

Lesson 5.1

Don't Repeat Unless You Mean It!

Following are two short passages by different writers:

Example 1

He looked in the mirror when he left the house. He looked in the mirror when he got into the car. He looked in the mirror in the lobby of the hotel. And when he entered his room, before he turned to give the bellman a tip for carrying the luggage, he looked in the mirror once again.

Example 2

I have a hard time with computers. I like word processing, but I find other things difficult. I have trouble with spreadsheets or charts of any kind. I also have trouble with forms in general.

.....

One of these writers used repetition on purpose, for emphasis. Which one? How do you know? A little repetition, used to make a point, can be highly effective. Most of the time, however, variety adds to fluency in much the same way that several different types of food can make a dinner party more interesting.

Sharing an Example: *After Hamelin*

In *After Hamelin*, author Bill Richardson uses the legend of the Pied Piper as a springboard for a new, imaginative tale. This book tells the story of Penelope, who awakens on her eleventh birthday to discover she's lost her hearing. The Pied Piper, who rid her city of rats, was never paid the gold he'd been promised. As revenge, he uses his hypnotic music to lure the children of Hamelin away, but Penelope, who cannot hear his song, is left behind. Read the passage quietly to yourself, highlighting the first two or three words of each sentence.

I am a harper's daughter. In our house, for as long as I could remember, the thrum and ring of the harp had been as common a sound as the clatter of dishes or the slamming of a door. Everyone knew there was no harper finer than my father. Banquets, festivals, state occasions: none would be complete if the virtuoso Govan were not on hand to strike the harp.

His fame was widespread. Apprentices came from near and far to study with him. There was always a young man staying in our attic room. Sometimes, if they were homesick, they would talk in their sleep. I would wake in the night and hear them moaning sad-sounding words in Italian, Spanish, Welsh, Portuguese. Not even the Plague kept them away. They were willing to put up with rats gnawing their shoes and chewing their strings so they might learn to play, and also learn how to make the harps for which my father was so celebrated.

From far and near they came, with all their talent and all their yearning. But no one, no matter how gifted, was able to convince a harp to sing as true as Govan. And no one, no matter how diligently he worked, was able to make a harp with a voice as pure as one crafted by the master. The Maestro. That is what

they called Govan. The Maestro. He could charm the music out of wood. No one, Govan least of all, could explain how he awakened the melody in balsam or beech or fir.

After Hamelin
by Bill Richardson

Reflection

Take a moment to read just the words you highlighted. How much variety did you notice in the beginnings of Bill Richardson's sentences?

- A great deal of variety
- Some variety
- Almost no variety

Now read the whole passage aloud. Do you hear any sentence repetition? Put an "R" in the margin where you notice repetition in the way sentences are formed. What point (or points) is the author trying to emphasize?

Looking for Variety

What about your favorite writers? Do they vary their sentences a lot, a little, or scarcely at all? Let's find out. Look through one of your favorite books and identify a passage to share aloud with your writing circle. Look for a passage that illustrates the following.

- A lot of variety—many different sentence beginnings
- Repetition with a purpose, done to make a point

Rehearse your passage. Then share it aloud with your circle. Tell them to comment on what they like and why they think you chose that particular passage. Choose one passage from your circle to share with the whole class.

A One-Sentence Warm-Up

How many different ways are there to write a given sentence?

- Two or three
- Half a dozen
- Any number, depending on the writer's skill and imagination

If you chose the third option, good job! Now we have a challenge for you. See how many different ways you can write this sentence in just two minutes. You can change the wording and the word order but not the main message. Use scratch paper. Read it aloud quietly to yourself to get your mind thinking. When your teacher says "Go," begin your revisions. Be creative!

My team hit and pitched the best it had all year and won the game, one to zero.

Revising a Whole Passage

Now that you've seen how much can be done with just one sentence, try your hand at a whole passage. Before you read or revise, underline or highlight the first three or four words of each sentence. Then read the passage aloud to get a sense of the message, as well as the rhythm and flow. Make any changes you think will improve sentence variety and overall fluency. You don't need to rewrite. We left room for revision on the page.

The Softball Championship Series

My softball team advanced to the championship series for the first time in school history. We had to travel to Sacramento, California, for the big tournament. My team was so excited to get to play for the title, even after we found out which teams were in our bracket. We had to win our first two games against teams who had won the tournament nine of the last ten years. We decided to use this as our motivation rather than let it discourage us.



My team's first game was against the current champion, a team from Texas. We really came through when it counted. My team hit and pitched the best it had all year and won the game, one to zero. We used this big win to propel us through our other games. My softball team won the rest of its games to earn the chance to play for the title. We fought hard in the championship, but we lost a tough game, six to one.

Share and Compare

Meet with a partner or in a writing circle to share your revisions. Read slowly so you can compare each writer's sentence beginnings with your own. Check each of the following strategies used by you or anyone else in your circle.

- Changing a sentence beginning
- Flipping a sentence around to reverse the order
- Changing the wording
- Combining sentences
- Shortening a sentence, or breaking it into smaller sentences
- Deleting a sentence

Creating Variety

Step 1: As a final step in this lesson, you'll write and revise a fluent piece of your own. Fluency improves when a writer cares about the topic. So choose something that's on your mind right now or use the following list to help you think of an idea.

★ My topic _____

- No fair
- Now or never
- Seeing things differently
- Best friend ever

Step 2: Take five minutes for prewriting. You might complete any of the following.

- Make a sketch
- List readers' questions
- List details
- Make a word web

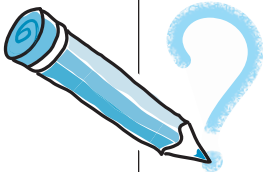
OR do anything that puts your thinking in motion.

Step 3: Write nonstop for 15 minutes. As much as possible, try to begin each sentence in a slightly different way *unless* you are repeating for emphasis!

Share and Revise

Before sharing, read your own writing aloud, underlining or highlighting the first three or four words of each sentence. Then share your writing aloud with a partner, who should listen for repetition. Does his or her impression confirm what your eyes tell you, looking at the passages you marked?

After sharing, take five minutes for revision, changing any sentences that don't sound quite right. Trust your ears to tell you what works.



A Writer's Questions

It probably isn't natural for most writers to start *every* sentence differently, even though we asked you to try that in this lesson. Does every sentence need to begin differently? Or could beginning even some sentences differently improve fluency significantly?



Putting It to the Test

In on-demand writing, too much sentence similarity can have a deadly effect. Why might this be the case? What can you do to prevent it?