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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence Pattern</th>
<th>Type of Sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan was accepted to his first choice of graduate schools. He was ecstatic.</td>
<td>two simple sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan was accepted to his first choice of graduate schools; he was ecstatic.</td>
<td>compound sentence joined with a semicolon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan was accepted to his first choice of graduate schools, so he was ecstatic.</td>
<td>compound sentence joined with a coordinating conjunction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan was accepted to his first choice of graduate schools; therefore, he was ecstatic.</td>
<td>compound sentence joined with a semicolon and conjunctive adverb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan was ecstatic because he was accepted to his first choice of graduate schools.</td>
<td>complex sentence formed with a subordinating conjunction</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
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