

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.

"He may be taken as the type of what was best among the men of rank and fashion at the English Court, and that he himself felt the poetry of his life the lines written while imprisoned at Windsor for some misdemeanor occasioned by his hot-blooded temper, bear witness."¹

"At this moment the clang of the portal was heard, a sound at which the stranger started, stepped hastily to the window, and looked with an air of alarm at Ravenswood, when he saw that the gate of the court was shut, and his domestics excluded."²

"Passing³ now to the wind-instruments, the exhibit of the French makers stands first, although it is small, they having sent none but first-class instruments; and they have captured nearly every prize, which is worthy of note, even if it is not a circumstance which is very creditable to native industry and intelligence."⁴

"Nicholas, taking the insensible girl in his arms, bore her from the chamber and down stairs into the room he had just quitted, followed by his sister and the faithful servant, whom he charged to procure a coach directly while he and Kate bent over their beautiful charge and endeavoured, but in vain, to restore her to animation."⁴

"On the present occasion, fifteen hundred ladies and gentlemen were invited; and the attendance, comprising about one thousand, was a full representation of the fashionable part of Liverpool society, but did not include any persons of rank from a sphere beyond the locality, except Lord Claud John Hamilton, M. P. for Liverpool, while⁵ Lady Claud Hamilton was unable to be present, and none of the county nobility could attend."⁶

"Among the principal events of Monday were Mrs. George Place's musicale, several receptions, and an elegant dinner given by Mr. Wilson at Kebo to eighteen guests, the decorations being beautifully done in deep red roses."⁷

"So at eleven o'clock I called, and we had a lovely drive, sauntering later through the Medici galleries, and I parted with her at her door, at which I again presented myself at seven."⁸

¹ Student's theme.

² Scott: *The Bride of Lammermoor*, vol. ii. chap. ii.

³ With what word is this participle connected?

⁴ Dickens: *Nicholas Nickleby*, vol. ii. chap. xxii. ⁵ See page 89.

⁶ *The Illustrated London News*, Feb. 3, 1883. ⁷ American newspaper.

⁸ William Graham: *Chats with Jane Clermont. The Nineteenth Century*, November, 1893, p. 764.

By recasting the last sentence, it would be possible to put into it all that occurred in the course of the morning; but the fact of the evening visit belongs in another sentence.

"Coningsby, who had lost the key of his carpet-bag, which he finally cut open with a pen-knife that he found on his writing-table, and the blade of which he broke in the operation, only reached the drawing-room as the figure of his grandfather, leaning on his ivory cane, and following his guests, was just visible in the distance."¹

The details about Coningsby's carpet-bag do not belong in the same sentence with the details of his arrival in the drawing-room. It would have been better to divide the sentence into two, the first enumerating the circumstances that detained Coningsby, the second the facts connected with his arrival in the drawing-room. This, of course, is on the supposition that the particulars about the carpet-bag were worth mentioning at all.²

The opposite fault to that of putting heterogeneous ideas into one sentence is that of scattering matter which belongs in one sentence through two or more. For example:—

"If you were to talk of my health, it would be more to the purpose," he said, with grim inconsequence. And raising his heavy lids he looked at her full."³

"He hesitated, struck with the awkwardness of what he was going to say. But Marcella understood him."⁴

"With all the force of her strong will she had set herself to disbelieve them. But they had had subtle effects already."⁵

"He has no rival. For the more truly he consults his own powers, the more difference will his work exhibit from the work of others."⁶

In each of these cases, the relation between the two propositions connected by "and," "but," or "for," would be brought out more clearly if the two sentences were thrown into one.

¹ Disraeli: *Coningsby*, book i. chap. v.

² See pages 167, 168.

³ Mrs. Humphry Ward: *Marcella*, book i. chap. vii.

⁴ *Ibid.*, book i. chap. iv.

⁵ *Ibid.*, book ii. chap. ii.

⁶ Emerson: *Essays; Spiritual Laws*.

When several short sentences, each of which is a unit in itself, are so closely connected in thought as to form parts of a larger unit, they may be put into one sentence. The advantages of putting several short sentences into a long one are exemplified in the following passages:—

"It is nothing, that the troops of France have passed from the Pyrenees to Cadiz; it is nothing that an unhappy and prostrate nation has fallen before them; it is nothing that arrests, and confiscation, and execution, sweep away the little remnant of national resistance. There is an enemy that still exists to check the glory of these triumphs. It follows the conqueror back to the very scene of his ovations; it calls upon him to take notice that Europe, though silent, is yet indignant; it shows him that the sceptre of his victory is a barren sceptre; that it shall confer neither joy nor honor, but shall moulder to dry ashes in his grasp. In the midst of his exultation, it pierces his ear with the cry of injured justice; it denounces against him the indignation of an enlightened and civilized age; it turns to bitterness the cup of his rejoicing, and wounds him with the sting which belongs to the consciousness of having outraged the opinion of mankind."¹

"Do you mean to say he [the painter or the sculptor] does not study his subject? does he not make sketches? does he not even call them 'studies'? does he not call his workroom a *studio*? is he not ever designing, rejecting, adopting, correcting, perfecting?"²

In a sentence that has unity in expression, ideas are not only homogeneous, but they are so expressed as to appear homogeneous and to show the true relation of one to another.

Unity in expression.

Unity in expression often suffers from an unwarranted change in the point of view. For example:—

¹ Daniel Webster: The Revolution in Greece, a speech in the House of Representatives, Jan. 19, 1824.

² Cardinal Newman: The Idea of a University; University Subjects, Literature.

"The train left us at Russell, and *we* climbed to the rear seat of a wagon."¹

Had the writer said, "We left the train at Russell," he would have avoided a clumsy change in the point of view.

"I found my friend Owen at liberty, and, conscious of the refreshments and purification of brush and basin,² [*he*]³ was of course a very different person from Owen a prisoner, squalid, heart-broken, and hopeless."⁴

In this sentence, the omission of "was" would remove the difficulty.

In each of the following sentences, the italicized words indicate the two points of view:—

"It is not probable, judging from all Asiatic history, that *Abbas II.* will content himself long merely with being sulky, and we fancy at the next explosion *it* has been determined to remove him."⁵

"I received the letter you wrote from Chicago yesterday, and, without a moment's delay or waiting for dinner, proceeded at once to Mr. Bunsby's office, though it was raining at the time, and *the clerk* said he had just telegraphed his acceptance."⁶

Unity in expression sometimes suffers from an arrangement that makes a grammatical connection between words that are not connected in thought. For example:—

"*Being* the belle of the town, *he* lost no time in making Miss McCarthy's acquaintance."⁶

This sentence is so framed as to force a reader to make the absurd supposition that "he" is "the belle of the town." The difficulty would be removed if the sentence read, "As Miss McCarthy was the belle of the town," etc. In each form there is a change in the point of view; but in the second form the sentence begins in such a way as to prepare the reader for the change.

In each of the following examples the italicized words are grammatically, but not logically, connected:—

¹ American magazine.

² See pages 164-166.

³ See page 70.

⁴ Scott: Rob Roy, vol. ii. chap. vii.

⁵ The [London] Spectator, Feb. 10, 1894, p. 181.

⁶ Student's theme.

"After eating a hearty dinner *our carriages* were brought to the door."¹

"And, now, he approached the great city, which lay outstretched before him like a dark shadow on the ground, reddening the sluggish air with a deep dull light, that told of labyrinths of public ways and shops, and swarms of busy people. *Approaching* nearer and nearer yet, *this halo*² began to fade, and the causes which produced it slowly to develop themselves."³

"This dispatch contained a proposition to Mr. Phoebus to repair to the court of St. Petersburg, and accept appointments of high distinction and emolument. Without in any way *restricting* the independent pursuit of his profession, *he* was offered a large salary."⁴

"*Riding* on a mule, clad in a coarse brown woollen dress, in Italy or Spain *we* should esteem him a simple Capuchin, but in truth he is a prelate."⁵

"*Lost* in prolonged reverie, *the hours* flew on."⁶

"But it is not untrue, the illustration having come under the personal observation of the writer. Moreover, in *discussing* this subject a few years ago with an officer of that state, and a resident of one of its principal cities, *he* acknowledged that the clannish feeling referred to existed to some extent in his city."⁷

"There is no necessity for three or four dozen of each garment, as, *possessing* this number, *many* will grow yellow awaiting their turn to be worn."⁸

The fault exemplified in these sentences — the fault of coupling a participial phrase with a word with which it has no connection in thought — is an offence against clearness as well as against unity.

Unity in expression sometimes suffers from an arrangement which presents the main idea of the sentence in false relations with subordinate ideas. For example: —

¹ Student's theme.

² Is this the proper word?

³ Dickens: Barnaby Rudge, chap. iii.

⁴ Disraeli: Lothair, chap. lxxv.

⁵ Ibid.: Tancred, book v. chap. ii.

⁶ Ibid., book vi. chap. xi.

⁷ American newspaper.

⁸ American periodical.

"I was walking home from school the other day and I met a little boy and girl."¹

In this sentence, the offence against unity consists in making the main idea and the subordinate idea co-ordinate in form. The main idea is in the second clause; to make this idea prominent, the sentence should read, "As I was walking home from school the other day, I met a little boy and a little girl."

A similar fault is committed in the following sentence: —

"These [doors] were opened by a grim old Highlander with a long white beard, and displayed a very steep and narrow flight of steps leading downward."²

"The chief of every day was spent by him at Lucas Lodge, and he sometimes returned to Longbourn only in time to make an apology for his absence before the family went to bed."³

In this sentence, the second clause is so framed as to seem to be co-ordinate with the first; but in thought it is subordinate. To make this subordination apparent, the sentence might be written thus: "The chief part of every day he spent at Lucas Lodge, sometimes returning to Longbourn," etc.

"That these statements are true is not a matter of theoretical controversy: a brief historical survey will conclusively settle the question."⁴

In this sentence, the two propositions separated by a colon are treated as if they were of equal importance and not closely connected. Unity as well as clearness would be promoted by recasting the second part of the sentence thus: "as a brief historical survey will conclusively show."

"I was walking along the street when I saw two little messenger boys sitting on the steps and opening some bundles which they were carrying."⁴

In this sentence, the subordinate idea is presented as the main idea, the main idea as subordinate. To bring out the proper relation between the two ideas, we might say, "As I was walking along the street, I saw," etc.

"Although it has been the fashion to laugh at the doings of the

¹ Student's theme. For the omission, see pages 146, 147.

² Scott: A Legend of Montrose, chap. xii.

³ Miss Austen: Pride and Prejudice, vol. i. chap. xxiii.

⁴ Student's theme.

Concord school as above the heads of ordinary mortals, I remember being greatly interested both in the papers read and in the informal remarks which followed."¹

The fault in this sentence is that words which would make the connection of thought clear are omitted. To connect the second clause with the first, we might say, "my observation leads me to a different conclusion; for I was, I remember, greatly interested," etc.

Such are some of the ways in which the principle of unity in a sentence may be violated. To illustrate all the varieties of error that fall under this head would take much more space than is at our command; for sins against unity spring from confusion of thought, and confusion of thought has many forms.

Lack of unity caused by confusion of thought.

SECTION V.

KINDS OF SENTENCES.

The principles which govern the choice, the number, and the arrangement of words apply to every sentence, whatever its length or its structure.

In our day, although we occasionally see a sentence of only two or three words and occasionally one of two hundred, extremely SHORT and extremely LONG SENTENCES are rare. Often the distinction between the two is so slight that a change in punctuation, phraseology, or arrangement suffices to put material that is scattered through several sentences into one, or material that is stretched through one sentence into several. When the difference is merely a matter of punctuation, and still

Short or long sentences?

¹ Student's theme.

more when it is a matter of substance, the choice between short and long sentences depends partly on the nature of the subject-matter and partly on the character of the persons addressed. To recommend the use of short sentences almost exclusively, as some writers do, is to look at the subject from but one point of view. The opposite point of view was taken by Coleridge:—

"I can never so far sacrifice my judgment to the desire of being immediately popular, as to cast my sentences in the French moulds, or affect a style which an ancient critic would have deemed purposely invented for persons troubled with the asthma to read, and for those to comprehend who labour under the more pitiable asthma of a short-witted intellect. . . . It is true that these short and unconnected sentences are easily and instantly understood: but it is equally true, that wanting all the cement of thought as well as of style, all the connections, and (if you will forgive so trivial a metaphor) all the *hooks-and-eyes* of the memory, they are as easily forgotten: or rather, it is scarcely possible that they should be remembered. Nor is it less true, that those who confine their reading to such books dwarf their own faculties, and finally reduce their understandings to a deplorable imbecility. . . . Like idle morning visitors, the brisk and breathless periods hurry in and hurry off in quick and profitless succession; each indeed for the moments of its stay prevents the pain of vacancy, while it indulges the love of sloth; but all together they leave the mistress of the house (the soul I mean) flat and exhausted, incapable of attending to her own concerns, and unfitted for the conversation of more rational guests."¹

Since Coleridge wrote, the number of writers addicted to short sentences has increased with the increase in the number of readers impatient of delay, eager to grasp at a part of an idea and less and less disposed to use their minds in the effort to understand a long sentence that presents the idea as a whole. Short sentences are,

¹ Coleridge: *The Friend*, vol. i. essay iii.