**Basic Grammar and Philosophy for Crafting Cumulative Sentences**

**CUMULATIVE SENTENCES:  Basic Philosophy and Grammar**

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A cumulative sentence gets its name from the fact that **it accumulates information**, gathering new details as it goes,  like a snowball that gets bigger and bigger as you roll it through snow.  To write a cumulative sentence, all you have to do is to turn the period at the end of one of your sentences into a comma and start adding modifiers.  As you add modifying details you will bring your writing "into focus," making your point sharper and sharper, your meaning more and more clear.

A simple cumulative sentence has two main parts:  a base clause and a modifying phrase or phrases.  A base clause (or main clause) can stand alone as a sentence.

A **base clause** contains the sentence's main subject and main verb.  A base clause can be thought of as a short, boiled down sentence.  The verb in a base clause is called a finite verb.  Verbs express an action or state of being.  State of being verbs are also called linking verbs.  An action verb expresses something that can be done.  A linking verb points to more information.  The following verbs are ***true*** linking verbs: any form of the verb ***be*** [***am***, ***is***, ***are***, ***was***, ***were***, ***has been***, ***are being***, ***might have been***, etc.], ***become***, and ***seem***. These true linking verbs are ***always*** linking verbs.

Then you have a list of verbs with multiple personalities: ***appear***, ***feel***, ***grow***, ***look***, ***prove***, ***remain***, ***smell***, ***sound***, ***taste***, and ***turn***. Sometimes these verbs are linking verbs; sometimes they are action verbs. Their function in a sentence decides what you should call them.  Verbs that require an object to complete their sense are called **transitive;**  verbs that do not require an object are called **intransitive.**

            Example:  **The boy fainted.** (action verb) (intransitive)

                              **The boy is tired**.  (linking verb)

                        **The boy kicked the ball.**  (action verb) (transitive)

The second part of a cumulative sentence consists of one or more **modifying phrases**.  Unlike a clause, a phrase does not contain a subject and a verb, and can't stand alone as a sentence.  The verbal in a phrase is a nonfinite verb.

            Example:  **his face turning white**

                              **a goofy looking sixth grader**

                              **muscles turning to Jello**

**A modifying phrase** does not have a subject and a predicate, so **it cannot stand alone as a sentence.**  Most modifying phrases can be classified as: Participial phrases, Gerund phrases, Infinitive phrases, or Prepositional phrases

**Participial phrases:**  The boy fainted, **exhausted by his long run.**  The boy fainted, **fainting as if he had been shot.**  The boy fainted, **slumping to the ground.**  The boy fainted, **stricken with grief.**  The boy fainted, **lost for the rest of the race.** The boy fainted\*, his face turning a sickly white.\*

A participle is a verbal adjective---a verb that has been turned into an adjective.  Endings of participles are usually:  --ing, --ed,  --t, --en.

**Gerund phrases:**  **Running too fast** made the boy faint.  **Fainting** is what the boy does best. **His fainting** set the tone for the race.

A gerund is a verbal noun---a verb that has been turned into a noun by adding --ing. Since a gerund functions as a noun, it occupies some positions in a sentence that a noun ordinarily would, for example: subject, direct object, subject complement, and object of preposition.

Gerund as subject:  Fainting might become a habit.

Gerund as direct object:  They do not understand my fainting.

Gerund as subject complement:  My biggest problem is fainting.

Gerund as object of preposition:  The coach chewed him out for fainting.

**Infinitive phrases:**  The boy wanted **to faint**.  Fainting is the problem **to be overcome.  To faint or not to faint** was the question.

**Prepositional phrases:**  The boy fainted **after finishing the race.**  The boy fainted **as his shocked parents watched.**  The boy fainted **in front of his parents**.  The boy fainted **with no warning.**

Common prepositions that begin prepositional phrases are:  **across, after, as, at, because of, before, between, by, for, from, in, in front of, in regard to, like, near, of on, over, through, to, together with, under, until, up, with.**

**Cumulative sentences are formed by adding one or more participial phrases to a base clause.**

**Cumulative Sentences Contain Participial Phrases**

A phrase may contain a verb form ( a verbal) that actually works like a modifying adjective or adverb.  These verb forms are called participles.  Since they function as adjectives, participles modify nouns or pronouns.

There are two types of participles: **present participles** and **past participles**. Present participles end in *-ing*. Past participles end in *-ed*, *-en*, *-d*, *-t*, or *-n*, as in the words *asked*, *eaten*, *saved*, *dealt*, and *seen*.

Example:   The boy fainted, **cracking his head on the corner of the desk as**

**he fell.** (present participle)

 The boy fainted\*, scared witless by what he saw.\*

 (past participle)

 The boy fainted, **dropping his books.** (present participle)

 The boy fainted, **uttering a kind of pained squeak.**

 (present participle)

        The boy fainted, **driven past his physical limits.**

                                   (past participle)

**Dangling Participles/Misplaced Modifiers:**

A dangling modifier is a word or phrase that modifies a word not clearly stated in the sentence.  We usually find misplaced modifiers at the start of a sentence;  they aren’t actually misplaced, but need something to modify.  Frequently, a misplaced modifier modifies an agent (someone doing something), but the agent is not  specified.

**After running the race so well, fainting was a disappointment.**

In order to prevent confusion, a participial phrase must be placed as close to the noun it modifies as possible, and the noun must be clearly stated.

**Cracking his head on the corner of the desk as he fell,** his fainting caused quite a commotion.

**Cracking his head on the corner of the desk as he fell,** he created quite a commotion when he fainted.

In the first sentence there is no clear indication of who or what is performing the action expressed in the participle *cracking*. Cracking can’t logically modify his or his fainting.  This is an example of a dangling modifier since the modifier (the participial phrase) is not modifying any specific noun in the sentence and is thus left "dangling." Since a person must be suffering the cracking for the sentence to make sense, a noun or pronoun that refers to a person must be in the place immediately after the participial phrase, as in the second sentence.

**Modifying phrases may add information about the subject or the verb of the base clause (or the object, if it contains an object), or they may simply add to our understanding of the entire clause.**

            Example:  The boy kicked the ball, hitting it squarely with the toe of his soccer shoe.

                               The boy kicked the ball, a tattered and worn old football.

                                The boy kicked the ball, grim determination clear in his every move.

                                The boy kicked the ball, his friends yelling heir encouragement.

Base clause plus one or more modifying phrases makes a cumulative sentence.

            Example: **The boy fainted, a goofy looking sixth grader, his face turning white, muscles turning to Jello, dropping his books, uttering a kind of pained squeak, scared witless by what he saw.**

**This cumulative sentence packs a lot of information.**  One way of looking at it is to say that it does the work of at least seven sentences.

1.  The boy fainted.

2.  The boy was a goofy looking sixth grader.

3.  When he fainted, the boy's face turned white.

4.  When he fainted, the boys muscles turned to Jello.

5.  When he fainted, the boy dropped his books.

6.  When he fainted, the boy uttered a kind of pained squeak.

7.  The boy fainted because he was scared witless by what he saw.

Because the cumulative sentence does pack so much detail and because it is easy to follow, professional writers use it very frequently.  In fact, it has been estimated that professional writers put their modifiers at the end of their sentences two thirds of the time.  But, a free modifying phrase can appear at the start of a sentence, in the middle of a sentence, or at the end of a sentence, its place limited only by modifying  logic.

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