Sentence Types

Writers create shades of meaning, consciously or subconsciously, by varying their syntax. Some books, some teachers (I’ve done it), tout syntactic variety as an end in itself. It is not; it is a means. Writers vary their syntax because they have to, because they must in order to create the clarity and cleanliness of composition that comprises good writing. In other words, syntactic variety is a means of communicating the exact thought, with the exact emphasis, that the writer wishes to communicate.

Syntax can vary an infinite number of ways: introductory participial phrases, appositives, trailing prepositional phrases, but that does not help us much.

Let’s start with the four basic sentence types and how writers can use the sentence types to create meaning and emphasis.

Simple Sentences

A simple sentence has a subject and a predicate. An example of a short, simple sentence with a lot of power and impact is “Jesus wept.” Here we have one word, a noun, a proper name, serving as the subject, and a single verb in the past tense. It is all the writer needs to makes his point. Most sentences are not as dramatic, not as emphatic, not at terse as this sentence.