



School of Liberal Arts

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Editing for Choppiness

Choppy writing results from an abundance of short sentences, lack of sentence transitions, and unvaried sentence patterns. Such an effect can be irritating or monotonous to readers who, consciously or not, respond to refreshing variety. The following tips suggest strategies to help writers edit for style during the final stages of revision. The key is variety; try to apply all the instructions throughout your writing.

1. Combine some short sentences that relate in content with comma and coordination (words like *and*, *but*, *so*, etc.).

Choppy: Jon went to class. He fell asleep.

Revised: Jon went to class, **but** he fell asleep.

2. Combine some short sentences with a semi-colon and transition.

Choppy: Beth was crying this morning. She was laughing by this afternoon.

Revised: Beth was crying this morning; **however**, she was laughing by this afternoon.

3. Vary sentence beginnings so that your sentence pattern is smoother.

- a. Use transitional words or phrases to begin a sentence.

Choppy: Billy misbehaved. He threw his crayons at his sister. He squeezed ketchup and mustard in the dog's bowl.

Revised: Billy misbehaved. **First of all**, he threw crayons at his sister, and **then** he squeezed ketchup and mustard into the dog's bowl.

- b. Use a prepositional phrase to begin a sentence.

Choppy: Anne can now barely sit up in bed after her long illness.

Revised: **After her long illness**, Anne can now barely sit up in bed.

- c. Use a participial phrase to begin a sentence.

Choppy: The trees were drenched with toilet paper when we came home on Halloween.

Revised: **Coming home on Halloween**, we discovered the trees drenched with toilet paper.

- d. Use an infinitive phrase to begin a sentence.

Choppy: Jenny had to practice playing her oboe every day in order to prepare for the music contest.

Revised: **To prepare for the music contest**, Jenny had to practice playing her oboe every day.

Handout created by Rima Hassouch. Revised May 2008

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