

The Art of Styling Sentences

Mastering Sentence Patterns

COMPOUND CONSTRUCTIONS

Pattern 1: COMPOUND SENTENCE: SEMICOLON, NO CONJUNCTION
(two short, related sentences now joined)

S V ; S V .

*Some people dream of being something; others stay awake and are.
It was the right color; it fit, and it was cheap
This car looks as if it has been wrecked; thus it's not a good buy.*

Pattern 2: COMPOUND SENTENCE WITH ELLIPTICAL CONSTRUCTION
(comma indicates the omitted verb)

S V DO or SC ; S , DO or SC .

Thought is the blossom; language, the bud; action, the fruit.

Pattern 3: COMPOUND SENTENCE WITH EXPLANATORY STATEMENT
(clauses separated by a colon)

General statement (idea) : specific statement (example).
(an independent clause) (an independent clause)

Darwin's The Origin of the Species forcibly states a harsh truth: Only the fittest survive.
Such disputes are occasionally satisfying: you* can take pleasure in knowing you have converted someone to your point of view.*

* Some writers capitalize the first word after the colon in this pattern, but this is a matter of personal taste and styling.

SENTENCES WITH SERIES

Pattern 4: A SERIES WITH A VARIATION
(a series in any place in the sentence)

A, B, C . (series without a conjunction)

The United States has a government of the people, by the people, for the people. One group will respond to wit, another to Biblical quotations, still another to a spread of statistics.

A or B or C.

(series with conjunctions)

Looking down from the Empire State Building, Jeannie felt thrilled and amazed—and scared.

Pattern 5: A SERIES OF BALANCED PAIRS
(may be in any slot in the sentence)

A and B , C and D , E and F _____.

*A new book and PBS television series traces the numerous traditions—folk and gospel, blues and zydeco—that shaped American music.
Eager yet fearful, confident but somewhat suspicious, Jason eyed the barber who would give him his first haircut.*

Pattern 6: A SERIES OF APPOSITIVES
(with a dash and summarizing subject*)

The depressed, the stressed, the lonely, the fearful—all have trouble coping with problems.

What do you think caused the American Revolution—the tea tax, the lack of representation, the distance from the mother country, or growing sense of being a new and independent nation?

Appositive, appositive, appositive – summary word S V.

*The key summarizing word before the subject may be one of these: *such, all, those, this, many, each, which, what, these, something, someone*. Sometimes this summary word will be the subject, but other times it will merely modify the subject.

Pattern 7: AN INTERNAL APPOSITIVE OR SERIES OF APPOSITIVES/MODIFIERS
(enclosed by a pair of dashes or parentheses)

S -- appositive -- V _____.

The sudden burst of light—a camera flash—startled me.

S (appositive) V _____.

His ex-wife (once a famous Philadelphia model) now owns a well-known boutique in the Bahamas.

S -- appositive, appositive, appositive -- V _____.

On our trip to Italy, the major sights—the Vatican in Rome, the Duomo in Florence, the tower in Pisa—didn't impress as much as the food and kindness of the people.

S (_____ modifier, modifier, modifier _____) V _____.

Pattern 8: DEPENDENT CLAUSES IN A PAIR OR IN A SERIES
(at the beginning or end of a sentence)

If..., if..., if..., then S V _____.

If he had the money, if he had the time, if he had a companion, he would take that trip around the world.

When..., when..., when..., S V _____.

When I had mastered the language of this water, and had come to know every trifling feature that bordered the great river as familiarly as I knew the letters of the alphabet, I had made a valuable acquisition.

S V _____ that..., that..., that... _____.

I wish I could say that I discovered Arden in some appropriately romantic fashion—that my Land Rover was stopped by hooded archers in a bosky byway; that I was kidnapped by free-love agitators on a dark and stormy night; or that I tracked a fugitive Soviet coup meister to a secret Stalinist camp in the Delaware woods.

REPETITIONS

Pattern 9: REPETITION OF A KEY TERM
(word must be important enough to repeat)

S V key term -- repeated key term in a modifying phrase.

We live in an uncertain world—the inner world, the world of the mind.

S V key term , repeated key term in a modifying phrase.

Privacy, of course, has the advantage of, well, privacy.

Pattern 9a: SAME WORD REPEATED IN PARALLEL STRUCTURE

If you have unrealistic dreams, you may need to find other goals, other desires.

Pattern 10: EMPHATIC APPOSITIVE AT END, AFTER A COLON OR DASH

S _____ V _____ word: _____ the appositive .

Her room contained a collection of trash: old clothes, soda cans, McDonald's wrappers.

S _____ V _____ word -- _____ the appositive .

Many traditional philosophies echo the ideas of one man—Plato.

MODIFIERS

Pattern 11: INTERRUPTING MODIFIER BETWEEN S AND V

S _____ , _____ modifier _____ , _____ V _____ .

A small drop of ink, falling like dew upon a thought, can make millions think.

S _____ -- _____ modifier _____ -- _____ V _____ .

Wolves—once feared and killed—are being reintroduced into the environment.

S _____ -- full sentence -- _____ V _____ .

One of Thoreau's most famous analogies—"If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music he hears, however measured or far away."—echoes Shakespeare's advice that we should be true to ourselves.

S _____ (full sentence) _____ V _____ .

He leaped at the chance (too impetuously, I thought) to go white-water rafting.

Pattern 12: INTRODUCTORY OR CONCLUDING PARTICIPLES

Participial phrase _____ , _____ S _____ V _____ .

Sprawled on the sofa, I finally faced up to the grim task, took the list out of my notebook, and scanned it.

S V _____ , _____ Participial phrase _____ .

The heavily armed soldiers guarding us with their powerful guns at the Rio conference looked ominous.

Pattern 13: A SINGLE MODIFIER OUT OF PLACE FOR EMPHASIS
(modifier may be in other positions)

Modifier _____ , _____ S V _____ .

Desperate, the young mother called for help.

S V _____ , _____ Modifier _____ .

The general demanded absolute obedience, instant and unquestioning.

INVERSIONS

Pattern 14: PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE BEFORE S AND V
(sometimes a comma is necessary after the prepositional phrase)

Prepositional phrase _____ S V _____ .

With horrified attention, we watched the planes crash into the World Trade Center.

Until next semester I have no more papers due.

Prepositional phrase _____ V S _____ .

From the mist emerged a figure playing a flute.

Pattern 15: OBJECT OR COMPLEMENT BEFORE S AND V
(The Yoda construction)

Object or Subject Complement _____ S V _____ .

His kind of sarcasm I do not like.

Object or Complement or Modifier _____ V S _____ .

*Down the field and through the weeds pranced the little puppy.
Never before have we had so little time to do so much.*

OTHER ASSORTED PATTERNS

Pattern 16: PAIRED CONSTRUCTIONS
(how to handle correlative conjunctions)

Not only	S	V	,	but also	S	V	.
Just as	S	V	,	so too	S	V	.
The more	S	V	,	the more	S	V	.
The former	S	V	,	the latter	S	V	.
If not			,	at least			.

Just as the Yankees dominate the World Series, so Tiger Woods dominates the golf world.

Kai and Ernst were two of my favorite ski instructors: the former taught me downhill racing; the latter helped carry me to the hospital where Dr. Alexander set my fractured arm.

Pattern 16a: A PAIRED CONSTRUCTION FOR CONTRAST ONLY
(does not involve the correlative conjunctions)

A “this, not that” or “not this, but that” construction _____.

Hard work, not luck gets you promoted in business.

Pattern 17: DEPENDENT CLAUSE AS A SUBJECT OR OBJECT OR COMPLEMENT

Dependent clause as subject _____ V _____.

What man cannot imagine, he cannot create.

S V Dependent clause as object or complement.

Ann never discovered why her husband bought her a diamond necklace.

Pattern 18: ABSOLUTE CONSTRUCTION ANYWHERE IN SENTENCE
(absolute construction uses a noun/pronoun plus a participle and has no grammatical connection to the rest of the sentence)

Absolute construction _____, _____ S _____ V _____.

Her skirt torn and her leg burnt, Sara cried on her mother’s shoulder after the accident.

S _____ absolute construction _____, _____ V _____.

The old man, prejudiced by past experience, viewed the newcomer with distrust.

S -- absolute construction -- V _____.

*The walls being blank, the new tenant—an unemployed artist—promptly set
about covering all of them in a mural of orange, vermillion, and yellow.*

S (absolute construction) _____ V _____.

*I was to go away to college (my parents willing) as soon as I graduate from
high school.*

Pattern 19: THE SHORT, SIMPLE SENTENCE FOR RELIEF OR DRAMATIC EFFECT

S V .

*Days passed.
But then it happened.
Everything changed.*

Pattern 19a: A SHORT QUESTION FOR DRAMATIC EFFECT

*Can we change?
Why do it?*

Pattern 20: THE DELIBERATE FRAGMENT

*So much for that.
Absolute power corrupting once more.
Shameful nonsense.*