

writing exercise iv

tool 7: fear not the long sentence

It is not easy to write a long sentence because its length provides more opportunities to make a mistake that causes your sentence to lose its meaning. Still, the ability to write a long sentence is important as it allows you to keep your narrative moving forward by eliminating the need to repeat information already shared with the reader. Consider this set of short sentences that are a slog to read through

It is the loveliest town. The houses are white and high. The elm trees are green. They are higher than the houses. The front yards are wide and pleasant. The back yards are busy and worth finding out about. The streets sloped down to the stream. The stream flowed quietly under the bridge. The lawns ended in orchards. The orchards ended in fields. The fields ended in pastures. The pastures climbed the hill. They disappeared over the top. Above is the wide sky. Stuart stopped to get a drink of sarsaparilla in this loveliest of towns.

which becomes this beautiful sentence from E. B. White's classic novel *Stuart Little*

In the loveliest town of all, where the houses were white and high and the elms trees were green and higher than the houses, where the front yards were wide and pleasant and the back yards were bushy and worth finding out about, where the streets sloped down to the stream and the stream flowed quietly under the bridge, where the lawns ended in orchards and the orchards ended in fields and the fields ended in pastures and the pastures climbed the hill and disappeared over the top toward the wonderful wide sky, in this loveliest of all towns Stuart stopped to get a drink of sarsaparilla.

Prompt 1. Clark suggests revising this passage of four sentences from the novel *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* by Jean-Dominique Bauby into a single sentence. Do so.

I am fading away. Slowly but surely. Like the sailor who watches the home shore gradually disappear, I watch my past recede. My old life still burns within me, but more and more of it is reduced to the ashes of memory.

tool 8: establish a pattern, then give it a twist

As your sentences become longer and richer, you need to make it easier for the reader to remain their focus. The simplest way to do this is to keep repeating the structure of your phrases, a process we call parallel construction. Breaking that pattern at the end is a useful way to relieve the tension that builds up as a long sentence chugs along.

Prompt 2. Read through the sentence above from E. B. White's *Stuart Little* and identify the several ways he uses parallel construction and how he ends this pattern with, as Clark's describes it, a ...boom, boom, bang.