

# The Art of Styling Sentences

**Fourth Edition**

**Ann Longknife, Ph.D.  
K.D. Sullivan**

- Learn to master 20 basic sentence patterns
- Write clear, coherent, eloquent sentences
- Improve your style by studying examples of well-known writers

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# The Art of Styling Sentences

*20 Patterns for Success*

Fourth Edition

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250 Wireless Boulevard  
Hauppauge, New York 11788  
<http://www.barronseduc.com>

*Library of Congress Catalog Card No. 2002018477*

International Standard Book No. 0-7641-2181-2

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Longknife, Ann.

The art of styling sentences : 20 patterns for success / Ann Longknife,  
K.D. Sullivan.—4th ed.

p. cm.

Rev. ed. of: The art of styling sentences / Marie L. Waddell . . . [et al.]  
3rd ed. c1993.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-7641-2181-2

1. English language—Sentences. 2. English language—Rhetoric.

I. Sullivan, K.D. II. Waddell, Marie L. Art of styling sentences. III. Title.

PE1441 .L57 2002

428.2—dc21

2002018477

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

9 8 7 6 5 4

# Preface

The authors of the original text compiled their book to help students improve their writing style. The principles they advocated—and that have been used throughout history—of learning to write by imitating patterns, are still valid today, as shown in this revised fourth edition. They devised the idea of the book from their extensive classroom experience, and we have built on that from our own classroom and editing experience.

In her twenty-five years of teaching, Dr. Ann Longknife has taught a variety of English courses—literature, poetry, and all forms of composition courses from English as a Second Language to Critical Thinking. Ann is also a freelance editor for a number of publications, including the on-line magazine *LineZine*, and has been in love with English and its possibilities since she started reading at age four.

K.D. Sullivan, as founder and owner of Creative Solutions Editorial, Inc., a global editorial services company, has worked with, and corrected, a wide variety of writing styles in more than 100 different industries. She is the author of *Go Ahead . . . Proof It!* (Barron's, 1996), and coauthor with Michelle Goodman of the upcoming *In the Driver's Seat: A Roadmap to Freelancing*. She is also developing a book series, *Go Ahead . . . \_\_\_\_\_!*, designed to cover a wide range of specific business topics. A popular seminar leader and trainer, K.D. regularly designs and implements proofreading workshops and corporate training programs throughout the United States and Canada. She is known for producing clear, error-free written communications.

In this new edition we have expanded some of the grammar references to more nearly reflect current knowledge and usage. We have also upgraded many of the professional examples to illustrate how current writers regularly continue to use these patterns.

Although the idea of the book is to learn by imitating the patterns, that technique is only the beginning. We, as did the original authors, hope that students will find new ways of being playful or serious, dramatic or forceful as they write. Above all, we want them to take risks with patterns they've never tried before, to claim authority for their individual style, and to develop their own voice.

At Barron's, we have appreciated the gracious and professional guidance of our editor, Max Reed, in preparing this new edition. We would like to thank Diane Roth, copyeditor. Her suggestions made good sense and strengthened our presentation.

We've included a very valuable addition in this version that was absent in previous editions—an Index—to help more easily guide the student in the reference process. DQ Johnson's expertise in the indexing field is a welcome addition to any project. K.D. would also like to thank Deirdre Greene, her Creative Solutions manager, who continually keeps the business going so beautifully, allowing K.D. to concentrate on this book and the multitude of other projects she enjoys.

*Ann Longknife  
K.D. Sullivan*

SAN FRANCISCO  
JULY 2002

## Introduction

Almost anyone can benefit by learning more about writing sentences. You don't have to be a student to benefit from this book; you just need the desire to write well. You must certainly want to create better sentences, or you would not be reading this page. If you already know how to write good, basic sentences but feel they still lack something, that they have no variety, no style, then this book is for you.

But how do you go about writing better sentences? The answer is simple. You learn to write better sentences as you learn almost every other skill: by imitating the examples of those who have that skill. You probably have already discovered that it is easier to master anything—jumping hurdles, doing a swan dive, or playing the guitar—if you imitate a model. Nowhere is this principle more obvious than in writing. If you are willing to improve your writing skills by copying models of clear sentences, the

following five chapters will help you master the skill of writing well, with grace and style.

## **THE WHOLE IS THE SUM OF ITS PARTS**

CHAPTER 1 briefly reviews what constitutes a sentence. If you need to review the functions of different parts of a sentence, you may need a supplementary book with a fuller discussion of sentence structure. This chapter covers the various parts of the sentence, utilizing the traditional terms you will find in the explanations of the patterns in CHAPTER 2.

## **SKILL COMES FROM PRACTICE**

CHAPTER 2, the heart of this book, contains twenty different sentence patterns, some with variations. Study the graphic picture of each pattern (the material in the numbered boxes) and notice the precise punctuation demanded for that pattern; you will then be able to imitate these different kinds of sentences. The explanation under each boxed pattern will further clarify HOW and WHEN you should use that particular pattern; the examples will give you models to imitate; the exercises will provide practice. With these as guides, try writing and revising until you master the skill of constructing better sentences.

As you revise, take some of your original sentences and rewrite them to fit a number of these patterns. This technique may at first seem too deliberate, too contrived an attempt at an artificial style. Some of the sentences you create may not seem natural. But what may seem artificial at first will ultimately be the means to greater ease in writing with flair and style.

## **CLEAR WRITING COMES FROM REWRITING**

Your first draft of any communication—letter, theme, report (either written or oral)—will almost always need revision. When you first try to express ideas, you are mainly interested in capturing your elusive thoughts, in making them concrete enough on a sheet of paper for you to think about them. An important step in the writing process—in fact, where writing really begins—is revision, an ongoing process. You must work deliberately to express your captured ideas in clear and graceful sentences.

## **COMBINATIONS LEAD TO ENDLESS VARIETY**

CHAPTER 3 will give you some tips on style and show you how some of the basic twenty styling patterns in CHAPTER 2 can combine with other patterns. Study the examples given and described in CHAPTER 3; then let your imagination guide you to making effective combinations of the different patterns.

Analyze the sentences from professional writers to discover rhetorical subtleties and ways of achieving clarity, style, and variety.

## **IMAGINATION IS ONE CORNERSTONE OF STYLE**

CHAPTER 4 will show you how to express your thoughts in imaginative, figurative language. Study the pattern for each figure of speech described there, and then insert an occasional one—simile, metaphor, analogy, allusion, personification, hyperbole—into your own writing. Or you might experiment with an ironical tone. Be original; never merely echo some well-known, ready-made cliché. Create new images from your own experiences.

## **UNDERSTANDING COMES FROM ANALYSIS**

CHAPTER 5 contains excerpts from the works of experienced writers who have incorporated patterns like the ones described. Study the marginal notes that give the pattern numbers you have learned from studying CHAPTER 2. Then analyze something you are reading; discover for yourself how writers handle their sentences and their punctuation. Don't be afraid to imitate them when you write. You will, of course, find "patterns" (arrangements of words in sentences) that are not in CHAPTER 2 of this book. Imitate others as well as the twenty we present.

# Suggestions for the Instructor

Since this method of teaching students to write by imitation may be new to some instructors, we hope this section will offer helpful and practical suggestions. For the new teacher, we want to anticipate possible questions and provide some classroom guidelines; for the experienced teacher, we hope to offer a fresh approach to an old problem: getting students to write papers that are not dull and boring for them to write or for us to read. The following pages contain some hints for ways of teaching the material in CHAPTERS 1 and 2. Additional pages addressed to students also suggest valuable ways for the teacher to present the patterns and other techniques to a class.

## SENTENCE COMBINING

Concurrently with publication of the first edition of *The Art of Styling Sentences*, a number of researchers developed a teaching technique quite different from the “imitation” method described in this book—sentence combining. Introduced first by John Mellon and later developed in the work of Frank O’Hare, William Strong, Donald Daiker, and others, this technique derives from a number of sentences—usually short, simple, kernel sentences—a pattern for combining them into one or two longer sentences. Through this type of practice, the student develops syntactic maturity. The result of this method is effective skill building; students’ sentences have greater variety, appear more mature and sophisticated, and illustrate how writers in the same class, working with the same kernels, are able to transform them into many different types of effective communication.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHING CHAPTER 1

As we said in the introduction, CHAPTER 1, “The Sentence,” does not pretend to be a complete discussion of sentence structure. The English sentence took several centuries to develop and is, as Sir Winston Churchill said, a “noble thing” indeed. There are entire books dedicated to an explanation of it; hence our coverage is minimal.



The main thing to do with CHAPTER 1 is to review with your class the important “slots” in the standard sentence—subject, verb, object, complement, modifier, and connector. Be sure the students understand the terms and the functions of each. Give them some class practice in separating subjects from verbs in their current reading. It is sometimes easier for them to find the essential skeleton of the sentence if they first cross out, or put in parentheses, all the prepositional phrases (which are usually modifiers, anyway). They can take these from their current reading—a textbook, the sports page, an advertisement, lyrics of a popular song, or the label on a ketchup bottle, or a soda can! This is an effective exercise because prepositional phrases are nearly always modifiers and almost never a part of the basic sentence. Then let them discuss the differences between phrases and clauses, between independent and dependent structures, between declarative and imperative sentences. Never assume that students will be adept at this kind of analysis. Guide them carefully with detailed explanations and many examples.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHING CHAPTER 2—THE PATTERNS

CHAPTER 2, “The Twenty Patterns,” is the heart of this book and contains enough material to keep your students busy throughout the semester as they incorporate the material into their compositions. Pace your discussions to fit your class; don’t go faster than your students can master the techniques, and never try to cover more than three patterns in any one class period. Since there is a logical grouping and arrangement of the patterns, you may find it easier to go straight through from PATTERN 1 to PATTERN 20.

You will need to explain each of these patterns in great detail; you will also need to justify the rationale of the punctuation. Before you start with PATTERN 1, write some sentences on the board and review the sentence structure from CHAPTER 1.

Now, with your class, create appropriate graphic symbols to use when you analyze and discuss sentences. For example, you can use a double bar (||) to separate subject and verb in independent clauses, or brackets to set off dependent clauses.

1. Draw one line under the main clause (in this case, the entire sentence):  
The events of 9/11 || exploded our old world and propelled us into a new era.
2. Dramatize what happens when there are two independent clauses in the same sentence:

The events of 9/11 || shattered our old world (into smithereens); it || suddenly propelled us (into a completely new kind) (of world).

Draw a circle between the two independent clauses (which *could* be separate sentences); then explain that only four things can replace the circle:

- a. a period, which would separate the clauses into two sentences;
  - b. a coordinating conjunction (*for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*)—which can be remembered with the mnemonic FANBOYS—preceded by a comma;
  - c. a semicolon, sometimes followed by a connective such as *therefore* or *however*;
  - d. a colon, but *only if* the second clause explains or extends the idea of the first.
3. Use brackets to set off a dependent clause, and clarify its function as PART of the independent clause; use a single bar to separate the subject and the verb in the dependent clause:

Marcie || bought [whatever she | wanted].

(noun clause used as direct object)

[What Tatum | needs] || is more discipline.

(noun clause used as subject)

The little children || played [where the fallen leaves | were deepest.]

(dependent adverbial clause)

4. Use a wavy line under an absolute phrase:

The war being over at last, the task (of arranging the peace terms) || began.

5. Use a circle around connectors and other nonfunctional terms.

Next, it might be fun to show that these constructions work even with nonsense words. Provide one or two examples, and then let students put their own creations on the board and explain them.

A bronsly sartian || swazzled (along the tentive clath).

Yesterday I || thrombled (down the nat-fleuzed beach) [where glorphs and mizzles | lay (in the sun)].

After this review, the class should be ready to tackle the first group of sentence patterns—the compounds. Each of them is really just two sentences in one, but you must make clear the vast differences that are possible. Now is the time to have the class really master the Checkpoints under PATTERN 3, which cover the differences in the three compounds.

For exercises beyond those that accompany the pattern explanations, consider these ideas:

1. Follow your discussion of particular patterns by asking students to write ten sentences of their own using the patterns you assign. Have students label each sentence with the number of the pattern in the left margin. *The advantage of this book is the control you have through the pattern numbers.* For subject matter students can draw upon their reading, hobbies, sports, and other interests. If for any given assignment the entire class uses the same topic or idea, have the students compare how many different arrangements of words can express the same idea, but each with slightly different emphasis or rhythm.
2. Use SENTENCE PATTERN 1, the compound with a semicolon and without a conjunction, to teach or to test vocabulary. In the first clause of the compound sentence have students USE and UNDERLINE the given word; in the second clause have them DEFINE that word.

EXAMPLE:

Zen Buddhism is an esoteric philosophy; only the initiated really understand it.

OR THIS VARIATION:

The Greek root chrono means “time”; a chronometer measures time accurately. (See how much you can teach about punctuation in a sentence with this structure!)

3. Assign ten vocabulary words, each to be written in a different sentence pattern. Have students underline the vocabulary word and label the pattern by number in the left margin. When students give the pattern number of the structure they are imitating, you can check the accuracy of their understanding of the pattern at the same time you are checking the vocabulary word.
4. Require students to have at least one different pattern in each paragraph of their compositions. Have them write the number of the pattern they are imitating in the left margin. See “Marginalia: to encourage deliberate craftsmanship” (pp. xv–xvi) for more ways of encouraging students to analyze their writing as they improve their craftsmanship.
5. Have students collect interesting sentences from their reading and make a booklet of fifteen or twenty new and different patterns, with no more than two or three sentences plus analysis on each page. They may simply copy sentences they find, or they may clip and paste them

in their booklets, leaving room for a description (analysis) of each sentence in their own words.

6. Take a long, involved sentence from the assigned reading; have your students rewrite it several times using four or five different sentence patterns. (These revisions may have to contain some words that the original does not have.) Have students read these sentences aloud in class, commenting on the various effects thus achieved.
7. Point out the effectiveness of incorporating PATTERN 8 (the one with two or three dependent clauses) into a thesis or of using it to forecast main points in the introduction or to summarize in the conclusion.
8. Toward the end of the term, after they have mastered the patterns and know them by number, have students analyze some of their current reading, even from other courses. Have them write in the margin the numbers of the sentence patterns they find. (See CHAPTER 5 for two examples.)
9. Some of the example sentences for analysis are from professional writers; they are often convoluted and excessively detailed. Yet they can be springboards for discussion of such things as style, punctuation, sentence length, level and appropriateness of vocabulary, content, or even historical information.
10. At the end of the term, have the students compare their first attempts to their current efforts. They'll be surprised (and pleased) to see the improvement.

# Suggestions for the Student

## HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM THIS BOOK

The suggestions and exercises below may seem too simple or too artificial at first sight, but if you make a game of playing around with words, of fitting them to a formula, you will learn how to write sentences that have flair and variety, and that is a skill worth developing. A well-constructed sentence is, like any artful design, the result of sound craftsmanship; it actually involves and requires:

- a. good composing or construction
- b. appropriate punctuation
- c. a feeling for the rhythm of language
- d. an understanding of idiom
- e. clarity of expression
- f. recognition of the power of logical arrangement

If you are not in a composition class, but are working alone without a teacher's guidance, the suggestions below will help you to get the most out of this book, so follow them carefully. Don't be afraid to copy a pattern and fit your own words into it. Remember that every great craftsman begins as an apprentice imitating a master. By following the suggestions below and mastering the patterns, you will increase your skill in the art of styling sentences.

1. Study one pattern at a time. Write four or five sentences that follow that pattern exactly, especially the punctuation. Go through all twenty patterns in CHAPTER 2, taking only one at a time, until you are confident you understand the structure and the punctuation. Practice, practice—and more practice; this is the only way to learn.
2. In every paragraph you write, try to incorporate one or more of these patterns, especially when you find yourself tending to write short, simple sentences having the same kind of subject-verb structure. Keep trying to improve the quality and arrangement of all of your sentences, whether they follow one of these patterns or not.

3. Think of something you want to say and then practice writing it in three or four different ways, noticing the changes in effect and tone when you express the same idea with different patterns and punctuation. Since you may not be aware of these changes when you read silently, read aloud often to train your ear.
4. Analyze your reading material for eye-catching sentences, ones that you think have striking patterns you could imitate. (CHAPTER 5 shows you how.) Whether reading a newspaper, a magazine article, or a skillfully styled literary work, you will find many sentences so well written that you will want to analyze and then imitate them. Underline them; learn the pattern. Or from your reading make a collection of sentences that you have especially enjoyed. Or keep a special notebook of new and different patterns that you want to copy. In short, look for unusual and effective sentences in everything you read and make a conscious effort to add those new patterns to the basic twenty in CHAPTER 2.
5. Use your computer and its software to practice brainstorming and to capture ideas. Save your drafts on a disk, as they may be useful later. Practice using Spellcheck, Thesaurus, and other functions as you edit. The computer will help you plan, delete, add, and rearrange as you write and revise.
6. In early assignments, your instructor will probably be highly prescriptive. When you are told how many words, how many paragraphs, sometimes even how many sentences should occur within paragraphs, don't resent the detailed directions. Think about them as training in a skill. After all, athletic coaches and music instructors alike begin their training with strict regulations and drills, too. So follow all the "requirements."

## **MARGINALIA: TO ENCOURAGE DELIBERATE CRAFTSMANSHIP**

### **ANALYSIS FOR THEMES**

In every theme or paper you write there should be some goals, some design that you are trying to create. Marginalia can be a helpful guide for you, a way of checking up on what you are doing when you write. Marginalia, which, as the name implies, you write in the margin, will consist of words and symbols that indicate an analysis of your writing.

### **THINGS TO DO**

1. Highlight the topic sentence of each paragraph. Identify it by the label TS in the margin.

2. In the left margin of each paragraph, indicate the attempted pattern from the sentence patterns (SP). Mark in the margin SP 6 or SP 9a, for example.
3. Indicate a pronoun reference pattern in one of the paragraphs by drawing a circle around each pronoun and an arrow pointing to its antecedent. Identify in margin as PRO PATT.
4. Circle transitional words in one paragraph ("echo" words, transitional connectives, conjunctions).
5. List in the margin the types of sentences in one paragraph; use a variety of simple (S), complex (CX), compound (C), and compound complex (CCX).
6. When you master a new vocabulary word, underline it and label it VOC.

You might want to use a different color for each type of entry so that you can see at a glance whether you have incorporated all the techniques of good construction. These marks might seem distracting at first, but the results will be worth the distraction. A glance at the marginalia will indicate whether you understand the composition techniques being taught.

Why bother with all of this? Because it works. There is no better answer. You will come to realize that a theme must have a variety of sentences, that there must be transitional terms if the theme is to have coherence, that pronouns help eliminate needless repetition of the same word, that synonyms and figurative language give the theme more sparkle than you ever hoped for. Your instructors will like what they are reading; you will like what you are writing, and your grades will improve.

The following pages show two paragraphs written by a student. Note the marginal analysis and the effectiveness of the different sentence patterns.

A PARAGRAPH ANALYZING  
A SIMILE IN POETRY

THE MOVEMENT OF TIME

MARGINALIA      “Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,  
So do our minutes hasten to their end. . . .  
—William Shakespeare, SONNET LX

TS

SP3

SP11

VOC#SP1

SP10

SP16

SP3#VOC

a repeated SVO  
pattern

repeated SP10

PRO PATT

SP9

Repeat of keyword

Summary of TS  
with “echo” of quote

In the first two lines of Sonnet LX, Shakespeare uses a simile comparing the waves of the ocean to the minutes of our life: “Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore, / So do our minutes hasten to their end. . . .” This line is inverted: that is, the subject “our minutes” is in the second line, and the comparison “like as the waves” is in the first line. The simile says, in effect, that “the minutes of our lives are like the waves on the shore.” The waves roll endlessly, inexorably toward the shore of the ocean; the minutes of our lives hasten endlessly toward the end of our lives. This figure of speech gives an image of movement. We can almost see time, like ocean waves, moving toward its destiny: the end of life. Just as the waves end on the shore, so too our life’s minutes end in death. Some words in the simile have particular power: the word hasten conjoins up a mental picture of rapid movement, of inexorable hurry toward some predestined end. The word towards suggests a straight, unerring path going without hesitation or pause to some goal. The waves move toward their goal: the shore. Our minutes move toward their goal: life’s end. This simile is a very effective, picture-making figure of speech. It paints a mental picture of movement and destiny. It suggests a very important fact about life, a fact we must remember. That fact is the truth expressed here beautifully by Shakespeare—life goes on forever toward its end, never slowing down or going back. Our lives do indeed “hasten to their end.”

—Shawn Waddell



## A PARAGRAPH DEFINING A TERM

## MARGINALIA

## A JUNK-MAN

TS  
 Order: general  
 to Particular  
 SP4A

SP14  
 SP12

VOC

Metaphor

VOC  
 SP1

Contrast  
 SP9

Definition of TS  
 repeated word  
 for coherence

Example

factual data

Contrast  
 VOC and two  
 levels of diction  
 SP1  
 echo of TS  
 for coherence

A junk-man in baseball is the most feared pitcher of all. Most batters go to the plate with the knowledge that the pitcher usually throws either curves or fastballs or knuckleballs in the clinch. From his view at the plate, a batter sees a curveball pitcher's curve starting off in a line seemingly headed straight for his head. Fortunately, just before making any painful contact, the ball seems to change its own mind, veering away to the opposite side of the plate. But after long and arduous practice, any batter can learn to anticipate or recognize a curve and be prepared for it. The same is true for a fastball that blurs its way into the catcher's mitt or for a knuckleball which seems to have trouble deciding where to go. A veteran batter can learn to sense the sometimes erratic path of either ball; he can feel some confidence when he has some idea of the pitcher's preferred ball. But he can be put completely off stride when he hears he has to face that most dreaded of all pitchers, a junk-man—dreaded because he can throw all pitches with equal effectiveness and surprise. This element of surprise coupled with variety makes the junk-man the most feared of all pitchers in baseball. For example, when Sam the Slugger goes to bat, he can feel more relaxed if he knows that Carl the Curve-man will probably throw curves about seventy-five percent of the time. The same is true for Sam when a well-known fast-baller or knuckler is facing him from sixty feet away. On the contrary, Sam the Slugger loses his equanimity and is tied in knots when Joe the Junk-man grins wickedly across that short sixty feet from mound to plate; Sam has no way to anticipate what surprises may lurk behind that wicked grin when he faces the most feared pitcher in baseball.

—Shawn Waddell