

CHAPTER 1

The Rhetoric of the Sentence: First Principles of Composition

Noun Head with Embedded Modifier

Noun Head with Free Modifier

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Verb head with Free Modifier

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Summing Up

As a starting point for this course let's examine an observation made by John Erskine, a practicing novelist and teacher of writing. It is an extremely interesting piece of advice, especially when you consider how often we are told to keep our sentences lean and our nouns and verbs muscular and unadorned.

When you write, you make a point, not by subtracting as though you sharpened a pencil, but by adding. . . . The noun, the verb, and the main clause serve merely as a base on which the meaning will rise.

But if *the noun, the verb, and the main clause serve merely as a base on which the meaning will rise*, where should we direct our attention and our efforts? The final part of John Erskine's statement is this:

The modifier is the essential part of any sentence.

In order for us to see how meaning is to be found chiefly in the modifier—what we add to a noun, verb, or base clause—let us examine various kinds of heads and their modifiers. A **head** is any kind of grammatical structure—noun or verb, for instance—to which a modifier can be added. Let us look first at the noun head.

(A main clause, in traditional terminology, consists of the subject and verb [or predicate] and any adjectives, adverbs, or phrases that are added to it: *The book belongs to my younger sister*. A base clause consists of the same structures plus any subordinate clauses that are added to it: *The book that I lost belongs to my younger sister*. In other words, traditional grammar makes the absence or presence of a subordinate clause an essential distinction. Modern grammar recognizes that subordinate clauses are no more significant—or insignificant—than other structures of modification. Hence we will generally use the term *base clause* because it signifies any main clause plus any modifiers bound to it.)

Noun Head with Embedded Modifier

It was a slaty, windy **day** with specks of snow sliding through the trees.

SAUL BELLOW

In this sentence *day* is a noun, the head to which the modifiers are attached. The words *slaty* and *windy* are adjectives, modifying the noun *day*; they tell us what sort of day it is. Both *slaty* and *windy* are embedded modifiers; that is, they are a part of the base clause of the sentence and not set off by commas. (The comma after *slaty* merely separates items in a series; it does not indicate what we will call a *free modifier*.)

After the noun head *day* we have an additional embedded modifier. This time the embedded modifier is more than a single word; it consists of a prepositional phrase (see Chapter 4), *with specks of snow sliding through the trees*.

So we can see that whatever meaning this sentence has is not to be found in the noun *day* but in the added modifiers. *It was a day* tells us almost nothing.

But not all modifiers are embedded. They can be set off by punctuation, and are then called free modifiers.

Noun Head with Free Modifier

She met him at the appointed time in the Plaza lobby, a lovely, faded, gray-eyed blonde in a coat of Russian sable.

F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

In this sentence we have as our free modifier the noun phrase *a lovely, faded, gray-eyed blonde in a coat of Russian sable*. When we call it a free modifier, we mean that the noun phrase is set off from the main or base clause by punctuation. As we can see, the pronoun *she* in the base clause tells us little about the woman, and the base clause tells us only what she did. The meaning in this sentence is to be found in the added modifiers.

The meaning in the noun phrase *a lovely, faded, gray-eyed blonde in a coat of Russian sable* is, likewise, to be found in the embedded modifiers added to the noun head *blonde*, which like *she* tells us little by itself.

In this course we will not be paying much attention to embedded, or bound, modifiers. The free modifier is the type of modifier we will be examining, since it can be better manipulated to the advantage of the writer. And this course will teach you many of the strategies employed by modern writers in using free modifiers.

Now let us see how meaning can arise from the additions made to the verb head.

Verb Head with Embedded Modifier

The picadors **galloped** jerkily around the ring.

ERNEST HEMINGWAY

In this sentence the verb head *galloped* is modified by the adverb *jerkily*, an embedded modifier. The verb *galloped* gives us some meaning, but adding the adverb *jerkily* lets us see how the picadors galloped

and the quality of the horses who galloped in this manner. As Erskine noted, "The modifier is the essential part of any sentence."

The prepositional phrase *around the ring* is also an embedded modifier of the verb *galloped*, but this program will not deal specifically with adverbials of time and place, only with adverbials of manner. Adverbials of time and place—*when, next, after, later*—usually take care of themselves; they are obligatory. Narrative writing is concerned with the picturing of an action; this picture—concentrated in the verb—can be sharpened through the addition of adverbials of manner, showing *how* the action took place—*quickly, slowly, laughingly*.

Once again, we will not be much concerned with embedded modifiers, since they cannot be manipulated as readily as free modifiers. Here is an example of the type of free modifier of the verb head that will absorb our interest during this program.

Verb Head with Free Modifier

We **caught** two bass, hauling them in briskly as though they were mackerel, pulling them over the side of the boat in a businesslike manner without any landing net, and stunning them with a blow on the back of the head.

E. B. WHITE

In this sentence the base clause is *We caught two bass*. The verb head is *caught*. The rest of the sentence consists of free modifiers, additions to the base clause which show the manner in which the bass were caught. As you can see, the meaning here lies not so much in the verb as in the modifiers added to the verb.

It might be pointed out that the rest of the sentence beyond the base clause consists of three participial phrases, each with a present participle as the verb head: *hauling, pulling, stunning*. To each is attached the usual complements and the various modifiers containing most of the meaning. For instance, the second phrase consists of the verb head *pulling* plus its object *them* plus two sets of nested prepositional phrases—*over the side of the boat* and *in a businesslike manner without any landing net*—which are embedded in a free modifier, not set off from their head by punctuation.

The embedded modifiers added to the noun and the verb are not a problem, but the free modifiers are—because, by definition, they are clause or sentence modifiers. The modifiers added to *We caught two bass*, besides being adverbials of manner telling how the bass were caught, are also modifiers of the subject.

The terms *bound* and *free modifier* are used to get around the problems raised by the term *sentence modifier*. All modifiers set off by punctuation will—in this course—be referred to as *free modifiers*—sometimes related to the subject, picturing the appearance or the behavior of the subject, sometimes related to the action, sometimes to both no more to one than the other. Another way to put it is that bound modifiers are fairly definitely word modifiers; free modifiers are not so definitely sentence modifiers.

By now you have seen, as John Erskine stated, that "The modifier is the essential part of any sentence." But where can modifiers be added? Let us look at another example, this one illustrating what we mean by *base clause* and *positioning of modifiers*.

Position of Modifiers

Stretching away, **the cotton fields**, slowly emptying, were becoming the color of the sky, a deepening blue so intense that it was like darkness itself.

EUDORA WELTY

he comes to the city park." This will never do. It has no rhythm and hence no life; it is tone deaf. It is the seed that will burgeon into gobbledygook. One of the hardest things in writing is to keep the noun clusters and verb clusters short. It is with modifiers added to the base clause—that is, with sentence modifiers—that we are able to keep our structures short and at the same time to achieve the rhythms of speech.

The typical sentence of modern English—the kind we can best spend our efforts learning—is what we may call the cumulative sentence. The main clause, which may or may not have a sentence modifier before it, advances the discussion; but the additions move backward, as in this clause, to modify the statement of the main clause or, more often, to explicate or exemplify it, so that the sentence has a flowing and ebbing movement, advancing to a new position and then pausing to consolidate it.

There are other types of sentences that are used in expository writing and can be effective, but we will not practice them here. For instance, one type of sentence that has almost no place in narrative-descriptive writing is the *balanced sentence*—a kind that President Kennedy attuned our ears to when he said:

Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.
JOHN F. KENNEDY

This is the language of oratory, making use of inversion and opposition—language that makes a direct frontal assault on our emotions. In print, apart from the emotional environment of the inaugural address, the sentence gives little hint of its hidden power. We might even wonder what there was in its bare structure to move us so greatly. On the other hand, ordinary narrative prose and descriptive prose builds quietly and steadily, piling sense impression on sense impression, although the total emotional effect may be as great.

Let's take a look at another balanced sentence, this one by Winston Churchill.

The inherent vice of capitalism is the unequal sharing of blessings; the inherent vice of socialism is the unequal sharing of mistakes.
WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

Here we have again that play of opposites that is characteristic of the balanced sentence. You are free to use such structures when there is reason and you can do so effectively. But modern prose stylists do not often write sentences such as these, and we will not practice them here.

Another kind of sentence found in expository writing but one we will not practice is the *noncumulative sentence*. A sentence that is not cumulative can often be recognized by its long noun and verb phrases. If it has free modifiers, they are in the initial and medial positions. Here is a good example, from a writer of distinction, of a sentence that is not cumulative:

Those who are appalled by the prospect of living in a universe which, for the first time in several centuries, has ceased to seem comprehensible **may be somewhat reassured** by the reminder that it is only the novelty of the modern instances which is disturbing and that they have all along been living with other irresolvable paradoxes which did not trouble them simply because they had been for so long accepted.
JOSEPH WOOD KRUTCH

Often we need practice in learning how to read different types of sentences. Don't feel upset if some types require more work to read and understand. This is often the case with the long sentence that is not cumulative, and especially if the sentence is expository. Let's see if we can make the sentence a little easier to understand by doing what we normally do. First we locate the words that make up the verb group: *may be reassured*. We'll keep that. Then we look at the subject, normally before the verb. We see that the entire stretch of the sentence before the verb group *may be reassured* is the subject of the sentence. For this subject we can substitute *Certain people*. For the rest of the sentence, which is a long embedded prepositional phrase, we can substitute *by certain circumstances*. And so we have a shorthand version of the original sentence: *Certain people may be reassured by certain circumstances*.

We can learn to read various types of sentences; we can learn to write them. The type we will concentrate on is the *cumulative sentence*, already illustrated in the examples from F. Scott Fitzgerald and E. B. White.

First Principle— Addition

We might look again at the narrative sentence:

We caught two bass, hauling them in briskly as though they were mackerel, pulling them over the side of the boat in a businesslike manner without any landing net, and stunning them with a blow on the back of the head.

E. B. WHITE

Notice the short base clause; notice the three final free modifiers, all verb phrases, all beginning with a present participle, an *-ing* form.

Now let's look at a cumulative sentence written in the nineteenth century—about a subject we may be unfamiliar with and containing a word or two we may not know—and see how easy it is to read once we identify the base clause:

And thus the work proceeds; the two tackles hoisting and lowering simultaneously; both whale and windlass heaving, the heavers singing, the blubber-room gentlemen coiling, the mates scarfing, the ship straining, and all hands swearing occasionally, by way of assuaging the general friction.

HERMAN MELVILLE

This sentence marches along effortlessly. The base clause—*and thus the work proceeds*—is a shorthand summary of the cumulative sentence itself. Everything after the base clause is a modification of the original statement; that is, the additions go back over the action summarized by the base clause, giving us the specific details of the manner in which the work proceeds.

This is the type of sentence Erskine was referring to in his statement. In this type of sentence the base clause, which may or may not have modifiers before or within it, advances the discussion or moves the narrative ahead to the next action. The additions placed after it move backward, as in this sentence you are now reading, to modify the statement of the base clause or more often to explain it or add examples or details to it, so that the sentence has a flowing and ebbing movement, advancing to a new position and then pausing to consolidate it.

The sentence you have just read has seven words in the base clause and 50 in the four additions after it. Let's take a look at the sentence, which is cumulative in structure but expository in purpose:

The additions placed after it move backward, as in this sentence you are now reading, to modify the statement of the base clause or more often to explain it or add examples or details to it, so that the sentence has a flowing and ebbing movement, advancing to a new position and then pausing to consolidate it.

This is a cumulative sentence which also describes the general characteristics of the cumulative sentence. *A sentence is cumulative if it has a base or main clause, which is usually short, and one or more added final modifiers.*

So, you can see that the cumulative sentence is far easier to read, although it might be as long as, or even longer than, the sentence that is not cumulative. But why, you might ask, bother writing such a long sentence, especially when it is easier to rewrite it in a shorter form?

Good question. It is true, for instance, that a description of the cumulative sentence could be written with shorter sentences instead of a single long sentence. Our single long sentence could be rewritten as a paragraph of five short sentences—a lead sentence of seven words and four added sentences totaling 52 words. Let's take a look at this long sentence rewritten as a paragraph:

The additions placed after it move backward. They move backward as in this sentence. They move backward to modify the statement of the base clause or more often to explain it or add examples or details to it. Thus the sentence has a flowing and ebbing movement. It advances to a new position and then pauses to consolidate it.

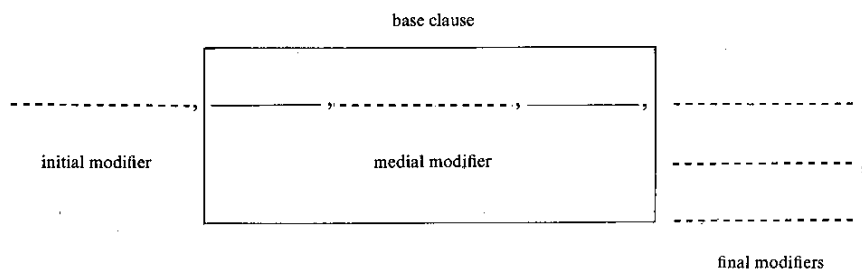
You are at liberty to think that the paragraph is no improvement over the sentence. We would agree with you. The paragraph is choppy, and there is undue repetition. The cumulative sentence flows more smoothly.

But look again at this paragraph, and you will see something more important than the butchering of a good, though long, expository sentence. *The principle of addition that you have seen operating within the cumulative sentence applies as well to the groups of sentences that we call expository paragraphs.* The lead or topic sentence of the expository paragraph has the same function as the main or base clause of the cumulative sentence; the supporting sentences of the paragraph have the same function as the added free modifiers, modifying the statement of the lead sentence or, more often, explaining it or adding examples or details to it.

Beyond the paragraph itself, the principle of addition applies to the group of paragraphs we call an essay, a chapter, or whatever. This, then, is our first principle, the foundation of all to come: **WRITING IS ESSENTIALLY A PROCESS OF ADDITION.**

Second Principle— Direction of Modification or Direction of Movement

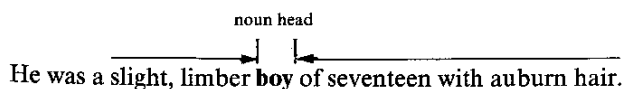
As we have said, writing is a process of addition. But speech is linear; that is, it moves in one direction only in time—forward. And it is not reversible. When you play a tape recorder backward, you hear gibberish, not reversed or mirror-image language. If you wish to add information to a statement you have already begun or if you wish to restate it, you must add to what you have already said—adding modifying words, phrases, or clauses. Writing takes place in linear space, which is analogous to time. That is, in the physical act of writing you add one word after another. As you do this consciously, putting words on paper, you can arrange your sentences in more varieties of patterns than you are likely to do when speaking aloud. Your base clauses will remain short, as they normally are in speech, but your free modifiers will occur in various positions as your writing moves forward in space:



When you add a modifier—whether to the noun, the verb, or the base clause—you may add it either before or within or after what it modifies. In this diagram, the modifiers are shown in all three positions, as you have already encountered them. As you might imagine, there are more final modifiers than initial and medial, since language is mainly a matter of addition and there is no way of calling back a statement once it is spoken—although you can, in writing, go back and insert words.

We can now illustrate our second principle of writing—the principle of direction of modification or direction of movement.

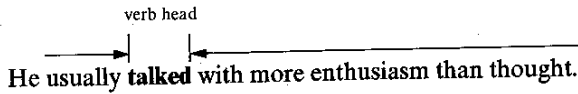
First, direction of movement with a noun head:



If you add the modifier before the head, the direction of modification can be indicated by an arrow pointing forward; if you add the modifier after the head, the direction of movement can be indicated by an arrow pointing backward.

In this sentence we know that the words *a slight, limber* can only modify a noun that is to follow; hence, we draw the arrow pointing forward. The phrases *of seventeen* and *with auburn hair* describe or modify a noun which has already been used, *boy*; hence, we draw the arrow pointing backward.

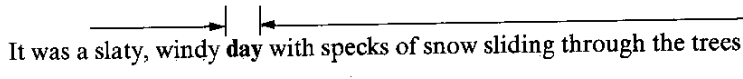
Then, direction of movement with a verb head:

verb head

 He usually **talked** with more enthusiasm than thought.

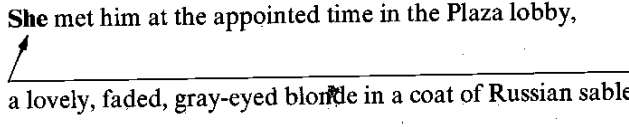
Here we have the same direction of movement, only this time the headword is a verb. We have before the verb the adverb *usually* modifying the verb *talked*, and after it the prepositional phrase *with more enthusiasm than thought* modifying the same verb. Again the direction of movement is backward, as it was with the noun head.

Now, let's look at some sentences you have already examined. This time, however, let's look at them as illustrating the direction of movement.

Noun head with embedded modifier:


 It was a slaty, windy **day** with specks of snow sliding through the trees. SAUL BELLOW

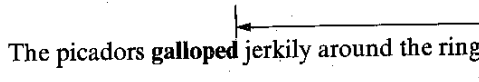
Noun head with free modifier:


She met him at the appointed time in the Plaza lobby,
 a lovely, faded, gray-eyed blonde in a coat of Russian sable. F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

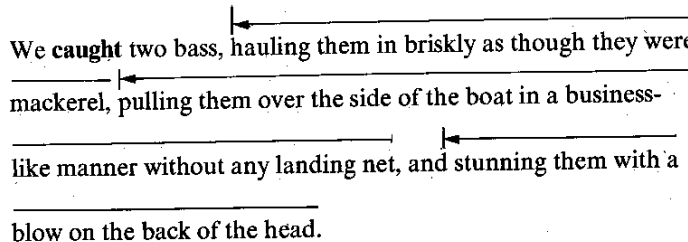
Here we have the direction of movement focusing on noun headwords. In the sentence by Saul Bellow we have the modifiers *slaty* and *windy* before the noun headword *day*; so we draw our arrow pointing forward. We also have the prepositional phrase *with specks of snow sliding through the trees* after the noun headword *day*; so we draw this arrow pointing backward.

In the sentence by F. Scott Fitzgerald the noun headword is the pronoun *she*. This pronoun is modified by a free modifier, the noun phrase *a lovely, faded, gray-eyed blonde in a coat of Russian sable*. So we draw our arrow pointing backward toward the noun headword *she*.

Verb head with embedded modifier:


 The picadors **galloped** jerkily around the ring. ERNEST HEMINGWAY

Verb head with free modifier:


 We **caught** two bass, hauling them in briskly as though they were
 mackerel, pulling them over the side of the boat in a business-
 like manner without any landing net, and stunning them with a
 blow on the back of the head. E. B. WHITE

Here we have the direction of movement focusing on verb headwords. In the sentence by Ernest Hemingway the modifiers *jerkily* and *around the ring* are after the verb headword *galloped*; so we draw our arrow pointing backward.

In the sentence by E. B. White the verb headword is the verb *caught*. This verb is modified by the three verb phrases that follow. Thus our arrows point backward toward the verb *caught*.

Both of the principles just explained—addition and direction of movement—are structural matters; that is, we can discuss them in terms of their grammatical form and function, what they are and what they are designed to do, apart from their meaning. To bring in the dimension of meaning we need a third principle, that of levels of generality or levels of abstraction, a rhetorical consideration.

Third Principle— Levels of Generality or Levels of Abstraction

The base clause of a sentence is likely to be stated in *abstract terms*, in *general terms*, or in *plural terms*. *Plural* needs no definition, since it can be illustrated in contrasting sets: *car/cars*, *person/people*, *idea/ideas*. But *abstract* and *general* require definition. We call some words concrete and others abstract, defining concrete words as representing things we can see, hear, touch, taste, or smell (*tree, rose, car, book*) and abstract words as representing qualities abstracted from—that is, drawn out from—things and our experience with things (*graceful, fragrant, durable, interesting*). But in another common sense of the term, all words are abstract. They are not themselves things but our internal representations of things and, moreover (except for some proper names), not of individual things, as we have seen, but of classes of things. *Car*, meaning “automobile,” stands for all the millions of individual cars the world over, of all makes and of all series, models, and types, with all color and equipment options, in all conditions and in all degrees of obsolescence, planned or unplanned. Thus *car*, although a concrete word, is general.

With the base clause stated, the forward movement of a sentence stops. If the writer adds free modifiers to the end of the sentence, the direction of movement is backwards. The writer backtracks, going over the same ground. But in going back over the same ground, the writer shifts down, giving the reader specific details. Thus the writer shifts to a lower level of generality or abstraction or to singular terms. The writer furnishes specific and concrete details; the movement is from the general to the specific or from the abstract to the concrete. For example, let us look at a base clause that has an abstract noun as its subject:

Oratory is the art of making pleasant sounds,

In this sentence the base clause is, to say the least, inexact. The abstraction *oratory* is not made intelligible by defining it as *the art of making pleasant sounds*. This definition would include all forms of music as well. We need something more, something that will make the abstraction more concrete for us. And the author has furnished this information in the additions to the base clause.

Oratory is the art of making pleasant sounds,

which cause the hearer to say “Yes, Yes”
in sympathy with the performer, without enquiring too closely what he means.

SAM TUCKER

With this added information the definition becomes meaningful to us. The definition, in becoming concrete, allows us to see an action taking place.

The same process takes place when an author gives us a general term in the base clause. He follows this general term with more specific material in the additions that follow. Consider the following base clause:

He could see everything about the man:

In this base clause we have the general term *everything*. It is an empty word, meaning nothing until the author gives it meaning with the additions he attaches to it.

He could see everything about the man:

his sly cat's smile, the peak of hair at the back of his head, his hemispherical stomach, his candy-striped T-shirt, and his crepe-soled shoes.

JOHN UPDIKE

With the addition of the noun phrases after the base clause, the word *everything* takes on meaning; the picture has become more specific.

The same process takes place when the author expresses himself in plural terms in the base clause of a sentence.

How grateful they had been for the coffee,

In this sentence there is an action involving two people. The author could continue to tell us about the two people as an inseparable unit. But in this case she has decided, instead, to tell us about each person separately. The plural term *they* has been reduced to its singular parts.

How grateful they had been for the coffee,

she looking up at him, tremulous, her lips pecking at the cup, he blessing the coffee as it went down her.

HORTENSE CALISHER

We now see how each person was involved in the action of being grateful for the coffee.

People naturally move to successively lower levels of generality when they wish to picture something exactly. Imagine someone saying the following: "I just bought a neat car, a Ford, a Galaxie, a fastback hardtop with a four-on-the-floor shift." You would understand, of course, that this person bought just one vehicle; that is, the first four terms are not a parallel series to be added up, but each one after the first is the name of a smaller class than is the one before it. This can be illustrated by rewriting the sentence as a set of descending steps.

I just bought a neat car,

a Ford,

a Galaxie,

a fastback hardtop with a four-on-the-floor shift.

Notice that as we go down the steps each term is more specific, less general, than the one before it. There are more Fords than Galaxies, and more Galaxies than Galaxie hardtops. We can see from this diagram that cars have less in common than Galaxies have; in other words, *Galaxie* is closer to the actual object the speaker bought because it represents fewer things. But note, too, that the last item in the sequence has had something added to the noun headword. One can go only so far in searching for a specific word to represent something; the *fastback* and the *four-on-the-floor shift* are parts or details of the *hardtop*.

Let us look at another sentence illustrating this principle of levels of generality, a sentence from *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck.

1 Joad's lips stretched tight over his long teeth for a moment,

and

1 he licked his lips,

- 2 like a dog,
- 3 two licks,
- 4 one in each direction from the middle.

JOHN STEINBECK

In this sort of analysis the main or base clauses are numbered *1*. Since we have two base clauses separated by the coordinating conjunction *and*, we have two *first levels*, as we shall call them. The first of these first-level elements deals with the action of the lips being stretched. The second first-level deals with the lips being licked.

Steinbeck is not much interested in the first action, for he hasn't provided any specific details to imprint the action on our minds, only the adverbials of place and time. But he definitely is interested in the second action, as the additions show. Note that what follows *he licked his lips* does not go on to a new action; the sentence pauses to examine more closely the licking of the lips.

We might imagine the following dialogue taking place between the reader and the sentence. Question: How did he lick his lips? Answer: Like a dog. Question: But how does a dog lick his lips? Answer: He makes two licks. Question: How does the dog make these two licks? Answer: One in each direction from the middle.

In dialogue an inquisitive person might have to wring such information out of a reluctant informant. But a speaker or writer who knows his business—and his dogs—anticipates the questions of his audience and adds level after level, as his purposes require and his skill permits. There is no theoretical limit to the number of levels. (If the prepositional phrase *from the middle* were set off by a comma from the noun phrase *one in each direction*, we would have five levels of generality instead of four. But diagraming for levels of generality should be carried out, as far as possible, with regard for the author's punctuation, however idiosyncratic it might be.)

But do not leap to the conclusion that all sentences march along in so straightforward a manner. Obviously, sentence structure can become quite intricate, even in the cumulative sentence. Still the principle of levels of generality continues to apply. Consider this sentence, for instance:

- 2 Without thought,
- 2 his arms and legs working beautifully together,
- 1 he headed right for the safety man, stiff-armed him,
- 2 feeling blood spurt instantaneously from the man's nose onto his hand,
- 2 seeing his face go awry,
- 3 head turned,
- 3 mouth pulled to one side.

IRWIN SHAW

In this sentence the main or base clause—indicated by the number *1*—is preceded by two introductory elements. Since both introductory elements modify the base clause, telling in what manner *he headed right for the safety man*, they are both second-level elements.

Sometimes it cannot be established with certainty that a given element is operating at a particular level. The second modifier, *his arms and legs working beautifully together*, is here classified as a second-level element. It might, however, be argued that it should be classified as a third-level element. That is, it might be claimed that *his arms and legs working beautifully together* is a modifier of *without*

thought, showing an action taking place without a corresponding and conscious willing of the action. This is a subtler, and perhaps truer, interpretation. If the writer perceives and communicates a multiple image, we have to realize we may interpret the image differently from the writer or from each other.

Notice that this analysis by levels shows what goes with what and clarifies what parts of the sentence are modified. It is not artificial; it is simply a graphic representation of what the reader must do as he reads and what the writer can do to develop an idea or describe an object, character, or action.

The two elements that follow the base clause are also second-level elements, although this time they modify *stiff-armed him*, the second part of the compound predicate. Both second-level elements are verb phrases: the verb head of the first verb phrase is the present participle *feeling*; the verb head of the second verb phrase is the present participle *seeing*.

But there are two more elements after the verb phrase *seeing his face go awry*. Both of these elements picture the face going awry. Since both of these elements modify a second-level element, they are third-level elements and are marked accordingly. Level by level, the picture of the action grows more definite and precise.

We can see that the principle of levels of generality grows out of the two principles previously treated: the principle of addition and the principle of direction of movement. And this brings us to the fourth and last principle, that of texture, also a rhetorical consideration.

Fourth Principle—Texture

Texture provides a descriptive term, one which you can use to describe or evaluate or judge a piece of writing. If a writer adds modifiers to few of his nouns or verbs or clauses and then adds little the texture may be said to be thin. The style will be plain or bare. The writing of most students is thin—even threadbare. But if the author adds frequently or much or both, then the texture may be said to be dense or rich. This can be overdone, of course, but keep in mind that elimination of unneeded elements is one of the ways a piece of writing can be revised. You should at first learn strategies for adding depth to your writing. In this course we will be working toward greater density and variety in texture as well as toward exactness and concreteness in what we add.

Now let us examine a piece of thin writing, noting the lack of additions to nouns, verbs, and clauses, and the consequent lack of texture:

Elisa watched to see the wagon pass by. But it didn't pass. It turned into the farm road in front of her house. The dog darted from beneath the wheels and ran ahead. The two shepherds ran out at him. All three stopped and they circled. The caravan pulled up at Elisa's wire fence and stopped. The dog lowered his tail and retired under the wagon.

This is a de-written paragraph by John Steinbeck. By de-written we mean that we have taken Steinbeck's original paragraph and removed all additions to the nouns, verbs and clauses. All we have left is a series of stripped-down base clauses, all at the first level of generality.

This paragraph lacks details, of course. But there is a more serious flaw that is a result of this lack of details: The scene is not authenticated. By *authentication* we mean the inclusion of details that are exact, details that are accurately observed. These details enable the reader to do more than participate; they allow him to accept. The details create the illusion of reality.

Let us examine what has been left out of this paragraph.

Elisa,	watched to see the	wagon pass by.
But it didn't pass. It turned into the farm road in front of her house,		
	The dog darted from beneath the wheels and ran ahead.	
the two	shepherds ran out at him.	all three stopped, and
		they
circled	The caravan pulled up at Elisa's wire fence and stopped.	
the	dog,	lowered his tail and retired under the wagon

level to level. The key to such learning is to recognize when to pause, when to shift to a lower level and let the reader know what it is you have been talking about. The signal for the shift must become automatic. It must enter into the very movement of your mind.

In studying these principles we have been examining various strategies for making the fullest possible use of our written language. Our written language is not the same as our spoken language. Speaking is a natural activity; writing is not. Our spoken language is normally rather bare and makes use of only a limited vocabulary and a few sentence patterns. If we were to write as we speak, we would soon grow bored and dissatisfied with ourselves. We must therefore learn to fool ourselves into accepting something that can only approximate the naturalness and simplicity of spoken language and yet is more complex and far richer. We must, so to speak, learn how to use language to outwit language. We certainly can't escape to something beyond language. Even the most extreme experiments at outwitting language—such as in poetry, the experimental novel, and modern theater—must use language. It's just a question of who is master—you or the language. The obstacle makes the opportunity.