writing exercise vii

tool 18: set the pace with sentence length

tool 19: vary the length of paragraphs

Clark's emphasis here is the importance of varying the lengths of our sentences and paragraphs. Clark argues that varying the length of our sentences and our paragraphs makes what we write more engaging for the reader. He also argues—and this really is his main point—that we can use the length of our sentences and paragraphs to vary the speed at which the reader travels through the text and to draw attention to our most important messages.

Copied below is the text I used to demonstrate analyzemytext.com during our last class. It has 205 words in six sentences, an average length of 34 words/sentence. Five of the sentences are between 25 and 36 words; one is 56 words.

Prompt 1. Edit my paragraph so the average sentence length is shorter. You can approach this by removing words from some sentences, by dividing some sentences into two or three sentences, or by using both strategies. Try this exercise a couple of times and then report your best effort and, in few sentences, explain why you settled on this choice.

Prompt 2. The prompt contrasts how we look at a painting and how we look at a scientific figure. In writing this paragraph, I decided to interlace these ideas. Edit my paragraph so that it consists of two paragraphs, one describing how we look at a painting and one describing how we look at a scientific figure. Try this exercise a couple of times and then report your best effort and, in few sentences, explain why you settled on this choice.

> When we look at a painting, our eyes move to its most salient features before we scan out in all directions in search of additional information. When we look at a figure, our eyes do the same thing, locating the data first and then looking for information that helps give meaning to the data. A well-designed figure, therefore, places the data at or near the center and distributes clues around the data in the form of labels and legends. In a museum, a detailed description of the painting, which provides important information about the artist and painting's context, is placed to its side where it does not intrude on our experience of the image itself. For a figure we include this information in a figure caption placed below the figure where the viewer can find it when they are ready (if we place it above the figure, the viewer will read the caption before they examine the figure; we want the viewer to see the figure before they read about it). Here is a first draft of a figure that shows how the cumulative mass and the cumulative volume change for pre-1982 pennies and post-1982 pennies using the typical default parameters of many plotting programs.

This assignment is due at our next class meeting.