

Syntax refers to the way words are arranged within sentences. It controls the way words are arranged within sentences and the way sentences are arranged within paragraphs. Writers or speakers can manipulate the rhythm or sound of sentence(s) for effect.

Syntax Encompasses:

1. **Punctuation**
2. **Word order**
3. **Sentence focus (period and loose, repetition and parallelism)**
4. **Sentence length (rhythm and variety)**
5. **(Paragraphing too)**

Punctuation: Is used to reinforce meaning, construct effect, and express the writer's voice. Look at the semicolon, colon, and dash.

- The *semicolon* gives equal weight to two or more independent clauses in a sentence. This balance reinforces parallel ideas and imparts equal importance to both or all of the clauses.
- The *colon* directs reader attention to the words that follow. A colon sets the expectation that important, closely related information will follow and words after the colon are emphasized.
- The *dash* marks a sudden change in thought or tone and can convey a casual tone or chaos or confusion.

Word Order: Most English sentences follow a SUBJECT-VERB-OBJECT/COMPLEMENT pattern. Deviating from the expected word order can serve to startle the reader and draw attention to the sentence. This can emphasize the unusual sentence's message.

- There are several ways to change the order-
 1. Inverting subject and verb (**Am** I ever sorry!)
 2. Placing a complement at the beginning of a sentence (**Hungry**, without a doubt, he is.)
 3. Placing an object in front of a verb. (**Sara** I like, not Susan)
- Good writers shift between conformity and nonconformity, preventing reader complacency without using unusual sentence structure to the point of distraction.

Sentence focus:

A.) Sentence focus--building tension: Is generally achieved by syntactic tension—withholding of syntactic closure (completion of grammatical structure) until the end of the sentence. Sentences that delay or suspend closure are called **periodic sentences** (expand the sentence between the subject and the verb or before the subject and the verb). They carry high tension—the reader must wait until the end of the sentence to understand the meaning.

- Example withholding the predicate (verb part) by expanding the subject: The **boy**, *who walks with a jaunty step and dreams of proposing*, **loves** the girl. (Here we run the risk of losing our reader if we delay too long!)
- Or we can withhold the entire independent clause: *From the depths of his heart*, the **boy loves** the girl.
- Example from LOTF: *Softly, surrounded by a fringe of inquisitive bright creatures, itself a silver shape beneath the steadfast constellation*, Simon's dead **body moved** out toward the open sea.

B.) Sentence focus- relieving tension: We can also relieve tension and allow the reader to relax and explore the rest of the sentence without urgency. **Loose Sentences or Strung Along or Cumulative sentences** relieve tension. The details are strung along after the subject and the verb. This is more like how we experience life in the moment—we see the action and then notice the details. “The mind in the act of coping with the world” (Lantham).

**Compare the periodic example from LOTF above with the Strung Along example:

Periodic: *Softly, surrounded by a fringe of inquisitive bright creatures, itself a silver shape beneath the steadfast constellation, Simon’s dead **body moved** out toward the open sea.*

Strung Along: *Simon’s dead **body moved** out toward the open sea, surrounded by a fringe of inquisitive bright creatures, itself a silver shape beneath the steadfast constellation.*

Repetition is another way writers achieve **sentence focus**. Purposeful repetition of a word, phrase, or clause emphasizes the repeated structure and focuses the reader’s attention on its meaning.

Parallel grammatical forms such as infinitives, gerunds, and prepositional phrases also can balance parallel ideas and give them equal weight.

Varying sentence length: Forestalls boredom and controls emphasis. It also prevents monotony. Varying sentence length gives the writing rhythm. This would include the use of effective **fragments** as well.

- **Short sentences** can quicken the pace, add a sense of decisiveness, anxiety, terseness, speed, etc. Many short sentences, one after another, create a staccato effect, making every point with finality. A short sentence after a long one shifts the reader’s attention, and can emphasize the meaning and importance of the short sentence.

The most powerful positions in a sentence are the first and the last words. The closer these words come together, the more forceful the message is. Many modern writers put key ideas in short sentences! *If you want to make an idea memorable, compress it in a short space.*

- **Longer sentences** can be used to slow the pace or for contemplative, heavy thoughts. Writers can use sentence length to replicate physical movement of characters.
- **If you don’t vary sentence length you have created “flatliners” a straight line of blips across the screen.** No life. If you write long sentences one after another readers can’t be sure which information to stress (short sentences stress ideas). And if you tend to write many short sentences, readers will stress every sentence. If every idea is emphasized, nothing is. If the stresses do not vary, the pitch remains the same, and the rhythms become monotonous.

Likewise, if we use all long sentences, nothing is emphasized as well. No piece is stressed more than any other. Monotonous.

When readers can’t hear what’s important in sentences, they can’t follow the sense very well. When we listen to someone speak, we pay attention to where the voice rises and where stress falls and where pauses are. The music and rhythm helps us to follow and remember. When we read we need similar cues—we get this by sentence pattern and sentence punctuation.

• **Monosyllabic words vs. Multisyllabic words:** Monosyllabic words are more like what we use in everyday speech. But the length of words have to do with the rhythm of a sentence too. *Monosyllabic words* in succession, tend to make the message seem emphatic and forceful. *Multisyllabic words* can soften the impact—we can show compassion, tenderness, and tranquility. But sometimes they can create distance with the audience—for the sake of objectivity or professionalism/seriousness.

**3 important things I learned about syntax (in my own words):

1.

2.

3.

Practice!

Assignment #1: Choose 1 passage from *The Great Gatsby* where you feel Fitzgerald uses strong syntax and type out the entire passage, including a proper citation. (Note: a passage is 1-3 paragraphs, a solid “chunk” of text). Underline/highlight examples of his strong syntax. In 1-2 paragraphs, explain WHY you think the syntax is strong. How does it impact your enjoyment/understanding of the text?

Assignment #2: Write an imitation of your chosen passage. Your imitation should be similar in length and should include similar sentence structures. Make sure to incorporate strong syntax! Try to include one or more of the rhetorical devices that you learned this week in your imitation (and annotate for those in parenthesis after the device). (Note: you have complete freedom of subject matter for your imitation).

** Assignments should be typed and should utilize proper MLA formatting.