

The Cumulative Sentence: Leading Back to Specific Detail

In his book *Mechanically Inclined*, Jeff Anderson calls close observation “the keystone to writer’s craft.” (p.97)

One effective way to craft details that stay with the reader is to add them to the end of the base sentence, using a **comma** as its connector. Of course, the more added details, the more commas.

Called a **cumulative sentence**, this right-branching sentence accumulates one detail after the other, each adding more specific detail to what just came before it (Constance Weaver, *Grammar to Enrich and Enhance Writing*, 2008, p.120).

Used sparingly, this sentence construction displays more and more specificity of detail, both concrete and abstract, and also contributes to sentence rhythm within the paragraph or essay.

Example # 1.

I relish crafting a cumulative sentence, highlighting its accumulation of detail, its extra-fine addition of imagery, poised to end with a flourish, in a crescendo of form and meaning.

Example # 2.

My sister is a no-nonsense, serious creature, unnaturally composed, rarely showing her remarkable wit, her need for inner peace so desperate.

Mentor Text Example # 1

From *The Treasure of Lemon Brown* by Walter Dean Myers

He was an errie sight, a bundle of rags standing at the end of the stairs, his shadow on the wall looming over him.

Mentor Text Example # 2

From *A Modest Proposal* by Jonathan Swift

It is a melancholy object to those, who walk through this great town, or travel in the country, when they see the streets, the roads and cabin-doors crowded with beggars of the female sex, followed by three, four or six children, all in rags, and importuning every passenger for an alms. (p.1)

Mentor Text Example # 3

From *The Three Musketeers* by Alexandre Dumas

It was a Bearn pony, from twelve to fourteen years old, yellow in his hide, without a hair in his tail, but not without windgalls on his legs, which, though going with his head lower than his knees, rendering a martingale quite unnecessary, contrived nevertheless to perform his eight leagues a day.