

Varying Sentence Beginnings

It is very important when you are writing a series of sentences that the sentences do not all sound the same. Sentences that all sound the same are not interesting to a reader. To help with this problem, you can **vary**, which means “change” or “rearrange,” your sentence beginnings.

Read the following short paragraph:

I want to be a veterinarian when I grow up. I want to take a class at the local community college so that I can get some experience. I also want to volunteer at the local animal shelter. I love animals, and I want to someday own a farm with a lot of animals that I have helped.

What did you notice about the beginning of every sentence? You guessed it—they all begin with the word “I.” In fact, 3 out of the 4 sentences start with “I want.” This type of error can hurt even the best writers. It is important that you pay attention to how your sentences begin so that you don’t sound like you are repeating yourself.

One of the ways to avoid this problem is to do some sentence combining like you did in the last exercise. Another way to avoid this problem is to be conscious of the beginning of your sentences, and try to rearrange the words you choose so that you are not always starting them the same way.

Here is the same paragraph, rewritten so that the sentences are more varied and interesting:

I love animals so much that when I grow up, I hope to be a veterinarian. In fact, I am planning to take classes at the local community college, and to gain experience, I would also like to volunteer at the local animal shelter. Someday, I hope to own a farm with animals that I have helped.

Notice that some of the sentences have been rearranged; some have been combined. Of course, this is only one way to rewrite the paragraph. There are many, many ways the paragraph can be rewritten. As long as you vary the beginning of each sentence so that it doesn’t sound boring or repetitive, you have made a huge improvement to the paragraph!

There are many different techniques you can use to vary your sentence beginnings. When you work to combine short, choppy sentences, you are also working to vary your sentences. Take a look at just some of the ways you can improve your writing by varying how you start your sentences.

1. Use **two adjectives** (see page 15 for a review of adjectives).

Ripe, juicy peaches made my Grandmother's pie the best.

2. Use a **gerund** (see page 50 for a review).

Skiing, a favorite winter sport, is being overtaken by snowboarding.

3. Use an **appositive** (see page 46 for a review).

Sheila, the smartest girl in the class, received an award.

4. Use an **infinitive** (to run, to sit, to play, etc.).

To win an award was a proud achievement for Natasha.

5. Use a **prepositional phrase** (see page 13 for review).

In the high tower, the princess waits for her prince to arrive.

6. Use **parallel structure** (a conjunction between adjectives).

Handsome and fearless, the prince climbed the tower to his princess.

Directions: *On a separate piece of paper, rewrite each of the following paragraphs so that the sentence beginnings are varied. Remember that you can change the paragraph by using different words, combining sentences, and rearranging the sentence structure. Challenge yourself as you work on the following three paragraphs, by trying to use all of the techniques above at least once as you improve your sentence beginnings.*

1. Many students have a hard time studying. Many students really don't know what to do in order to take notes. Many need to learn the skills to become better students. Many students want to be better students, but are not sure how to study better in order for their grades to improve.

Name _____ Period _____

2. To help you study, you need to find a quiet place. To do this, be sure that your family knows that you are studying, and ask them not to disturb you. If you have a lot of homework, you may want to break it up into smaller parts. If you divide your homework into parts, you should schedule 10-15 minutes of pure study time in order to get your work done. If you take the time to study in short units of time, it may be easier to remember what you are studying.

3. Napoleon has changed so much throughout the story *Animal Farm* and the reader will understand some of the changes Napoleon underwent. Napoleon was at first very honorable to the other animals. Then he quickly changed and became very unfair and sneaky. Napoleon kept on changing more and more and became worse as time went on. Napoleon has changed a lot and his changes will be explained in the following essay.