



Sentence Length

Lecture 8

Simple sentence: just one clause

I am writing a paper.

A compound sentence: two clauses on the same grammatical level

I am writing a paper, and I am loving it!

Complex sentence: one main clause and one or more subordinate clauses.

*I am writing a paper that will change the world.
Although I am not sure what it's about, I am writing a paper.*

average sentence length > 24 words



Long sentence: 45 words

Lee and colleagues noted that, although removal of physical inactivity had - in terms of percentage reduction - the largest effect on colon cancer and the smallest on coronary heart disease, the number of coronary heart disease cases prevented would be greater due to higher global incidence.

String of short sentences: total 61 words

Lee and colleagues noted the following. Removal of physical inactivity had the largest effect on colon cancer. The smallest effect was observed for coronary heart disease. These two observations were expressed in terms of percentage reduction. Yet, the number of coronary heart disease cases prevented would be greater than that for colon cancer. This is explained by a higher global incidence.

The original text: two blocks connected (54 words)

Removal of physical inactivity had the largest effect on colon cancer, and the smallest on coronary heart disease, in terms of percentage reduction. However, with respect to the number of cases that can potentially be averted, coronary heart disease would have a far larger effect than would colon cancer because of its higher incidence.

Advantages of short sentences

SHORTER SENTENCES:

- Are more easy to read
- Make reshuffling of sentences within a paragraph easier
- Prevent you from needless mistakes
- Give key messages more power

BUT.....

- In a longer sentence, messages can be displayed in their mutual context
- Variety gives more harmony
- Complex sentences enhance information density - you need less words
- Complex sentences allow more detailed expression

Emphasis in a complex sentence

- 1 Main clause
- 2 End placement

Source: Gopen and Swan: *The science of scientific writing*. American Scientist Online

Emphasis on main clause (subordination)

Although Fred is a nice guy, **he beats his dog.**

Although Fred beats his dog, **he is a nice guy.**

Emphasis on final part

Although the solution of the Helmholtz Equation for σ and ε looks, at first glance, to be simple, **a series of issues hinder its applicability.**

More balance in a coordination

Fred is a nice guy, **but** he beats his dog.

Fred beats his dog, **but** he is a nice guy.

Placement short-long

Shorter sentences: topic or key sentences

Longer: body of the paragraph

Placement short-long

Our results suggest that adherence to the full bundle is important.

Given that adherence rates for patients who had urgent or emergent operations performed by surgeons who implemented the bundle were substantially lower than for patients who underwent scheduled operations, we hypothesize that institutional barriers may prevent full bundle adherence for patients undergoing urgent or emergent operations.

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Embedded sentences

The smallest of the URF's (URFA6L), a 207-nucleotide (nt) reading frame overlapping out of phase the NH₂-terminal portion of the adenosinetriphosphatase (ATPase) subunit 6 gene has been identified as the animal equivalent of the recently discovered yeast H⁺-ATPase subunit 8 gene.

Embedded sentences

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Take Home Messages

- ✓ Place important (and new) information in end position or in a main clause
- ✓ Follow a grammatical subject as soon as possible with its verb
- ✓ Put important information in **simple** sentences
- ✓ Vary your sentence lengths
- ✓ Keep your average sentence length between 20 and 24
- ✓ Give your longer (complex) sentences a simple structure