

Good Writing Practice

Syntactic Structure - Inter-sentence

Incrementalism: Sentences



Introduction

Inter-sentence incrementalism is an expansion of information, often secondary, into a sentence rather than a reduction of the information to a clause or phrase and incorporation (sentence combining) into a contiguous sentence. Such incrementalism may be a consequence of the advice to express ideas as a series of short sentences to avoid grammatical mistakes. Although there is wisdom to this advice, such information expansion conveys a non-professional tone and seems tedious and

simplicistic to an expert in the discipline who expects a focused interrelation of thought achievable by sentence combining. Incrementalism is organised into three subsections according to how a reduced syntactic structure is incorporated into a contiguous sentence: coordination; modification; apposition.

Coordination

In the first part of our examination of inter-sentence incrementalism, we look at coordination subdivided into the following syntactically

SECTION EDITORS



Wendy Kingdom

info@wendykingdom.com



Amy Whereat

amy.whereat@peakthespeech.fr

reduced structures: independent clause of a compound sentence (Part 1); noun clause (Part 2); noun phrase (Part 3).

Part 1 - Independent clause of a compound sentence

Example: Discussion section: limitation

An MT-like protein was present in this polychaete. However, amino acid analysis is necessary for confirmation.

Revision 1

An MT-like protein was present in this polychaete; however, amino acid analysis is necessary for confirmation.

Revision 2

An MT-like protein was present in this polychaete, but amino acid analysis is necessary for confirmation.

Notes

The rhetorical advantage gained by coordinating two sentences into a compound sentence is information relatedness. In the example, the separateness of the sentences emphasises their individual importance, whereas sentence-combining in the revisions bridges their relatedness.

In the compound sentence of Revision 1, the independent clauses are more visually and cognitively integrated than are the separate sentences in the example. A sentence conveying a contrast may be more effective when transformed into the independent clause of a compound sentence. This transformation, the least dramatic reduction in hierarchical syntax, is from two sentences into a compound sentence separated by either a semicolon or a comma.

In Revision 2, the independent clauses of a comma-separated compound sentence seem more interrelated than in Revision 1, because a

comma is a weaker border marker than a semicolon.

In the Example and Revision 1, *however* is a conjunctive adverb followed by a comma that contrasts information in an independent clause with information in an immediately preceding independent clause. The comma distinguishes the conjunctive adverb from an intra-clause adverb, whereby *however* functions as an adverb modifying a constituent in the clause in which it occurs as in *however exhaustive the purification method, protein purity is not assured*. In this situation, *however* is not followed by a comma.

Part 2 - Noun clause

Example: Introduction section: research importance

The results of the proposed study are important for understanding how joint pressure affects the physiology and pathology of the TMJ. This study will also indicate the effect of mandibular position on mandibular growth.

Revision

*The results of the proposed study are important for understanding how joint pressure affects the physiology and pathology of the TMJ **and how mandibular position affects mandibular growth.***

Notes

There are cues that justify sentence combining. The repetitive *this study* is a cue that the two-sentence example emphasises *the study* at the expense of what was to be accomplished. Coordinating the potential accomplishments as noun clause objects (of the preposition *gerund for understanding*) renders the accomplishments equivalent in importance rather than does the second sentence of the example, which seems as a tag-on (i.e., of lesser importance than the joint pressure).

Part 3 - Noun phrase

Example 1: Materials and Methods section: method

Then, the participants were instructed to perform two instructed practice trials. Afterward, they had 2 minutes' rest. Finally, they performed three test trials.

Revision

The sequence for the participants was two instructed practice trials, 2 minutes' rest, and three test trials.

Notes

The three successive time-focused transitional expressions are just too story-like (i.e., narrative). The repetition of time-focused transitional expressions emphasises the time at the expense of the conceptual components. In addition to the

narrativism of the transition expressions, there is an underlying narrativism caused by the incremental sequence of subjects and actions in the three sentences. In the revision, the sequence of actions (including the first sentence) is expressed as a descriptive coordinated listing rather than incrementalised actions.

A narrative pattern is informal compared to a descriptive format consisting of a thematic topic (instead of an agent) as the subject and the linking verb (instead of an action verb) as the predicate.

Example 2: Introduction section: research problem

Previous studies were based on small sample size. And interviews were delayed ~16 years after term.

Revision

*Previous studies were based on small sample size **and delayed interviews (~16 years after term).***

Notes

The second sentence in the Example does emphasise the *delayed interviews* but at the expense of the *sample size*. That is, it seems the succeeding sentences will concern the *delayed interviews* and not the *sample size*. In contrast, coordination in the revision renders the *sample size* and *delayed interviews* as coordinate causes of the research problem.

The revision involves syntactic reduction of the second sentence into a noun phrase *delayed interviews*, which is coordinated with the object (of a prepositional phrase) *small sample size*. Further syntactic reduction (primarily visual) is accomplished by parenthesis of the adverbial appositive noun phrase *~16 years after term*.

Modification

Another type of sentence incrementalism occurs with modification, which is organised according to a better match between structure and function than a full sentence: noun phrase (Part 4); infinitive phrase (Part 5); prepositional phrase (Part 6); and elliptical adverb clause (Part 7).

Part 4 - Noun phrase

Example: Introduction section, research problem pertinent background

In the dental mesenchyme, Msx-1 is required for induction of syndecan-1 expression by BMP-4 (Ref). BMP-4 is also a downstream target of Msx-1 (Ref).

Revision 1

*In the dental mesenchyme, Msx-1 is required for induction of syndecan-1 expression by BMP-4 (Ref), **which is also a downstream target of Msx-1 (Ref).***

Revision 2

*In the dental mesenchyme, Msx-1 is required for induction of syndecan-1 expression by BMP-4 (Ref), **a downstream target of Msx-1 (Ref).***

Notes

A sentence that describes a noun in a preceding sentence may be better matched to its relative importance when conveyed as a dependent adjective clause. In Revision 1, syntactically reducing the second sentence into an adjective clause and combining the clause with the first sentence to form a complex sentence is not more concise. Both the incremental adjectival description and its reduced adjective clause (Revision 1) contain 8 words. However, further syntactic reduction into an appositive noun phrase, containing just 5 words, maintains the thematic focus on MSX-1.

The adjective clause, somewhat emphasised by its length and end position, is known also as a relative clause, because it is fronted by the relative pronoun *which*.

Part 5 - Infinitive phrase

Example: Introduction section: research objective

A robust delay fault simulation was performed. The purpose of this simulation was to identify robust-testing paths.

Revision

*A robust delay fault simulation was performed **to identify robust-testing paths.***

Notes

The infinitive phrase succinctly conveys an objective, rendering unnecessary the redundant syntactically over-emphasised and incrementalised statement *the purpose of this simulation was*.

Part 6 - Prepositional phrase

Example: Materials and Methods section: method

The resulting homogenate was then centrifuged (5 min, 4°C). Next, the gels were incubated in buffer containing 5 mM CaCl₂.

Revision 1

***After the resulting homogenate was centrifuged (5 min, 4°C),** the gels were incubated in buffer containing 5 mM CaCl₂.*

Revision 2

***After homogenate centrifugation (5 min, 4°C),** the gels were incubated in buffer containing 5 mM CaCl₂.*

Notes

The incrementalism is more rhetorically matched

to laboratory instructions than to a journal article descriptive format of a Materials and Methods section. Such incrementalism is lessened by sentence combining, whereby the first sentence is partially deemphasised as a dependent adverb clause (Revision 1) and further into a prepositional phrase (Revision 2). This further revision is justified by the narrativism and by the superfluous information *the resulting*.

Part 7 - Elliptical Adverb Clause

Example: Discussion section: conclusion

The actual cause for decreased collagen hydroxylation is conjecture. However, the strong correlation between decreased hydroxylation and the degree of hyperglycaemia is consistent with a glucose-mediated effect.

Revision 1

Although the actual cause for decreased collagen hydroxylation is conjecture, the strong correlation between decreased hydroxylation and the degree of hyperglycaemia is consistent with a glucose-mediated effect.

Revision 2

Although conjecture, the strong correlation between decreased hydroxylation and the degree of hyperglycaemia is consistent with a glucose-mediated effect.

Notes

In the example, the second of the two independent clauses merits emphasis. Therefore, the first independent clause is syntactically reduced into an adverbial dependent clause (Revision 1) and further into an elliptical version (Revision 2).

Apposition

The focus in this subsection is on sentences expressing secondary information that could be in apposition to information in a contiguous sentence. The examples are arranged according to the syntactically reduced units: noun phrase (Part 8); and listed noun phrases (Part 9).

Part 8 - Noun phrase

Example: Introduction section, research problem pertinent background

Phoneme detection is designed to test the human ability to understand the different phonemes that constitute the spoken word. By this test, the experimenter pronounces a pseudoword. An example of a pseudoword is shalt. The individual repeats that word to ensure accurate encoding.

Revision

Phoneme detection is designed to test the human ability to understand the different phonemes that



constitute the spoken word. By this test, the experimenter pronounces a pseudoword (e.g., *shalt*). The individual repeats that word to ensure accurate encoding.

Notes

Succinctness is achieved by attenuating an entire sentence into the embeddable appositive *shalt* of a contiguous sentence. This is a prototypic example of syntactic reduction whereby secondary information (an example) is reduced into a noun phrase instead of its incremental over-emphasis as a sentence.

Part 9 - Listed noun phrases

Example 1: Materials and Methods section: method

A sample of 100 pre- and post-treatment patient records were examined from one orthodontic office in Yorba Linda, CA. Patient records consisted of study models, panoramic radiographs, intra- and extra-oral photos, and detailed medical histories.

Revision

From one orthodontic office (in Yorba Linda, CA), examined patient records consisted of study models, panoramic radiographs, intra- and extra-oral photos, and detailed medical histories.

Notes

The passive verb phrase *were examined* of the first sentence is reduced into the past participial phrase *examined* thereby enabling incorporation of the phrasal verb *consisted of* from the second sentence. The cue justifying sentence combining is repetition of the *patient records* in sentence 2.

Example 2: Materials and Methods section: method

Pregnant female Sprague-Dawley rats (Simonsen Inc.) were individually housed (standard cages; 21°C; 12 h light-dark cycle). From the brains of their embryonic day-18 fetuses, nerve cells were prepared.

Revision

Nerve cells were prepared from the brains of embryonic day-18 fetuses of pregnant female rats (Sprague-Dawley; Simonsen Inc.; individually housed, standard cages; 21°C; 12 h light-dark cycle).

Notes

The intended focus is the nerve cells. Thus, in the revision, multiple details are appositively listed and parenthesised.

Summary

Focused paragraphs can be written by syntactically reducing sentences into phrases that coordinate, modify, or appose information in a contiguous sentence. Overall, information that is incrementally expressed in sentences can be reduced into pinpoint placement next to pertinent information, thus achieving succinctness and clarity.

Michael Lewis Schneir, PhD

Professor, Biomedical Sciences
Ostrow School of Dentistry at the
University of Southern California,
Los Angeles, CA, USA
schneir@usc.edu

Phillip S. Leventhal, PhD

4Clinics, Paris, France
pleventhal@4clinics.com