windows would look out on a view of massive constructions and airy bridges, of huge vaults and fine intricacies. The complexity of our culture could be captured again by the imagination of the architect: our buildings could begin to look a little less like armored tanks and more like clipper ships. Would we also then feel the dignity of sailors on a four-master at sea? Living so high, thrust into space, might we be returned to that mixture of awe and elation, of dignity and self-respect and a hint of dread, that sense of zest which a man must have known working his way out along a yardarm in a stiff breeze at sea? Would the fatal monotony of mass culture dissolve a hint before the quiet swaying of a great and vertical city?

Exercises

1. Identify the basic and stylistic paragraph patterns Norman Mailer employs in "Cities Higher Than Mountains."
2. Select one of the paragraphs from the essay to use as the model for a paragraph of your own composition on quite a different subject.
3. Transform a paragraph of Mailer's essay from one pattern to another somewhat different one making whatever revisions are necessary.

11. SENTENCES

Like the paragraph, the sentence is a basic unit of composition. It is—by traditional definition—a group of words, consisting of at least a subject and verb, which expresses a complete thought. To write well, we learn to write a basic kind of sentence—and then learn to develop the basic sentence into other sentence forms. With a little practice, we discover that virtually all sentences can be shortened or extended, compounded or complicated to serve our rhetorical needs. As we write our sentences, we try to keep three rules in mind: First, we must never let our reader lose sight of the central thought upon which the sentence turns. Second, we should keep in mind that complicated thoughts need to be expressed as simply as possible. And third, we should always be prepared to use, in order to achieve various rhetorical profiles, a full range of sentence forms.

To write effective sentences you must first realize that you have a wide range of sentence forms to choose from. Some of the most crucial decisions you make will be whether to use a virtual, simple, compound, complex, or combination compound-complex sentence. Though you may think that you write the kind of sentence that subject matter and content dictate, actually the choice is far from being that simple or automatic. If anything, the content itself has less to do with your decision than such considerations as variety, emphasis, and rhetorical profile.

The basic sentence pattern can be modified, combined, and elaborated in different ways to accommodate any thought of sentence proportions. This basic pattern is, in short, the axle upon which all your sentences turn, from the most elliptical virtual sentence to the most elaborate compound-complex sentence. *The basic sentence consists of a subject, an action verb or linking verb, and, almost always, an object or complement:*

Time flies.
I love you.

This sentence pattern can be infinitely adapted by varying one of its four attributes.

It is typically declarative; but by *altering the order of elements*, you can subtly shift its emphasis or change its function:

He was brave. (declarative)
Was he brave? (interrogative)
How brave he was! (exclamatory)
Be brave. (imperative)
Brave he was. (moves the complement ahead of the subject)

It can be *abbreviated, elaborated, compounded, or complicated.* By abbreviating the basic sentence, you can sometimes express a complete thought in a grammatically incomplete way:

Brave? Him!
The impenetrable mystery in those reptilian eyes.

By slightly elaborating certain elements you can make the basic sentence more flexible without sacrificing terseness:

The great god Pan is dead.
The Polynesians explored and colonized the Pacific.
He was brave from then on.

By more extensively compounding or modifying elements, the basic sentence becomes even more affluent. Ultimately you begin coordinating basic sentences to make compound sentences and subordinating added thoughts to make complex sentences:

He was brave, but his foolish lack of caution cost him his life.
Since there was no alternative, he was brave.

And by combining in various ways these compound and complex patterns, you can expand the basic sentence even further:

He was brave because there was no alternative to bravery but cowardice, and he feared being a coward more than dying.

So possibilities here range from the shortest simple sentence of two or three words (or even the virtual sentence of perhaps a single word) to the labyrinthine compound-complex sentence of ten or twenty times that length.

The sentence, whatever size or shape, *is most commonly loose, but can often be written as periodic.* Often in conversation and sometimes in writing you begin a sentence without really knowing how it will end, completing the sentence as you can by tacking on additional thoughts as they occur. Only the loose sentence, which expresses the main idea first and then adds details, permits such an easygoing approach to communication. While the loose sentence is so casual and instinctive that you use it most of the time, it is apt to be diffuse, anticlimactic, and overworked.

The following examples illustrate how the loose sentence grows:

Red-tailed hawks hunt my meadow.
Red-tailed hawks hunt my meadow for rabbits and field mice.
Red-tailed hawks hunt my meadow for rabbits and field mice on those sheet-metal days in February.

The first expresses only the main idea; the second expresses the main idea, then adds a couple of immediately related details; but the third expresses the main idea, then adds so many details that the sentence begins to falter at the end. The loose sentence pattern

is not inherently interesting, and a succession of loose sentences can be terribly monotonous. The last sentence is better rewritten as partially periodic:

On those sheet-metal days in February, red-tailed hawks hunt my meadow for rabbits and field mice.

Or somewhat more periodic:

On those sheet-metal days in February when the rabbits and field mice creep out to feed, red-tailed hawks hunt my meadow.

Or almost wholly periodic—there being, of course, degrees of periodicity:

Hunting my meadow for rabbits and field mice on those sheet-metal days in February was a pair of red-tailed hawks.

Had the loose original been a complex sentence, the periodic revision would have been an even more striking improvement:

Red-tailed hawks hunt my meadow for rabbits and field mice on those sheet-metal days in February when the grey ice bows down the bluestem leaving rusty patches where the sedge grass grows. (basically loose)

On those sheet-metal days in February when the grey ice bows down the bluestem leaving rusty patches where the sedge grass grows, red-tailed hawks hunt my meadow for rabbits and field mice. (basically periodic)

While a compound sentence as a whole cannot be periodic, its parts can:

The red-tailed hawk hunts my meadow in soaring cricles by day; the barn owl scans my meadow in silent swoops by night. (basically loose)

By day the red-tailed hawk hunts my meadow in soaring circles; by night the barn owl scans my meadow in silent swoops. (slightly periodic)

The periodic sentence, which delays completing the main thought until the end, or near the end, is an interesting pattern because it holds the reader in suspense and forces him to keep all the details in mind. Most loose sentences can easily be translated into

by adding or moving forward a modifier (to the beginning of the sentence or between the subject and verb),

Red-tailed hawks, searching for rabbits and field mice, hunt my meadow.

by inverting the sentence,

Hunting my meadow for rabbits and field mice was a red-tailed hawk.

and by beginning the sentence with "It was."

It was February before the red-tailed hawks began to hunt my meadow.

Don't be too quick to change, for a succession of periodic sentences, even more than a succession of loose sentences, can be precociously self-conscious and thoroughly wearisome. But consider using a higher proportion of periodic sentences than you have in the past:

(1) *for varying your predominantly loose style and emphasizing your more important ideas,*

All the luck was on my side in the first encounter with the mysterious trade of teaching. I had found a personality not antagonistic to mine. His 'teenish gallantry rose to the challenge of my desperate determination to interest him. He offered me the gifts of believing that maybe I had "had something" in this Aeneid. *At any rate I was a decent sort and he would listen long enough to give me the benefit of the doubt. Somehow or other, probably because there is nowhere else in life such unadulterated idealism and decency as the pure strain, if it can be tapped, than flows in the veins of sixteen—perhaps, too, because the impact of long weeks lounging about Europe had subconsciously released and stimulated his sense of the beautiful permanent things of civilization—he did get interested in the story itself and how Virgil had contrived to tell it.—Esther Cloudman Dunn,* Pursuit of Understanding: Autobiography of an Education

(The last and most important sentence is strongly periodic.)

(2) *for putting the important ideas at the end of the sentence,*

Out of the wild, crumbling confusion born of the dissolution of the force and the last great shape, foamy fountains spurt, and ringlets of spray.—Henry Beston, The Outermost House

Here, amid the throngs, the buses, the dodging taxicabs, the clanging streetcars; here, among the gaudy billboards and the glaring colors of the nighttime spectaculars; here, in this public and populous spot—fenced in by glass and brick, stone and asphalt, cement and steel—is a world so divorced from that of the open fields and woods that it seems impossible that the two should ever meet.—Edwin Way Teale, The Lost Woods

And, although it can be written in the passive voice, the basic sentence is most forceful in the active. In fact, if you used only the active voice, you would be right most of the time. The active voice, which preserves the natural order of sentence elements, is direct and forceful; the passive voice, which inverts the sentence, is frequently wordy and noncommittal. It is usually more effective to say "Darwin collected and popularized ideas that had been talked about for centuries," than "Ideas that had been talked about for centuries were collected and popularized by Darwin." And it is clearly better to write, "I climbed the Matterhorn," than, "The Matterhorn was climbed by me," for this implies something you don't mean.

Use the active voice regularly; use the passive voice only where it would be more effective:

to emphasize the receiver of the action rather than, as the active voice does, the doer of the action. If navigation were your subject you would write,

A form of stellar navigation was used by the ancient Phoenecians.

And if the Phoenicians were your subject,

The ancient Phoenicians used a form of stellar navigation.

to shift the real subject to the end position where it can sometimes be more easily modified,

The Ossianic poems were actually written by James Macpherson, a talented literary forger who apparently made use of genuine Celtic tradition but composed most of the epic *Fingal* himself.

to give the effect of detachment

The bride's worst fears were confirmed. (What they were is unknown.)

She was left waiting at the door of the church. (By whom is unimportant.)

But her tears were changed to smiles. (Modesty prevented, "I changed her tears to smiles.")

and sometimes to make the thought easier to phrase. It is simpler to write, "A horse can be taught to stand when the reins are dropped," than any equivalent in the active voice.

THE VIRTUAL SENTENCE

The basic sentence pattern can, on occasion, be foreshortened. Any thought or feeling put into words is a sentence. And sometimes not many words are required. "Mayday!" in certain circumstances means, "I am bailing out; get a fix on my signal and send help," and "Oh, yeah?" with the right intonation says "I don't believe that what you have just told me is true." Ordinary speech contains a good many of these abbreviations and fragments. So when you talk about sentences you have to begin with a construction that isn't really a sentence at all in the strictest sense—the virtual sentence. It is a short cut taken by a writer who knows the route extremely well and knows the reader is right behind. And it demonstrates the importance of context in writing, for the virtual sentence is a complete thought not because of what it says, but because of what is said or suggested elsewhere.

Occasionally use the virtual sentence to capture some of the snap and immediacy of speech and to shorten and simplify what would otherwise be an ineffectively complicated statement:

in dialogue (especially questions, answers, exclamations),

"Have your people got a car?"
"Yes."
"What sort of car?"
"Daimler."
"How many horse-power?"
(Pause, and leap in the dark.) "Fifteen."
"What kind of lights?"
The little boy is bewildered.
"What kind of lights? Electric or acetylene?"
(A longer pause, and another leap in the dark.) "Acetylene."—George Orwell, Such, Such Were the Joys

in description,

A restless morning, with clouds lower down, moving also with a larger roundward motion. Everything moving. But to go out in motion too, the slow roundward motion like the hawks.—D. H. Lawrence, Mornings in Mexico

for transitions,

So much for Raffles. *Now for a header into the cesspool.—George Orwell,* Raffles and Miss Blandish

for introductions,

Kimono. It covers her from throat to ankles; with a gesture as feminine as the placing of a flower or as female as the cradling of a child, the hands themselves can be concealed into the sleeves until there remains one unbroken chalice-shape of modesty proclaiming her femininity where nudity would merely parade her mammalian femaleness.—William Faulkner, Faulkner at Nagano

for conclusions,

The Greeks and Romans were the first comers in the fields of thought and literature. When they arrived at fairly obvious reflections upon life and love, upon war, fate or manners, they coined them into the slogans or epigrams for which their language was so well adapted, and thus preserved the patent rights for all time. Hence their reputation.—Winston Churchill, A Roving Commission

for emphasis,

They say here that great waves reach this coast in threes. Three great waves, then an indeterminate run of lesser rhythms, then three great waves again.—Henry Beston, The Outermost House

But use virtual sentences rarely, and don't confuse them with incomplete sentences. A fully intended and clearly effective "incomplete sentence" is not the same as an accidental and uncalled for "incomplete sentence." It would be pointless to write,

Washington's veterans encamped at Valley Forge not only to lick their wounds but to learn soldiering. To prepare for the day they could meet the British in a decisive action.

Either complete the sentence,

Washington's veterans encamped at Valley Forge not only to lick their wounds but to learn soldiering. Here preparations were made for the day they would meet the British in a decisive action.

or join it with another,

Washington's veterans encamped at Valley Forge not only to lick their wounds but to learn soldiering and prepare for the day they would meet the British in a decisive action.

THE SIMPLE SENTENCE

The basic sentence pattern is most prominent in the simple sentence, a routinely and sometimes strikingly effective form. Many of your best sentences will possess the clarity of the simple sentence, the directness and force of the active voice, and the suspense of periodic construction.

Use the simple sentence:

in its most austere form for variety, but mainly for emphasis,

I got up. The Burmans were already racing past me across the mud. It was obvious that the elephant would never rise again, but he was not dead.—George Orwell, Shooting an Elephant

I have never walked down the south side of Piccadilly without being all in a dither about what was happening on the north. This is folly.—W. Somerset Maugham, A Summing Up

or with parts compounded or modified to make it more variable, comprehensive, and periodic. In the familiar subject-verb-complement sentence, for example, you can elaborate the subject,

To come all the way to Europe, to arrive full of expectation, and then to find the monuments covered with scaffolding and the streets full of American tourists is maddening. (subject compounded)

That red Morocco volume, with the cracked spine and illegible gilt lettering, is a rare first edition. (subject modified)

or the verb,

Most quarter milers sprint for a good position going into the first curve, float much of the backstretch, and sprint again coming out of the last curve. (verb compounded)

The tidal wave advanced, slowly at first, then faster, then with awesome speed toward the beach. (verb modified)

or the object,

I relish spring mornings, summer evenings, fall afternoons—and winter not at all. (object compounded)

I read his reasonably artistic, but somewhat tiresome memoirs. (object modified)

or some combination of subject, verb, and complement. But don't overelaborate the simple sentence like this,

The tiger and the lamb live in peace and serenity in Edward Hicks's Peaceable Kingdom and in St. Francis' Paradise. (subject, object of preposition, and prepositional phrases compounded)

The courageous Gloucesterman sails across stormy seas to the lonely fishing grounds. (subject, verb, and objects of prepositions modified)

When you have this many details to communicate, you'd better think about coordinating them in some more effective way, perhaps even subordinating some of them. A succession of simple sentences is, especially in expository writing, likely to appear simple-minded and sure to be monotonous:

I was once seized by the desire to read Homer in the original. I bought an interlinear edition of *The Odyssey*. I also got a lexicon. Later I added a grammar. And I spent many long summer evenings with those books.

Writing more simple sentences is not the way to elaborate a simple sentence. You can even write the above five sentences as one and stay within the general framework of the simple sentence:

I was once seized by the desire to read Homer in the original and spent many long summer evenings with a grammar, a lexicon, and an interlinear edition of *The Odyssey*.

Contrary to what you might expect, the uncomplicated and insignificant thought often belongs in a compound or complex sentence, rather than in a simple sentence where it might appear ridiculously patent or overemphasized.

THE COMPOUND SENTENCE

The compound sentence, which is made up of what are essentially simple sentences joined by conjunctions or punctuation, coordinates thoughts of more or less equal importance. In the hands of an alert stylist, the compound sentence is swift and rhythmical, considering in the same breath thoughts that belong together because they are in either close agreement or close contrast. Thus you may write,

To many, democracy is phlegmatic, equivocal, and mean; but no one has found a better way to manage the housekeeping affairs of a nation. Only a few have tried—and their opinions are read only to be ridiculed.

rather than in the primer style,

To many, democracy is phlegmatic, equivocal, and mean. But no one has found a better way to manage the housekeeping affairs of a nation. Only a few have tried. Their opinions are read only to be ridiculed.

Make a compound sentence more effective:

by coordinating only those ideas that are logically related and equal, and when necessary, by expanding the relation,

St. Mark's and its Campanile stood out against the evening sky. Twittering swallows wheeled through the air. (Avoid simply tacking on an independent clause as in, "St. Mark's and its Campanile stood out against the evening sky, and twittering swallows wheeled through the air.")

As the birds and cumulus clouds became more numerous, we felt increasingly sure land was near. (Avoid coordinating what you should subordinate as in, "The birds and cumulus clouds became more numerous and we felt increasingly sure land was near.")

Indian Johnny was an old cowboy, and he could reminisce for hours about cattle ranching in the southwest. (Avoid leaving too much of the relationship up to your reader's imagination as in, "Indian Johnny was an old cowboy, and he could talk for hours.")

by coordinating with other than the all-too-inevitable "and" or by dropping the conjunction altogether and letting the punctuation support the connection. There is nothing wrong with *and* in the right place, as when it subtly pivots a cause and effect:

Critics denounced the novel as pornographic, and most who read it agreed.

But too often *and* is used in place of a more exact coordinator—but, for, or, nor, so, consequently, therefore, thus, however, still, yet, otherwise, then.

The nations were still at war and the founding fathers were doubtful about whether a world organization could be made to work at all, so they inserted a clause or two to cover themselves in case it didn't.—E. B. White, The Shape of the U.N. (*And* would have obscured the causal relation.)

We intended to clean it out and live in it, but there were holes in the roof and the birds had come in and were roosting in the rafters.—Loren C. Eiseley, The Immense Journey *(And* would have obscured the sense of qualification and exception.)

The compound sentence with a coordinator is perhaps smoother and more natural; but the compound sentence with punctuation only is likely to appear more adroit and impressive. When the relationship of parts is so clear that no coordinator is necessary, rely on your punctuation to link the clauses.

Goodness is easier to recognize than to define; only the great novelists can portray good people.—W. H. Auden, I Believe

I bored my parents, they bored me.—Robert Lowell, Life Studies

by coordinating for special effect. The compound sentence, even more than the simple sentence, is the pattern of ordinary speech.

I was in the woman left on the shore; the canoe held my companions of the past summer; the island was to be my home until another summer should bring them back again.—Laura Lee Davidson, A Winter of Content

They rise out of the earth, they sweat and starve for a few years, and then they sink back into the nameless mounds of the graveyard and nobody notices that they are gone.—George Orwell, Marrakech

The sheep ran forward in little pattering rushes; they began to bleat, and ghostly flocks and herds answered them from under the sea. "Baa! Baaa!"—Katherine Mansfied, At the Bay

But in the hands of a wide-awake writer the compound sentence can have snap, as when one of the clauses is a brief anticipation or afterthought to a longer one:

The storm is gone, and here in the country a mild sun has bit by bit argued the cold and snow away.—Donald Culrose Peattie, Green Laurels

The act of dying is not of importance, it lasts so short a time.—James Boswell, The Life of Johnson

And is capable of long rhythms that are sometimes right for the context:

The rain began to patter down in broad and scattered drops; the wind freshened, and curled up the waves; at length it seemed as if the bellying clouds were torn open by the mountain-tops, and complete torrents of rain came rattling down.—Washington Irving, Bracebridge Hall

and by balancing the sentence. Since it is rather distinctive, the balanced sentence should be used mainly for emphasis and only occasionally for variety. Ordinarily balance is achieved when parts of

the same sentence are similar in length and structure. But it may involve separate sentences of similar design. In either case, when the thoughts are in agreement, the effect is one of mutual reinforcement; and when thoughts are in contrast, the effect is one of tension. (This last sentence is essentially a balanced one. The slight variation from perfect symmetry, provided here by the short introductory phrase, is usually an improvement when the statement is rather routine.)

Love not pleasure; love God.—Thomas Carlyle, Sartor Resartus

I have loved individuals; I have never much cared for men in the mass.—W. Somerset Maugham, A Summing Up

The power of French literature is in its prose writers, the power of English literature is in its poets.—Matthew Arnold, Essays in Criticism

Outside, the flurry rain made muddy scallops in the street; but inside, dust particles floated serenely in the filtered evening half-light.

This kind of balance can involve the complex sentence or some combination of compound and complex as well:

The true American knew something of the facts, but nothing of the feelings; he read the letter, but he never felt the law.—Henry Adams, The Education of Henry Adams

The thunder burst in tremendous explosions; the peals were echoed from mountain to mountain; they crashed upon Dunderberg, and rolled up the long defile of the highlands, each headland making a new echo, until old Bull Hill seemed to bellow back the storm.—Washington Irving, Bracebridge Hall

Not a victory is gained, not a deed of faithfulness or courage is done, except upon a maybe; not a service, not a sally of generosity, nor a scientific explanation or experiment or text book, that may not be a mistake.—William James, Is Life Worth Living?

THE COMPLEX SENTENCE

The complex sentence, which consists of one independent clause and one or more dependent clauses, subordinates thoughts of lesser importance. It is vastly more sophisticated than either the simple or compound sentence because it not only contains more than one idea, but distinguishes the central idea from its details.

As separate simple sentences,

The sea boomed and hissed. I slept but fitfully.

and as a single compound sentence,

The sea boomed and hissed, and I slept but fitfully.

these two ideas are of undifferentiated importance. But rewritten as a complex sentence, either the sound of the sea,

The sea boomed and hissed, while I slept but fitfully.

or the fitful sleep,

When the sea boomed and hissed, I slept but fitfully.

can be emphasized. Whenever you possibly can, put the important thoughts into independent clauses and reduce the others to modifying clauses, phrases, and words.

You can make a complex sentence more effective by keeping sight of the central idea. The central idea belongs in the main clause, never in the subordinate clause or phrase.

When he happened to glance in the display case, he noticed a scarab of unusual design. (Not, "He happened to glance in the display case, noticing a scarab of unusual design.")

As the survivors watched from lifeboats, the doomed ship heeled over and slowly disappeared. (Not, "As the doomed ship heeled over and slowly disappeared, the survivors watched from lifeboats.")

The central idea should stand out clearly and never be obscured by unnecessary subordinate details or by a sequence of subordinate clauses, each dependent upon the one before.

Though I have coins from Greece, Palestine, and Egypt, my prize exhibit is a silver coin from Rome. (Not, "My collection includes a silver coin minted in Rome seventeen hundred years ago that bears a portrait of the Emperor Probus, and an assortment of bronze coins from Greece, Palestine, and Egypt that I ordered from a place in New York.")

At the opera I sat next to a friend of the leading soprano. They had been classmates at a musical conservatory that has produced several famous operatic sopranos. (Not, "At the opera I sat next to a woman who told me she knew the leading soprano, who had been her classmate when both attended a musical conservatory that has produced several operatic sopranos who have become famous.")

You can make a complex sentence more effective by using a subordinator that points up the most exact relationship. Some subordinators are often so

smooth we are not aware of there being separate thoughts (who, whom, where, which, that, what).

The sprinter who leaves the blocks first usually wins.

Which she chose made no difference.

He didn't know what he wanted.

Some generally connect a clause modifying a word in the main clause (when, whenever, where, wherever, how, why, while, as, before, after, until, since).

When the wind is easterly we usually have rain.

She couldn't remember why she had come.

He got out while there was time.

And some distinguish between the central thought and its details more emphatically than other subordinators (although, as, as if, so, so that, because, before, if, since, that, until, till, unless, when, where).

She likes terra-cotta because it is a color associated with Sufism.

Since it is too late for tea, let's have dinner.

Until you learn to relax in the water you cannot expect to be a good swimmer.

Some subordinators have rather precise meanings. For example, *if* at the beginning of a dependent clause indicates that it is the cause of the effect described in the independent clause; and *although* suggests some kind of concession.

But some have more than one meaning; when you use *as, so,* and *while,* you especially run a risk of being ambiguous. In the sentence, "As the desert heat grew more intense, the travelers began to suffer," you would be much clearer if you replaced *as* with *when* (referring to time) or *because* (referring to cause). And in the sentence, "While Melville was at work on *Moby Dick*, he often rode over to visit Hawthorne," you would be better off replacing *while* with *when* (referring to time) or *although* (referring to concession). Even more serious is the tendency to say something like, "Fruit trees, which bloom early, are a poor risk on the central plains." (But this is partly a problem of punctuation; turn to page 251.)

Finally, *you can make a complex sentence more effective by suppressing the subordinator whenever possible.* Too many *that*'s and *which*'s and *whose*'s will ruin otherwise good prose by making it tedious and over-

formal. When the clauses are side by side and the relation clear, consider dropping the subordinator. Of course, this takes a good ear and an alert mind, for there is possibility of ambiguity, confusion, and unintended humor. But the fluency you gain justifies the effort.

There stood the oak, blasted by lightning. (Not, "There stood the oak that was blasted by lightning.")

Finally reaching the ledge, realizing how exhausted he was, he made camp for the night. (Not, "He finally reached the ledge. He realized how exhausted he was. He made camp for the night.")

The happy man with the trophy is a driver for the Ferrari team. (Not, "The man who is carrying the trophy and who looks so happy is a driver for the team that races Ferraris.")

The last two examples were streamlined further by simplifying the grammar of the sentence. A good way to keep the complex sentence from getting out of hand is to substitute a phrase for a clause, a word for a phrase.

THE COMBINATION SENTENCE

The English sentence is capable of great sophistication. Some of your most ingenious and intricate sentences will be neither compound nor complex but one of the numerous combinations of the two. The range of possibilities is limited only by the skill of the writer—and, sometimes, by the patience of the reader.

The combination sentence must have at least two independent clauses and at least one dependent clause:

When Columbus failed to find quantities of gold, he was disappointed; but he was not disillusioned.

But beyond that, the number of both independent and dependent clauses is variable:

Louis XIV, not the self-indulgent wastrel his grandfather had been, was a serious and compassionate man; and he was, particularly in view of the disastrous finances that prevailed in the French government, a fairly able administrator.

All sorts of combinations are possible:

Late one September night, as I sat reading, the very father of all waves must have flung himself down before the house, for the quiet of the night was suddenly overturned by a gigantic, tumbling crash and an earthquake rumbling; the beach trembled beneath the avalanche, the dune shook, and my house so shook in

its dune that the flame of a lamp quivered and pictures jarred on the wall.—Henry Beston, The Outermost House

Over the whole earth—this infinitely small globe that possesses all we know of sunshine and bird song—an unfamiliar blight is creeping: man—man, who has become at last a planetary disease and who would, if his technology yet permitted, pass this infection to another star.—Loren Eiseley, The Time of Man

The front door is especially handsome: the door itself is dark green and equipped with a brass knocker, and the woodwork which frames it is white; it is crowned with a wide fanlight and flanked by two narrow panes of glass, in which a white filigree of ironwork makes a webbing like ice over winter ponds.—Edmund Wilson, The American Earthquake

Occasionally use a form of the combination sentence to achieve variety or emphasis, or to indicate more precisely the relationship among a number of details. Keep in mind, however, that important thoughts have a way of getting lost in the intricacies of the combination sentence; always put them at the beginning, or better, at the end.

The principal thing to remember about both short, simple sentences and long, combination sentences is that together they give you more control over style than would ever be possible if you used sentences from the middle range of the spectrum only. Certainly most of your sentences will be elaborated simple sentences, compound sentences, and complex sentences; and you can achieve variety and pattern using these alone. But real stylistic virtuosity requires the full range of sentence forms.

SUMMARY CHECKLIST

Ask yourself these questions:

1. Are the sentence forms in my compositions everywhere appropriate to the thought?
2. Are sentences drawn—for variety— from the whole range of forms?
3. Do I use as high a proportion of periodic sentences as is compatible with the desired rhetorical profile?
4. Do I use the active voice except in cases where the passive would be a clear gain?

THE WHOLE COMPOSITION

You will find John Baker's essay a catalogue of sentence forms. It opens with an austere simple sentence ("Stand up.") and closes with a more elaborate combination sentence ("Remember, the first travelers of all went on foot; before wheels were, walking was."). And the essay ranges in its complexity from a three-word virtual sentence

("A last word.") to a seventy-five-word combination sentence ("His legs stride along beneath him with what becomes amazingly soon an automatic motion. . . .").

You will find the phrasing declarative ("But the walker must steel himself. . . ."), interrogative ("But what, you may ask . . .?"), exclamatory ("How they walked and talked, and exalted in what they saw!"), and imperative ("Don a stout pair of shoes. . . ."). And you will find the sentence patterns are now loose ("Usually I am not much given to lamenting the vanished glories of the past."); now more periodic ("But there is something in the picture of these old writers, striding over the countryside along with their visions, or discoursing to a companion, as did Coleridge, 'in the most delightful explanatory way over hill and dale a summer's day,' that is remarkably touching."). Give special attention to the diversity and naturalness of Baker's sentences, and to their absolute appropriateness to his thoughts.

An Honest Day's Walk

John F. Baker

Stand up. Move one leg out in front of you, placing the foot firmly on the ground. Bring the other leg from behind it, placing that foot firmly in turn. Carry on with this motion and look around you. Objects are moving past, receding behind you, advancing to meet you. You are walking.

So much for the actual technique; basic pedestrianism, as it were. It's something you pick up quite early in life. The first step, in fact, is always regarded as something of a landmark. I know people who feel their whole life has been one long anticlimax, starting at the ecstatic moment when they tottered from one pair of out-stretched arms to another. But the chances are that, once having acquired the knack of walking, you never make much further conscious use of it, and your foot power is allowed to atrophy while you wallow in the back seats of limousines. This just isn't good enough. Think for a moment of what happened to the ability to waggle the ears. There was a time when we could all do that. Now it is a party trick of only a selected few, preserved from among multitudes by the stern principles of Darwinism.

Do you want that to happen to walking, too? Before you have a chance to say how little you care, I must stress that I mean walking as an art, not the automatic shuffling process that carries you out of the house in the morning and into the garage, or across the lobby and into the elevator. The sort of progress I have in mind takes you across the river and into the trees.

Time was when the sort of walking I mean was much in

fashion, when the activities of a man like Associate Justice William Douglas of the United States Supreme Court—who has been known to walk several miles at a stretch in country so remote as to be beyond the reach of news photographers—would have caused not the slightest inclination of an eyebrow. Time was, in fact, when a literary exercise was more than a mere English composition, and many of the great writers—Hazlitt, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Carlyle, Thoreau, Robert Louis Stevenson, to name a few—were dedicated trampers.

They marched about all over the nineteenth-century landscape, talking up a storm as they went, then settling down in the candle-lit evening to a bottle, and a blank sheet of paper on which to immortalize it all—and their eloquence survives them strongly. Usually I am not much given to lamenting the vanished glories of the past. But there is something in the picture of these old writers, striding over the countryside alone with their visions, or discoursing to a companion, as did Coleridge, "in the most delightful explanatory way over hill and dale a summer's day," that is remarkably touching. How they walked and talked, and exulted in what they saw! And how sweetly they set it all down—the changing landscape, the people met along the way, the evening peace of the inn.

But what, you may ask, can walking offer to those who have no wish to write about it afterward, and whose cars are in working order? It's no use pretending the physical effects are remarkable. You could develop better muscles by a good gym workout, get to live longer by a healthier diet, keep your weight down by running or playing handball. The benefits are philosophical and mental, rather. The British historian G. M. Trevelyan, a passionate advocate of walking as spiritual exercise, put it this way: "I never knew a man go for an honest day's walk . . . and not have his reward in the repossession of his own soul."

Fighting words; but consider a little. Man is becoming increasingly out of touch with the natural world, moving as he does through a universe of glass, plastic, rubber, metal. He is dwindling out of scale with the material world he has built around himself—a world scaled to the automobile rather than to the walking human, to wastage and satiety rather than a reasonable sufficiency. More than a hundred years ago the unnaturalness of human life was enough to drive a thinker like Thoreau into the wilderness; yet we now look on the period that he found intolerable as a golden age of lost innocence and quiet satisfactions. The pace is ever quickening, the pressures ever growing. But if you want to stop the world for a while and get off, you can.

Don a stout pair of shoes and drive out, alone or with only the

very choicest of companions, to the nearest open country—and start walking. You should try to include on the route some forest and a few hills; but if there aren't any, just enjoy the sky and the sense of space. Don't try to set any speed records; the coming of evening will wait for you, as a train never would. Don't try to cover too much ground; the idea is not to stumble back at night exhausted, but to amble in with the sort of afterglow that comes from body and mind well extended.

I have found, and men more eloquent than I agree, that however miserable, anxious or tense the walker when he starts out, it is impossible for him to be long on the way without a degree of calm descending upon him. His legs stride along beneath him with what becomes amazingly soon an automatic motion; his eyes turn on leaves, grass, water, sky and distant views; preoccupations recede like the sounds of civilization behind him; his feet planted on the earth give him a certainty of himself he had come near to losing among the city's concrete ambiguities; in a natural setting his sense of human scale returns with a delightful shock. If he wants to talk to himself, he will not meet the blank stare of the city dweller warily recognizing yet another nut. (We have progressed a long way in unhappy self-consciousness since Hazlitt confessed that on his solitary walks, "I laugh, I run, I leap, I sing for joy.")

He may find, of course, that the brain stubbornly refuses to participate in his ramble, and that he becomes simply a walking vegetable, sensing a general dim enjoyment of his surroundings. This is a matter of taste; but I should have thought that, considering what the brain inflicts upon us when it is actively participating in our lives, a little rest would be all to the good. (Max Beerbohm used to experience this mental blankness while on a walk, and resented walking as a result—but then our brains are not such lively companions as his.)

I've made the whole process sound so simple: as if a bit more wear on the shoes will keep the shine off the psychiatrist's couch. But there are a few difficulties I haven't mentioned, which never had to be faced by the sages who set out for their constitutionals a century ago. They merely had to leave their inn in the morning, walk a little way along a quiet street, and they were in the country—a shining landscape full of trafficless roads, public rights of way across private property, and—well, inns.

Today's walker cannot hope to start walking where he lives (unless where he lives is so far away from it all that he has no need of a walk to soothe his soul). He must get in his car and drive along a few congested highways, then find somewhere to park, before he can step out into the wilds—and at that, the wilds are more likely to come in the form of a national or state park, with pictures of

Smokey the Bear gazing at him from the trees, and a litter of beer cans around picnic sites, than the idyllic landscape of the heart's longing.

And once he's on his way he must take care with his route, for nothing is more jarring to newly won peace of mind than to come, suddenly and unawares, on a highway replete with service stations, hamburger stands, used car lots and prefabricated discount stores. Yet no matter how far from the madding crowd today's tramper may succeed in fleeing, he must return at nightfall to the ignoble strife of that very same highway. For where, today, is the country inn that regaled his forebears? It has been hauled into the automotive age and now describes itself as a motel; and there he will probably have to stay, carless though he may be. Looking, and probably feeling, rather like a hotel guest without luggage, he must march from one motel office to another in search of a night's lodging. (Have you ever tried *walking* along a highway shoulder between "No Vacancy" signs? It's that business of inhuman scale I was talking about, all over again.)

The inn parlor will no longer form a background to his contented evening reverie. Highway diners will be his restaurants, the constant swish of tires past their windows drowning the day's last sleepy birdsong. And instead of enjoying a snug taproom, winking with pewter and old oak, he must down his evening dram—without which, naturally, no therapeutic walk would be complete—in road-side cocktail lounges where the only illumination comes from the jukebox, and where the drinks are cold and deadly in their power.

But the walker must steel himself to survive these assaults on the tender shoots of his new self. And if he is carefully following my formula for a life-enhancing walk, the time he spends in daily freedom from urban fetters will more than make up for his nightly thralldom.

A last word. Americans are gregarious creatures, and it may occur to the would-be walker that my experiment in asocial living would be best conducted in a friendly group. It wouldn't. The perils of even a single companion are considerable: Perhaps he wants to talk when you wish for silence, or is lost in rapt meditation just when you are particularly anxious to call his attention to something. And it's amazing how few poeple can share a notion of the ideal distance and speed for a worthy ramble.

As for organized hiking parties, our old essayists, determined individualists all, shunned them: too many people, too much concentration on sheer brute progress and miles per hour. You will find this stress on efficiency, output and performance whenever a quiet, self-indulgent occupation becomes a hobby of mass

popularity. Compare today's cyclist, with his hunched back and his sinews etched in effort, to the stately, perpendicular pedaler round the lanes of fifty years ago, and you'll see what I mean about hikers as against the solitary walker.

They are, of course, admirably keen, these hikers; and there is some comfort in knowing that there are so many people who share your pleasure in perambulating through the countryside in preference to surveying it from the windows of a passing car. With that, however, their advantage ends. Let them march out of sight, with their rucksacks, their reckless pace and their jostling for position at the head of the line in which they go. They represent too perfectly the life we want to leave behind when we walk.

Off, then, into the trees, moving along beneath the leaves' dapple, hearing again the oldest sounds man has heard—chirp and rustle, and trickle of water. Soon you're back before the Fall. Remember, the first travelers of all went on foot; before wheels were, walking was.

Exercises

1. Abbreviate, elaborate, and complicate the same basic sentence until it exemplifies the whole spectrum of sentence forms from the virtual to the combination compound-complex. Write at least a dozen versions.
2. Using fairly difficult materials, write a paragraph dominated by simple and compound sentences. Then revise the paragraph to contain more complex and combination sentences. Notice how much more discerning the second paragraph is.
3. Write different versions of the same paragraph, one in which loose sentences predominate, a second in which periodic sentences predominate. Compare the interest generated by the two paragraphs.
4. Now write different versions of another paragraph, one in the passive voice, a second in the active. Compare the length and forcefulness of the two paragraphs.
5. In the following paragraph which sentences are loose, which are mildly periodic, which are strongly periodic—and why?

Washington Irving published his famous collection of short stories, *The Sketch Book*, in England in 1819. He published in that same collection a little essay called "A Rebuke to English Writers." In this nonfiction piece, Irving argues that English authors have failed in their writings to describe America accurately. He

accuses the English authors of actually fomenting an unnecessary international hostility. So vigorous is Irving's attack on the British, that the essay has been called "The American Declaration of Literary Independence."

6. Identify the virtual sentences in the following examples and explain their use.

I wish you could see La Spezia. The terraces of square, red-roofed houses. The palms and the umbrella-pines and rhododendrons. But especially the soft blue Spezian bay.

So much for the Anglo-Saxons. Now a word about the Celts, those original inhabitants of Britain who were pushed into Wales and Scotland and Ireland by the invaders.

Alexander the Great quelled a revolt among the Illyrians and Greeks, conquered a Persian empire which included all of western Asia and Egypt, and marched deep into India, creating a Macedonian empire larger than anything Rome would possess for several centuries. And died in his thirty-second year!

7. Rewrite the following overcoordinated paragraph, subordinating mere details to the more important ideas.

This happened when I was ten. I built a "man-carrying" glider. For my efforts I earned a neighborhood reputation as an aeronautical genius. But I was frightened of high places and persuaded a chum to test my muslin and lathe creation by jumping with it from a garage roof. He broke both the glider and his leg. He sent my reputation into a nosedive.

8. In the following sentences, substitute a more exact coordinator for the overused *and*.

It was a good lecture, and it was rather long.

Hemingway deserves his fame as a stylist, and he taught American writers how to use the simple declarative sentence.

The captain ordered the anchor let go, and he scanned the beach for some sign of life.

9. Consider the preliminary work you did earlier (Chapter 9, exercise 6); are the beginnings and endings, the topic sentences as appropriate, forceful, and varied as they might be? Do you habitually favor one sentence form—the compound, for example—to such a degree that you overlook opportunities for effectively employing other forms?