning of the sentence, it is set off with commas. Non-restrictive elements are usually adjective clauses, adjective phrases, and appositives.

WHAT’S AN ADJECTIVE CLAUSE? An adjective clause is a type of dependent clause that modifies a noun or pronoun. All adjective clauses begin with a relative pronoun (who, whom, whose, which, that) or a relative adverb (when, where) and usually appears right after the word it modifies.

NON-RESTRICTIVE ADJECTIVE (DEPENDENT) CLAUSE: Horace refused to eat the salad, which looked particularly unappetizing today.

WHAT’S AN ADJECTIVE PHRASE? An adjective phrase is a prepositional or verbal phrase that functions as an adjective.

NON-RESTRICTIVE ADJECTIVE PHRASE: The salad, with its pungent blue cheese dressing, had been sitting on the counter for over an hour.

NON-RESTRICTIVE APPOSITE: The romaine lettuce looked fresh enough, but the blue cheese dressing, warm and stinky, disgusted Horace.

RESTRICTIVE ELEMENTS

Restrictive elements define or limit the meaning of the words they modify. Therefore, restrictive elements are essential to the words they modify and should not be set off with commas. Restrictive elements, too, are composed of adjective clauses, adjective phrases, and appositives.

RESTRICTIVE ADJECTIVE (DEPENDENT) CLAUSE: Horace refused to eat the salad that his uncle made.

RESTRICTIVE APPOSITE: The book They Say, I Say helps students interested in entering academic conversations.

EXERCISE: USE THE GRAMMATICAL CONSTRUCTIONS EXPLAINED ABOVE TO ELIMINATE REPETITIVE SENTENCE STRUCTURE IN THE FOLLOWING SENTENCES. IDENTIFY THE GRAMMATICAL CONSTRUCTIONS THAT YOU CHOOSE, AND EXPLAIN WHY YOU CHOSE THEM.

1. Few young people attend regular religious worship services. Allison is interested in this new trend. Allison thinks that trends in religions service attendance relate to
lower marriages among young Americans. Allison will use this hypothesis as the basis for her senior thesis.

2. Alberto will be in Brazil for the entire summer. He will not join the staff on the annual retreat. Olivia will attend the annual staff retreat. Olivia will send Alberto the information that he misses.

3. Yesterday, I saw a flyer posted on the door. The flyer asked for participants for a psychology dissertation. I normally avoid psychology research. Psychology research generally involves some sort of pain or deprivation for a small stipend. I was intrigued by this research study, though. I might call and sign up to participate.

4. Yolanda rows every morning. She likes the cardiovascular exercise. She likes being outside in the morning air. She likes socializing with other rowers. Yolanda does not like waking up at 5:00 a.m. to go rowing. She does not like rowing on cold mornings.

5. Aviator Charles A. Lindbergh was undeniably a man of genius. He was the first to fly from New York to Paris. His success did not result from academic excellence. His success resulted from ingenuity and determination.