

Sentence Clarity

Repetition

According to Diana Hacker in the third edition of *The Bedford Handbook for Writers*, **repetition** occurs when writers are “Afraid, perhaps, that they won’t be heard the first time; they insist that a teacup is small *in size* or yellow *in color*, that married people should cooperate *together*, that a fact is not just a fact but a *true* fact. Such redundancies may seem at first to add emphasis. In reality they do just the opposite, for they divide the reader’s attention” (166). Furthermore, “Though words may be repeated deliberately, for effect, repetitions will seem awkward if they are clearly unnecessary. When a more concise version is possible, choose it” (167).

Repetitious: Mr. Barker still hasn’t paid last month’s rent, yet.

Revised: Mr. Barker still hasn’t paid last month’s rent.

Repetitious: Slaves were called or stereotyped as lazy even though they were the main labor force of the South.

Revised: Slaves were stereotyped as lazy even though they were the main labor force of the South.

Repetitious: Joel was determined in his mind to lose weight.

Revised: Joel was determined to lose weight.

Repetitious: Our fifth patient, in room six, is a mentally ill patient.

Revised: Our fifth patient, in room six, is mentally ill.

Repetitious: The best teachers help each student to become a better student both academically and emotionally.

Revised: The best teachers help each student to grow both academically and emotionally.

Lack of Variety

A lack of variety in writing can come from many sources. To name just a few, there can be a lack of variety in the introduction of ideas, sentence structure, word choice, and the introduction of cited sources. Hacker says, “When a rough draft is filled with too many same-sounding sentences, try injecting some variety—as long as you can do so without sacrificing clarity or ease of reading” (158).

Vary Sentence Openings

Instead of always beginning sentences with a noun followed by its verb and object with modifiers placed throughout or saved until the end, try beginning with adverbial modifiers that can be easily put in front of a noun.

Original: A few drops of sap eventually began to trickle into the pail.

Revised: Eventually, a few drops of sap began to trickle into the pail.

Original: A pair of black ducks flew over the blind just as the sun was coming up.

Revised: Just as the sun was coming up, a pair of black ducks flew over the blind.

Use a Variety of Sentence Structures

Instead of always relying on a string of simple sentences, try interjecting a compound sentence to bring variety to your writing. Conversely, instead of always using long, compound sentences, try placing a brief simple sentence to break up the monotony of longer sentences.

Original: Today it rained. My umbrella broke. I got soaked. My sweater was ruined.

Revised: Today it rained, and because my umbrella broke, I got soaked, ruining my sweater.

Try Using an Occasional Question or Quotation

Hacker says that using “An occasional question can provide a welcome change of pace especially at the beginning of a paragraph, where it engages the reader’s interest” (161). Similarly, “Quotations can also provide variety, for they add other people’s voices to your own” (161).