

Sentence Unscrambling

Sentence unscrambling simply means putting mixed-up sentence parts back together to make a meaningful, well-written sentence. Sentence unscrambling permits a close look at how professional writers assemble the parts of their sentences.

The sentence parts are listed in a different order from that in the original sentence. To illustrate, here's an original sentence, a list with the sentence parts in the same order as in the original, and a list with the sentence parts scrambled.

Original Sentence

When his father, who was old and twisted with toil, made over to him the ownership of the farm and seemed content to creep away to a corner and wait for death, he shrugged his shoulders and dismissed the old man from his mind.

Sherwood Anderson, Winesburg, Ohio

Original Order

1. When his father,
2. who was old
3. and twisted with toil,
4. made over to him the ownership
5. of the farm
6. and seemed content
7. to creep away
8. to a corner
9. and wait for death,
10. he shrugged his shoulders
11. and dismissed the old man
12. from his mind.

Scrambled Order

1. to a corner
2. from his mind.
3. and wait for death,
4. When his father,
5. he shrugged his shoulders
6. made over to him the ownership
7. who was old
8. and dismissed the old man
9. of the farm
10. and twisted with toil,
11. to creep away
12. and seemed content

Practice 1

To recognize that sentence parts are movable, do the following Practice. For each list of scrambled sentence parts, unscramble the parts three times, each time producing a sentence with the parts in a different order. Punctuate accordingly. Indicate which of the three versions you consider the most effective arrangement, and explain your choice. Then check the References on page 157 to compare your choices with the sentences as originally written.

Example

Scrambled Sentence Parts

- a. so coldly burning
- b. falling upon his knees
- c. which was so huge
- d. as he watched the star
- e. he began to pray humbly

Unscrambled Sentences (three versions)

1. Falling upon his knees as he watched the star, which was so huge, so coldly burning, he began to pray humbly.
2. He began to pray humbly, falling upon his knees, as he watched the star, which was so huge, so coldly burning.
3. As he watched the star, which was so huge, so coldly burning, falling upon his knees, he began to pray humbly.

The most effective version is the first. The second is less well organized, with the main actions (praying, falling on his knees) appearing secondary to the description of the star. The third version places the phrase *falling upon his knees* in a position in which it seems to describe the star rather than the person.

- 1a. leaving the oak box of money
 - b. leaving the quilt
 - c. he ran from the place
 - d. leaving his suitcase
- John Steinbeck, East of Eden*

- 2a. a mortgage financier
 - b. the father was respectable and tight
 - c. and forecloser
 - d. and a stern, upright collection-plate passer
- O. Henry, "The Ransom of Red Chief"*

- 3a. for nothing can be done
 - b. after Buck Fanshaw's inquest
 - c. without a public meeting
 - d. a meeting of the short-haired brotherhood was held
 - e. on the Pacific coast
 - f. and an expression of sentiment
- Mark Twain, "Buck Fanshaw's Funeral"*

- 4a. the lightest
 - b. with them
 - c. I had ever seen
 - d. carrying a gnarled walking stick
 - e. oldest man
 - f. was Elmo Goodhue Pipgrass
- Max Shulman, "The Unlucky Winner"*

- 5a. over long woolen underwear
 - b. he bounded
 - c. around his chest
 - d. out of bed
 - e. and a leather jacket
 - f. wearing a long flannel nightgown
 - g. a nightcap
- James Thurber, "The Night the Ghost Got In"*

- 6a. looked up from his scrambled eggs
 - b. once upon a sunny morning
 - c. who sat in a breakfast nook
 - d. quietly cropping the roses
 - e. with a gold horn
 - f. a man
 - g. to see a white unicorn
 - h. in the garden
- James Thurber, "The Unicorn in the Garden"*

- 7a. grabbed my right foot
- b. of patent-leather dancing pumps
- c. then
- d. and shoved it into one of them

- e. as a shoehorn
- f. she removed the gleaming pair
- g. out of a box on the bed
- h. using her finger

Jean Shepherd, "Wanda Hickey's Night of Golden Memories"

Practice 2

Part One: Each list below, when unscrambled, will become one of the sentences in a paragraph from Michael Crichton's *Jurassic Park*. In that paragraph, a Tyrannosaur attacks, during a thunderstorm, a Land Cruiser (car) containing two children, a brother and sister. Unscramble the lists to produce the four sentences in the paragraph. In each list, the sentence part that begins the sentence is capitalized. Answers are in the References on pages 157-158.

- 1a. with a muddy splash
- b. The rear of the car
- c. and then it thumped down
- d. into the air for a moment
- e. lifted up
- 2a. of the car
- b. Then it moved
- c. around the side
- 3a. that blended with the thunder
- b. At the back
- c. a deep rumbling growl
- d. the animal snorted
- 4a. out of all the side windows
- b. The big raised tail
- c. blocked their view

- 5a. mounted on the back of the Land Cruiser
- b. and,
- c. It sank its jaws into the spare tire
- d. tore it away
- e. in a single head shake.

After unscrambling the sentences, arrange the sentences according to this outline to produce a meaningful paragraph:

- Sentence 1: approach by animal
- Sentence 2: car windows blocked
- Sentence 3: sounds of animal
- Sentence 4: attack to part of car
- Sentence 5: lifting of car

Write out and punctuate the paragraph.

Part Two: Each list below, when unscrambled, will become one of the sentences in a paragraph from Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher." In that paragraph, the mysterious main character Lady Madeline of Usher is described. Unscramble the lists to produce the four sentences in the paragraph. In each list, the sentence part that begins the sentence is capitalized.

- 1a. there did stand the lofty and enshrouded figure
- b. but then without those doors
- c. It was the work of the rushing gust—
- d. of the Lady Madeline of Usher
- 2a. and the evidence of some bitter struggle
- b. There was blood
- c. upon every portion of her emaciated frame
- d. upon her white robes
- 3a. there had been found the potency of a spell.

- b. upon the instant, their ponderous and ebony jaws
- c. As if in the superhuman energy of his utterance
- d. the huge antique panels
- e. to which the speaker pointed
- f. threw slowly back,
- 4a. to and fro upon the threshold—
- b. bore him to the floor a corpse,
- c. then, with a low, moaning cry,
- d. and in her violent and now final death-agonies,
- e. For a moment she remained trembling and reeling
- f. fell heavily inward upon the person of her brother,
- g. and a victim to the terrors he had anticipated

After unscrambling the sentences, arrange the sentences according to this outline to produce a meaningful paragraph:

- Sentence 1: setting the stage
- Sentence 2: introduction of Lady Madeline
- Sentence 3: description of Lady Madeline
- Sentence 4: action of Lady Madeline

Write out and punctuate the paragraph.

Practice 3

In the paragraphs below, practice sentence variety by moving sentence parts to new positions. Change the position of underlined sentence parts to a place that is equally effective.

Write out the new paragraphs.

1. As quickly as it had come, the wind died, and the clearing was quiet again. The heron stood in the shallows, motionless and waiting. A little water snake swam up the pool, turning his periscope head from side to side.

John Steinbeck, Of Mice and Men

2. Behind us was the town of Castle Rock, spread out on the long hill that was known as Castle View, surrounding its green and shady common. Further down Castle River you could see the stacks of the woolen mill spewing smoke into a sky the color of gunmetal and spewing waste into the water. The Jolly Furniture Barn was on our left, and straight ahead of us were the railroad tracks, bright and heliographing in the sun.

Stephen King, "The Body"

3. Standing at the front window and holding back the curtain, Agatha watched for the first star. In the summertime she had to be alert because the sky stayed light for so long that the stars would more or less melt into view. Sometimes Thomas waited, too. He said his wishes aloud, no matter how often she warned him not to. He wished for definite objects—toys and candy and such—as if the sky were one big Sears, Roebuck catalog. Agatha, on the other hand, wished silently, and not even in words. She wished in a strong wash of feeling.

Anne Tyler, Saint Maybe

4. We paid our dollars at the admission gate and threw ourselves into the carnival like famished beggars at a feast. The strings of light bulbs gleamed over our heads like trapped stars. A lot of kids our age were there, along with their parents, and some older people and high school kids, too. Around us the rides grunted, clattered, and rattled. We bought our tickets and got on the Ferris wheel, and I made the mistake of sitting with Davy Ray. When we got to the very top and the wheel paused to allow riders on the bottommost gondola, he grinned and started rocking us back and forth and yelling that the bolts were about to come loose.

Practice 4

From your own writing, choose several paragraphs to practice sentence variety by rearranging the sentence parts in your sentences. Identify the parts of the sentences that can be rearranged, and then rewrite those sentences, moving those parts to new places.

cus 2

Sentence Imitating

Sentence imitating is the use of professional writers' sentences as models for writing your own sentences. The structure of your sentence is the same as the model's, but the content is different. The purpose is to increase your ability to vary sentence structure through a deliberate imitation of the structure of the model sentence.

Practice 1

Below are groups of three sentences. Two of the sentences in each group are identical in structure. The other sentence in the group, although competently written, is structurally different from the other two. Identify the sentence that is different. Answers are in the References on pages 158–159.

- 1a. Great was his care of them.
- b. Something else he saw.
- c. Chilling was her story of passion.
- 2a. The big thing, exciting yet frightening, was to talk to her, say what he hoped to do.
- b. There was also a rhino, who, from the tracks and the kicked-up mound of strawy dung, came there each night.
- c. An acceptable solution, simple and efficient, is to negotiate with the management, emphasize what the workers want to delete.
- 3a. Much later the accountant finished, ledgers in their vertical files on the right side of the desk, pencils and pens in their containers decorated with seals and designs on the shelf above the desk.
- b. This leader, whose word was law among the boys who defied authority for the sake of defiance, was no more than twelve or thirteen years old and looked even younger.