**Syntax Cheat Sheet**

“Sentences which suggest far more than they say, which have an atmosphere about them, which do not merely report an old, but make a new, impression…: to frame these, that is the *art* of writing.” –Henry David Thoreau, 1851

**scheme = artful syntax** (e.g., parallelisms, juxtapositions, antitheses)

**When analyzing syntax, we look for the following types of constructions or patterns:**

1. specific phrasing patterns
2. length of sentence (long or short)
3. number of sentences
4. divisions within a piece with different syntax for each
5. parallel structure
6. different sentence types (simple, compound, complex, cumulative, loose, or periodic)
7. specific kinds of punctuation
8. rhythm and cadence in a sentence
9. repetitions
10. subject openers and non-subject openers
11. rhetorical questions

**To help you get a first impression of the writer’s syntax, you might ask yourself:**

1. What is the order of the parts of the sentence? Is it *normal* (subject-verb-object: Oranges grow in California) or is it *inverted* (In California grow oranges)?
2. Which part of speech is more prominent—nouns or verbs?
3. What are the sentences *like*? Are they *periodic* (moving toward something important at the end) or *cumulative* (adding details that support an important idea in the beginning of the sentence)?
4. How does the sentence connect its words, phrases, and clauses?
5. Does the sentence length fit the subject matter? Why is the sentence length effective? What variety of sentence lengths are present?
6. Sentence beginnings – is there variety or a specific pattern?

**Words that may help you describe a writer’s syntax:**

plain, spare, austere, unadorned, simple, dry

ornate, elaborate, flowery, flowing

jumbled, chaotic

erudite, esoteric, complex, deceptively simple

journalistic, terse, laconic

harsh, grating

mellifluous, musical, lilting, lyrical

whimsical

elegant

staccato, abrupt

solid, thudding

sprawling, disorganized

**Construction of sentences to convey attitude**

**Declarative** assertive – a statement

**Imperative**                         authoritative - command

**Interrogative** asks a question

**Exclamatory** expresses emotion

**Simple Sentence 🡪** one subject and one verb

*Effect:*  child-like quality; highlights certain things as important against a background of other things (when used after a string of longer sentences)

**Compound Sentence 🡪** more than one subject and/or verb (no dependent clauses)

*Effect:* balance; makes two ideas equal in importance

**Complex Sentence 🡪** one independent and 1+ clauses

*Effect:* orders ideas into main and subordinate ideas: the main or most important idea is the independent (main) clause while the subordinate idea is the dependent (subordinate) clause

**Compound-Complex Sentence 🡪** 2+ independent clauses and 1+ dependent clauses

**Loose (Cumulative) Sentence 🡪** details after the subject and verb

*Effect:* reader knows the main action from the beginning; all the modifiers (description) serve to elaborate; also allows the writer to mass attributes/ideas that seem to “sprout” from the main clause

**Periodic (Climactic) Sentence 🡪** details before the subject and verb

*Effect:* builds up to a climax with meaning unfolding slowly

**Juxtaposition** normally unassociated ideas, words or phrases placed together

**Parallelism** show equal ideas; for emphasis; for rhythm

**Repetition** words, sounds, and ideas used more than once – rhythm/emphasis

**Rhetorical Question** a question that expects no answer

**Punctuation is included in syntax**

**Ellipses** a trailing off; going off into a dreamlike state

**Dash**interruption of a thought; an interjection of a thought into another

**Semicolon**parallel ideas; equal ideas; a piling up of detail

**Colon** a list; a definition or explanation; a result

**Italics**for emphasis

**Capitalization**for emphasis; to personify

**Exclamation Point**for emphasis; for emotion