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# SENTENCE SENSE

DEVELOPING SENTENCE SKILLS IN STUDENT WRITERS

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## Sentences from Scratch

### I. Teaching Parts of Speech for Sentence Development

- the warm-up
- what guides instruction
- activities that make sense

### II. Using the Clause to Build Sentences of Varying Structure

- building blocks of sentence writing
- the clause
- components of a lesson

# GRAMMAR REFERENCE SHEET

## Keep two things in mind:

- We teach grammar to improve writing. If you cannot justify teaching a particular concept in terms of improving a student's writing, don't teach it.
- The best sentence-level activities involve having students *write* sentences that practice/contain taught concepts.

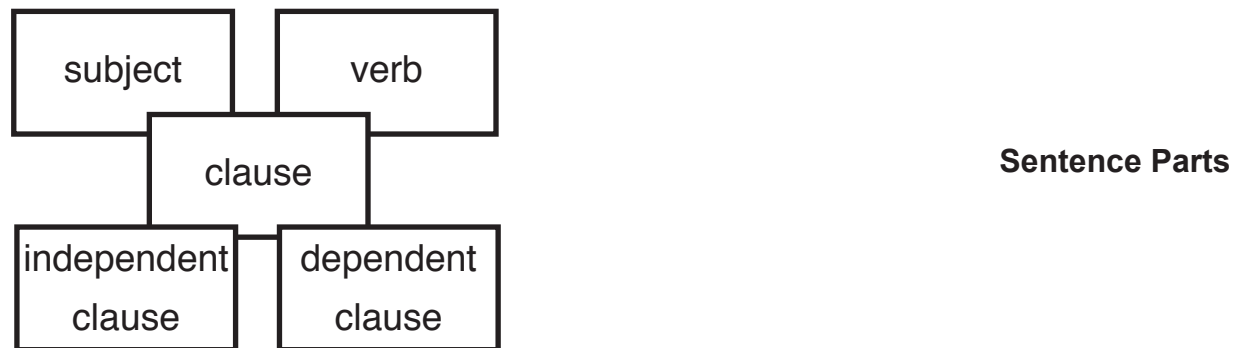
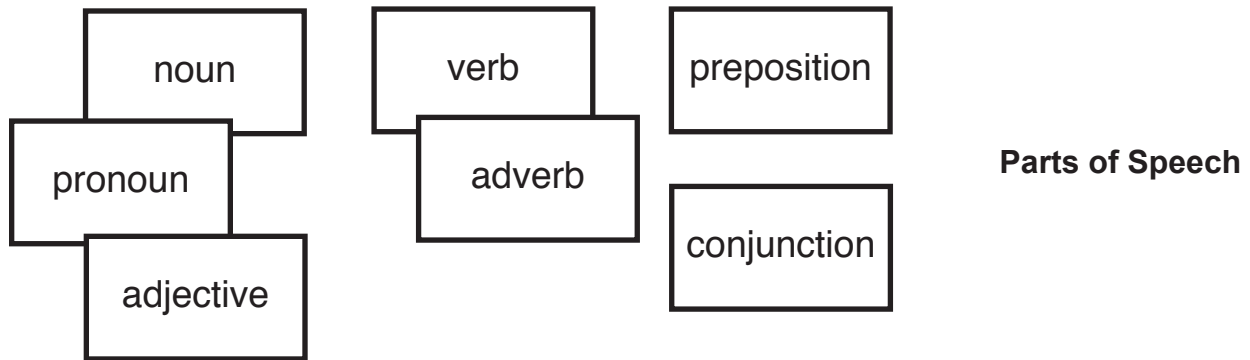
## Parts of Speech: Consider the job the word does in the sentence.

• noun	names a person, place, thing, or idea	boy, school, bench, peace
• verb	action, linking, or helping word	jump, am, seem
• pronoun	takes the place of a noun (stands for a noun)	he, you, they, me
• adjective	describes a noun or pronoun	ugly, ignorant, silly
• adverb	describes a verb (or an adjective, or other adverb)	quickly, soon, never
• preposition	begins a phrase (shows position)	in, during, around
• conjunction	joins 2 words or 2 groups of words	and, whenever
• <i>article</i>	<i>teach in adjective family</i>	<i>a, an, the</i>
• <i>interjection</i>	<i>expresses emotion - not useful for instruction</i>	<i>whoa!</i>

## Sentence Parts: Clauses are the building blocks to all sentence writing.

simple subject	who/what is doing the action		The elderly <u>man</u> went to the store.
complete subject	subject with its baggage (the "doer")		<u>The elderly man</u> went to the store.
simple predicate	main verb		The elderly man <u>went</u> to the store.
complete predicate	verb with its baggage (the "do")		The elderly man <u>went to the store</u> .
direct object	receives action of predicate (verb)		John threw the <u>ball</u> .
indirect object	tells to whom/for whom action is done		John threw <u>Mark</u> the ball.
predicate noun	follows linking verb and renames subject		John is a <u>pilot</u> .
predicate adjective	follows linking verb and describes subject		John seems <u>exhausted</u> .
object of preposition	noun/pronoun that ends prepositional phrase		John sat on the <u>chair</u> .
clause	group of words with subject and predicate		- John went to the store - because she is finished
independent clause	clause that can stand by itself	I	John went to the store
dependent clause	clause that cannot stand by itself	D	because she is finished
simple sentence	one independent clause	I	John went to the store.
compound sentence	2 independent clauses joined by comma + for, and, nor, but, or, yet or 2 independent clauses joined by ;	I, fanboys I I; I	John went to the store, but it was closed. John went to the store; it was closed.
complex sentence	1 independent clause and 1 or more dependent clauses	ID D, I I D	John went to the store because he needed milk. When John went to the store, he forgot his wallet. John, who was selected as our leader, rarely smiled.

**Displaying grammar vocabulary cards:** During the warm-up and any identifying activities, the teacher (and ideally the students) should display their cards using the layouts below. Students should learn to organize the cards as such independently. This practice will help students internalize the relationships between the different parts of speech. They will understand the way words, phrases, and clauses work together, improve their syntax comprehension, and develop sentence writing and expanding skills.



**On the next page:** This activity sheet (and similar sheets) have several advantages.

- (1) They move students quickly from “identify” to the text generation activities that truly benefit writing.
- (2) They are interactive, allowing students to work together, share results, and check their work with each other -- in a non-punitive way.
- (3) They are instructive (a rarity for a “worksheet”).

# Now It's Your Turn!

## IECC: IDENTIFY, EXPAND, COMBINE, CREATE

### Adjectives

**Identify:** Underline the adjectives in the following sentences. (Do not include articles.)

1. The hungry green alligator slithered up the muddy shore. (3)
2. The young girl was scared but brave. (3)
3. The frightened girl called to her father in a loud voice. (3)

Check your work!

**Expand:** Add at least 3 adjectives to each sentence to make it more descriptive.

1. The children and their leader took vans to a campground.

---

2. Over a campfire, the children roasted hotdogs and sang songs.

---

Share: Choose #1 or #2 to share with your group.

**Combine:** Combine the following short sentences into one longer sentence.

1. My grandfather told jokes at the table. He is friendly. His jokes were funny.

---

2. My sisters and I listened to the jokes and ate snacks. My sisters were hungry. The snacks were sweet.

---

Check your work!

**Create:** Write your own sentences.

1. Write a sentence using these adjectives: happy, energetic

---

2. Write a sentence with at least two of your own adjectives in it:

---

Share: Choose #1 or #2 to share with your group.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**noun = names a person, place, or thing**

chicken    girl    truck    lamp    school    pencil

The mother and her daughter bought tickets to see the show.

The nasty troll lived under the wooden bridge.

A rusty nail stuck out of an old board at the local playground.

Nouns To Use

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Use good nouns in your own sentences below:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Sentence Check:*

\_\_\_ Do your sentences start with capital letters?

\_\_\_ Do your sentences end with proper end punctuation?

## Five-Point Instructional Strategy

### New Concept

- a. **Teacher introduces concept and then asks students to explain it, proving understanding.** In most instances, introducing a part of speech or sentence part to your students should take just a few minutes. Students should create (or you should provide) a vocabulary card with term on front, definition and examples on back; explain the term and its definition; and have them explain it back to you or, in the case of large group instruction, to each other. Students can illustrate their cards as well.

### Review Concept

- a. **Students explain concept, proving understanding.** The emphasis here is on information your students have learned and can share. With most concepts this will take only a few minutes. Students should begin by verbalizing what they know from memory and then use the concept vocabulary card to elaborate on their understanding.

- b. **Students identify examples of the concept in context.** Have students sort words, sentence parts, or sentences to help them recognize the concept you are teaching. Have them identify examples of the studied element in a larger context. Professionally written sentences, from both textbooks and good literature, sometimes serve this purpose well and also offer material for further discussion.

- c. **Students create their own examples in isolation.** Students must focus primary attention on creating examples of the concept, in isolation and in applied context. Keep the emphasis on student-generated work.

- d. **Students share their examples with the instructor and their classmates.** When the students complete independent practice of a concept at their desks, always allow time to share results. This (a) validates the students' writing, (b) encourages them to write at a more sophisticated level since they anticipate an audience, (c) allows the instructor to check for competence, and (d) provides student-generated examples (whether correct or not) for further discussion and analysis.

- e. **Teacher uses examples, both correct and incorrect, for clarification and further instruction.** As the students share, the teacher writes any incorrect examples as well as any examples that show a new or interesting development that warrants discussion. Since the examples come from the students' own writing on the day in question, the teacher is able to target student difficulties immediately and strengthen class understanding. Using student examples rather than prefabricated, professionally written sentences connects students to the assignment, provides immediacy and relevance, and gives the teacher valuable information about where the students are and what they need next in order to further their writing.

# SENTENCE DEVELOPING ACTIVITIES

As your students develop an understanding of parts of speech and sentence parts, here are some activities designed to improve writing at the sentence level. Independent sentence writing (I) is the ultimate goal.

- A. Phrase/Clause & Independent/Dependent Clause Sorting - ESSENTIAL
  - sort groups of words by whether they are clauses or phrases
  - sort clauses by whether they are Independent (main) or Dependent (subordinate)
- B. Sentence parts matching - join sentence parts to make sentences
- C. Sentence unscrambling - unscramble sentence chunks to make logical sentences
- D. Sentence imitating - write a sentence similar in structure to a provided model
- E. Sentence combining - combine sentences to create more sophisticated sentences with increased variety (in activities/exercises & your own writing)
- F. Sentence expanding - using bare bones sentence expanders
  - provide simple subject and verb and use questioning to prompt sentence expansion (e.g., John ate. when? where? why? how?)
  - provide simplistic sentence with nouns, verbs, and phrases and ask student to add adjectives and adverbs
- G. Tandem writing
  - student writes first half of sentence, trades papers with a classmate, and finishes classmate's sentence (subject to predicate or first clause to second clause)
- H. Writing sentences from prompts
  - "begin a sentence with the word \_\_\_\_\_" (sub. conj., transition word, etc.)
  - "write a sentence that contains \_\_\_\_\_" (sub. conj., prep., noun, etc.)
  - provide student with first sentence and transition word that is to begin second sentence
- I. Sentence writing - ESSENTIAL
  - as a class starter
  - for class work and homework, even instead of paragraph writing

# Clause/Phrase Activities I

**Identify each group of words below as a clause (C) or a phrase (P). Remember that a clause must contain a subject and its verb (or predicate):**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| _____ 1. if the rain never stops          | _____ 14. when the manager organizes the team       |
| _____ 2. for breakfast                    | _____ 15. through the woods by the river            |
| _____ 3. under the window                 | _____ 16. the party ended at midnight               |
| _____ 4. since I slept                    | _____ 17. as long as you study before the game      |
| _____ 5. beside the grocery store         | _____ 18. if I finish the book                      |
| _____ 6. before she finished the pie      | _____ 19. as soon as the painter finished           |
| _____ 7. as soon as the temperature drops | _____ 20. when the exercise was over                |
| _____ 8. because Mike could drive         | _____ 21. at the end of the long road               |
| _____ 9. if we see another ant            | _____ 22. beneath the deep blue sea                 |
| _____ 10. after careful consideration     | _____ 23. we both finished eating breakfast in time |
| _____ 11. between two slices of bread     | _____ 24. because of the number of boxes            |
| _____ 12. since yesterday                 | _____ 25. though I gave you three warnings          |
| _____ 13. until you hear back from me     | _____ 26. until I receive your donation             |

**All the groups of words below are clauses. Identify each as I (independent or main) or D (dependent or subordinate):**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| _____ 1. Constantine joined the sports club     | _____ 13. whenever we have a chance to play golf   |
| _____ 2. since Abraham Lincoln was elected      | _____ 14. before I will clean out the closet       |
| _____ 3. school lets out in June                | _____ 15. if T.V. remained black and white         |
| _____ 4. the play begins at 9 a.m.              | _____ 16. my family is coming for the holidays     |
| _____ 5. after we purchased the new car         | _____ 17. the doe was brown with a white tail      |
| _____ 6. if we can handle the time change       | _____ 18. cleats were left on the radiator to dry  |
| _____ 7. we ate the purple potato chips         | _____ 19. although asparagus is out of season      |
| _____ 8. water is the most healthy drink        | _____ 20. the black panther pounced at the crowd   |
| _____ 9. if my migraine doesn't linger          | _____ 21. when the strawberries arrived            |
| _____ 10. as long as the schedule will be kept  | _____ 22. before I considered my sister's request  |
| _____ 11. if I worry too much about the trip    | _____ 23. where our cousins live                   |
| _____ 12. the postal carrier delivered the mail | _____ 24. whenever the detective catches the crook |



## B SENTENCE PART MATCHING

*Subject*

*Predicate*

- |                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| 1. The little boy with dimples | landed on the feeder in our yard.            |
| A chirping blue jay            | smiled at the doctor's offer of candy.       |
| My grandmother                 | used to bake me cookies each weekend.        |
| 2. A swarming nest of bees     | caused the family to leave the picnic early. |
| A pair of monarch butterflies  | awkwardly bent down to reach the pond.       |
| Two long-legged giraffes       | fluttered near me on my Saturday walk.       |
- .....

*Subject*

*Verb*

*Object*

- |                             |            |                              |
|-----------------------------|------------|------------------------------|
| 1. The grasshopper          | was ruined | on a green leaf in our yard. |
| Our dinner                  | landed     | the antique vase.            |
| The rambunctious child      | toppled    | by a loud family argument.   |
| 2. An outstanding performer | announced  | the national anthem.         |
| The diver                   | sang       | on the board.                |
| Our president               | bounced    | a new plan for the country.  |

---

## C. SENTENCE UNSCRAMBLING

1. At the word cluster level:

a. in our house    we discovered    much to our surprise    \$10,000

---

b. to get ice cream    we rode    at noon    our new bicycles    to the store

---

2. At the word level:

a. frog    brown    rock    under    a    crawled    the    large

---

b. friend    night    all    we    and    video    new    a    my    got    game    played

---

## D. SENTENCE IMITATING

Write a sentence that is similar in form to the provided sentence:

1. Our friends came for dinner.

---

2. At the game we saw a home run.

---

3. While I was riding my bike, I saw a streak of lightning.

---

## E. SENTENCE COMBINING

1. Delete the 2nd and 3rd sentences by putting their information in the 1st sentence:  
The man and woman went to the mall. The man was tall. The woman was short.

---

The dinosaur stomped. He did it over the rocky ground. He did it to chase food.

---

2. Make each pair of sentences into a compound sentence using the provided keyword:  
The new video game hit stores yesterday. We were the first ones to get it. (and)

---

Make each pair of sentences into a compound sentence. Use a conjunction:

Two rivers surrounded the town. There was still not enough water to drink.

---

3. Make each pair of sentences into a complex sentence using the provided keyword:  
She was a good teacher. She yelled a lot. (although)

---

Make each pair of sentences into a complex sentence. (Use a subordinating conjunction.):

You do your homework. You will pass every test.

---

4. Combine into one sentence. Do not leave out any information:

The movie was excellent. It ran quite late. It starred Denzel Washington.

---

We were hungry. We went to my favorite restaurant. I ordered a burger and fries.

---

My cousins are from Australia. They visited us last month. We had a blast.

---

## F. SENTENCE EXPANSION QUESTIONS WITH STUDENT RESPONSES

The crocodile snapped.  
when? this morning  
where? in the lagoon  
how? with strong jaws  
why? because he was hungry  
concession... despite the fact that the  
tourists were careful  
what kind? ancient, wise  
which one? with a nasty attitude  
how many? *the (already included)*

The man ate.
when? _____
where? _____
how? _____
why? _____
concession? _____
what kind? _____
which one? _____
how many? _____

## G. TANDEM WRITING

1. Finish these sentences:

- I love weekends because \_\_\_\_\_.
- John finished the quiz before \_\_\_\_\_.
- Elijah found treasure in the chest, but \_\_\_\_\_.
- We bought a used car from Chris; meanwhile, \_\_\_\_\_.

2. Add a sentence to each of these sentences:

- Abraham Lincoln was the 16th president of the United States.  
\_\_\_\_\_

- A Porsche pulled up to the five star hotel.  
\_\_\_\_\_

- My friends and I won our first soccer game last Saturday morning against our arch rivals. \_\_\_\_\_

## H. WRITING FROM PROMPT WORDS

1. Write sentences including the provided transition words:

- although \_\_\_\_\_
- sometimes \_\_\_\_\_
- before \_\_\_\_\_

B. Write sentences including the provided content-based words:

- Benjamin Franklin \_\_\_\_\_
- Hamlet \_\_\_\_\_

**I. SENTENCE WRITING (JUST WRITE SENTENCES!) CONTENT-BASED SENTENCE REVIEW ACTIVITY THAT CAN BE MODIFIED ACCORDING TO SKILL LEVEL.**

1. List six things about \_\_\_\_\_ (content topic):

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. Write sentences using elements from the above list:

Use 2 in a compound sentence with a comma and coordinating conjunction: \_\_\_\_\_

Use 2 in a compound sentence with a semi-colon and a conjunctive adverb: \_\_\_\_\_

Use 2 in a complex sentence (D,I): \_\_\_\_\_

Use 2 in a complex sentence (ID): \_\_\_\_\_

**OTHER SENTENCE BUILDING ACTIVITIES**

A. Prepositional Phrase Placement: Put a ^ in each spot where the given prepositional phrase could be placed. (This can also be done by giving students in a group setting their own cards, each with a word on it, and having them sort themselves into a logical sentence. An additional student, armed with the phrase, can stand in various places along the sentence's route where the phrase could logically be inserted):

1. The angry troll gobbled the mischievous children.                      under the bridge
2. The doctor prepared for a difficult surgery.                              in the operating room
3. My friend came to stay with me.    over the weekend

B. Write each sentence two ways, one beginning with the dependent clause and the other ending with it. Be careful to use a comma when necessary.

1. my friend gave me a present    because she is a nice person

version a: \_\_\_\_\_

version b: \_\_\_\_\_

2. I moved the boxes into the garage                                      when my brother agreed to help

version a: \_\_\_\_\_

version b: \_\_\_\_\_

## Conjunctions

**coordinating** (for compound sentences): I, fanboy I  
for and nor but or yet (so)

**subordinating** (for complex sentences to begin adverb clauses - grouped by purpose): D,I ID

<i>time:</i>	<i>cause:</i>	<i>manner:</i>
after	as	as
as	because	as if
as soon as	since	as though
before		
just as	<i>comparison:</i>	<i>purpose:</i>
now that	as	in order that
once	just as	so that
since	than	
until		<i>condition:</i>
when	<i>concession:</i>	as long as
whenever	although	even if
while	even though	if
	though	unless
<i>place:</i>	whereas	whether
where	while	
wherever		

## Relative Pronouns

(for complex sentences to begin adjective clauses):

who which that whom whose

## Conjunctive Adverbs

(optional for I;I compound sentences\* - grouped by meaning):

<u>additionally</u>	<u>accordingly</u>	<u>afterwards</u>
also	as a result	later
furthermore	consequently	next
likewise	hence	subsequently
moreover	therefore	then
similarly	thus	
in addition		<u>alternatively</u>
	<u>actually</u>	instead
<u>however</u>	certainly	
nevertheless	indeed	<u>for example</u>
nonetheless	in fact	for instance
on the contrary		
on the other hand	<u>at the same time</u>	<u>certainly</u>
still	meanwhile	clearly
	simultaneously	obviously

\*Use a semi-colon before and a comma after the conjunctive adverb.

## Prepositions

**concrete prepositions**  
(to begin prepositional phrases)

above	near to
across	next to
around	on
at	on top of
behind	onto
below	out of
beneath	outside
beside	outside of
between	over
beyond	past
by	through
close to	throughout
down	to
far from	toward
from	towards
in	under
in front of	underneath
inside	up
into	upon
near	within

**advanced prepositions**  
(to begin prepositional phrases):

aboard	during
about	except (for)
according to	for
after	in addition to
against	in case of
ahead of	in place of
alongside	in spite of
among	instead of
amongst	of
along	off
aside from	on behalf of
atop	out
because of	prior to
before	subsequent to
besides	with
despite	with regard to
due to	without