

Survey of Sentence Length

- ★ Consider the kinds of sentences you would find in the following: Children's story, Chemistry textbook, teen fiction, diving manual, classic fiction, Broadsheet newspaper, leaflet.
- ★ Which do you expect to contain the longest sentences? Which will have the shortest? Why? Which will use a simple construction (e.g. S V O)? Which will have the most complex/compound sentences?
- ★ Count the number of words in these passages collected from a variety of sources and work out the average. In each case, you have been given the first 10 sentences.
- ★ Which type of text uses the longest sentences? How does your findings compare with your predictions? Can you think of any reasons for this?
- ★ Are there any instances where you begin to lose the meaning of a sentence, because it is too long? Try rewriting these sentences as shorter ones. What impact does it have on the effect of the passage?

1 From: *Little Grey Rabbit and the Weasels* - Alison Uttley

Down in the dell lived a family of weasels. They had a dark little house built against a wall where nobody could see it. There were two rooms upstairs and two rooms down and a scullery as well. The door was hidden behind a curtain of foxglove leaves and the foxglove bells rang when anybody passed. The narrow windows were covered with green moss. Only in the middle of each was a tiny crack where the weasels peeped out at passers-by.

"There goes Milkman Hedgehog," they cried. Old Hedgehog walked slowly past. Then one of them would leap downstairs, slip out of the doors and run as softly as a shadow after him. Sometimes a weasel dipped a mug in a can of milk without Hedgehog knowing. Sometimes a weasel tripped a mug and drank the milk.

2 From: *Chemistry Matters* - Richard Hart

Crystals have a regular shape. Many substances occur as crystals. Naphthalene, used in moth-balls, forms crystals. Its crystals have straight edges and flat surfaces. This can be explained by suggesting that Naphthalene is made of molecules. When Naphthalene crystallises from a solution, the molecules arrange themselves in regular rows to give the crystal shape. Other crystals of other substances have different shapes, but they are always regular and do not vary. In each case, the molecules are packing together in a regular pattern. Crystals dissolve. When a lump of sugar is dropped into water, it dissolves.

3 From: *Which Witch?* - Eva Ibbotson

As soon as he was born, Mr and Mrs Canker knew that their baby was not like other people's children. For one thing he was born with a full set of teeth and would lie in his pram for hours, chewing huge mutton bones to shreds or snapping at the noses of ladies fool enough to kiss him. For another, though he screamed with temper when they changed his nappies, his eyes never actually filled with tears. Also, and perhaps this was the strangest of all, as soon as they brought him home from hospital and a nice, bright fire in the sitting room, the smoke from their chimney began to blow against the wind. For a while, the Cankers were puzzled. But as Mr Canker said, there is a book about everything if you only know where to look and one day he went to Toxaster Public Library and began to read. He read and he read and he read and what he read most about was Black Magic and Sorcery and how to tell from an early age whether someone is going to be a wizard or a witch. After which he went home to make the news to Mrs Canker. It was a shock of course. No one likes to think that their baby is going to grow up to be a wizard and a black one at that.

4 From: *Adventures in Diving Manual* - PADI

Deep diving is similar. You don't make a deep dive just to go deep, but as a means to an end. Deep diving gives you access to new dive sites that are below 18metres and allows you to extend some of the activities you enjoy to new depths. Through deep diving you can observe aquatic life that doesn't live in shallow water, visit wrecks that rest in deeper water as well as shoot photographs. In some places, deep diving makes it possible to drift past deep water reefs and in other areas you might collect or recover objects that were lost at greater depths. In planning a deep dive you must determine an appropriate objective. An appropriate deep dive objective will usually be singular because you have less no decompression time as you descend. It's a reasonable objective too and it's based on your training and experience as well as your dive conditions. An inappropriate deep diving objective is one that expects to accomplish too much in one dive, or for nothing more than the "thrill" of facing risk.

5 From: *Dracula* - Bram Stoker

May. Bistritz. __Left Munich at 8:30 P. M., on 1st May, arriving at Vienna early next morning; should have arrived at 6:45 but train was an hour late. Buda-Pesth seems a wonderful place, from the glimpse which I got of it from the train and the little I could walk through the streets. I feared to go very far from the station, as we had arrived late and would start as near the correct one as possible. The impression I had was that we were leaving the West and entering the East; the most western of splendid bridges over the Danube, which is here of noble width and depth, took us among the traditions of Turkish rule. We left in pretty good time, and came after nightfall to Klausenburgh. Here I stopped for the night at the Hotel Royale. I had for dinner, or rather supper, a chicken done up some way with red pepper, which was very good but thirsty. (Mem. get recipe for Mina.) I asked the waiter, and he said it was called "paprika hendl," and that, as it was a national dish, I should be able to get it anywhere along the Carpathians. I found my smattering of German very useful here, indeed, I don't know how I should be able to get on without it. Had some time at my disposal when in London, I had visited the British Museum, and made search among the books and maps in the library regarding Transylvania. It struck me that some foreknowledge of the country could hardly fail to have some importance in dealing with a nobleman of that country.

6	From: <i>Up and Running: Your complete guide to getting started with BT Total Broadband</i>
<p>Make sure your activation date has passed. You will have received an email confirming your activation date. Your line may be activated at any time up to 8.00pm on this day. If you have Windows 98, you may need your computer's operating system disc during installation - so please have this handy. You will be prompted if it's needed. Please do not connect any of the BT voyager 220V cables until prompted by the installation CD-ROM. Turn your computer on and insert your BT Total Broadband CD-ROM into a CD drive and follow the simple on-screen instructions. Even if you're experienced on the internet, please make sure you read your "Broadband Life" magazine and go through the following steps so you don't miss out on any important aspects of your service. Once you've completed the installation using your CD-ROM, you'll find the following icons on your desktop. Simply double-click on an icon to access its service.</p>	

7	From: <i>The Observer 23.09.07</i>
<p>Kate and Gerry McCann requested the re-examination of evidence that led directly to the Portuguese police naming the couple as official suspects in the death of their daughter because they were so concerned about the chaotic nature of the police investigation. The couple, worried that inquiries by the Policia Judiciaria were losing momentum, asked detectives last month to re-examine the apartment where their daughter went missing and also for the use of sniffer dogs to seek fresh clues. The subsequent use of British police-trained dogs detected the 'scent of death' on Kate's clothing, a finding that was central in the decision by the Portuguese authorities to name Madeleine McCann's parents as formal suspects. Fresh forensic tests also found new biological samples, partially matching Madeleine's DNA, in the apartment and in the parents' hire car - developments that crystallised the thesis of Portuguese police that the couple were somehow responsible for the disappearance of a four-year-old.</p> <p>'The family were asking for the investigation to be more thorough,' said a source close to the McCanns. 'That is the supreme irony of the case; that it was them who were asking for the police to look harder at the evidence and re-examine all the issues. Is that the action of a guilty couple?' Police sources close to the investigation said yesterday that, although the sniffer dogs 'reacted' to some of Kate's clothes, 'no usable evidence' could be extracted for DNA testing, meaning there was no forensic corroboration for the dogs' reaction. Tomorrow, in an ironic reversal of the UK media invasion of Praia da Luz, a number of Portuguese journalists who have been covering the McCann case are due to arrive in Britain and make their way to Rothley for a scheduled press conference on the case.</p> <p>Before the refocusing of the inquiry urged by the McCanns, Portuguese police had named only Robert Murat as a 'arguido' - official suspect - but sources close to the investigation have told <i>The Observer</i> there is no evidence so far that he was involved. Yesterday a Portuguese newspaper said Murat himself had been told this by police, but that he would remain a formal 'arguido' for the duration of the investigation.</p>	