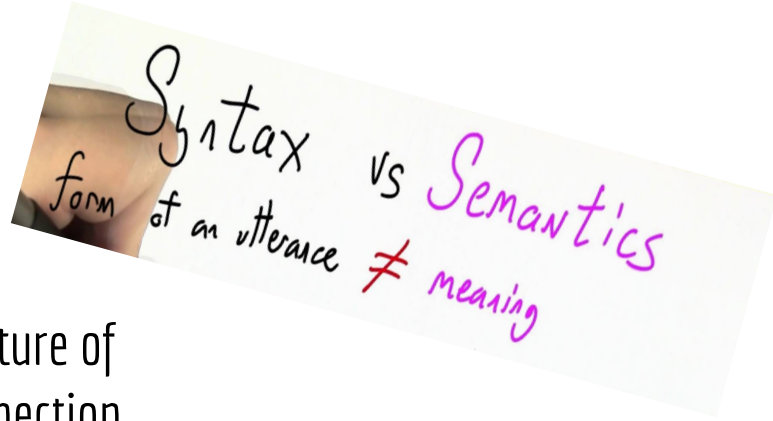


# Syntax



The term *syntax* refers not only to the structure of sentences, their types, their uses, their connection, and the variations authors choose, but also to smaller structures *within* sentences.

Phrases (any group of words) and clauses (groups of words that contain a subject and a verb) are also syntactic elements that require a reader's attention.

# Syntax affects the pace of a piece...

**Short**, clipped phrases, sentences and clauses tend to create a feeling of quickness, decisiveness, and speed to a piece. It is important to be aware of the content of a piece and look for connections to syntax. Pay attention to how pacing relates to the action and purpose of a particular piece.

**Long**, convoluted sentences, especially with subordinate clauses at the beginning tend to slow the pace of a piece. Often they are connected to a contemplative section, a heavy or serious subject and the writer wants to emphasize it. Sometimes, however, they are placed in a piece for the purpose of demonstrating the ramblings of a character, the ludicrousness of an idea, or the ridiculousness of a situation. Watch for occasional satire or irony in these long sentences.

## Key questions:

How does syntax (syntactical techniques) contribute to and enhance the meaning and *effect* of language?

How does syntax contribute to **tone**?

# How to get started with Syntax:

1. “Syntax” refers to the ways words and phrases are arranged to form sentences. The **reader must identify an author’s syntax and discuss the relationship it has to the content of the passage.** Authors may use:

- a. specific patterns of phrases and sentences
- b. divisions within a piece with different syntax for each
- c. parallel structure
- d. different sentence types
- e. specific kinds of punctuation
- f. other syntax techniques

## To begin studying syntax, follow these steps:

1. Number the sentences in the passage. This will help analyze each sentence and discuss it efficiently.
2. Make observations about the content and syntax of each sentence or group of sentences. Look for elements listed below or others observed.
  - i. Does the sentence length fit the subject matter?
  - ii. Why is the sentence length effective?
  - iii. What variety of sentence lengths is present?
  - iv. Sentence beginnings – Variety or Pattern?
  - v. Arrangement of ideas in sentences
  - vi. Arrangement of ideas in paragraph – Pattern?
3. Write down what is observed. These observations will be the paper's examples.

# Simple Sentences

A **simple sentence** has the most basic elements that make it a sentence: a subject, a verb, and a completed thought.

1. Joe waited for the train.

"Joe" = subject, "waited" = verb

2. The train was late.

"The train" = subject, "was" = verb

3. Mary and Samantha took the bus.

"Mary and Samantha" = compound subject, "took" = verb

4. I looked for Mary and Samantha at the bus station.

"I" = subject, "looked" = verb

5. Mary and Samantha arrived at the bus station early but waited until noon for the bus.

"Mary and Samantha" = compound subject, "arrived" and "waited" = compound verb

A simple sentence can also be referred to as an **independent clause**. It is referred to as "independent" because, while it might be part of a compound or complex sentence, it can also stand by itself as a complete sentence.

\*\* In your beginning years of writing, you may have learned to not use simple sentences. However, these sentences has a purpose when used correctly.

Ex 1:

**But you are an audience of journalists.** There is no audience anywhere that should be more bored -- indeed, more revolted -- by a speaker who tried to fawn on it, butter it up, exaggerate its virtues, play down its faults, and who would more quickly see through any attempt to do so.



# Fragments

A **SENTENCE FRAGMENT** fails to be a sentence in the sense that it cannot stand by itself. It does not contain even one **independent clause**.

There are several reasons why a group of words may seem to act like a sentence but not have the components to make it as a complete thought

# Fragment Example

“**One dollar and eighty-seven cents.** That was all. And sixty cents of it was in pennies. Pennies saved one and two at a time by bulldozing the grocer and the vegetable man and the butcher until one’s cheeks burned with the silent imputation of parsimony that such close dealing implied. Three times Della counted it. **One dollar and eighty-seven cents.** And the next day would be Christmas.” (from “*The Gift of the Magi*” by O. Henry)

“**None!—nothing but despair!**” he answered. “What else could I look for, being what I am, and leading such a life as mine? Were I an atheist,—a man devoid of conscience,—a wretch with coarse and brutal instincts,—I might have found peace, long ere now. Nay, I never should have lost it!

(from “*The Scarlet Letter*” by Nathaniel Hawthorne)

# Parallelism

Parallelism refers to using elements in sentences that are grammatically similar or identical in structure, sound, meaning, or meter. This technique adds symmetry, effectiveness and balance to the written piece.

# Parallelism Examples

Ex #1 “My fellow citizens: I stand here today **humbled by the task before us, grateful for the trust you have bestowed, mindful of the sacrifices** borne by our ancestors.” - Barack Obama

Ex #2 “I could be well content that **my labors, and my sorrows, and my sins, and my pains,** should shortly end with me...” *The Scarlet Letter*

Ex #3 But, in a larger sense, **we can not dedicate — we can not consecrate — we can not hallow —** this ground. - The Gettysburg Address by Abraham Lincoln

# Rhetorical Questions

A rhetorical question is a question that you ask without expecting an answer. The question might be one that does not have an answer. It might also be one that has an obvious answer but you have asked the question to make a point, to persuade or for literary effect.

# Rhetorical Question Examples:

Ex 1: That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! **And ain't I a woman?** Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! **And ain't I a woman?** I could work as much and eat as much as a man – when I could get it – and bear the lash as well! **And ain't I a woman?** I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! **And ain't I a woman?**

–Sojourner Truth, speech delivered at 1851 Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio

If asked to analyze the SYNTAX of Sojourner Truth's speech. What would you write?

WHEN ANALYZING SYNTAX, CONSIDER SUCH QUESTIONS AS:

Are there dramatic shifts in sentence length or complexity?

Are there particular sentence structures that imitate content (short sentences that convey abrupt thoughts, repetition of commas to convey hesitation or suspense)?

Are there interruptions in sentences that convey the author's state of mind or a shift? Interruptions include ellipses (...) and sections of a sentence set off in commas or dashes ( -)

Is there repetition for emphasis?

Do you see any patterns? Parallelism? The same structure at the end or beginning of each paragraph?

What is the author EMPHASIZING with any of the above?



# Other Things to Consider:

**Look at handout as we review these!**

# Syntax Group Practice

1. Read your assigned passage
2. Analyze the reading using the **Syntax Analysis Chart**
3. Use the questions to analyze the SYNTAX of the passage.

Does the sentence length fit the subject matter?

Why is the sentence length effective?

What variety of sentence lengths is present?

Sentence beginnings – Variety or Pattern?

Arrangement of ideas in sentences

Arrangement of ideas in paragraph – Pattern?

4. Be prepared to “teach” your passage to the class.

Questions to ask yourself before you write your present your assigned paragraph to the class:

1. What sort of syntactical techniques are used in your paragraph?
2. What sort of tone is implied because of those techniques?

## Bradbury paragraph:

She remembered a visit she had once made to some Mexican border towns--the hot days, the endless crickets leaping and falling or lying dead and brittle like small cigars in the shop windows, and the canals taking river water out to the farms, the dirt roads, the scorched seascape. She remembered the silent towns, the warm beer, the hot, thick food each day. She remembered the slow, dragging horses and the parched jackrabbits on the road. She remembered the iron mountains and the dusty valleys and the ocean beaches that spread hundreds of miles with no sound but the waves--no cars, no buildings, no nothing.