

# **Sentence Combining and Paragraph Construction**



**Katie Davis**

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# SENTENCE COMBINING & PARAGRAPH CONSTRUCTION

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Lafayette, Louisiana*

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# PREFACE

*Sentence Combining and Paragraph Construction* grew out of suggestions made by directors of English writing laboratories in universities and colleges located in eight different states. Personal contact with these directors as well as careful observation of their laboratory procedures made apparent the need for a supplementary text to be used by students with real difficulties in organizing logically developed sentences and paragraphs. The consensus of most laboratory directors interviewed was that students profit little from exercises in error recognition but that practice in writing, correcting, and rewriting has many more positive results.

Considerable research into various positive approaches to better writing has resulted in the conviction that practice in sentence combination is perhaps the most successful method of improving the writing of students enrolled in basic courses. This success obviously evolves from *two* facts: (1) Practice in writing sentences containing such structures as gerund, infinitive, and participial phrases as well as adjective and adverbial clauses makes the composition of sentences containing these structures intrinsic to the student; (2) the subject matter contained in the sentences to be combined expands the student's knowledge in such areas as geography and history and thus supplies him with the material necessary for writing sentences with substantial content.

The students using this text not only will learn the techniques of writing better sentences but will also be given practice in using this ability in writing good paragraphs developed according to the basic rhetorical modes. *Sentence Combining and Paragraph Construction* is not designed to be used as the only textbook for a basic writing course; rather, it is a supplementary

text to be used along with a reader, such as *Comprehension and Composition* by Ann Dobie and Andrew Hirt, also published by Macmillan Publishing Company, Inc.

I am indebted to several people who have made the writing and publication of this book possible. They are Charlinda Davis Hebert, who provided the art work; Katherine D. Davis, who suggested the format; Edward Davis, Albert Fields, Ann Dobie, and Andrew Hirt, who provided the inspiration and constant encouragement; Sylvia Patterson and Kitty Simoneaux, who suggested that some of the exercises be used in the University of Southwestern Louisiana writing laboratory on an experimental basis; Sydney Lasseigne, who worked untiringly on the manuscript; and Tony English, the Macmillan editor, who patiently yet firmly insisted on the completion of the book. I am grateful to all of them.

*Katie Davis*

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# TO THE STUDENT!

Often during your college experience as well as during your career you will be called upon to write. Your success in writing will depend in large measure upon how well you have mastered the skills of writing good sentences and composing good paragraphs.

Of course, the very first step in the writing process is the construction of good sentences. Because this is true, the first twelve lessons of this book are designed to make you more aware of the various elements that make up a sentence, the ways these elements can be put together to form a good sentence, and the ways you can achieve sentence variety by using various combinations of these elements. Each of these twelve lessons contains valuable instructional material, such as definitions of sentence elements and appropriate examples of such elements, as well as adequate exercises designed to make the use of these elements an intrinsic part of your own writing. When you have completed the first twelve lessons, you will no doubt have mastered the technique of good sentence writing and will be better prepared to master the technique of good paragraph construction.

In Lessons 13 through 18 you will learn the art of good paragraph construction by learning how to write a thesis statement and how to use various methods in developing this thesis statement into a well-organized paragraph. These methods include example, definition, comparison and contrast, cause and effect, and classification and division. Numerous paragraphs developed by these methods are provided for your study. Most of these paragraphs are from one hundred to three hundred words in length. This does not mean that paragraphs cannot be shorter than one hundred words or longer than three hundred

words. This length is used in the examples and also suggested for your writing because paragraphs of this length require careful development and are at the same time completely manageable.

When you have mastered the lessons on paragraph development, you will have solved many of the major problems of essay writing and will be well on your way to becoming a more competent writer.

Lessons 19 and 20 are included in order that you may be able to master some of the rules for correct spelling and punctuation, both of which are considered important in the writing process. The last lesson is one on grammar review. It is intended as a quick reference for those of you who need to have a particular grammatical term defined and illustrated.

Finally, the author has included an answer section that provides suggested solutions to the problems in the first exercise in each chapter. The solutions suggested in this section are by no means the only solutions. They are included to provide guidance for the student who is working toward his own solution.

The writing skills that you master as you proceed through the materials in this textbook will without doubt be reflected in the improved quality of your writing. In order to verify this improvement, at the end of the semester compare a paragraph you wrote early in the semester with one you wrote late in the semester. The improvement you note will perhaps surprise you but certainly will not fail to please you.

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# Basic Sentence Elements

ALL formal writing—whether it is personal, such as a letter; academic, such as an essay written in a history course; or professional, such as a report on monthly sales—begins with the sentence. It follows, then, that a thorough understanding of the basic elements of a sentence and of the ways these basic elements can be organized into a sentence is essential to good writing.

Our first question, then, is, “What is a sentence?” A sentence can be defined as a group of words containing a subject and a predicate that makes complete sense or expresses a complete thought. This definition, however, means almost nothing unless we know what a subject is and what a predicate is. The subject of a sentence is the word with all its modifiers that names the person, place, thing, or concept about which something is said. The predicate of a sentence is the word with all its modifiers that tells what the subject does or what the subject is. The subject and the predicate, then, are the basic elements of a sentence. Each of these two elements can consist of one word, as in

Dogs bark.

The word *dogs* is the subject because it names the thing about which something is said. The word *bark* is the predicate because it tells what the subject does. However, the subject as well as the predicate can consist of several words.

The two large, ferocious dogs in the back yard, which belong to my uncle, bark loudly at all strangers who come near them.

In this sentence the complete subject is *the two large, ferocious dogs in the back yard, which belong to my uncle*. The complete

predicate is *bark at all strangers who come near them*. All the words in the subject except *dogs*, which is the simple subject, are modifiers; that is, they tell something about the dogs, their number, size, disposition, and owner. All the words in the complete predicate except the predicate verb *bark* are also modifiers; that is, they tell something about the frequency of the barking.

The modifiers of the subject as well as the modifiers of the predicate can be words, phrases, or clauses. In the preceding sentence, *two*, *large*, and *ferocious* are words that modify *dogs*. *In the back yard* is a phrase modifying *dogs*, and *which belong to my uncle* is a clause modifying *dogs*. By the same token, *loudly* is a word modifying *bark*; *at all strangers* is a phrase modifying *barks*; and *who come near them* is a clause modifying *strangers*.

A phrase can be defined as a group of words that functions as a unit but does not contain a subject and a predicate. When we say that a phrase functions as a unit, we mean that it functions as a noun or as a modifier. Phrases can be classified as prepositional phrases and as verbal phrases.

A prepositional phrase is one that is introduced by a preposition that is followed by a noun or a pronoun and its modifiers. Prepositions are words that are hard to define but easy to recognize. Frequently used prepositions include

in	before	at
on	behind	for
to	between	up
through	down	below
around	during	beneath
above	from	beside
under	into	along
about	off	inside
across	over	outside
after	underneath	against
among	toward	beyond

You will notice that most of these prepositions have something to do with position.

Prepositions followed by a noun and its modifiers are called prepositional phrases.

in the house	above the treetops
on the road	under the magnolia tree
for a purpose	about my grades
to the many students	across the green meadow
through the dark alley	after the lunch break
around the distant mountain	below the water

These prepositional phrases function as either adjectives or adverbs. When they function as adjectives, they tell something about places, persons, or things.

The house across the street is deserted.

The prepositional phrase *across the street* tells something about the thing *house* and is therefore a prepositional phrase functioning as an adjective.

The man in the red jacket is my father.

The prepositional phrase *in the red jacket* tells something about the word *man* and is therefore a prepositional phrase functioning as an adjective.

The furniture in the house is mine.

The prepositional phrase *in the house* tells something about the word *furniture*. It, too, is a prepositional phrase used as an adjective.

When the prepositional phrase tells something about a verb, that is, a word expressing action, being, or state of being; or when it tells something about an adjective, that is, a word that describes, numbers, or points out; or when it tells something about an adverb, that is, a word that says something about time, manner, or condition, the phrase is functioning as an adverb.

The soldiers marched down the road.

In this sentence the phrase *down the road* tells where the soldiers marched. Since it tells something about the action word *marched*, it is a prepositional phrase used as an adverb.

Phrases can also be classified as verbal phrases. A verbal phrase can be defined as a verb plus other words, all of which function as a noun or as a modifier. Verbal phrases can be classified as gerund phrases, as participial phrases, and as infinitive phrases. A gerund phrase is the *ing* form of the verb plus other words, all of which are used as a noun.

Mowing the grass is a tiresome job.

In this sentence *mowing the grass* is a gerund phrase made up of the *ing* verb *mowing* plus the other words *the grass*, all of which function as a noun, in this case as subject of the sentence.

A participial phrase is the *ing* or *ed* form of the verb used as a modifier of nouns.

The land occupied by the settlers was fertile.

In this sentence *occupied by the settlers* is a participial phrase made up of the *ed* form of the verb *occupy* plus other words, all of which tell something about the noun *land*.

Players entering this tennis tournament are the best in the nation.

In this sentence *entering this tennis tournament* is a participial phrase made up of the *ing* form of the verb *entering* plus other words, all of which tell something about the noun *players*.

An infinitive phrase is the word *to* plus a verb plus other words. An infinitive phrase can be used as a noun or as a modifier.

To be a successful farmer was my father's lifelong ambition.

In this sentence the words *to be a successful farmer*, made up of the word *to* plus the verb *be* and other words, is an infinitive phrase used as a noun—in this case, as subject of the sentence.

The way to achieve success is through hard work and determination.

In this sentence the words *to achieve success*, made up of *to* plus the verb *achieve* and another word *success*, is an infinitive phrase used as a modifier; that is, it identifies *the way*. A further explanation of verbal phrases can be found on pp. 81–83, 90–91, 99–100, and 203–205.

Phrases, whether prepositional or verbal, cannot function alone as sentences. They are, however, acceptable word groups that must be joined to other word groups to form sentences. For example, the word group

in spite of his excellent grades

is not a complete sentence; it is a prepositional phrase. This word group, which, standing alone, does not express a complete thought, can be joined to other words to make the thought complete.

In spite of his excellent grades, John was unhappy as a college student.

Another word group

a successful businessman in our town

is made up of a prepositional phrase *in our town* plus the noun *businessman*, which the phrase modifies, and the other modifiers *a* and *successful*. Since the phrase does not express a complete thought, it is not a sentence. But when other words are added, it becomes a part of a complete sentence.

A successful businessman in our town has established a scholarship for deserving students.

Let us look at still another word group:

my father running for public office

This word group is made up of the participial phrase *running for public office* and the word it modifies, *father*, plus the pro-

noun *my*. Standing alone, it does not express a complete thought and is therefore not a sentence. By adding one word, the verb *is*, the word group becomes a complete sentence.

My father is running for public office.

The difference between a phrase and a clause is simply this: A phrase does not have a subject and a predicate; a clause does. When the clause forms a sentence, that is, when it expresses a complete thought or makes complete sense, it is called an independent clause. This means, essentially, that it can function alone, that it does not depend on additional words to make the thought expressed a complete thought. On the other hand, when the clause does not express a complete thought or make complete sense, it is called a dependent clause. This means that it cannot function or stand alone but that it depends on additional words in order to express a complete thought. The following clauses are independent. They have subjects and predicates and express complete thoughts.

Joan locked the doors and turned out the lights.

Chimpanzees live about forty years in their natural surroundings.

Balboa discovered the Pacific Ocean.

Louise Kincaid wants you to return the books immediately.

James Burns is our nominee.

The following groups of words are dependent clauses; they, too, have subjects and predicates, but they do not express complete thoughts:

after Joan locked the doors and turned off the lights

although chimpanzees live forty years in their natural surroundings

who discovered the Pacific Ocean

whose books you took by mistake

whom you are going to nominate

Each of these dependent clauses, when added to other word groups, can become complete sentences.

After Joan locked the doors and turned off the lights, she went to bed.

Although chimpanzees live forty years in their natural surroundings, they live only about half that time in captivity.

Vasco Nuñez de Balboa, who discovered the Pacific Ocean, was a Spaniard.

Louise Kincaid, whose books you took by mistake, wants you to return them immediately.

James Burns is the man whom you are going to nominate.

Sentences containing only one independent clause and no dependent clauses are called simple sentences. Simple sentences by all means should be used when you are writing letters, es-

says, and reports. However, to achieve sentence variety and thus improve your writing, you should not write a series of simple sentences but rather vary your sentence style by writing sentences containing two or more independent clauses, as well as those containing one or more dependent clauses.

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## EXERCISE 1

### Basic Sentence Elements

In the following exercise add words to the phrases and clauses and thereby turn them into complete thoughts and thus into complete sentences. To illustrate, the word group

whenever you have completed your term paper

is a dependent clause. The thought is not complete. Additional information can turn the dependent clause into a complete sentence.

Whenever you have completed your term paper, you will have more time to concentrate on the examination review.

Furthermore, the word group

the Thames River, running through the city of London

contains a participial phrase *running through the city of London*, which modifies the noun *Thames River*. This word group does not express a complete thought until additional information is included.

The Thames River, running through the city of London, empties into the English Channel.

Again, the word group

that English composition is a required course

is a dependent clause and becomes a sentence only when more information is added.

All freshmen should know that English composition is a required course.

1. The city of London, which is the capital of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

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2. The Westminster Bridge and the buildings where Parliament meets.

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3. St. Paul's Cathedral, a famous London landmark designed by Sir Christopher Wren.

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4. The British Museum, which is famous for its manuscripts, books, and art.

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5. Since London is located on the navigable Thames River.

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6. When London saw its population decline during the Great Plague of 1665.

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7. In 1666, as a result of the worst fire in London's history.

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8. When Germany bombed London during World War II.

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9. London, which is Great Britain's most important manufacturing and trading center.

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10. Although London is a large city.
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- 
11. Because clay rather than granite lies under the surface of the city of London.
- 
- 
- 
12. Trafalgar Square, named for a great British naval victory.
- 
- 
- 
13. The Haymarket, lying to the west of Trafalgar Square.
- 
- 
- 
14. Plays written by playwrights from all over the world.
- 
- 
- 
15. Many bridges spanning the Thames River in the city of London.
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- 
- 
16. Tower Bridge to the east and London Bridge to the west.
- 
- 
- 
17. Westminster Bridge and Blackfriars Bridge, which are two other important and well-known bridges.
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- 
18. Several parks, including Hyde Park and St. James Park.
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19. Regent's Park, containing the Zoological Gardens.

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20. The University of London, founded in 1836.

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After you have completed the exercise, refer to the section entitled "Suggested Answers" and examine two of several possible ways you can add words to the phrases and clauses and thereby turn them into complete thoughts and thus into complete sentences.

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## EXERCISE 2

### Basic Sentence Elements

As in the previous exercise, add words to the phrases and clauses so that you express a complete thought and thus write a complete sentence.

1. Hawaii, which became the fiftieth state of the United States of America in 1959.

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2. The more than twenty beautiful tropical islands that make up the Hawaiian Islands.

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3. Hawaii Island, the largest of the islands and shaped like a triangle.

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4. Pearl Harbor, located on the island of Oahu.

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