



Lesson 4: Repetition of Sentence Structure

Today we're going to talk about one of the more difficult aspects of repetition – Repeated Sentences Structures.

This may be a bit more challenging than our previous topics. Many of us naturally fall into the same patterns in our writing—always starting with a verb phrase, for example, or frequently writing short sentences without clauses or commas.

But varying our sentence styles and lengths can have a huge impact on our writing, making our prose livelier and more energetic. So it's worth taking a few minutes to consider what sentence structure repetition is all about, and how to avoid it in your manuscript.

What is repetition of sentence structure?

The structure of a sentence refers to the arrangements of words or phrases in a sentence. It's not just about how sentences begin, but how the entire sentence is organized—for example, if it includes independent clauses, modifiers, conjunctions, prepositional phrases, or other variations.

Why is it a problem?

When you have too many sentences that follow the same structure or pattern, it can be boring. It's like playing the same note over and over again on a piano. Fresh, lively writing uses a variety of sentence structures in each paragraph.

While there are many forms of repeated structure, here are three of the most common.

Pitfall 1: Two sentences linked by a conjunction

She jammed her hand into her pocket **and** searched for a tissue. An old, crinkled one came out **and** she used it to dab her eyes. She hated crying in public **and** now she couldn't help herself.

Problem: We have the same structure three times in a row. It's boring for the reader.



Pitfall 2: Using a clause in the middle of a sentence more than once.

Where, *she wondered*, were they going? Perhaps, *she thought*, they would never tell her and just drive endlessly.

Problem: This can be particularly difficult for the reader to read, and can get annoying quickly.

Pitfall 3: Always beginning with a verb or verb phrase

Verb:

Smiling, she reached for the coffee. *Laughing*, he held it out of her reach.

Verb phrase:

Reaching for the sugar, she thought about the day ahead.
Feeling guilty, she wondered if she should call her mother and invite her to lunch. *Grimacing*, she pushed that idea out of her mind.

How do I fix it?

There's only one way to get rid of sentence structure repetition, and that's to vary the structures of your sentences. But I promise, your prose will instantly improve.

Here are solutions to the examples I gave above:

Pitfall 1:

ORIGINAL:

She jammed her hand into her pocket *and* searched for a tissue. An old, crinkled one came out *and* she used it to dab her eyes. She hated crying in public and now she couldn't help herself.



REVISED:

She jammed her hand into her pocket, searching for a tissue. An old, crinkled one came out and she used it to dab her eyes. She hated crying in public.

Pitfall 2:

ORIGINAL:

Where, **she wondered**, were they going? Perhaps, **she thought**, they would never tell her and just drive endlessly.

REVISED:

She wondered where on Earth they were going. Perhaps they would never tell her and just drive endlessly.

Pitfall 3a:

ORIGINAL:

Smiling, she reached for the coffee. **Laughing**, he held it out of her reach.

REVISED:

She smiled as she reached for the coffee. Laughing, he held it out of her reach.

Pitfall 3b:

ORIGINAL:

Reaching for the sugar, she thought about the day ahead. **Feeling guilty**, she wondered if she should call her mother and invite her to lunch. **Grimacing**, she pushed that idea out of her mind.

REVISED:

Reaching for the sugar, she thought about the day ahead. She felt a stab of guilt and wondered if she should call her mother. Invite her out to lunch, maybe. She grimaced and pushed that idea out of her mind.



How can AutoCrit help?

Take a look at the Sentence Variation analysis found under the Pacing & Momentum Tab in AutoCrit.

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women, though these were his most famous. The faces of madmen and vagrants from his Dublin sketchbooks, and of his own children when they were young.

Sometimes he even said she was named after Lucian Freud, that cold fish, just to tease her. Lucian Freud! The London establishment. To Ridley, painting was just a fragment of what he was about. His great enterprise was the gathering of hidden knowledge, and for him the true meaning of art transcended craftsmanship.

All of his offspring were talented. Costello was playing Horatio at the Old Vic. Tatiana's first novel was on the Booker shortlist, while Cassandra was a furniture designer and Icarus a potter. Only Lucia had chosen a more conventional career. She taught at a school in a small town far away. She loved the bright eyes and the squirrelling bodies of the little children. Many of them arrived at reception class barely able to talk or answer to their own names. Most of them had never sat down at a table to eat. Yet she could not see the whole lot of them bustling about at the bus for the same reason: when she

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Sentence Variation

How do I interpret this analysis?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Portraits mostly...	13	■
<input type="checkbox"/>	The faces of mad...	19	■
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes he eve...	17	■
<input type="checkbox"/>	Lucian Freud!	2	
<input type="checkbox"/>	The London estab...	3	

This analysis graphically presents the length of each sentence in your text. At a glance, you can see whether you have enough variety in the length of your sentences. Too many short sentences? Add in longer sentences for a better rhythm, and vice versa.

Next topic: Character action repetition

Until then, happy writing!