

SYNTAX

Adapted from *A Guide for Advanced Placement English Vertical Teams*. New York: The College Board.

At its simplest level, syntax consists of sentence structure, but analysis of style and meaning never relies on one concept alone. Syntax should not be studied in isolation, but rather it should be examined in conjunction with other stylistic techniques that work together to develop meaning. At least four areas can be considered when analyzing style: diction, sentence structure, treatment of subject matter, and figurative language. This review focuses on sentence structure.

You can analyze sentence structure in several ways:

1. Examine the sentence length. Are the sentences telegraphic (shorter than 5 words in length), short (approximately five words in length), medium (approximately 18 words in length), or long and involved (30 words or more in length)? Does the sentence length fit the subject matter? What variety of length is present? Why is the sentence length effective?
2. Examine sentence beginnings. Is there a good variety, or does a pattern emerge?
3. Examine the arrangement of ideas in a sentence. Are they set out in a special way for a purpose?
4. Examine the arrangement of ideas in a paragraph. Is there evidence of any pattern or structure?
5. Examine sentence patterns. Some elements to be considered are listed below:

A declarative (assertive) sentence makes a statement: e.g., *The king is sick*. An imperative sentence gives a command: e.g., *Stand up*. An interrogative sentence asks a question: e.g., *Is the king sick?* An exclamatory sentence makes an exclamation: e.g., *The king is dead!*

A simple sentence contains one subject and one verb: e.g., *The singer bowed to her adoring audience*. A compound sentence contains two independent clauses joined by a coordinate conjunction (and, but, or) or by a semicolon: e.g., *The singer bowed to the audience, but she sang no encores*. A complex sentence contains an independent clause and one or more subordinate clauses: e.g., *You said that you would tell the truth*. A compound-complex sentence contains two or more principal clauses and one or more subordinate clauses: e.g., *The singer bowed while the audience applauded but she sang no encores*.

A loose sentence makes complete sense if brought to a close before the actual ending: e.g., *We reached Edmonton/ that morning/ after a turbulent flight/ and some exciting experiences*. (Note that the sentence makes sense at each point marked by a slash). A periodic sentence makes sense only when the end of the sentence is reached: e.g., *That morning, after a turbulent flight and some exciting experiences, we reached Edmonton*.

In a balanced sentence, the phrases or clauses balance each other by virtue of their likeness of structure, meaning, or length: e.g., *He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters.*

In a cumulative sentence, layers of descriptive detail are added before and after the main idea in order to develop the main idea

Natural order of a sentence involves constructing a sentence so that the subject comes before the predicate: e.g., *Oranges grow in California.* Inverted order of a sentence involves constructing a sentence so the predicate comes before the subject: e.g., *In California grow oranges.* This is a device in which normal sentence patterns are reversed to create an emphatic or rhythmic effect. Split order of a sentence divides the predicate into two parts with the subject coming in the middle: e.g., *In California oranges grow.*

Juxtaposition is a poetic and rhetorical device in which normally unassociated ideas, words, or phrases are placed next to one another, creating an effect of surprise and wit: e.g., *"The apparition of these faces in the crowd;/Petals on a wet, black bough."*
(*"In a Station of the Metro"* by Ezra Pound)

Parallel structure (parallelism) refers to a grammatical or structural similarity between sentences or parts of a sentence. It involves an arrangement of words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs so that elements of equal importance are equally developed and similarly phrased: e.g., *He was walking, running, and jumping for joy.*

Repetition is a device in which words, sounds, and ideas are used more than once to enhance rhythm and create emphasis: e.g., *"government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth"*
(*"Address at Gettysburg"* by Abraham Lincoln)

A rhetorical question is a question that expects no answer. It is used to draw attention to a point and is generally stronger than a direct statement: e.g., *If Mr. Ferchoff is always fair, as you have said, why did he refuse to listen to Mrs. Baldwin's arguments?*

At a more advanced level, syntax develops in types of schemes, which you have studied as rhetorical devices.

Syntax

When examining syntax, it is appropriate to look at sentence types, the variety of sentences, the placement of details in the sentences, the length of sentences, sentence patterns, and punctuation.

Helpful tips: Examine sentence length. Are the sentences **telegraphic** (shorter than 5 words in length), **short** (approximately five words in length), **medium** (approximately 18 words in length), or **long and involved** (30 words or more in length)? Does the sentence length fit the subject matter? What variety of lengths is present? Why is the sentence length effective? It is also a good idea to examine sentence beginnings. Is there a good variety, or does a pattern emerge? You should also examine the arrangement of ideas in a sentence. Are they set out in a special way for a purpose? You will also want to look at the arrangement of ideas in a paragraph? Is there evidence of any pattern or structure? It is also wise to look at sentence patterns. Examining sentence patterns includes looking at what types of sentences are being used. Below is information about different types of sentences.

Sentences can be classified in many ways, and it's helpful to consider the potential effect a particular type of sentence might have on a reader in a certain situation. There are four basic sentence types: the simple sentence, the compound sentence, the complex sentence and the compound-complex sentence.

Simple Sentence:

-Has a single independent clause (one subject and one verb)

Identify the subject and verb in the following simple sentence:

*Abraham Lincoln struggled to save the Union.

-Within its single clause, a simple sentence can have a compound subject, and compound verb, or both. (compound means "two")

Identify the compound subject and/or compound verb in the following sentences:

*Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson struggled to save the Union.

*Abraham Lincoln struggled to save the Union and persevered.

Simple sentence as a rhetorical device:

-When you need to make a succinct point, often a short, simple sentence will do so effectively. A short, simple sentence can suggest to a reader that you are in control, and/or that you want to make a strong point.

- Ironically, often times writers express complex ideas or emotions with simple sentences. In doing so, they are acknowledging that some ideas or emotions are so complex that words cannot describe them.

Ernest Hemingway is well known for his fondness of using simple sentences in this way.

- Simple sentences are also often used to emphasize the importance of each individual step in a process or timeline.

- Many times a writer will use a simple sentence after a string of more complex sentences to drive home a point.

- Writers may also use a simple sentence to show time moving slowly, or quickly – depending on the writer's style.

Compound Sentence:

-Has two independent clauses, each of which could exist as a simple sentence. Compound sentences can be created using coordinating conjunctions (and, but, or, not, for, so, yet) and correlative conjunctions (not only...but also; either...or; just as...so also); however, you can also use a semicolon alone or coupled with a conjunctive adverb (however, indeed, thus, moreover, in fact, therefore, nevertheless).

Identify each independent clause, as well as the conjunction used in the following sentences:

*Abraham Lincoln struggled to save the Union, and Andrew Johnson assisted him.

*Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson struggled to save the Union and persevered, but the leaders of the Confederacy insisted that the rights of the states were more important than the maintenance of the Union.

Compound sentence as a rhetorical device:

- If you are trying to show how ideas are balanced and related in terms of equal importance, a compound sentence can convey that to the reader.
 - Several compound sentences in a row can tell the reader that you are the kind of person who takes a balanced view of challenging issues.
 - A writer may use a conjunction or a conjunctive adverb such as "but," "yet," or "however" to show the contrasting relationship between two ideas.
 - A writer may join what would have been two abrupt sentences with a conjunction such as "and" to create fluency, and/or to emphasize the equal importance of both ideas.
 - A writer can show a cause/effect relationship between two ideas with conjunctions or conjunctive adverbs such as "thus," "for," "therefore."
 - When a writer uses a semicolon he/she is stressing the closeness between the ideas in the two independent clauses.
 - A semicolon may also emphasize balance or alternation: it is not this; it is that.
 - Two parallel* independent clauses may show a perfect balance between ideas.
- *Information about parallelism appears later in this packet.

Complex Sentence:

- Has two clauses, one independent clause (aka main clause) and at least one subordinate clause (aka dependent clause).
- Often time subordinating clauses begin with a subordinating conjunction. Subordinating conjunctions can be classified by the relationships they indicate:
 - Contrast or Concession: although, even though, though, while, whereas
 - Cause and Effect or Reason: because, since, so that
 - Condition: if, once, unless
 - Time: when, whenever, after, before as, once since, while

Identify the independent clause and the subordinate clause in the following sentence:

*When the leaders of the Confederacy insisted that the rights of the states were more important than the maintenance of the Union, Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson struggled to save the Union and persevered.

Complex Sentences as a rhetorical device:

- If you want to show more complicated relationships between ideas, then complex sentences can communicate the intricacies of your thinking.
- Remember, just because a clause is subordinate does not mean that what it is says is unimportant. The ideas in both clauses in a complex sentence contribute to the meaning of the sentence. It is the job of subordination to tell us how those ideas are related. Thus, you can show the logical relationships in a rather lengthy sentence so that the length in no way impedes clarity.
- Writers may use a subordinate clause to establish the chronology of events that lead to the main action of the sentence.
- Subordination is sometimes used to blend short sentences into more graceful, longer sentences.
- A writer has to determine which clause should be dependent and which should be independent in a complex sentence. The independent clause usually carries the most force, so writers will often put the idea they want to emphasize in a the independent clause.

Compound-Complex Sentence:

- Has the defining features of both a compound sentence and a complex sentence. In other words, it has at least two independent clauses and at least one dependent clause.

Identify the independent clauses and the dependent clause(s) in the following sentence:

*When the leaders of the Confederacy insisted that the rights of the states were more important than the maintenance of the Union, Abraham Lincoln struggled to save the Union and persevered, and Andrew Johnson assisted him.

Compound-Complex sentence as a rhetorical device:

-If you want to show more complicated relationships between ideas, then compound-complex sentences can communicate the intricacies of your thinking.

-Much like Ernest Hemingway used simple sentences to communicate complex emotions or ideas, F. Scott Fitzgerald used compound-complex sentences to communicate complex emotions or ideas. This is simply a matter of style.

-Writers often use compound-complex sentences to communicate time going by slowly or quickly, depending on the writer's style. The same is true for short sentences versus long sentences, as short sentences are often simple sentences, and long sentences are often compound-complex sentences.

Here is an example of a compound-complex sentence followed by a complex sentence from Fitzgerald's Tender is the Night, as well as analysis of the sentence:

"She looked up at him as he took a step toward the door; she looked at him without the slightest idea as to what was in his head, she saw him take another step in slow motion, turn and look at her again, and she wanted for a moment to hold him and devour him, wanted his mouth, his ear, his coat collar, wanted to surround him and engulf him; she saw his hand fall on the doorknob. Then she gave up and sank back on the bed."

In this first sentence we can see Fitzgerald enacting the bubbling desire of Rosemary's young love. This first sentence begins with a complete thought and ends with a complete thought, but in the middle, as Rosemary's desire for Dick escalates, the pauses become quicker and the ideas more abrupt, leaving us as readers rhythmically ready for the climax; however, by ending with Dick's hand on the doorknob our expectations are completely dissolved. We are deflated by the following sentence's simplicity and Rosemary's quick willingness to give up. The structure of the sentence emulates a complex emotional thought process and subtly strengthens Fitzgerald's thematic investigation of youth, excess, and destruction. Fitzgerald is a master of manipulating sentence structure to imitate the processes of emotional thought.

Declarative (Assertive) Sentence:

- Makes a statement

Imperative sentence:

- Gives a command

Interrogative sentence:

- Asks a question

Exclamatory sentence:

- Makes an exclamation

Identify the following sentences as declarative, imperative, interrogative, and exclamatory. Also, identify if each sentence is telegraphic, short, medium, or long and involved.

*Stand up.

*Is it true that the queen is sick?

*The king of Mongolia is dead.

*Someone killed the queen!

A second method of analyzing sentences looks at them in terms of another important structural distinction: Loose (aka Cumulative) Sentences and Periodic Sentences.

A **cumulative (loose) sentence** makes complete sense if brought to a close before the actual ending. It is a type of sentence in which the main idea (independent clause) comes first, followed by the dependent clause(s) or other kinds of dependent phrases and clauses. These details accumulate, or pile up – hence, the name cumulative.

Identify the main idea (independent clause) and identify the added details.

*Abraham Lincoln wept, fearing that the Union would not survive if the southern states seceded.

Cumulative (loose) sentence as a rhetorical device:

-Often times the independent clause in a cumulative sentence will focus on one idea, concept or person. The added details or string of modifiers that follow may all serve to describe that person, place or idea in one smooth sentence, rather than using a series of shorter sentences. This accumulation of modifiers that describe the main subject takes the reader into the scene as the writer experiences it, one detail at a time.

-A writer may also use a series of cumulative sentences to make the piece seem informal, relaxed or conversational.

-A cumulative sentence or a series of cumulative sentences can be used to quicken the pace of a narrative.

-Because this is an unusual sentence pattern, often times writers use it to emphasize a point, as well as to control sentence rhythm, increase tension, or create dramatic impact. It also helps a writer avoid monotony in his/her writing.

Periodic Sentence:

-A sentence in which additional details are placed at the beginning of the sentence, and the main idea comes at the end of the sentence. This is the opposite of the cumulative sentence.

Identify the main idea (independent clause) and the additional details (modifiers) in the following sentences:

*Alone in his study, lost in somber thoughts about his beloved country, dejected but not broken in spirit, Abraham Lincoln wept.

*Crossing a bare common, in snow puddles, at twilight, under a clouded sky, without having in my thoughts any occurrence of special good fortune, I have enjoyed a perfect exhilaration.

Periodic Sentence as a rhetorical device:

-Often times when vivid descriptions are given first, they engage us, so that by the end of the sentence we are anxious to know what the subject is. When we find out, we are already well informed of the subject and maybe even emotionally involved with the subject.

-Because this is an unusual sentence pattern, often times writers use it to emphasize a point, as well as to control sentence rhythm, increase tension, or create dramatic impact. It also helps a writer avoid monotony in his/her writing.

-The periodic sentence slows the pace of a piece.

Inverted Syntax (Inverted Sentence):

-In every standard English sentence pattern, the subject comes before the verb. But if a writer chooses, he or she can invert the standard sentence pattern and put the verb before the subject. This is called an inverted sentence.

Identify the verb and the subject in the following sentences:

*Everywhere was a shadow of death.

*Under them are evergreen thickets of rhododendron.

Inverted Sentence as a rhetorical device:

-Because this is an unusual sentence pattern, often times writers use it to emphasize a point, as well as to control sentence rhythm, increase tension, or create dramatic impact. It also helps a writer avoid monotony in his/her writing.

-The inverted sentence pattern slows the reader down, because it is imply more difficult to comprehend inverted word order. This can make the idea present in the sentence stand out.

Parallelism (parallel structure):

-Parallelism refers to a grammatical or structural similarity between sentences or parts of a sentence. It involves an arrangement of words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs so that elements of equal importance are equally developed and similarly phrased.

A few examples of parallelism at the WORD level:

"Why should we live with such hurry and waste of life?"

In this sentence, the words "hurry" and "waste," both nouns, follow the preposition "with"; "hurry" and "waste" are parallel.

"In eternity there is indeed something true and sublime."

In this sentence, the words "true" and "sublime," both adjectives, modify the pronoun "something"; "true" and "sublime" are parallel.

A few examples of parallelism at the PHRASE level:

"Men esteem truth remote, in the outskirts of the system, behind the farthest star, before Adam and after the last man."

To modify the adjective "remote" in this sentence, the writer uses parallel prepositional phrases; "in the outskirts," "before the farthest star," "before Adam," "after the last man."

"It has truly been said that never in history have so many educated people devoted so much attention to so few children."

In this example the writer has used three parallel noun phrases, each beginning with "so": "so many educated people" "so much attention" "so few children."

"This is more difficult, because there is no zeitgeist to read, no template to follow, no mask to wear."

In this sentence the writer used three parallel nouns each preceded by "no" and each followed by an infinitive: "no zeitgeist to read" "no template to follow" "no mask to wear."

A few examples of parallelism at the CLAUSE level:

"Where I Lived, and What I Lived For"

This title of an essay by Henry David Thoreau consists of two parallel dependent, or subordinate, clauses; one begins with "where," and the other begins with "what."

"We perceive that only great and worthy things have any permanent and absolute existence, that petty fears and petty pleasures are but the shadow of the reality."

In this example the writer has used two parallel dependent clauses, each beginning with "that" and functioning as an object of the verb "perceive."

"If we are really dying, let us hear the rattle in our throats and feel cold in the extremities; if we are alive, let us go about our business."

"In this example the writer begins with a dependent clause "If...dying" followed by an independent, or main, clause (let...extremities"; then after the semicolon, the writer presents another dependent-independent construction parallel to the first.

Define the following terms that were used in the above explanations:

Noun:

Adjective:

Adverb:

Verb:

Preposition:

Modifiers:

Prepositional phrase:

Noun phrase:

Infinitive:
Object:
Infinitive phrase:
Pronoun:

Parallelism as a rhetorical device:

Writers use parallelism on the level of the word, phrase, or clause as a rhetorical and stylistic device to emphasize ideas, to contrast ideas, or to connect ideas.

If the writer wants to show the equal worth and importance of ideas he/she will often present these ideas in the same grammatical or syntactical form.

Balanced Sentence:

- A balanced sentence is a type of parallel sentence in which two parallel elements are set off against each other like equal weights on a scale. A balanced sentence is a sentence that employs parallel structure of approximately the same length and importance. Balanced sentences are particularly effective if you have an idea that has a contrast or antithesis. Balanced sentences can then emphasize the contrast so that the rhetorical pattern reflects and supports the logical pattern.

Here are some examples of balanced sentences:

“And so my fellow Americans—ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.”

“If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich.

“It is not that today’s artists cannot pain, it is that today’s critics cannot see.”

Now, write your own balanced sentence that contains antithesis – this is also called an antithetical sentence (see definition below).

Balanced Sentence as a rhetorical device:

-Balanced sentences are particularly effective if you have an idea that has a contrast or antithesis. Balanced sentences can then emphasize the contrast so that the rhetorical pattern reflects and supports the logical pattern.

Here are some names, definitions of specific types of parallelism:

Anaphora: The deliberate repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive clauses.

Antithesis: The contrast of thoughts in two phrases, clauses, or sentences. A compound sentence which compares opposites is called an **Antithetical Sentence**.

Antimetabole: The identical or near repetition of words in one phrase or clause in reverse order in the next phrase or clause.

Zeugma: A figure of speech made when one part of speech (usually a verb, but sometimes a noun or an adjective) is related to another part of speech in a way that is consistent in terms of grammar but incongruous in terms of meaning. Such use often humorous and usually ironic.

Identify which of the above specific types of parallelism (anaphora, antithesis, antimetabole, zeugma) exist in the following sentences. Then state the rhetorical effect of the specific type of parallelism in the sentence.

*Freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed.

*But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate-filled policemen curse, kick and even kill your black brothers and sister;...when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of “nobodiness” –then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait.

*Someone sent me a T-shirt not long ago that read "Well-Behaved Women Don't Make History." They don't make good lawyers, either, or doctors or businesswomen.

*That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.

*Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.

Juxtaposition:

A rhetorical device in which normally unassociated ideas, words, or phrases are placed next to one another. Here is an example: "The apparition of these faces in the crowd; petals on a wet, black bough."

Juxtaposition as a rhetorical device:

-Most often when unassociated ideas, words, or phrases are placed next to one another, this creates an effect of surprise and/or wit.

Rhetorical Question:

This is a question that expects no answer

Here is an example: "If Mr. Ferchoff is always fair, as you have said, why did he refuse to listen to Mrs. Baldwin's arguments?"

Rhetorical Question as a rhetorical device:

-Most often these questions are used to draw attention to a point and is generally stronger than a direct statement.

Polysyndeton:

The deliberate use of a series of conjunctions.

Here is an example: "She could take up her painting. Or she could dial her friends. Or she could wait till Henry came home. Or she could go up and play with David."

In the preceding example the writer uses polysyndeton in a series of individual sentences. The result is an emphasis on the choices—the "or"—and a march like pace.

Polysyndeton as a rhetorical device:

-Often times polysyndeton is used to speed up the pace of a narration.

-Writers may also use it to emphasize individual ideas, or as in the sentence above, individual choices.

Asyndeton:

The deliberate omission of conjunctions. This is the opposite of polysyndeton.

Here is an example: "And that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

In the preceding example the writer removed conjunctions thereby separating the ideas distinctly, thus giving them greater emphasis.

Asyndeton as a rhetorical device:

-Often time asyndeton is used to slow down the pace of a narration.

-Writers may use it to emphasize individual ideas.