



SENTENCE VARIETY

Avoiding the SVO Cookie Cutter

Learning objectives

1. Identify an SVO sentence.
2. Understand how SVO sentences can make writing dull and monotonous.
3. Learn how to add variety to sentences.

SVO

- “SVO” is an acronym that stands for Subject, Verb, Object.
- The acronym “SVO” describes the basic pattern of a simple sentence:
 - Subject first
 - Verb second
 - Object third
- Subject: The noun that the sentence revolves around.
- Verb: The word that shows what the subject noun does or is.
- Object: A noun that follows the verb.

“The ball hit the wall.”



SUBJECT

“The ball hit the wall.”



VERB

“The ball hit the wall.”



Object

Identify the problems with the paragraph below:

The fair tax system is designed to eliminate the federal income tax and replace it with a national sales tax. This will impose a national flat rate for everyone in the country. This system will place a higher tax on every good sold. This ensures a flat rate fee for both legal citizens and illegal immigrants. Also this will eliminate the “tax on success” and favoring of the lower classes. Everyone will be treated equally. The fair tax system would be much easier for the government and for tax payers. This system would make consumers pay an added tax on sold goods. That way the government would not have to worry about loopholes or overcomplicated tax laws. If the government imposed the fair tax system this would eliminate the need for the IRS which would save the government money. The government would still need employees to collect the revenue, but this system would drastically reduce the number of employees needed. A great advantage of the fair tax system would be equality for everyone. Because the tax would be placed upon the sale of goods, every citizen would pay. This system also ensures that everyone pays an equal tax no matter how much or little their income is.

Problems with paragraph

- Too many short, simple sentences. The paragraph seems choppy and stilted as a result.
- Sentences repeat the same word over and over (“this”).
- Sentences follow the same monotonous SVO pattern: Subject, Verb, Object. Subject, Verb, Object. Subject, Verb, Object. Subject, Verb, Object. Etc.

Methods to add variety to writing

1. Join short, choppy sentences together using the techniques we have learned so far: subordination, coordination, semicolons, colons, and dashes.
2. Split up S and V with an interrupter phrase.
3. Begin sentence with an introductory phrase.
4. Condense and combine clauses, or expand and separate them.

Method 1. Join choppy sentences using the techniques we have learned so far

Use subordination, coordination, semicolons, dashes, and colons to transform short, choppy, boring sentences into longer, more fluid sentences.

Method 2. Split up S and V with an interrupter

An interrupter is a word, phrase, or clause that significantly breaks the flow of a sentence.

Models:

- S, Interrupter, V, O.
 - The fish, *in all reality*, was fairly small.
 - My mom is usually late. Tonight she, *surprisingly*, was on time
- S, V, Interrupter, O
 - The fish was, *in all reality*, fairly small.
 - My mom is usually late. Tonight she was, *surprisingly*, on time.

Method 3. Begin sentences with an introductory phrase

There are three common types of phrases that begin sentences:

1. The participial phrase
2. The adverbial phrase
3. The prepositional phrase

The participial phrase

A **participial phrase** will begin with a participle. Participles look like verbs and can be present (-ing) or past (-ed).

- **Present Participle:** **Skipping joyfully**, the girl made her way down the street.
- **Past Participle:** **Delighted to see her**, the young man approached his bride to be.

The adverbial phrase

An **adverbial phrase** will begin with an adverb. Adverbs often end in “ly.” Examples:

- **Happily**, the girl ran to greet her sister.
- **Angrily scowling**, the drill sergeant informed the recruit that his grandmother should be ashamed of him.
- **Wildly flailing his arms**, the matador turned away from the bull and ran for his life.

The prepositional phrase

Prepositional phrases begin with a preposition. A list of prepositions is on the next slide.

- **Above the streets of Atlanta**, airplanes can be seen flying.
- **Beside the stream**, a mighty old oak grew.
- **Upon hearing that the British government intended to tax tea**, the colonists dumped all of the tea in Boston Harbor into the sea.

COMMON PREPOSITIONS

about

above

across

after

against

around

at

before

behind

below

beneat

h

beside

besides

between

beyond

by

down

during

except

for

from

in

inside

into

like

near

of

off

on

out

outside

over

since

through

througho

ut

till

to

toward

under

until

up

upon

with

without

Method 4a. Vary sentence length by condensing and combining clauses.

Clauses can be condensed and combined in order to add variety to a paragraph.

Example:

- It was yesterday. The boy stood outside. It was very cold.
- Yesterday, the boy stood outside in the cold.

Method 4b. Vary sentence length by expanding and separating clauses

Clauses can also be expanded and then separated to create variety.

Example:

- Clause: The man saw the show.
- Expanded Clause: The man, at the newly renovated Fox theater, saw the show *Fiddler on the Roof*.