Vary Your Sentence Structure

Introduction

Which of the following introductions do you prefer? Comparing these two introductions shows the importance of varying sentence patterns in your writing.

Introduction 1: Academic writing is a creative process. Authors control both the content and the flow of a text. Skilled writers incorporate a varied rhythm into their texts to reduce monotony. Longer sentences provide readers with information and can connect ideas. Shorter sentences provide clarity. They can be used to make a point or summarize a main idea. Texts full of short sentences are choppy. Texts full of only complicated sentences can be difficult to read. Using a variety of sentence patterns results in texts that are comprehensible and a joy to read.

Introduction 2: Academic writing is a creative process because authors control both the content and the flow of a text. Skilled writers incorporate a varied rhythm to their texts to reduce monotony. Longer sentences provide readers with information and can connect ideas while shorter sentences provide clarity and can be used to make a point or summarize a main idea. Texts full of short sentences are choppy, but texts full of only complicated sentences can be difficult to read. Therefore, using a variety of sentence patterns results in texts that are both comprehensible and a joy to read.

Introduction 1 is composed of only simple sentences, whereas Introduction 2 incorporates different sentence types/patterns and uses transition signals to connect ideas. Most readers would prefer Introduction 2 over Introduction 1.

Common sentence patterns (see the BU Writing Centre *Types of Sentences* handout)

Various sentence patterns convey the same information, so the substitution of one type for another to increase sentence variety in your writing is possible.

Jonathan was accepted to his first choice of graduate schools. He was ecstatic.	*two simple sentences*
Jonathan was accepted to his first choice of graduate schools; he was ecstatic.	*compound sentence joined with a semicolon*
Jonathan was accepted to his first choice of graduate schools, so he was ecstatic.	*compound sentence joined with a comma and coordinating conjunction*
Jonathan was accepted to his first choice of graduate schools; therefore, he was ecstatic.	*compound sentence joined with a semicolon and conjunctive adverb*
Jonathan was ecstatic because he was accepted to his first choice of graduate schools.	*complex sentence formed with a subordinating conjunction*

How to achieve sentence variety in your texts (see the BU Writing Centre *How to Combine Sentences* handout)

1. **Check for choppiness**
   Read your text aloud. If the rhythm shows that you have too many simple sentences, combine some of them (as in the introduction example).

2. **Check for long and winding sentences**
   Long and winding: Read your text aloud, and if you have to take a breath within a sentence or you have to read it twice to understand it, your sentence is too long or complex, and you should separate it into smaller chunks. **X**

   Improved: Read your text aloud. If you have to take a breath within a sentence or you have to read it twice to understand it, your sentence is too long or complex. You should, therefore, separate it into smaller chunks. **√**

3. **Check for the overuse of semicolons (;)**
   Too many semicolons: Changes in punctuation also increase sentence variety**;** skillful writers, therefore, incorporate semicolons in their texts. However, the overuse of semicolons can be monotonous**;** use a maximum of one per paragraph. **X**

   Improved: Changes in punctuation also provide sentence variety in a text, so skillful writers incorporate semicolons in their texts. However, the overuse of semicolons can be monotonous**;** use a maximum of one per paragraph. **√**

4. **Balance the use of coordinating conjunctives and conjunctive adverbs when forming compound sentences.**
   Too many coordinating conjunctions: Students write the first drafts of their texts quickly to get their ideas on paper, **but** they often sacrifice grammar and clear writing for speed, **so** proof-reading a draft is a necessary component of the writing process. **X**

   Too many conjunctive adverbs: Students write the first drafts of their texts quickly to get their ideas on paper; **however**, they often sacrifice grammar and clear writing for speed; **therefore,** proof-reading a draft is a necessary component of the writing process. **X**

   A balance of sentence patterns and punctuation: Students write the first drafts of their texts quickly to get their ideas on paper. **However,** they often sacrifice grammar and clear writing for speed, **so** proof-reading a draft is a necessary component of the writing process. **√**

References:
https://www.sjsu.edu/writingcenter/docs/handouts/Sentence%20Variety%20and%20Rhythm.pdf