

## Varying Sentence Openers for Emphasis, Pace, and Cohesion

Most of us learn how to write sentences by using the following pattern: subject + verb + object. Therefore, we expect to read sentences in this order. By using different sentence openers to delay the subject and/or verb of the main clause, we create tension and draw attention to certain aspects of the sentence. Consequently, we can manipulate the emphasis and pace of a sentence. We can also create cohesion when we use different sentence openers.

### Sentence Openers

Let's look at a sentence that follows the conventional S-V-O pattern.

My brother went to the store to buy bread because yesterday my sister forgot to go grocery shopping.

We can rewrite this sentence using the following strategies for sentence openers.

- Subordinate clause
- Present participle phrase (“-ing”)
- Past participle phrase (“-ed”)
- Adjective
- Appositive
- Prepositional phrase
- Transition word

#### **Original:**

My brother went to the store to buy bread because yesterday my sister forgot to go grocery shopping.

#### **Using a subordinate clause:**

a dependent clause that begins with a subordinator (e.g. when, although, if, etc.)

#### **Revised sentence:**

Because my sister forgot to go grocery shopping yesterday, my brother went to the store to buy bread.

#### **Using a present participle phrase (“-ing”):**

a phrase that functions as a modifier of a noun or pronoun (begins with an “-ing” suffix)

#### **Revised sentence:**

Shopping at the grocery store, my brother picked up a loaf of bread because yesterday my sister forgot to buy it.

**Using a past participle phrase (“-ed”):**

a phrase that functions as a modifier of a noun or pronoun (begins with an “-ed” suffix)

**Revised sentence:**

Annoyed by my sister’s forgetfulness, my brother grudgingly went to the store to buy bread.

**Using an adjective:**

a word that describes a noun or pronoun

**Revised sentence:**

Irritated, my brother went to the store to buy bread because yesterday my sister forgot to go grocery shopping.

**Using an appositive:**

a noun or noun phrase that is used to describe the preceding or following noun

**Revised sentence:**

A busy person, my sister forgot to go grocery shopping yesterday, so my brother went to the store to buy bread.

**Using a prepositional phrase:**

a phrase that contains a preposition and an object

**Revised sentence: (See Activity 1.)**

To the store to buy bread, my brother went, because my sister forgot to go grocery shopping yesterday.

**Or, a subsequent sentence:**

On the way, a stranger complimented him on his new shoes.

**Using a transition word:**

a word that provides a segue into a subsequent thought

**Revised sentence: (See Activity 1.)**

Subsequently, my brother went to the store to buy bread because my sister forgot to go grocery shopping yesterday.

**Or a subsequent sentence:**

Therefore, my brother was in a good mood when he walked to the store.

## Emphasis, Pace, and Cohesion

Now that we have looked at different ways to start a sentence, let's examine how they affect emphasis, pace, and cohesion.

### Emphasis

The end of the main clause is the most emphatic position of a sentence and receives the most attention. Readers pause when they get to a period, and they're left with a final thought before moving on to the next sentence.

The second most emphatic position of a sentence is the opening. When we deviate from the expected pattern of a sentence by using different openers, we create suspense and force readers to process what they've read as they search for the subject and/or verb.

Which sentence openers can alter emphasis?

- Subordinate clause
- Present participle phrase
- Past participle phrase

The original sentence places the most emphasis on the fact that the sister forgot to go grocery shopping. We focus our attention on her forgetfulness and blame her for making her brother go to the store. However, when we use the subordinate clause and past participle phrase in the beginning of the sentence, we move the brother's trip to the store to the end of the sentence, putting it in the most emphatic position. Now, the emphasis falls on the brother.

### Pace

Pace refers to the speed at which readers read. When we follow the standard pattern of subject + verb + object, readers can read at a normal pace. Altering word order can manipulate pace by creating tension that slows a reader down.

Which sentence openers can alter pace?

- Adjective
- Appositive

When readers read the original sentence, they do not experience a disruption. By using an adjective or appositive in the beginning of the sentence, we suspend the main clause, which defers meaning. An abrupt pause forces readers to alter the pace of their reading.

### Cohesion

Varying sentence openers can allow you to connect your thoughts in a logical order, creating cohesion. For example, presenting old information before new information helps readers understand the relationship between sentences.

Which sentence openers can alter cohesion?

- Prepositional phrase
- Transition word

Consider the following order of these sentences:

My brother went to the store to buy bread because yesterday my sister forgot to go grocery shopping. A stranger complimented him on his new shoes on the way. My brother was in a good mood when he walked to the store.

Each sentence starts with a subject. However, there is little cohesion, and old information is not presented before new information. Now, let's look at how different sentence openers change the reader's comprehension of the sentences.

My brother went to the store to buy bread because yesterday my sister forgot to go grocery shopping. On the way, a stranger complimented him on his new shoes. Therefore, my brother was in a good mood when he walked to the store.

By using the prepositional phrase and transition word, we created a bridge to link the ideas.

### Activity 1

Shifting the prepositional phrase to the opening of a sentence or adding a transition word create shifts in the normal patterns of emphasis, pace, and cohesion. Write down your observations about the effects of these openers to discuss with your tutor. Refer to the models of these sentence openers provided on page two.

1. Effects of using a prepositional phrase as a sentence opener:

2. Effects of using a transition word as a sentence opener:

## Activity 2

Rewrite the following sentence, using different sentence openings. Next, observe how you created and manipulated emphasis, pace, and cohesion by delaying the subject and/or verb. Discuss the results with your tutor.

Jacqueline called Nicky to ask her if she wanted to meet at the library to study for an upcoming chemistry exam.

Using a subordinate clause:

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Using a present participle phrase:

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Using a past participle phrase:

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Using an adjective:

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Using an appositive:

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Using a prepositional phrase:

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Using a transition word:

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## References

Lunsford, Andrea. *The Everyday Writer*. 5<sup>th</sup> Edition. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2013. Print.

Tufte, Virginia. *Artful Sentences: Syntax as Style*. Cheshire: Graphics Press LLC, 2006. Print.