

Syntax

Consider:

No sooner had the reverberation of my blows sunk into silence, then I was answered by a voice from within the tomb! – by a cry, at first muffled and broken, like the sobbing of a child, and then quickly swelling into one long, loud, and continuous scream, utterly anomalous and inhuman – a howl! – a wailing shriek, half of horror and half of triumph, such as might have arisen only out of hell, conjointly from the throats of the damned in their agony and of the demons that exult in the damnation.

— Edgar Allan Poe, “The Black Cat”

Discuss:

1. The dashes in this long sentence set off a series of appositives. (An appositive is a noun or noun phrase placed beside another noun or noun phrase and used to identify or explain it.) What noun phrase is explained by the appositives?
2. This sentence makes syntactic and semantic sense if it ends with the first exclamation point. What do the appositives add to the meaning and effectiveness of the sentence?

Apply:

Rewrite Poe’s sentence, changing it into a series of short sentences. Read your sentences to the class and discuss how the use of short sentences changes the overall meaning of the original.