

Fish & Wildlife Service – National Conservation Training Center
Critical Writing/Critical Thinking Follow-up Web Series CSP3167OL
Reduce the Reader's Workload by Coordinating and Subordinating the Right Ideas
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[audio start]

MB: We're going to get started in just a few minutes. There is a Word document to accompany today's presentation. It was emailed to you sometime within the last half hour, and it's called coordination and subordination. So we're going to wait for about three minutes to let everyone have the chance to get logged on, and while we're waiting, go ahead and check your email, download that file, and you'll want to have it on your computer minimized during today's WebEx session.

So once again, you need to download the file coordination and subordination that was emailed to you within the last half hour. And we'll be back on in two minutes to get started.

Good afternoon everyone, and welcome to the webinar series for Critical Writers, Critical Thinkers: Reduce the Reader's Workload by Coordinating and Subordinating the Right Ideas. This is Michelle Baker, one of the many course instructors working on this project. And just a few housekeeping items before we get started today. I see that we've already got a number of participants that are logged on. Welcome! It's good to see you all. If you can see the slide that says thank you for joining, please click on the green checkmark that is right here at the bottom of your participant screen. So if you can see the screen that says thank you for joining, please click on that green checkmark that's right here. As you can see, I just changed our slide, so we are now on reduce the reader's workload, and this is the Word document that was emailed to everyone about a half an hour ago. As we go through today's webinar, there will be times when I ask you to revise these paragraphs, and because they're kind of long, you would probably want to do that in Word. So go ahead and download that file, open it in Word, and minimize it on your computer screen, so that when you have the opportunity to work on these revisions, you can do that on your own computer, you can save your work, and you can check your work against the suggestions that I'm offering today.

If that sounds like a good idea to everybody, go ahead and put a little emoticon next to your name. These are our fun little pictures of how we're feeling right at the moment. So if that makes sense to you, if you've got your Word document up and ready to go, click on your little emoticon and give us a clue that... Wow! All of those smiling faces out there. Looks good!

Alright. So we're going to get started with reduce the reader's workload, coordinate and subordinate the right ideas. Those of you who attended the last webinar will remember that we talked in November about transitions. But transitions don't solve all of our writing

problems. They solve a lot of them, but not all of them. You can add transitions and still have writing that is clunky and unwieldy and hard to read. So let me show you an example of what I mean by that.

You should see right now on your screen a summary of one of our Fish and Wildlife Service regulations, the Lacey Act. Take just a minute to read through this. Well I think you can see that this series of sentences has a number of different transitions, under the Lacey Act, for example. And the repetition of both the word species and the Service. It's also fairly clear in the sense that subjects are at the beginning of the sentence and are close to their verbs. But it's still kind of clunky and hard to read.

Let's take a look at another example. Again, notice that there are transitions here, like the word however, or the phrase, between 2000 and 2007. You'll also notice that some of our sentences are rather short, like this one here. So certainly we could do a better job combining sentences and adding transitions. But the real problem here is that we have several independent clauses strung together.

One more example. Even more so than the last two, this example does a really good job providing the kinds of transitions we talked about in the last class. The repetition of the ABC, which you see the whole way through this example creates a unity to the document. The subject remains the same, and it stays very close to the verbs in the sentence. Those are up front and clear. But still, there's a clunkiness to all of this. And particularly when we finish reading, we feel a little bit fatigued, like we had a lot of work to do to make sense of everything that happened. The reason is because none of our ideas have been subordinated. So what I'd like to do right now is to give us a definition of the two terms we're talking about today: coordination and subordination.

Very simply, coordination is a way of joining ideas that are at the same level of importance. All of our coordinating conjunctions. Remember our mnemonic: FANBOYS. For, and, nor, but, or, yet, and so. Every one of those coordinate. Also our coordinating conjunctions work like however, moreover, and therefore. They introduce independent clauses and they link ideas that are at the same level of importance. That's a good thing. We need transitions. The problem is when we have a long string of independent clauses, the reader is forced to maintain a very high level of attention, and readers can't do that for long periods of time.

Subordination also links ideas, but it tells the reader which ideas are more important, so if they're having any difficulty at all maintaining their attention span, subordination allows them to bow out for just a very seconds, to sort of doze off or space out, or jump to the next important idea. So today we're going to talk about how to construct both subordinate and coordinate structures, we're going to get some practice doing that, and we're going to look at some examples of how it can be used effectively, and how it doesn't really work very well.

So here's the key point we want to take home today. We need to subordinate ideas, because long strings of independent clauses demand a high level of attention that's

impossible to sustain. If we subordinate some ideas, we can relieve fatigue and create emphasis. In order to make sense of all of this, we need to do some definitions. And those of you who were in the class may remember that this is just a little bit of a review. We need first to cover the difference between a phrase and a clause. Simply speaking, a phrase is a group of words, like to the store, or by a bus. Those are both what we call prepositional phrases, they start with a preposition.

This group of words, waling to the store, is also a phrase, because it does not have a subject and a verb, and that's really what distinguishes a phrase from a clause. You'll notice that in the first example, walking to the store, there's a word that looks like a verb, but there's no subject. In the second sentence, while I was walking to the store, the I was walking is our subject and verb, and that is the difference between a phrase and a clause.

Under clauses, we have two kinds of clauses that constitute our sentence structures. The first of them is independent clauses. We also call these complete sentences. This clause, I almost got hit by a bus, is an independent clause. It has a subject, a verb, and it expresses a complete thought. On the other hand, if we read this all by itself, while I was walking to the store. We have a dependent clause. Most of us can hear that that's an incomplete structure. Now, the tough part about these dependent clauses is that, if we take out that word while, it kind of sounds like an independent clause. I was walking to the store, period. And that's the point. The word "while" tells us that what follows is dependent on something else. So if we're having difficulty making sense of the sentence, we automatically skip ahead to the comma, make sense of the idea, and then go back to process the information.

That's what happens when we read. So, let's talk about how to make that happen for our readers. Coordinate ideas, ideas that are linked at the same level of importance, are expressed in independent clauses. Let's have some practice identifying these. Sentence A: The only direct effect of the policy is to accept or reject population segments for these purposes. Lots of language. Several transitions. I see an or here as well as a for. But, subject of the sentence is effect, and the verb is is, and that's the core structure, which makes this an independent clause despite all the fluff.

In our next example, in carrying out this examination. This word looks like a verb, but there's no subject, which means this is not a clause. It's just a phrase. The sentence begins here. The services will consider. And that's the core. Everything else that follows is just a phrase. And our final example, probably the most tricky one. Our proposal was evaluated favorably by the committee and subsequently adopted by the board. The subject is proposal. But it's got two actions. It was evaluated, and subsequently adopted. This is what we call a compound element, element being the key word here. The only thing that's been compounded in this sentence is the verb, evaluated and adopted, two verbs to go with one subject. That's still a single independent clause.

Let's compare that to dependent clauses, which are the way that we subordinate ideas. Dependent clauses normally start with relative pronouns, or subordinating conjunctions, the term that we referred to last class as "adverbs." And here's a prime example of a relative pronoun: the revision of the regulation is making this information requirement more obvious to an applicant who uses. Who refers back to the word application, and uses is the subject. Grammatically, who uses is our subject-verb pair. And, trust your ear. If you read this together, who uses the regulation as a guide in applying for this type of permit, you'll see that what we really have here is an incomplete sentence. When we read this, we know that if we're struggling with the idea, we can end here, make sense of one small unit of thought, and then move on to another idea.

Let's try another example, this time with what we called last class an adverb. While we acknowledge circumstances that are beyond the control of the land owner, we acknowledge, is our subject and verb pair, but if we're having trouble reading the sentence, understanding the content, we understand because of that word "while" that we can skip ahead to the comma and start reading this, we will not make renegotiation of the baseline a requirement, and now we understand the idea.

So let's pause for a minute and practice this inside of a piece of writing done by Rachel Carson and included in her book *Silent Spring*. If we take a look at how she writes, we can see how coordination and subordination can be used effectively to help keep readers steady. What we're going to do is bracket off her use of clauses and distinguish between her coordinate structures and her subordinate structures. Because this is really a very complicated set of ideas, but simultaneously, a pretty easy read. So let's identify subjects and verbs so that we can mark off clauses. Although the Second World War marked, here is our first clause. And she tells us where it ends, right here at the comma. So let's bracket that off and see what our subject of the independent clause is. A few of the old materials persist. That's one dependent clause, and one independent clause.

Next, chief among these is arsenic. Arsenic is our subject, is is the verb, and that relative pronoun indicates that a dependent clause is beginning, which is—subject, verb. And there's our next clause. The next sentence is a single independent clause. It has a long list at the end of it, but the main structure is right here, arsenic is. And then the rest of us is just phrases. Its relations to man are, relations are. And now, we have another subordinate structure, since. Many are. Subject, verb. It has been a favorite. Subject and verb in an independent clause.

Let's look at that again. Subordinate structure. Main idea, main idea, subordinate structure. Main idea, main idea, subordinate structure. Main idea. There's a lovely balance that's created here between the subordinate structures and the main ideas, and when we review the paragraph for content, there's a harmony created between these passages in white, or the independent clauses, and the primary points that she wants to get across. These toxic chemicals are still present in the very structures of the earth itself. Those are the points.

Before we move on to trying some of these examples on our own, I'd like to ask if there are any questions at this point about the difference between dependent and independent clauses or the difference between coordinate and subordinate structures. Once again, you can ask questions using the chat feature, or you can ask questions by un-muting yourself and talking to us on the phone.

Alright then. Now is your time to practice. And this is where that Word document is going to be handy for you to use. If you go there, you'll find that the first example is the one that I'm showing on my slide right now. The everglades of South Florida provide a large area of undisturbed subtropical habitat. What I'd like you to do is to highlight by underlining or italicizing, however you feel comfortable in your own Word document, the sections of this paragraph that are absolutely key for our reader. So if they walk away not knowing anything else, what is it that you think they absolutely have to know. Take just a minute in your Word document to underline or italicize the sections of this paragraph that readers need to know.

Alright. So I hope that you were able to read this and pick out the key ideas you think readers should walk away with. In reading this paragraph, I think that this idea right here is really important. Invasive Burmese python has entered the region and spread at an alarming rate. That seems to me like a key point that readers really need to take away. Next, the current population is estimated in the thousands. Key point. People need to know that. And finally, Fish and Wildlife must determine if they are invasive under the Lacey Act. This other material is important. We can't get rid of it, but what we can do is subordinate it so that our reader can pay attention to these three ideas. Invasive Burmese python has entered the region and spread at an alarming rate, current population is estimated in the thousands, the Fish and Wildlife Service must determine.

Now, how do we do that. Well, first of all, we add transitions. And we do those by evaluating the logical connections between the ideas in this paragraph. But second, as we do that, we try to subordinate all of these ideas, the everglades, the saline and freshwater wetlands, the diverse array of wildlife, the between 2000 and 2007, and the increase of more than 200 percent. All of those clauses need to be placed behind either a relative pronoun or an adverb. Let me give you a couple of examples.

Relative pronoun include the words who, whose, which, or that. The adverbs that give us subordinate structures include words like because, although, while, and since. So then, let's try our hand at revising this paragraph, putting words in front of these ideas like, who whose which or that, because although while or since. Take a few minutes to try to add that language to this paragraph.

When you're finished. Come back to the WebEx, and put a green checkmark next to your name, and when I see a good number of green checkmarks, I'll give you one example of an answer. Alright. Fantastic! So many of you are working so quickly. I think that's great!

So let's take a look at one example that I tried and what I did was to sort of dim these subordinate structures, which is kind of the way that our brains work when we read. Although, which, because. Now, what happens is, if the reader is having difficulty processing this paragraph, they jump directly to these sections. Over the last ten years. Exotic invasive Burmese python has entered the region. The current population is estimated in the thousands. Therefore, I kind of snuck that one in on you. We've got this action that we really need to take right now.

This dimming is exactly what happens in the minds of our readers when we subordinate structures, and unlike the earlier examples that we saw, not only does this give transitions, but it gives that rest to our reader, that little breathing space, so that they can say, oh, that's the point! It's a big help.

Let's try it again. We're back to this American Bird Conservancy. And once again, the first step is to underline or italicize the language in this paragraph that you really want your reader to walk away with. So take a minute in your Word document to underline or italicize the key points in this paragraph. Is anybody having difficulty figuring out what's most important in this paragraph? That's because practically everything here is really key to defining who ABC is and what they do. Still, if we leave this the way that it is, I can guarantee you that right about here, your readers' eyes are going to glaze over and they will not bother to keep going, because they're tired. They really need a break. So, the way that we do this is by combining some of these early sentences, combine these as much as you possibly can. And then, try to subordinate these, this idea right here. Of all the ideas that are here, the fact that ABC has over 7000 members throughout the United States including Hawaii is probably the least important. It still matters, especially because the bird that they're trying to save, the akikiki, is located in Hawaii, so this is an organization that has a vested interest in the species that they're trying to protect, but like I said, of all the ideas that are here, that's probably the least important. That one, and maybe this one right here. The fact that they use this whole network of resources. So, let me clean that up for you. This idea and this idea need to be put in a structure that begins with the word who, whose, which, or that, or with the words because, although, while, and since. So give that a try and see how well it works.

Alright. Let's take a look at one example. And what I've done in this case is to highlight the core structure of each of these sentences in white. So the American Bird Conservancy works together. ABC draws on. And ABC measures its success. I was able to add a while here to subordinate the number and the location of the members. And these lists, while not technically subordinate structures, are still ideas that readers tend to dim if they're having trouble understanding a passage. This, these two commas, create what we call a parenthetical expression. We covered these in class under the heading of restrictive and non-restrictive elements. Parenthetical expression is another word for non-restrictive elements. And again, readers tend to dim those as we read.

So, I cheated a little bit, and I only added one of the subordinate structures that we talked about so far. But be aware that non-restrictive elements, or parenthetical expressions, work very similarly to subordinate expressions. Also, lists work a lot like

subordination. Now, I don't want to call them that, because they don't use transitions. So unlike true subordination, they don't express logical connections between ideas. But in this case, really all that we had to do was link some of our sentences together and be aware that we wanted to subordinate at least one of those links. So hopefully subordination can be a little bit easier than what it sounds like.

We're going to give it one more try today with this example. So take a minute to read through this, and figure out again, either italicize or underline the language that you feel is really key.

So hopefully you came up with something similar to this, both hyperdermatitis and plague, and oh, please forgive me for the typos there, yuck—can be found in desert populations and these diseases often spread rapidly and can be fatal. Now, the definitions of plague and hyperdermatitis are going to be important to somebody is trying to wrap their brain around that topic, but like lists, definitions have a tendency to get stored in the back of our brains when we read. We don't refer back to them until we actually need to know what they are. So as long as they're expressed in these clear structures and especially as long as they've got these italicized descriptions, these little visual clues next to them, readers will kind of mentally bookmark those and save them for another day. It honestly doesn't matter whether you put these in a coordinate structure or a subordinate structure. With these two ideas, we're concerned about hyperdermatitis and plague, and these diseases can spread rapidly and be fatal. That's what we want to leave our reader with. So again, try adding the language who, whose, which, or that, because, although, while or since to this sentence, this sentence, and this sentence.

Alright folks. Like the last time, I'm going to ask that you send your revisions to my email address, which is lbaker@shepherd.edu. We had two good submissions last time that we were able to compile into a follow up document and put online along with the webinar so that future users of this series can work along with you, really, and get a feel for how this webinar would have worked if they had been able to make it on the live session. So if you have an answer that you would like to share, please send it to me. I'll give you personal feedback on your response, and then anonymously, I'll compile those answers together and they will be uploaded with this webinar on the Sharepoint site.

Before we leave this topic today, before I open it up for a question and answer period, there's one last point that I'd like to make about the very subtle power of these relationships—coordination and subordination. Those of you who were in the class might remember this example that we used at the end of our sentence structure module. In this particular example, the word that and the word although subordinates everything in this paragraph after this idea, we disagree. In other words, the only thing the reader hears is we disagree. That makes our readers, who disagree with us, not particularly happy. A very subtle change in this sentence structure, from the word “although” to the word “but” makes an absolute world of difference, because mentally, the reader now hears, we disagree, but we recognize. And that structure, the independent clause instead of the dependent clause, the coordinated idea instead of the subordinated idea

builds partnership and good will and it makes our reader feel like they've been heard. That makes a huge difference in our relationships with our partners, and it's all due to that one little word change right there.

So, to bring together the lesson from November and December together, transitions are absolutely key to our writing. They establish logical connections, help our readers make sense of the relationships between ideas, but they need to be [...] either coordinated or subordinated so that readers not only understand but [...] to the right ideas. Before we close today, does anyone have questions or comments on [...] topic. Let's give you a few minutes to do that.

Alright folks. It's been great to see you all on here today. I hope you appreciated the lesson. And we will have this material available online so that you can review the PowerPoint presentation again in case anything went by too quickly or wasn't clear enough. And again, if you've got a revision for that last example, please email it to me at lbaker@shepherd.edu. Thanks, everybody. Have a great afternoon, a wonderful holiday, and we look forward to seeing you back for January's webinar. Take care.

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