Sentence Combining

We combine sentences by using various clauses and phrases to show the relationship between our ideas. The following information and exercises will review relative clauses, subordinate clauses, participial phrases, appositive phrases and absolute phrases.

**Relative Clauses**

Words like *which*, *who*, *whom*, *that*, and *whose* are called *relative pronouns* and the new structure created from using these words is a *relative clause*. *Which* is used to refer to people or things. *That* is used to refer only to things.

Using a relative clause can tighten up sentence structure, thereby making the meaning more concise. It is one way of avoiding short, simple sentences.

*eg.* The peasant farmers still work in the ancient ways of their ancestors. The peasant farmers till the Nile Delta. The peasant farmers who till the Nile Delta still work in the ancient ways of their ancestors.

Relative clauses can also strengthen paragraph structure.

*eg.* The Norway rat is regarded by experts as the most destructive mammal on earth and the most adaptive to changing situations and environments. It abounds in the debris of North American cities, resisting all attempts to control it. The Norway rat actually reached this country on the ships of many nations.

The final sentence is out of place, disrupting the continuity of the paragraph. The focus of the paragraph is on the rat's adaptability, not on its origin. Making the final sentence into a relative clause, modifying the term Norway rat, will lessen its importance and tighten the structure of the paragraph.

*eg.* The Norway rat, which actually reached this country on the ships of many nations, is regarded by experts as the most destructive mammal on earth and the most adaptive to changing situations etc.

Sometimes a relative clause is useful for emphasis within a sentence.

Consider the following two sentences:

**Jupiter**, which has eleven moons, *is the largest planet in the solar system.*

**Jupiter**, which is the largest planet in the solar system, *has eleven moons,*
In sentence one, the most emphatic point is that Jupiter is the largest planet, as that fact is contained in the independent clause. In the second sentence, the eleven moons is emphasized most because the other information is contained in the relative clause, which is subordinate or dependent.

Exercise I

Print out the following exercise to complete it. Combine the following sentences with a relative clause, deciding which point you want to emphasize.

A.  
   1. The Chinese character "hau" combines the symbol for "woman" with the symbol for "boy".  
   2. The Chinese character "hau" means "good".

B.  
   1. The Autobahn was built by Hitler to transport tanks and troops to Germany's borders in World War II.  
   2. The Autobahn is still one of the world's finest highway systems.

C.  
   1. The tests do not measure genuine intellectual ability.  
   2. Colleges use the tests to screen applications for admission.
Subordinate Clauses

The same two sentences combined differently can make different points.
Suppose you want to make these two observations:

a) Some species of whales are nearing extinction.

b) Many countries refuse to accept even a partial ban on whale hunting.

To suggest that these two sentences are logically related but that neither has more weight than the other, you can combine them with a connective such as yet or so:

Some species of whales are nearing extinction, yet many countries refuse to accept even a partial ban on whale hunting.

Suppose, however, that you want to emphasize one statement more than the other. If, for example, you are writing an essay about the lack of international cooperation in environmental protection, the point to emphasize is that many countries are unwilling to accept a ban on whaling. Main points generally go into main (independent) clauses. Thus, sentence b) becomes the main clause, and the observation about the predicament of some species of whales is changed into a subordinate (dependent) clause to supplement or qualify the main statement:

(Although, Though, Even though, While) some species of whales are nearing extinction, many countries refuse to accept even a partial ban on whale hunting.

The subordinate clause is introduced by a subordinating word which expresses a specific relationship between the meaning of the subordinate clause and that of the main clause.

Let’s suppose that your paper is not about protecting the whales but about the whales themselves, or the growing threat to many species. In this context, you will want to focus on sentence a):

(Because, Since, In view of the fact that) many countries refuse to accept even a partial ban on whale hunting, some species of whales are nearing extinction.
You can make a subordinate clause out of any simple sentence, as long as you link its meaning in some logical way to the meaning of another sentence. **The choice of which sentence to subordinate must be guided by your purpose.** Some of the most common subordinators are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONDITION</th>
<th>PLACE</th>
<th>DEGREE</th>
<th>CONTRAST</th>
<th>TIME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>if provided that in case assuming</td>
<td>where wherever</td>
<td>in as much as in so far as to the extent that</td>
<td>although even though</td>
<td>when whenever as long as while since before after until</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Reason**

- because
- since
- considering
- that

**Contrast**

- although
- even though

**Time**

- when
- whenever
- as long as
- while
- since
- before
- after
- until
Exercise II

Print out the following exercise to complete it. In each set below, combine the sentences into a single sentence that contains at least one subordinate clause. Try to place the subordinate clause in different positions in the sentence. Where possible, try out different connectives.

A.
1. Many liberal arts graduates will have difficulty finding employment.
2. They are willing to accept work outside their major areas.
3. The economic situation becomes more favourable.

B.
1. Kamikaze pilots flew their missions.
2. They cut off a finger or a lock of hair.
3. They sent it as a memento to their mothers or wives or lovers.
Participle Phrases

The simple sentences below may be combined, with no change in their meaning, into a more concise sentence simply by dropping the repeated words he was.

a) The janitor staggered down the stairway.
   b) He was stunned.
   c) He was gasping.

Here, compactness is achieved by reducing sentences b) and c) to the participles "stunned" and "gasping". **Stunned**, like kicked, sung or bit is a past participle.

**Gasping**, like running or dancing, is a present participle, always formed by adding "ing" to the basic verb form.

A participle is often supported by additional words built around it and adding detail to it. Together these form a participial phrase such as equipped with a can of throat spray or singing songs that the Beatles had made famous.

Although more concise than a sequence of three simple sentences, the sentence -- The janitor staggered down the stairway, stunned and gasping -- still gives you the bare skeleton of an idea. **Participial phrases enable you to include concrete details into your sentences without actually increasing the number of sentences needed.**

The janitor staggered down the stairway, stunned by the strange noises he had just heard upstairs, and gasping for air as he hesitantly held on to the bannister.

When to Use Past, and When to Use Present

In the example of the janitor, **stunned** suggests the past cause of the staggering, whereas **gasping** refers to an action simultaneous to the staggering.

**Participial phrases are especially suitable for suggesting live, animated action, as well as for describing events that take place simultaneously.** Consider the difference in these two sentences:

1. Water lifted her body, caressed it, and carried her out into a misty sea.
2. Water lifted her body, caressing it, and carrying her out into a misty sea.

**Combine the following sentences by using a participial phrase.**

1. I carried the cumbersome bass drum in front of me.

2. I burrowed and jostled my way through the stubborn crowd to the bandstand.

**Exercise III**

Print out the following exercise to complete it.

Combine each sequence of sentences into a single sentence, using participial phrases.

A.

1. It was a battered face.
2. It was a noble face.
3. It commanded immediate respect.

B.

1. Prosecutor, judge, and jury were convinced of the defendant's guilt.
2. They twisted the facts to support their prejudgment.

C.

1. Mandy was covered with mud.
2. Mandy was shivering.
3. Mandy sat hunched over a bowl of hot broth.
4. Her father had prepared the broth to drive off the chill.
Appositives Phrases

The usual way to define or identify something is by saying what it is:
Mr. Howe is my favorite professor.
Sharks are streamlined swimmers and bloodhounds of the sea.

Often full sentences like these are appropriate. But sometimes definition-like details about a noun are more effectively and economically expressed by using an **appositive**. An appositive is the equivalent of a noun and is placed beside that noun to explain it further. It is almost always set off by commas.

Mr. Howe, **my favorite professor**, has received a Distinguished Teacher Award.
Sharks, streamlined swimmers and bloodhounds of the sea, are equipped with an extraordinary sense of smell.

Appositives help reduce the number of clauses and, at the same time, make the remaining clauses fuller and more compact.

Look at two of the many options for combining the following three sentences. Which one do you prefer?

She is an excellent, all-round student with a congenial personality.
She is a promising candidate for WOW.
WOW is an international scholarship program for outstanding women around the world.
Since she is an excellent, all-round student with a congenial personality, she is a promising candidate for WOW, which is an international scholarship program for outstanding women around the world.
(subordinate clause + main clause + relative clause)

OR

An excellent, all-round student with a congenial personality, she is a promising candidate for WOW, an international scholarship program for outstanding women around the world. (appositive + main clause + appositive)

The second sentence more concisely states the same idea that, in the first sentence, requires the connectives *since* and *which*. By replacing clauses, the appositives seem to make the second sentence move more briskly. "Appositive" means being positioned next to something, usually a noun. It does not make any difference where the noun happens to be located in the sentence.
The most common position for the appositive is immediately after the noun, but the appositive can also precede the noun, often at the beginning of the sentence.

A free-lance preacher from the West Coast, Joe Pippin has been repeatedly denied a speaking permit by the university.

By beginning with an unusual detail about Joe’s identity, you can arouse the reader’s interest. Short appositives placed at the end can be striking and will be remembered for their punch line effect.

Half an hour later, the second diver returned with the same report -- nothing.

There was one court order the neighbourhood refused to accept -- busing.

Although appositives are normally nouns or nounlike structures, adjectives used in the appositive position can be just as effective in conveying descriptive details.

He revealed himself to be just what he seemed to be -- low-key, honest, and loving.

Unhappy with their lives, defiant of authority, eager to find a sense of family in communal settings, a giant wave of youth counterculture rolled across the North American continent.
Exercise IV

Print out the following exercise to complete it.

Combine each sequence of sentences below into a single sentence with at least one appositive.

A.
1. Pet owners upset by soaring veterinary costs can now register for Medipet.
2. Medipet is a prepaid insurance plan for dogs and cats.

B.
1. Nairobi's railroad station is the starting point for East Africa's most travelled passenger train.
2. East Africa's most travelled passenger train is the overnight express to Kenya's port on the Indian Ocean.

C.
1. Casanova was a seducer.
2. Casanova was a charlatan.
3. Casanova was a dabbler in Black Magic.
4. Casanova was that most magnetic of figures.
5. Casanova was a legend with nothing lofty about him.
Absolute Phrases

One of the ways of connecting the following two sentences is with an absolute. An absolute is a phrase consisting of a noun + a modifier.

Marie was sitting at her desk.
Her head was slightly lowered over a pile of chemistry notes.
Marie was sitting at her desk, her head slightly lowered over a pile of chemistry notes.

The phrases "her head slightly lowered over a pile of chemistry notes" is an absolute, a group of words that is almost, but not quite a sentence. An absolute has a full subject but only part of a predicate (verb), often only a participle. Absolutes are especially appropriate for focusing on parts of a whole, in this case for shifting from a general description to specific details.

Marie was sitting at her desk, her head slightly lowered, her hands clasped, her feet tapping the floor gently.

Aside from adding details, absolutes can be used to suggest a relationship of cause and effect.

The stern of the battleship was torn apart by torpedoes.
The battleship slowly sank into the Pacific.

You could combine these two sentences by using a subordinate clause beginning with because:

Because its stern was torn by torpedoes, the battleship sank into the Pacific.

But sometimes this cause-effect can be more concisely expressed by an absolute.

Its stern torn apart by torpedoes, the battleship sank into the Pacific.

Like participles and appositives, absolutes may be used in a series, which can be particularly forceful when building toward a climax.
The arrested woman was slammed against a wall, her body frisked, her wrists handcuffed, her dignity lost.
The room was in chaos -- soiled clothes strewn on the floor, cosmetics scattered over the dresser, empty soda bottles and beer cans everywhere.
Exercise V

Print out the following exercise to complete it.

Combine each of the groups of sentences below into a single sentence containing at least one absolute.

A.
1. The photographer sits, compact, on the 30 yard line.
2. One knee is folded under his body.
3. The other knee is upright to support his elbow.

B.
1. The professor rested against the blackboard.
2. Chalk was in one hand.
3. A look of profound discouragement was in her eyes.
4. A textbook was in the other hand.
Answer Key

Exercise I

A.
1. The Chinese character "hau", **which** combines the symbol for "woman" with the symbol for "boy", means "good".  
   OR
2. The Chinese character "hau", **which** means "good", combines the symbol for "woman" with the symbol for "boy".

B.
1. The Autobahn, **which** was built by Hitler to transport troops and tanks to Germany's borders in World War II, is still one of the world's finest highway systems.  
   OR
2. The Autobahn, **which** is still one of the world's finest highway systems, was built by Hitler to transport troops and tanks to Germany's borders in World War II.

C.
1. The tests, **which** are used by colleges to screen applications for admission, do not measure genuine intellectual ability.  
   OR
2. The tests, **which** do not measure genuine intellectual ability, are used by colleges to screen applications for admission.

Exercise II

1. Many liberal arts graduates, **unless** they are willing to accept work outside their major areas, will have difficulty finding employment **until** the economic situation becomes more favourable.
2. **When/before** Kamikaze pilots flew their missions, they cut off a finger or lock of hair and sent it to their mothers or wives or lovers.

Exercise III

A.
1. The battered, noble face commanded immediate respect.  
   OR
2. The face, battered but noble, commanded immediate respect.

B.

1. The prosecutor, judge, and jury, convinced of the defendant’s guilt, twisted the facts to support their judgment.
   
   OR

2. The prosecutor, judge, and jury, twisting the facts to support their judgment, were convinced of the defendant’s guilt.

C.

1. Mandy, shivering and mud covered, sat hunched over a bowl of broth that her father had prepared to drive off the chill.
   
   OR

2. Mandy, hunched over a bowl of broth prepared by her father to drive off the chill, was shivering and covered with mud.

**Exercise IV**

A. Pet owners upset by soaring veterinary costs can now register for Medipet, a prepaid insurance plan for dogs and cats.

B. Nairobi’s railroad station is the starting point for East Africa’s most travelled passenger train, the overnight express, to Mombaso, Kenya’s port on the Indian Ocean.

C. Casanova, a magnetic seducer, charlatan and dabbler in Black Magic, was a legend with nothing lofty about him.
   
   OR

Casanova, a legend with nothing lofty about him, was a seducer, a charlatan, and a dabbler in Black Magic.

**Exercise V**

A. The photographer sits, compact, on the 30 yard line, one knee folded under his body, the other knee upright to support his elbow.

B. The professor, a look of profound discouragement in her eyes, rested against the blackboard, chalk in one hand and a textbook in the other.