Repeated Words in a Sentence

What is a sentence with the same word repeated several times?

There is a common misconception that surrounds this problem, namely, that the following sentence has the word "had" seven times in a row: Jill, where Jack had had "had," had had "had had."

The misconception lies in not recognizing the difference between using a word and mentioning a word. When a word is used in a sentence, it is not quoted; when it is mentioned, it is quoted. The quoted word "'had'" is not the same as the unquoted word "had." Therefore, this sentence has no more than two repeats of any word.

The most satisfying case of repeated words occurs when the repeated words all mean different things in the sentence. An example of unsatisfactory repetition is intensifying an adjective or adverb by simply repeating it over and over:

The coffee was very very very very very ... very hot.

Even though the word "very" occurs arbitrarily many times, it means the same in each case. A sentence can be constructed that has a noun repeated arbitrarily many times, followed by a verb repeated the same number of times:

1. Bulldogs fight

2. Bulldogs bulldogs fight fight. (i.e., Bulldogs (that) bulldogs fight, (themselves) fight.)

3. Bulldogs bulldogs bulldogs fight fight fight. (i.e., Bulldogs (that) bulldogs (that) bulldogs fight, (themselves) fight, (themselves) fight.) ...

The inflation of this type of sentence can be accelerated by the use of the three senses of the word "buffalo":

1. oxen (noun)

2. baffle (verb)

3. from a city in Western New York (adjective, usually capitalized)

The progression becomes:

1. Buffalo buffalo buffalo. (i.e., Buffalo (from the city of) Buffalo baffle.)

2. Buffalo buffalo Buffalo buffalo buffalo buffalo. (i.e., Buffalo (from the city of) Buffalo (that) buffalo (from the city of) Buffalo baffle, (themselves) baffle.)

3. Buffalo buffalo Buffalo buffalo Buffalo buffalo buffalo buffalo buffalo. (i.e., Buffalo (from the city of) Buffalo (that) Buffalo (from the city of) Buffalo (that) Buffalo (from the city of) Buffalo baffle, (themselves) baffle, (themselves) baffle.) ...

This sentence will have an adjective-noun pair repeated arbitrarily many times, then a verb repeated the same number of times. So the word "buffalo" really only has three meanings in the sentence.

A progression using the pronoun, conjunction, and adjective meanings of the word "that" was composed by George Herbert Moberly in the 1850s.

1. I saw that C saw. (i.e., I saw the following: C saw.)

2. C saw that that I saw. (i.e., C saw the thing which I saw.)

3. I saw that that that C saw was so. (i.e., I saw the following: the thing which C saw was so.)

4. C saw that, that that that I saw was so. (i.e., C saw this fact, the following: the thing which I saw was so.)

5. I saw that, that that that that C saw was so. (i.e., I saw this fact, the following: the specific thing which C saw was so.)

6. C saw that that, that that that that I saw was so. (i.e., C saw the specific thing, the following: the specific thing which I saw was so.)

7. I saw that that, that that that that that C saw was so. (i.e., I saw the specific fact, the following: the specific thing which the specific C saw was so.)

In the final statement, the first, fourth and seventh occurrences of "that" are adjectives meaning "specific," the second and fifth are pronouns, and the third and sixth are conjunctions.

Thus there are seven uses but only three meanings.

Here is an example with five occurrences of "had" in a row, each with a different meaning. This is the longest known case of this phenomenon. As an aid to understanding, we'll build it up a step at a time.

The parents were unable to conceive, so they hired someone else to be a surrogate.

The parents had had a surrogate have their child.

The parents had had their child had.

The child had had no breakfast.

The child the parents had had had had had no breakfast.

S

s—longest common palindrome centered on letter s (1)

Saar—example of a word that is a confusing code for letter s [czar]—*from a river between France and Germany*

sagas—longest common palindrome beginning with letter s (5-t)—longest common palindrome centered on letter g (5)

said—example of a word pronounced differently when capitalized, beginning with letter s [spoke, Middle Eastern port]

salades—longest uncommon lowercase upside-down word pair [sapeles] (7-t)—*medieval helmet*

salet—see "atles"—*Medieval helmet*

salsa—longest common head 'n' tail centered on letter l (5)

salter—see "psalter"

samia—see "animates"—*silkworm moths*

sammas—longest uncommon palindrome centered on letter m (6)—*early Indian people*

sande—longest uncommon progressive sum pair [sande → tori → iga → ph → x] (5-t)—*African custom of training girls*

sangfroid—example of a word that ends with silent letter d—*imperturbability*

sank—longest common progressive sum pair [sank → toy → in → w] (4-t)

sapeles—see "salades"—*types of mahogany*

sapphire—example of a word that contains silent letter p

sara—see "aras"—*people of central Africa*

Saracen—see "ceresin"—*nomadic people of the Arabian desert*

sat—shortest common word with last letter next in alphabet after first for letter s (3-t)

satraps—see "snap traps"—*ancient Persian governors*

sawbwas—longest uncommon palindrome beginning with letter s (7-t)—longest uncommon palindrome centered on letter b (7)—*Burmese rulers*

scent—example of homophones differing by letter c [sent]—example of homophones differing by letter s [cent]

schadenfreude—uncommon word containing most consecutive letters in order after letter c (4-t)—*gloating*

schoolbooks—longest common word containing one type of vowel for vowel o (11-t)

schoolrooms—longest common word containing one type of vowel for vowel o (11-t)

schwartzbrots—longest uncommon word containing two vowels (13-t)—*black bread*

scintillescent—longest uncommon pair isogram (14)—*twinkling*

scissel—uncommon homophone that has most letters in list of homophones with no removable prefix or suffix [scissile & sicel & sisal & sisel & sissle & syssel] (42)—*metal scrap*

scissile—see "scissel"—*easily cut*

scratchbrushed—longest two-syllable word beginning with letter s (14)—*brushed with a wire brush*