

In each of these passages, the simile is so placed as to bring out the meaning more forcibly, as well as more clearly, than if placed either at the beginning or at the end.

SECTION III.

EASE.

In the arrangement, as well as in the choice and the number, of words in a sentence, attention should be paid not only to clearness and force, but also to EASE. With a view to ease, a skilful writer so places words, phrases, and clauses that there is no jar or interruption, and no false emphasis. In this matter it is impossible to prescribe rules that will be of much service to the student of composition; but he may get a little help from a few general suggestions accompanied by examples that point out some of the obstacles to the attainment of ease and some of the ways in which they may be overcome.

Ease prohibits an arrangement that throws the emphasis *on*, and thus causes a suspension of the sense *at*, a particle or other unimportant word (as in this sentence). Such an arrangement is hostile to clearness, for it obliges the mind to halt at the very points which it would naturally hurry over; it is also hostile to force, for it emphasizes words that do not "deserve distinction"¹ at the expense of those that do. Examples of this fault are:—

"I have often spoken to you upon matters kindred *to*, or, at any rate, not distantly connected *with*, my subject for this Easter."²

¹ This happy phrase is Professor Barrett Wendell's. See "English Composition," pages 102, 103.

² Helps: Social Pressure, chap. iii.

... "the two youths had been long engaged to drive *with*, and keep the birthday *of*, Mr. Cornelius O'Shane, the king of the Black Islands."¹

"He was quizzed and bespattered and made a fool of, just as *though*, or rather worse than *if*, he had been a constant enemy instead of a constant friend."²

"When the memoirs and correspondence of Sir Robert Peel are published, a disclosure, it is believed, will take place which will furnish a fresh illustration *of*, if it does not throw new light *on* the characters, of the two eminent men concerned."³

"Eighty-five years ago to-day the sun shone *on* and the wintry winds sang *to* a gray old house beside a bleak hillside in Haverhill town."⁴

"The loss of so important an aid to the intelligent and living apprehension of a truth, as is afforded by the necessity of explaining it *to*, or defending it *against*, opponents, though not sufficient to outweigh, is no trifling drawback *from*, the benefit of its universal recognition."⁵

The question whether the last word in a sentence should be a particle or a longer and more important word is usually a question of ease.

How to end a sentence.

We may write: (1) "These were the authorities which he referred to or commented upon," or (2) "These were the authorities to which he referred or upon which he commented;" (1) "Mr. Mill was, I believe, the first who distinctly characterized the ambiguity, and pointed out how many errors in the received systems of philosophy it has had to answer for,"⁶ or (2) "for how many errors . . . it has had to answer;" (1) "It is a fun-

¹ Miss Edgeworth: Ormond, chap. i.

² Anthony Trollope: Barchester Towers, vol. ii. chap. v. Tauchnitz edition.

³ The Political Adventures of Lord Beaconsfield. The Fortnightly Review, June, 1878, p. 880.

⁴ American newspaper.

⁵ J. S. Mill: On Liberty.

⁶ Ibid.: A System of Logic, book i. chap. iv. sect. i.

damental principle in logic, that the power of framing classes is unlimited, as long as there is any (even the smallest) difference to found a distinction upon,"¹ or (2) "upon which to found a distinction;" (1) "The progress of knowledge pointed out limits to them, or showed their truth to be contingent upon some other circumstance not originally attended to,"² or (2) "to which attention was not originally paid."

In each of these cases, the more formal structure would be preferred by some writers, the less formal by others; but there are cases in which the less formal would be chosen by many, if not all, authors who wish to write with ease. Such cases are the following:—

"But, in truth, cats are a slandered people; they have more affection in them than the world commonly gives them credit for."³

... "after all the chief stimulus of good style is to possess a full, rich, complex matter to grapple with."⁴

"But are you sure, — I am not, — that I am such stuff as an English lady should be made of?"⁵

"I should have remembered how a title would shine out in such a hole as this," says the Master, white as a sheet: "no matter how unjustly come by."⁶

"Even a person unacquainted with the noble remains of ancient orators, may judge, from a few strokes, that the style or species of their eloquence was infinitely more sublime than that which modern orators aspire to."⁷

¹ J. S. Mill: A System of Logic, book i. chap. vii. sect. iv.

² Ibid., book iii. chap. iv. sect. ii. See also Marsh: Lectures on the English Language, lect. vii.

³ Irving: Bracebridge Hall; Dolph Heyliger.

⁴ Pater: Appreciations; Style.

⁵ Anthony Trollope: The Duke's Children, vol. iii. chap. xv. Tauchnitz edition.

⁶ Stevenson: The Master of Ballantrae, chap. x.

⁷ Hume: Essays; Of Eloquence.

Sentences like those just quoted do not contravene the principle which forbids a writer to throw stress on unimportant words; for in these sentences, as any one who reads them aloud will perceive, the stress is thrown, not on the last word, but on the next to the last. They show too that the less formal way of ending a sentence is especially suited to familiar writing. "This form of sentence," writes Hallam, "is, in my opinion, sometimes emphatic and spirited, though its frequent use appears slovenly. I remember my late friend, Mr. Richard Sharp, whose good taste is well known, used to quote an interrogatory of Hooker: 'Shall there be a God to swear by, and none to pray to?' as an instance of the force which this arrangement, so eminently idiomatic, sometimes gives."¹

In some cases opinions may differ as to the choice of form. For example:—

"Now, we feel lively interest when a veteran statesman or soldier gives us his recollections of stirring events in which in his younger days he had taken part."²

This sentence as quoted by Mr. Earle is certainly clumsy, in consequence of the juxtaposition of the two *in's*; but some writers might hesitate between the form he suggests — "events which in his younger days he had taken part in" — and this form, "events in which he had taken part in his younger days."

The foregoing examples go to show that the question whether to end a sentence with a particle or with a more important word is wholly a question of adapting means to end. A practised writer will, in every case, instinctively choose that way which suits his immediate purpose.

¹ Hallam: Introduction to the Literature of Europe in the Fifteenth, Sixteenth, and Seventeenth Centuries, part iv. chap. vii. note.

² Quoted by John Earle: English Prose, chap. vii.

In a sentence which contains qualifying or parenthetical expressions, ease requires that these expressions be so arranged that the sentence shall run smoothly from beginning to end. Such a sentence is that from Lord Shaftesbury's "Advice to an Author," already quoted as an example of clearness in arrangement:—

Position of
adverbial and
parenthetical
expressions.

"If, whilst they profess only to please, they secretly advise, and give instruction, they may now, perhaps, as well as formerly, be esteemed, with justice, the best and most honourable among authors."¹

The following sentences are examples of awkward arrangement:—

"That is not an unwise attitude to take . . . for it makes of the Bulgarian Army the steel tip as against Russia of the great Ottoman spear."²

In its present position, the phrase "as against Russia" offends against ease. It would not have this effect if it were placed either after "for" or after "army."

"He was regular, as became a pilgrim, in his devotional exercises."³

In its present position, the expression "as became a pilgrim" obstructs the flow of the sentence. It would not have this effect if it were placed either at the beginning or at the end of the sentence.

"I have ventured to give to the foreign word *Renaissance*—destined to become of more common use amongst us, as the movement which it denotes comes, as it will come, increasingly to interest us—an English form."⁴

This sentence—already quoted for a different purpose⁵—is clumsy in consequence of the length of the parenthetical clause. It

¹ Blair: Lectures on Rhetoric, lect. xii. See pages 182, 183.

² The [London] Spectator, June 23, 1894, p. 841.

³ Scott: The Talisman, chap. v.

⁴ Matthew Arnold: Culture and Anarchy, sect. iv. note.

⁵ See page 35.

would be better to say, "I have ventured to give an English form to," etc. It is to be noticed, however, that the effect of this change is to remove the important words "an English form" from the emphatic position at the end of the sentence.

The sentences cited exemplify a frequent offence against ease,—that caused by the separation of words which belong together in meaning, such as subject and verb, verb and object, noun and pronoun, principal and qualifying expression. Sometimes, as in the amended form of Mr. Arnold's sentence, the order which conduces to ease conduces also to clearness, but not to force. This is true of a sentence which Mr. Spencer uses as an example of defective arrangement:—

"A modern newspaper-statement, though probably true, would be laughed at, if quoted in a book as testimony; but the letter of a court gossip is thought good historical evidence, if written some centuries ago."

This sentence Mr. Spencer would rearrange so as to make it read thus:—

"Though probably true, a modern newspaper-statement quoted in a book as testimony, would be laughed at; but the letter of a court gossip, if written some centuries ago, is thought good historical evidence."¹

In point of force, Mr. Spencer's sentence is preferable to the original; for the important words in each clause are in the emphatic place. In point of ease, however, as well as of clearness, the original seems the better.

In the first of the following sentences parenthetical expressions are so badly arranged, in the second they are so numerous, as to offend against both clearness and ease:—

"In every one of those masterly sentences of Flaubert there was, below all mere contrivance, shaping and afterthought, by some happy instantaneous concourse of the various faculties of

¹ Herbert Spencer: The Philosophy of Style.

the mind with each other, the exact apprehension of what was needed to carry the meaning."¹

"In lieu of our *half-pickled* Sundays, or *quite fresh* boiled beef on Thursdays (strong as *caro equina*), with detestable marigolds floating in the pail to poison the broth—our scanty mutton scraggs on Fridays, — and rather more savoury, but grudging, portions of the same flesh, rotten-roasted or rare, on the Tuesdays (the only dish which excited our appetites, and disappointed our stomachs, in almost equal proportion) — he had his hot plate of roast veal, or the more tempting griskin (exotics unknown to our palates), cooked in the paternal kitchen (a great thing), and brought him daily by his maid or aunt!"²

The imitation of an arrangement natural to Latin, Greek, or German, but foreign to English, is an offence against ease, — an offence committed sometimes in ignorance, sometimes by design.

The offence may consist in the adoption of compound expressions unusual in English. For example:—

"Now you must know, that from the last conversation that passed between my aunt and me, it comes out, that this sudden vehemence on my brother's and sister's parts, was owing to stronger reasons than to *the college-begun antipathy* on his side, or to slighted love on hers."³

. . . "*the earliest learnt and oftenest used words* will, other things equal, call up images with less loss of time and energy than *their later learnt synonyms*."⁴

"Considering then the writings and fame of Sir W. Hamilton as the great fortress of the intuitional philosophy in this country, a fortress the more formidable from the imposing character, and *the in many respects great personal merits and mental endowments*, of the man."⁵

¹ Pater: *Appreciations*; *Style*.

² Charles Lamb: *Essays of Elia*; *Christ's Hospital Five-and-Thirty Years Ago*.

³ Richardson: *Clarissa Harlowe*, vol. i. letter xiii.

⁴ Herbert Spencer: *The Philosophy of Style*.

⁵ J. S. Mill: *Autobiography*, chap. vii. Quoted in John Earle's "*English Prose*," chap. vii.

The offence may consist in the adoption of a form of artificial arrangement which has been called "Johnsonese."

"His [Johnson's] letters from the Hebrides to Mrs. Thrale are the original of that work of which the *Journey to the Hebrides* is the translation; and it is amusing to compare the two versions. 'When we were taken upstairs,' says he in one of his letters, 'a dirty fellow bounced out of the bed on which one of us was to lie.' This incident is recorded in the *Journey* as follows: 'Out of one of the beds on which we were to repose started up, at our entrance, a man black as a Cyclops from the forge.'¹

Macaulay cites these two ways of saying the same thing as illustrative of Dr. Johnson's preference for fine words over the "simple, energetic, and picturesque" ones that were at his command; and certainly the word "bounced" gives to the first version a life which is absent from the second. In the second version, however, "the style is characterized as unidiomatic, quite as much by the suspension of the sense, in consequence of the complicated inversion, 'Out of one of the beds started up, at our entrance, a man,' as by the selection of the words which compose it."² The first version follows the order in which one would naturally tell the story; the second is unnatural in prose, and especially so in the account of so simple an incident.

Miss Burney in her later novels out-Johnsons Johnson at his worst.

"Never was writer," says a recent critic, "so bent on putting words out of their natural order as Miss Burney. The trick becomes unpleasant to the eye; still more so to the ear, if 'Cecilia' be read aloud. . . . Still we fancy that she considered inversion to be ornamental, nay, dignified, and did not consciously affect a French arrangement of words as being French. What she came to in 'Camilla' is so insufferable, that, on finding this simple sentence 'Thus lived and died another week,' we copied it at once as being the best in the five volumes."³

¹ Macaulay: *Essays*; *Boswell's Life of Johnson*.

² Marsh: *Lectures on the English Language*, lect. vii.

³ Annie Raine Ellis: *Preface to Miss Burney's "Cecilia"*.

An example from Miss Burney shows what this critic means:—
 “Mr. Morrice, without ceremony, attacked his fair neighbour; he talked of her journey, and the prospects of gaiety which it opened to her view; but by these finding her unmoved, he changed his theme, and expatiated upon the delights of the spot she was quitting.”¹

Examples from other authors are:—

“As soon as Mrs. Dashwood had recovered herself, to see Marianne was her first desire.”²

“But when . . . she heard him declare that of music and dancing he was passionately fond, she gave him such a look of approbation as secured the largest share of his discourse to herself for the rest of his stay.”³

“Of breakfast she had been kept by her fears, and of dinner by their sudden reverse, from eating much.”⁴

Except in “Sense and Sensibility,” such constructions are very rare in Miss Austen.

“‘Mind and matter,’ said the lady in the wig, ‘glide swift into the vortex of immensity. Howls the sublime, and softly sleeps the calm Ideal, in the whispering chambers of Imagination. To hear it, sweet it is. But then, outlaughs the stern philosopher, and saith to the Grotesque, ‘What, ho!’”⁵

“Galloped up the winding steep of Canobia the Sheikh Said Djinblat.”⁶

“Came slowly, on steeds dark as night, up the winding steep of Canobia, with a company of twenty men on foot armed with muskets and handjars, the two ferocious brothers Abuneked, Nasif and Hamood. Pale is the cheek of the daughters of Maron at the fell name of Abuneked.”⁶

“Stole over his spirit the countenance august, with the flowing beard and the lordly locks, . . . stole over the spirit of the gazing

¹ Miss Burney: Cecilia, vol. i. chap. ii.

² Miss Austen: Sense and Sensibility, vol. ii. chap. xviii.

³ Ibid., vol. i. chap. x.

⁴ Ibid., vol. ii. chap. xvi.

⁵ Dickens: Martin Chuzzlewit, chap. xxxiv.

⁶ Disraeli: Tancred, book v. chap. ii.

pilgrim, each shape of that refined and elegant hierarchy made for the worship of clear skies and sunny lands.”¹

The foreign structure of sentence was elevated by Bentham into a matter of principle. “He could not bear,” says Mill, “for the sake of clearness and the reader’s ease, to say, as ordinary men are content to do, a little more than the truth in one sentence, and correct it in the next. The whole of the qualifying remarks which he intended to make he insisted upon imbedding as parentheses in the very middle of the sentence itself. And thus the sense being so long suspended, and attention being required to the accessory ideas before the principal idea had been properly seized, it became difficult, without some practice, to make out the train of thought.”² Mr. Herbert Spencer’s³ theory of arrangement is not unlike Bentham’s, but his practice does not closely conform to his theory.

Whatever arrangement may, according to Bentham or to Mr. Spencer, be theoretically the best, the best working arrangement is that which—whether “direct” or “indirect,” “natural” or “inverted”—The natural order the best. conduces most to “clearness and the reader’s ease.” Any order which seems natural to the persons addressed is easier, as well as more forcible, than one which strikes them as strange and by its strangeness calls their attention from the substance to the form of the sentence. Writers who are most artificial in style are addicted to “harsh inversions, so widely different from those graceful and easy inversions which give variety, spirit, and sweetness to the expression of our great old writers”:⁴ those

¹ Disraeli: Tancred, book vi. chap. iii.

² J. S. Mill: Dissertations and Discussions; Bentham.

³ See “The Philosophy of Style.”

⁴ Macaulay: Essays; Boswell’s Life of Johnson.

distinguished by idiomatic ease vary the order of words in successive sentences so agreeably that attention is not called to the arrangement.

SECTION IV.

UNITY.

In some kinds of writing clearness is of special value, in others force, in others ease; in every kind of writing
 Meaning and value of unity. UNITY is of paramount importance. Every sentence, whether short or long, simple, compound, or complex, should be a unit.

That unity does not depend on the length or the complexity of a sentence the following examples will show:—

“Mr. Drummer spent a week at the World’s Fair.”

“Mr. Drummer at last went to the World’s Fair; but he was able to be there a week only.”

“Mr. Drummer would have spent more than a week at the World’s Fair if he had not been pressed by business engagements.”

“Though Mr. Drummer spent but a week at the World’s Fair, he did all that a man of his years and tastes could be expected to do: he saw the buildings by day and by night and from every point of view; he glanced at the pictures and examined the machinery; he took a whirl on the Ferris wheel and a turn in a gondola; he spent two or three evenings in the Midway Plaisance.”

Each of these sentences expresses one idea; in the first the idea is simple, in the others it is more or less complex.

A sentence should be a unit both in substance and in expression.

In a sentence which has unity in substance, ideas are homogeneous: they form a whole. The following sentences lack unity in that they contain heterogeneous ideas:—

Unity in substance.

“But I did not wonder at her earning the reputation she had, for she was absolutely world-weary, and, with the exception of a pet priest or two (whom she laughed at, moreover), she would see no one; *and, as I have already said, her powers of satire, and even mimicry, remained unimpaired.*”¹

It would be difficult to frame a sentence less homogeneous than this. The fact that Jane Clermont “would see no one” has nothing in common with the fact that her powers of satire remained unimpaired. The words in italics belong in a separate sentence.

... “the other falls so grossly into the censure of the old poetry, and preference of the new, that I could not read either of these strains without some indignation; *which no quality among men is so apt to raise in me as self-sufficiency.*”²

This sentence naturally ends at “indignation.” It is not only overloaded but weakened by the succeeding words, which add extraneous matter in a postscript as it were.

“Mendelssohn brought it to London in MS. in 1844, and it was tried at a Philharmonic Rehearsal, but for some reason was not performed till a concert of Mrs. Anderson’s, May 25, 1849, *and is now in the library at Buckingham Palace.*”³

In this sentence, besides the offence against unity, there is another serious fault: it was not the manuscript of “Ruy Blas” that was “performed” in 1849; it is the manuscript that “is now in the library at Buckingham Palace.”

In each of the following examples, the words in italics belong in a separate sentence:—

“No accident whatever occurred [at the Czar’s coronation], except that a Court chamberlain was thrown and broke his head, *and the reception by the people was most enthusiastic.*”⁴

“The best contested was the third race, in which California and Harry Reed were about equal favorites, *and the judges could not separate them at the finish.*”⁵

¹ William Graham: Chats with Jane Clermont. The Nineteenth Century, November, 1893, p. 766.

² Blair: Lectures on Rhetoric, lect. xi. Quoted from Sir William Temple.

³ Sir George Grove: A Dictionary of Music and Musicians; Ruy Blas.

⁴ The [London] Spectator, May 26, 1883, p. 661.

⁵ American newspaper.