

The Stewart English Program

Book 3 Writing Plus...

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It might be useful to imagine that the base clause positions you, and your reader, in front of a set of doors. It establishes the topic for discussion, but gives little indication of the direction that discussion will follow. With the Level 2 you reach out your hand, turn the knob on one of the doors, and step through. Think about this image as you read the following sentences.

- 1 We rarely profit from our mistakes,
- 2 mistakes which often result in war after war with only intermittent periods of peace.

From the many doors offered by the opening statement, this author has chosen to explore the topic from a global and historical perspective. A strong cause-and-effect relationship is established by the word *result*, and the overall tone of the paragraph will probably be serious.

The second level in the preceding example uses the most basic of noun phrase techniques, the direct repetition of the noun *mistakes* from the Level 1.

Here is another way that the same base clause might be developed.

- 1 We rarely profit from our mistakes,
- 2 making the old ones over again but giving them new names.

This time the lower-level modifier, a present participial phrase, sets up a possible approach for the rest of the paragraph based on contrast, the old mistakes and their new names. The tone might be serious, as *war* becomes *peacekeeping action*. Or the tone might be playful, as *fat* becomes *circumferentially challenged*. Quite different doors!

In the next example, an absolute phrase attempts to explain why the statement offered in the base clause is true.

- 1 We rarely profit from our mistakes,
- 2 emotion being more powerful than reason.

With this beginning, one author might launch a debate between religious fundamentalism and Darwinism, while another could discuss the wisdom of following fashion trends or buying more practical clothes.

The final example uses a subordinate clause as the free modifier.

- 1 We rarely profit from our mistakes,
- 2 unless it is to make bigger ones.

This statement seems to offer the most cynical view of all. Yet, depending on the examples that come later in the paragraph, the result could range from serious historical analysis to biting satire to absurd silliness. The choice is yours.