

“An Ancient Gesture” by Edna St. Vincent Millay
“Siren Song” by Margaret Atwood
“Prologue” and “Epilogue” from *The Odyssey* by Derek Walcott
“Ithaca” by Constantine Cavafy

Build Grammar Skills: Varying Sentence Lengths

Good writing not only provides information that readers need, but it also has a rhythm that keeps readers engaged. One way to create a rhythm in your writing is to **vary the lengths of your sentences**. Use a combination of shorter and longer sentences to eliminate choppiness and build an interesting rhythm.

If your writing contains many short sentences, try combining them with a coordinating conjunction such as *and*, *or*, or *but*. Or, use a subordinating conjunction such as *since* or *although* to create a sentence with an independent and a dependent clause.

Short Sentences: I read the poem slowly. I got a feeling for its rhythm.

Combined: I read the poem quickly, so I got a feeling for its rhythm.

Combined: Because I read the poem slowly, I got a feeling for its rhythm.

If your writing contains long, rambling sentences, try breaking them up and omitting unnecessary words.

Long Sentence: We read a whole article about the background of Derek Wolcott, and we learned that he grew up on an island, and his poetry has lots of images from his childhood.

Improved: We read an article about Derek Wolcott. He grew up on an island, and his poetry contains many images from his childhood.

Practice: Improve the following passages by varying the lengths of the sentences. You might combine short sentences, break up long sentences, or both.

1. The Sirens sing a song. It must be irresistible. It always forces me to leap overboard.
2. Odysseus traveled from Troy. He hoped to arrive safely, but he had many adventures on his travels that caused him and his crew a lot of pain and bad times, but many of them survived long enough to make it home.
3. The difficult journey of Odysseus and his men to Ithaca was worthwhile because it presented challenging and valuable experiences such as fighting Cyclops and Poseidon and seeing lots of seaports and visiting Egyptian cities.