

CLEARWRITER'S FOUR STEPS TO STUNNING SENTENCES

How do you get from common sentences to stunning? Not by diagramming sentences, though that's a good start toward understanding a sentence's pieces. And certainly not by viewing sentences through such grammatical categories as simple, compound, or complex. We tried both, but neither led us to understand how good writers use sentence structures to make their writing sing. It was only when we began trying to identify what was unusual about a sentence—a dramatic flourish, an elegant repetition, a conversational injection—that we began to see patterns.

First, organize sentences effectively

- Organize items in a series from short to long.
- Add balance by making a series parallel.
- Structure sentences using paired conjunctions, including: both . . . and; not only . . . but also; either . . . or; just as . . . so.
- Eliminate the joining conjunction, and use a semicolon to link two independent clauses.
- Use a colon to link an elaboration or to set off an example.
- Make use of parallel structure by repeating a sentence's grammatical structure.

Second, draw attention to your main point

- Repeat a word or its root for emphasis, rather than use a synonym.
- Use an interruptive em dash (—) to draw attention to the last part of a sentence.
- Draw attention to a major point by converting a sentence or clause to a fragment.
- Reduce an independent clause to a short sentence.
- Reverse a sentence's common order for emphasis.
- Put important words first or last.

Third, involve the reader in your writing

- Switch from the declarative to the imperative.
- Convert sentences to questions or to questions and answers.

Fourth, emulate the patterns of the best sentences

- Identify patterns for compelling sentences: deft connections, stark attachments, elegant repetitions, dramatic flourishes, one-syllable openings, and conversational injections.
- Use these patterns to make your writing more dynamic.

The hard part is identifying the many patterns of compelling sentences. Fortunately, we've done the work for you. ClearWriter's online training and instructor-led workshops present dozens of patterns that you can immediately use in your writing.