

Varying Your Sentences

Late Gary Provost, one of the most popular writing instructors in U.S. and author of 24 books in multiple genres, famously wrote:

This sentence has five words. Here are five more words. Five-word sentences are fine. But several together become monotonous. Listen to what is happening. The writing is getting boring. The sound of it drones. It's like a stuck record. The ear demands some variety.

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Now listen. I vary the sentence length, and I create music. Music. The writing sings. It has a pleasant rhythm, a lilt, a harmony. I use short sentences. And I use sentences of medium length. And sometimes when I am certain the reader is rested, I will engage him with a sentence of considerable length, a sentence that burns with energy and builds with all the impetus of a crescendo, the roll of the drums, the crash of the cymbals--sounds that say listen to this, it is important.

To illustrate how you can improve your writing, here are three examples describing the same situation:

I considered the evidence carefully. I think disciplinary action is called for. I am writing to the managing director and expect his reply by Tuesday.

The evidence has been carefully considered and there seems to be ground for disciplinary action. The managing director has been informed by letter and his reply is expected by Tuesday.

Having considered the evidence carefully, I think disciplinary action is called for. I am writing to the managing director and expect his reply by Tuesday.

Comments: The first, with the sentences starting with 'I', is monotonous and the worst of three. The second uses passive voice in both the sentences, and, therefore, is impersonal and less direct. Third, *with variation* in the sentences and use of active voice is clearly the best.