**Grammar Concept 12: Free Modifiers, Branching Sentences**

Taken from *Artful Sentences* by Virginia Tufte

**Branches and Base Clauses**

“Free modifiers are set off from a base clause, usually by commas or dashes. Free branches may modify the entire base clause or a single word.” Typical methods for using branches are subordinating clauses, verbal and noun phrases, and prepositional phrases.

I watched him warily (base clause)

Then attach a free modifier in front, creating a left-branching sentence:

Sensing a possible rival, I watched him warily.

(left branch) (base clause)

Or place a free modifier at the end of the base clause, an arrangement called a right-branching sentence:

I watched him warily, wondering who he was.

(base clause) (right branch)

When you put the left, base, and right together you get the sentence from Ralph Ellison

Sensing a possible rival, I watched him warily, wondering who he was. Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man, 315.

**Left Branching Sentences**

**Mid-branching sentences. These sentences insert parenthetical or syntactically extraneous material in the center of a sentence, usually via a parenthesis, hyphen, or commas.**

I feel—and the anxiety is still vivid to me—that I might easily have failed before I began. V.S. Naipaul, *Literary Occasions*, 195.

As she often says to herself—though never aloud, for she knows how unpleasant it would sound—why shouldn’t she look out for herself? Nobody else will. Alison Lurie, *Foreign Affairs*, 5.

Anne, sticking entertainment-tax stamps on to green and orange tickets, listening to mother’s rich lazy ironical voice, frowned. Christopher Ishwerwood, *The Memorial*, 11.

So he didn’t move. He lay with his eyes closed, his breathing gentle and peaceful, and heard them one by one leave the tent.William Faulkner, *Delta Autumn*, 725.

**Right branching or cumulative sentences. These use information for emphasis after the sentence is already grammatically correct.**

Nothing would remain at last except the name itself, itself a legend, beautiful and talismanic, a sound of magic and of recollection, a phrase of music and of strangeness—Raintree County. Ross Lockridge, *Raintree County*, 54-55.

The air was thin and clear, stringent with wood smoke and the tang of fallen apples, sharp with the hint of early frost. A.J. Cronin, *The Keys of the Kingdom*, 3.

**Putting it together:**

For each sentence underline the base clause. How does Faulkner use left and right branches to create a description of the character of Miss Emily?

WHEN Miss Emily Grierson died, our whole town went to her funeral: the men through a sort of respectful affection for a fallen monument, the women mostly out of curiosity to see the inside of her house, which no one save an old man-servant--a combined gardener and cook--had seen in at least ten years.

It was a big, squarish frame house that had once been white, decorated with cupolas and spires and scrolled balconies in the heavily lightsome style of the seventies, set on what had once been our most select street. But garages and cotton gins had encroached and obliterated even the august names of that neighborhood; only Miss Emily's house was left, lifting its stubborn and coquettish decay above the cotton wagons and the gasoline pumps-an eyesore among eyesores. And now Miss Emily had gone to join the representatives of those august names where they lay in the cedar-bemused cemetery among the ranked and anonymous graves of Union and Confederate soldiers who fell at the battle of Jefferson.

Alive, Miss Emily had been a tradition, a duty, and a care; a sort of hereditary obligation upon the town, dating from that day in 1894 when Colonel Sartoris, the mayor--he who fathered the edict that no Negro woman should appear on the streets without an apron-remitted her taxes, the dispensation dating from the death of her father on into perpetuity. Not that Miss Emily would have accepted charity. Colonel Sartoris invented an involved tale to the effect that Miss Emily's father had loaned money to the town, which the town, as a matter of business, preferred this way of repaying. Only a man of Colonel Sartoris' generation and thought could have invented it, and only a woman could have believed it. William Faulkner, “A Rose for Emily,” p. 1.

**B. Base clauses and branch clauses. Write a paragraph using the following base clauses. Each base clause should have a right, left, or middle branch clause.**

 He contacted the authorities

 He hadn’t seen his parents in a couple of years

 It would probably be a mistake

 Dad didn’t quite fit into society