

Lesson 5.2

Tuning In to Variety

Variety doesn't work with everything. If some hours ran 60 minutes while others ran 47.5 minutes, our days would be difficult to organize. Writing, however, thrives on variety, especially when it comes to sentence length and structure. Too much unintentional repetition creates a monotonous rhythm that makes readers tune out. Variety wakes readers up like a new song on the radio. In this lesson, you will practice varying sentence length in order to keep readers tuned in to your message.

Sharing an Example: *The Time Machine*

In the following passage, the time traveler buckles into his machine and embarks on his first leap into the future. Read the passage aloud, paying particular attention to the sentence fluency. Then read it once more, noticing sentence lengths and beginnings.

I took the starting lever in one hand and the stopping one in the other, pressed the first, and almost immediately the second. I seemed to reel. I felt a nightmare sensation of falling; and, looking round, I saw the laboratory exactly as before. Had anything happened? Then I noted the clock. A moment before it had stood at a minute or so past ten. Now it was nearly half-past three!

I drew a breath, set my teeth, gripped the starting lever with both hands, and went off with a thud. The night came like the turning out of a lamp, and in another moment came tomorrow. The laboratory grew faint and hazy, then fainter and ever fainter.

Tomorrow night came black, then day again, night again, day again, faster and faster still.

The Time Machine
by H.G. Wells

Respond

From your perspective as a reader, rate the fluency of this passage from **1** (repetitive and hard to read) to **10** (highly varied and easy to read):

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

What Else Did You Notice?

Without looking back, make your best guess about each of the following:

- How many sentences begin in different ways?
☐ all ☐ most ☐ very few
- How many words are in the shortest sentence? _____
- How many words are in the longest sentence? _____
- What is the writer writing about *mainly*? _____
- Is there a topic sentence in this passage? _____

Share and Compare

Compare your responses with a partner or in a writing circle. Also compare your ratings (**1** to **10**). Then, with the class, review the passage and discuss the variety and fluency.

Analyze to Revise

Here's another passage to analyze. Read it aloud, softly, to yourself. As you read, ask yourself, *Is this easy to read? How fluent is it? What could make it stronger?*

Prisoner of the Food Channel

I think I could be a neglected child. I think I am technology-neglected. I think *my* parents are technology-challenged. We have only one computer. We have no electronic games. We have only one TV in our house. We keep it in the family room. We don't even have a flat screen. I don't have a TV in *my* room. *My* friends all have TVs in their rooms. *My* parents think TV time should be family time. We might as well live back in the 1950s. We need to come into the 21st Century. I would like one TV just for *me*. I could watch things I like. I would not have to watch cooking shows. Anything is better than the Food Channel.

Respond

Rate the fluency of the TV passage from **1** (repetitive and choppy) to **10** (highly varied and readable—a gem of fluency):

1**2****3****4****5****6****7****8****9****10**

What Else Did You Notice?

Answer the following questions without looking back at the Food Channel piece. When you've answered them, go back to see if your first impressions were right.

- How many sentences begin in different ways?
 - ☐ Every single one—the variety was amazing!
 - ☐ Most—the only repetition was for special effect.
 - ☐ Very few—the repetition got tiresome.

- About how many words were in the shortest sentence? _____
- About how many words were in the longest sentence? _____
- What is this writer writing about *mainly*? _____

- Is there a topic sentence? _____

Share and Compare

Compare your responses with a partner or in a writing circle. Also compare your ratings (**1** to **10**). Then, discuss the fluency of this passage as a class.

Make a Plan

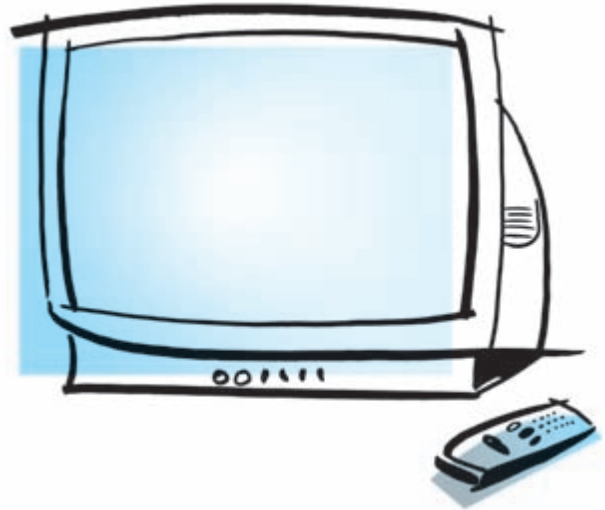
With your partner or in a writing circle, make a plan for revising “Prisoner of the Food Channel.” What are the main strategies you need to apply to make this piece fluent? Jot down three or four ideas.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Putting Your Strategies to Work

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Work together on a revision of “Prisoner of the Food Channel,” putting your strategies to work. Remember to quietly read aloud to yourself as you go. Your goal is to make the passage as fluent and readable as possible. Imagine someone reading it for the very first time with ease.



Share and Compare

Share your revision of “Prisoner of the Food Channel” with another group or the whole class. Discuss the strategies you used to bring out the fluency. Did your revisions also influence the voice of the piece?

Writing with Fluency

Choosing a Topic

Revising the work of others can influence the way you write as you draft. Try it and see. First, choose a topic from our list or—better yet—come up with your own. Pick something you can write on quickly and easily, something about which you have a lot to say. We kept our topics broad so you can narrow them to suit yourself:

- The unfairness of it all
- It turned out to be a myth
- A true legend
- I remember it well . . . OR
- My own idea: _____

Planning and Drafting

Once you have your topic clearly in mind, take about 5 minutes to plan your writing. Make a sketch or idea web, list some questions you plan to answer, list details you want to remember, or do any kind of planning that works for you. With a plan at your side, write steadily for 15 minutes or more. Keep the ideas flowing—and go for variety. Be daring. Start some sentences in ways you never tried before.

Share and Compare

Share your draft with your partner or writing circle. Read aloud with expression, and let your teammates know what you'd like them to listen for. As a listener, pay close attention to fluency and comment on the variety you hear.



A Writer's Questions

In this lesson, you focused on revising a draft for fluency. By doing this, did you also strengthen other traits—ideas, voice, or word choice, for example? What does this tell you about the process of revision?



Putting It to the Test

In on-demand writing, writers are not always given true revision time. Often, *revision* means simply reading over a draft and correcting obvious errors, such as misspelled or missing words. If you found yourself in such a situation and you wanted to be sure to weave some sentence variety into your writing, what could you do to make this happen?