SENTENCE COMPLEXITY

Variety in sentence structure can improve the flow of your writing.

A simple sentence is composed of a single independent clause.
- Ex. I like my English class.
- Ex. I usually get lunch at Charger Union.

A compound sentence contains two or more independent clauses typically joined by a conjunction or a semicolon.
- Ex. I went to the Student Success Center; I had a great tutoring session.
- Ex. I usually get lunch at Charger Union, but I wanted Starbucks today.

A complex sentence has an independent clause and a dependent clause. A dependent clause cannot stand on its own.
- Ex. When I get home, I'm going to take a nap.
- Ex. After class ends, I'm going to start my essay.

A compound-complex sentence is composed of two or more independent clauses and one dependent clause.
- Ex. When I get home, I want to take a nap, and then I want to start my essay.
- Ex. After class, we should get lunch, and maybe we can go to a drop-in tutoring session.

Here's the difference that varying sentence complexity can make:
- Ex. This is a simple sentence. This is another simple sentence. Your paper's flow will be staccato. Your writing will sound choppy.
- Ex. This is a simple sentence. This is not a simple sentence, and you can tell by the two independent clauses. When you have sentences of different complexities, your writing sounds more fluid; it sounds more like you're talking. See the difference?

Both of these paragraphs have four sentences, but one flows much more smoothly.

Keep in mind: complex sentence structures do not inherently sound more "professional" or "academic". What makes a sentence effective is the information it contains, as well as where it is placed within the organization of the paper. Sentence structure variety is what makes a paragraph have the correct flow within an essay.

For more information, make an appointment for your course with one of our content tutors. All appointments are available in-person at the Student Success Center, located in the Library, or online.