

CHAPTER 3

Writing and Language

“We seduce the students into grammar. We let grammar seduce us. We assume that it is, in fact, seductive, and we search out those writers who manipulate and exploit grammatical structures in their writing.”

—MARY EHRENWORTH

BACK IN THE CLASSROOM...

- T: Let’s look at some of the sentences from *To Kill a Mockingbird* that you put a sticky note by. Isac?
- Isac: In the middle of page 205, “But there is one way in this country in which all men are created equal—there is one human institution that makes a pauper the equal of a Rockefeller, the stupid man the equal of an Einstein, and the ignorant man the equal of any college president.”
- T: I like that one, too. Who else picked it? Trent? Why do you think it’s powerful?
- Trent: I don’t know. It just sounds, like, you know, like something a president would say or something.
- Isac: Yeah. I like how it kinda repeats. It sounds important that way.
- T: OK. We’ll look at it a little more in a minute. What other sentences did you note?
- Jenny: The one above that, “We know that all men are not created equal in the sense some people would have us believe—some people are smarter than others, some people have more opportunity because they’re born with it, some men make more money than others, some ladies make better cakes than others—some people are born gifted beyond the normal scope of most men.”
- T: Good. Why do you think that’s a powerful sentence?
- Jenny: I don’t know. I just like it.

T: Liking it is a good sign that it is powerful. Did anyone else pick that sentence? Sarah, why do you think it's powerful?

THOUGHTS FROM THE CLASSROOM

Strong (2001) points out that "to develop certain habits of mind—and an awareness of one's own style—is clearly a lifelong pursuit. It is assisted by collaborators who can verbalize what they notice about a text, terms more specific than *lame*, *good*, and *awesome*" (p. 80). I agree and also notice how hard it is for students to develop the language to describe such aspects of text. They can pick out strong, effective sentences; they just lack the vocabulary for explaining their choices. I try to get them to articulate just a little more each time, but this learning is also a lifelong pursuit.

Sarah: I don't know. I guess because it's, like, you know, true. I mean, we all know that some people do some things better, so it's kinda like he's contradicting what we say by pointing out what we know—and then he goes on to say that even with this inequality there should still be equality in the courts, so it kinda like makes the point better. I don't know.

T: I think you do know—you did a good job showing how this sentence sets up the main point Atticus wants to make. Let's talk about these two sentences for a minute. They have something in common that helps to make them powerful. Can you look at them and see what it is?

Jason: They're both long! [Laughing]

T: You're right. That's one thing they have in common. Anything else?

Tanner: Well they both have repeated parts. I mean, in the first sentence, "some people, some men, some ladies, some people," and so on, and in the second one it's like something is the equal of something else, repeated.

T: Good eye. There is repetition, but it's a different kind than the repetition we saw with "guilt" and "pity." This is more of a repetition of structure that we can see through the repetition of words. It's called parallel structure, and it's an important strategy to learn, especially for persuasion. People who study sentence structure and how it affects meaning say that parallel structure, because it's logical and patterned, suggests that the person using it is also logical—and therefore we can put more trust in what he or she says. Cool, huh? I want people who read what I write to think I know what I'm talking about. I think it's interesting, too, that you pick it out, even when you don't know what it is. You recognize its power, so you should be able to use it when you think it can help you persuade. You will certainly want a person you're trying to convince of something to think you are logical and trustworthy, won't you?

THOUGHTS FROM THE CLASSROOM

A minilesson can become a seamless part of a lesson, part of the reading and part of the writing. Even if something arises for which we haven't planned or prepared a handout or an overhead transparency, minilessons can still flow from the reading and writing and back again. Have students help create the example and nonexample sentences, rewrite sentences, and then discuss them. Frey (2007) defines "robust minilessons" as ones "that provide students with a strong foundation to try out the skill or strategy" (p. 26). That's what I'm trying to do here.

Look at these examples for a minute. I think they will help us figure out parallel structure. What do you notice is the difference between the non-parallel examples and the parallel ones?

Nonparallel: My hobbies are skiing, shopping, and to read a good book.

Parallel: My hobbies are skiing, shopping, and reading a good book.

Parallel: My hobbies are to ski, to shop, and to read a good book.

Nonparallel: The new student in our class was loud and made crude comments.

Parallel: The new student in our class was loud and crude.

Parallel: The new student in our class had a loud voice and made crude comments.

Vanessa: Well, the words are the same in the parallel ones and not the same in the not-parallel one. I mean, like, there's an *-ing* at the end of all the parallel ones or *to* something, *to ski*, *to shop*, *to read*. They're the same kinds of words.

T: OK. Anyone see anything else?

Matt: Does it always have to be a list? I mean, the first one has three things and the second example has two. So, does it like have to have a certain number to be parallel or something?

T: Good question. A good rule of thumb is any time you use a coordinating conjunction—a word from our short list—you should check to be sure the items, however many there are, are parallel. So, you can have two, three, even four or more items in a list. In fact, if you write a brochure or make lists in a vertical column, you should especially check for parallel structure.

Emily: I don't get the second example. I mean, the first one is so out there. Who would really say it like that? But the second one seems OK, even not parallel.

T: Good point, Emily. And it isn't strictly incorrect. If we wanted to, we could diagram the sentence—but we won't!—and show how the sentence could have two predicates: *was loud* and *made crude comments*. It's just that it's smoother, more effective this way. When we start a sentence with "The person was..." whoever is listening expects

THOUGHTS FROM THE CLASSROOM

Like Anderson (2005), I keep posters on my wall to remind students of conjunctions we use to talk about sentences. What students call the "long list" is the list of common subordinating conjunctions. What they call the "short list" is the list of coordinating ones. Having the words posted helps us refer to them quickly; they aren't, after all, secrets.

that we'll end with adjectives: *loud* and *crude*. When we start a sentence the second way, we have two similar kinds of verbs: *had* and *made*. That makes it a little better.

Jon: What if we just said "The new student made crude comments in a loud voice"? Would that work?

T: Sure, and it doesn't have to be concerned with parallelism because you've put one of the ideas in a prepositional phrase. Why might we choose to say it your way or the first parallel way? Why choose one over the other?

Tiffany: The two words—*crude* and *loud*—stand out more in the parallel example. They get less attention in Jon's example.

Vanessa: Yeah, I guess if you wanted to really make the point about how he was, that sentence would be better. But if you were, like, describing the class and saying stuff about a bunch of students, then Jon's sentence would be the best.

T: So we choose parallel structure to make a point, to create an effect, right? Let's try a few examples together to see how we do in fixing sentences that aren't parallel. Try the first one. The beginning of the sentence kind of sets up the two parts that should be parallel.

1. I can't decide which activity I prefer: to swim at the shore in July, when the sand is warm, or jogging along country roads in October, when the autumn leaves are at their colorful best.
2. The coach announced an extra hour of drill on Saturday and that the practice on Sunday would be canceled.
3. To reduce stress, Margie tried deep breaths, yoga, and to eat chocolate. (sentences 1 and 2 from Kolln & Funk, 2006, p. 229)

James: "To swim at the shore" and "to jog along country roads."

T: OK. That's parallel. Is there another way we could do it?

Jon: I don't know another way, but do you always have to have the other parts the same, too?

T: What parts?

Jon: The "when the sand is warm" and "when the autumn leaves are at their colorful best" parts.

T: Good question. What do the rest of you think?

Emily: Well it sounds kind of good, like it's the same thing again, so it's kinda like a double one, isn't it?

T: Good point, Emily. I'd say that you don't always have the option of having modifiers be the same kinds of structures, prepositional phrases or adjectives or whatever. The main parts that match up should be the same kind of structure, though. If you can keep the modifiers similar, that creates a nice effect, as Emily noticed. See the first part of the sentence? "Swim at the shore" or "jogging along country roads." Different words start the modifying phrases, but they are both the same kind of phrases. And you could have one with a modifier and one without, if you want, as long as the main structures are the same. See how the second one adds "in October"? Does that answer your question?

Jon: Yeah, I get it.

T: Are there any other options for making this sentence parallel?

William: What if you said "swimming at the shore...or jogging along country roads"?

T: It's parallel. What do the rest of you think?

Several: It's OK.

T: What's the difference? Is one better than the other?

Tanner: I like the *-ing* ones. They're shorter.

Vanessa: I don't see a difference really.

James: The one with "to swim...and to jog" seems more like writing. I think in talking we say *swimming* and *jogging* more.

T: So one sounds more formal?

James: Yeah.

T: So we choose sometimes between two correct versions to make a different effect, then. What about number 2?

Tanner: I can't figure it out.

T: OK. Let's try to underline the two parts that should be parallel. What is the set up? It's not as clear as in the first example, but it's there.

Shelby: "The coach announced two things."

T: So we'll underline what? The two things he announced were...?

Jenny: “An extra hour of drill on Saturday.”

Several: “That the practice on Sunday would be canceled.”

THOUGHTS FROM THE CLASSROOM

It's important that much of this work of noticing and comparing how language works in sentences is done orally because much of what we learn about language is learned that way. This kind of discussion allows students to make guesses and question choices. As Strong (2001) reminds us, “the activity of sharing and comparing—with students paying attention, voicing what they notice, and bringing their observations to a level of awareness—is part of a context in which language itself does much of the teaching” (p. 90). Listening is an important part of learning language.

T: So how do we make these two parts the same?

Jon: You could start both of them with *that*.

T: What would the first part be then?

Matt: “That they'd have an extra hour of drill on Saturday”?

T: What do the rest of you think?

Several: Yeah.

Tanner: I don't like it—it makes the sentence too long.

T: How could we make the second part like the first part?

Sara: “A cancellation of Sunday's practice”?

Tanner: “A cancellation?” Who talks like that?

T: Well, then, Tanner, how could we say it in a way that is parallel and how a person talks?

Tanner: “No practice on Sunday”?

T: What do the rest of you think? “The coach announced *an extra hour of drill on Saturday* and *no practice on Sunday*.” Is it parallel?

Sara: Yes.

T: Why?

James: Well, an extra hour and no practice. They're kind of the same, aren't they?

T: Sure, both are noun phrases. How does it sound?

Tiffany: Well, it's more like talking now, but I kind of liked the other one, too—the one with the *thats*.

T: Why?

Tiffany: I don't know. It sounds good to me.

Tanner: It's too long—and it sounds stuck up.

T: What if we wanted to create that formal effect, though. Would it be a better choice then?

Several: Yeah.

Tanner: OK, I get it. It's like I can say it like talking or say it like writing?

T: Sure. It isn't just about making it right—it also has to be about the effect you create. Let's try number 3. I guess the short way first, right?

Shelby: “Deep breaths, yoga, and chocolate.”

T: OK, that's parallel. What's another way to do it?

Sarah: “Taking deep breaths, practicing yoga, and eating chocolate”?

T: Sure. And what's the difference?

Tanner: The first one's shorter.

Sarah: But the second one's more exact, because you really are trying three different activities, not just three different things.

Tanner: Yeah, but I know what is meant with the short one so why take time for the longer version?

T: It comes down to meaning: What do we really want to say? And there's the effect, too. Personal choice is some of it.

THOUGHTS FROM THE CLASSROOM

Here, as earlier in the discussion, students explore the difference between oral and written speech. Gaining sensitivity about language variety—that it changes for situation—and about appropriateness is important for students to develop as effective speakers and writers. Ehrenworth and Vinton (2005) insist that “learning grammar must be linked to the process of discovery, to intellectual thought” (p. 17). I agree—and even brief discussions like this allow that discovery and thought to develop.

I believed what I read: Teaching grammar is useful for helping students fix their mistakes in writing. I knew the admonitions about connecting grammar instruction with writing, but the only place people talked about the connection seemed to be with the last part of writing, with editing. I was a little uncomfortable with the limitation, but what did I know? It just seemed logical to me that knowing about language could influence what comes before editing—when we are putting ideas down on paper, maybe even before that, when we are shaping ideas.

Since my early questioning, I've found others who've wondered about the same thing: Umbach (1999), speaking of the way handbooks present grammar, explains that “the message is clear. Grammar is what you use to clean up the mess that you make, that you will inevitably make” (p. 5). Ah. So, even if we do connect grammar to writing, if we do it only as a way to “clean up” writing, what does that say about grammar and language—and why would students be motivated to learn much about it? After all, computers pick up a lot of those messes.

Shouldn't grammar—language—have an impact on the *whole* writing process? It seems that it should help writers know the level of language to use with certain genres in

specific situations, even as they begin drafting. If I write my draft of a research paper with the level of language appropriate for a text message, I probably will have a lot of trouble finishing an adequate paper. Knowing about genres and the language expectations associated with them is part of *starting* to write. And shouldn't language help writers find ways to express ideas more effectively? I need to decide when I write if the ideas I'm writing about are coordinate or subordinate to each other, don't I? It seems that an understanding of grammar helps writers express ideas more effectively, even in the early stages of writing. Ehrenworth and Vinton (2005) assert that understanding language even contributes to voice in writing and, thus, should be considered not just at the end of the writing process:

If, as we believe, grammar is linked to voice, students need to be thinking about grammar far earlier in the writing process. We cannot teach grammar in lasting ways if we teach it as a way to fix students' writing, especially writing they view as already complete. Students need to construct knowledge of grammar by practicing it as part of what it means to write, particularly in how it helps create a voice that engages the reader on the page. (p. 10)

Burke (2001), in his discussion of Textual Intelligence, sees the connection between language and writing from an even broader perspective. For him, language knowledge develops an understanding of how texts work—and influences many decisions writers make, even before they begin to put words on paper: “The more a student understands [how language works], the more options he or she has when starting to write” (p. 57). His argument, that students' understanding of how language creates responses

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Burke (2001) lists the following ways understanding language can help a writer prior to editing:

- Choosing a genre
- Choosing sentence types
- Creating a tone
- Selecting effective formats (lists or paragraphs, for example)
- Finding the right word (p. 57)

All of these writerly decisions come early in the writing process. Because language informs them all, we can help students see that grammar will aid them as writers through the entire writing process.

in readers can be useful to their writing, supports the notion of teaching grammar integrated with writing but suggests that such integration is much broader than what is used only during editing and is not just for “fixing” the inevitable mistakes.

Did we do our students a disservice when we thought we were doing better by connecting grammar to writing? If we have made the connection only as a remediation strategy, it's not surprising that students still see grammar as an unfamiliar, unpleasant aspect of writing. Instead, if grammar is taught as part of the entire writing process, it can seem integral to expression, not a separate element added later to satisfy some picky reader or grader.

All of this talk of integrating grammar with writing assumes an understanding of the conversation about grammar instruction over the last few decades. As I mentioned

earlier, the controversy over grammar instruction arose largely over the failure of traditional instruction to have an impact on student writing. In fact, all the statements about that failure were couched in terms related to writing. The consequence of that research

has been an outpouring of published materials about teaching grammar with the purpose of improving writing, about teaching grammar in the context of writing. And that makes sense: As Weaver (1996b) claims, “teaching ‘grammar’ in the context of writing works better than teaching grammar as a formal system, if our aim is for students to use grammar more effectively and conventionally in their writing” (p. 23). Poth (2006) explains the reason grammar in isolation doesn’t work: Grammar exercises are often simpler than real language, and, if students can complete the exercises, they feel that they “know” grammar—but they can’t transfer what they know into their writing.

Poth (2006), working on transfer in learning, also identifies additional reasons why traditional grammar hasn’t worked—but her ideas show us why we need to be careful when we integrate grammar, too. In order for students to apply their learning to new situations, we need to deliver instruction in ways that can “easily be retrieved,” that are “logically organized,” and that can be easily used: “When students learn a grammar principle, they should learn all the ways that it should be applied” (p. 11). Teaching grammar with writing does appear to improve writing. Recent research confirms that “teaching students to focus on the function and practical application of grammar within the context of writing...produced strong and positive effects on students’ writing” (Graham & Perin, 2007, p. 21). An understanding of grammar can improve student writing, but it should be taught in a way that also makes sense to the learners and seems useful to them so that they can transfer their learning to other situations.

Traditional Grammar

Creating Cinquain Poems

Poetry is an effective way to build students’ understanding of traditional grammar through writing. Many poetic forms require students to use specific parts of speech, but all poetry focuses on language—its denotative and connotative meanings as well as its metaphorical and symbolic uses. The enlarged perspective of language that students can gain from writing poetry is beneficial in numerous ways to their growing understanding of language.

1. Begin by teaching students the form of the poem. *Cinquain* poems are poems with five lines that allow students to write poetry at the same time as they use their knowledge of parts of speech. In this form, the first line is a noun that announces the subject (and title) of the poem. The second line consists of two adjectives that describe the noun. Line three consists of three verbs in the *-ing* form. Line four differentiates between phrases and clauses by requiring a phrase that represents a feeling, image, or metaphor about the subject. Line five is a single noun, a synonym for the first line or subject of the poem.

2. To complete the poems, students need to know the ideas of the parts of speech and the idea of phrases and clauses—even if they can't define them or explain them in traditional grammar terms. Seeing models helps my students, who otherwise would be confused, to know what I mean by the terms I use to explain the directions. There are many models available on the Internet (just type in “cinquain”). Show students models and discuss them until students understand the expectations for the poem. Then have them write their own poems and share them. Following is my example:

Alaska
Enormous, Empty
Freezing, Flowing, Quaking
Land of the Midnight Sun
Home

Alternative Suggestion: Other poetic forms can also help students learn about traditional grammar concepts—if not the terms themselves. *Diamante* poems work like cinquains except that they have two more lines (duplicating parts but not content of the second and third line after the phrase line). Weaver uses “I Am” poems to help students learn participial phrases (1996a, pp. 214–217). The poems begin with a metaphor in the first line, with each subsequent line describing how the metaphor works and beginning with a participial phrase, an *-ing* verb form. Most poems have three or four such lines after the first one. I show students models of the poetic form and discuss with them what they see and what they understand about the poems and the form. They see from the examples that some of these poems are pretty concrete; others are more abstract, as shown in this example from Weaver's book:

I am a strong lasting tool.
Nailing friends together
Pounding kindness into the world
Sawing through problems
Sanding rough edges in life. (p. 216)

Students write these “I Am” poems about themselves, about characters in books they are reading, or about concepts they are studying. A preservice teacher, Tonya Hamill, adapted the concept to a lesson on metaphors and similes by having her students identify the metaphors in art by Vladimir Kush and then explain those metaphors in poems built with participial phrases. In Tonya's lesson, students were learning a literary concept, using writing to explore their ideas and thinking, and learning about grammar—all at once.

Other poetic forms that can help students to learn traditional grammar concepts or terms include the following (all explained very nicely with examples in *R Is for Rhyme: A Poetry Alphabet*, Young, 2005):

- *Doublets* are poems built around a word ladder—words in a list, each word one letter different from the word before. The form encourages creativity with and sensitivity to words.
- *Haiku* poems require sensitivity to imagery and language. Examples from *If Not for the Cat* (Prelutsky, 2004) can help students see how adjectives and adverbs can be used in this poetic form.
- *Rap poetry* encourages students to play with language and rhythm in ways that help them learn about grammar as they try to make meaning in rhythmic language.

Writing From Different Perspectives

Another way I use writing to help students learn traditional grammar concepts is when I have them rewrite a scene or story, but from different perspectives.

1. Begin by retelling familiar childhood stories such as *The Three Bears* or *The Three Pigs* from the perspectives of different characters in the stories. In these oral retellings, students practice shifts in stance that they can apply when they write their own experience from different perspectives. This gives them practice with using first person (*I/we/me*) and third person (*They/he/she/them*).
2. Have students choose an event that they attended with at least a few other people: a football game, a concert, a movie, and so forth. Initially, have them write a first-person account, as this allows them to review the event in what (for my students at least) is the most comfortable perspective to retell an event. I tell them this means that they use *I*, *we*, and *me*.
3. After they complete the first-person draft, have them rewrite the event in the third person. Discuss what this means orally first so that students understand that not only do we shift pronouns, but we also have to consider other aspects of the event—what would others see and experience that I might not have? What would others not experience that I did? Then have students write the second version of the event.
4. When students have finished their two versions, have them compare and contrast them in small- or whole-class discussion. What differences do they notice? Students discover that shifting perspective changes the information selected and the stance toward that information. More than that, though, they should see that the different stance creates a different tone—first person is more immediate and personal while third person is more distant and impersonal.
5. With this foundation about the effects of pronoun choice laid, have students investigate different genres that are traditionally written in first or third person.

Newspaper articles, for instance, are written in third person, as are traditional research papers. Letters, however, are written in first person. Even business letters, which are more formal than personal letters, aren't as objective and distant as news articles or research articles. Students should discover that the genres use the different perspectives for a reason—those perspectives are part of each genre's situation and purpose.

6. Next, have students rewrite selected genres from a different perspective. This will teach them about writing and genre while they learn about language. For instance, when they rewrite a news article from a first-person perspective, they can see what is lost and what is gained. Personal letters written from a third-person stance (this is tricky) lose something that makes a letter meaningful. After students write these genres from alternate stances, lead them in a discussion about how stance is related to the genre and the situation in which the genre is acting. Although there are variations in genres, students can build awareness of traditional grammar (pronouns) not only as parts of speech but also as related to the effects they create in writing different genres.

Alternative Suggestion: In a similar application, Burke (2001) suggests having students rewrite text passages—either published ones or their own—in a different verb tense to see the resulting effect. As he notes, “Such exercises help students to understand how language functions to orient the reader in time, and to create different perspectives on the same story or subject” (p. 59). Ehrenworth and Vinton (2005) agree and suggest reading literature by authors such as Sandra Cisneros for things like examples of shifts in verb tense to see how Cisneros creates voice and point of view. As they note, “It is hopeless to ask students to memorize verb forms, especially irregular verb endings, until they see the choice of verb tense as a meaningful one” (p. 69). Again, the shift in grammar creates resultant shifts in tone and position that readers should notice and writers can emulate when necessary.

Editing

Punctuating for Meaning

In *Image Grammar: Using Grammatical Structures to Teach Writing*, Noden (1999) remarks that for “most authors, meaning takes precedence over rules” when it comes to punctuation (p. 98). Iyer (2000) represents this idea in his description of punctuation as guides, not as rules:

Punctuation marks are the road signs placed along the highway of our communication—to control speeds, provide directions, and prevent head-on collisions. A period has the unblinking finality of a red light; the comma is a flashing yellow light that asks us only to slow down; and the semicolon is a Stop sign that tells us to ease gradually to a halt, before gradually start-

ing up again. By establishing the relations between words, punctuation establishes the relations between the people using words. (pp. 93–94)

Helping students see punctuation as road signs, as meaning making, benefits them as readers and writers—and, in the long run, helps students understand how their own choices as writers can benefit readers, or make it harder for readers to understand what they are trying to communicate.

1. Begin by reading with students the following passage from a short story by Adam Schwartz, shared by Randy Bomer (2006). Help students develop their understanding of how punctuation can assist readers by having them imagine the phrasing created by the commas in the sentence. Here's the original text:

I told her I knew she might be disappointed, but I wasn't rejecting her; I only wanted to spend more time with my father, to know and love him as well as I knew her. (p. 528)

2. In his rewriting of the passage, Bomer punctuates the sentence to show that “to figure out what sentences are saying, we have to hear the words (in our mind's ear) together in the appropriate phrasing” (p. 529). What follows is Bomer's repunctuated version that, interestingly, doesn't get flagged by the grammar check on my computer. Read it aloud to contrast it with the original sentence:

I told her. I knew she might. Be disappointed. But I wasn't rejecting. Her I only wanted to spend. More time with my father to know? And love him as well as I knew her. (p. 529)

Ask students what they notice. How does the repunctuation make communication harder? Students will see the obvious—punctuation can make a big difference in communicating effectively. It isn't only about “right” and “wrong.”

3. Next, speak sentences or passages you have prepared and have students punctuate them so that another person reading the printed text would read it as we said it. For example, how might a writer punctuate this sentence so that a sense of frustration (or even a threat) is evident in the written text? “I haven't gotten to you (pause) yet.” Students could write it this way: “I haven't gotten to you yet.” But that doesn't suggest the pause at all. They could write, “I haven't gotten to you, but I will eventually.” Different words—but the message is closer to our intent. What about this version? “I haven't gotten to you—yet.” Better. How is this version different? “I

EXTENDING YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Romano (2004), an advocate of alternate style and personal voice, recognizes the value of conventional correctness: “I also want [students] to realize that if their writing is a mechanical disaster, their natural voice might be dismissed by others, regardless of how authentic, colorful, and pointed it is” (p. 73).

haven't gotten to you. Yet." Is this more threatening? Have students discuss how they can use punctuation to make meaning clear. Find sentences in conversations or in movies, and take them to class to use in explorations like this one. This activity helps students get practice in making editing choices that guide readers and that make punctuation a contributor to meaning, not just an application of rules.

Using Models to Help Students Infer Reader Expectations for Punctuation

When my students have trouble with conventions that interfere with my reading of their writing—and these problems are not a result of trying to make meaning but more a result of failing to consider reader expectations—I find sentences that exemplify the conventions I want my students to edit for, sentences that help them know that readers read punctuation like road signs. If writers put up a stop sign when they want the reader only to slow down, that's a problem.

1. Find examples of the punctuation challenges students are having in texts you read. For example, I had noticed that my students' writing had distracted me because of their use (or, rather, the lack of use) of commas with long introductory elements and in compound sentences. When I read the book *Sitting Ducks* (Bedard, 1998), I realized it could help my students learn reader expectations for commas in these constructions. I read the book to them and used sentences from the text for a minilesson. I gave students three sets of sentences and asked them to tell me what they could learn about comma use from the examples. The following is an abbreviated sample set.

But one day, an egg came through the incubation chamber unhatched.

Dazed by this rude introduction into the world, a little duck emerged and surveyed his strange surroundings.

He just had to sneak away and explore the streets below.

He rushed in and hopped up onto a stool.

At first, the alligator was bewildered by this weird welcome, but soon he joined in the crazy dance.

They even tried going out together, but it proved to be very awkward. (n.p.)

The students infer, correctly, that they should use commas after introductory elements and between independent clauses (although they didn't use those terms) but not if the second part of the sentence wasn't a "whole sentence."

2. Next, have students return to their writing and implement what they have learned about punctuating for reader expectation. Encourage students to pay attention to punctuation when they read so that they become familiar with reader expectations about punctuation. There is only one caution—and that is that some writers don't always follow the “rules.” Sometimes the reason is because expectations change over time, and an author's punctuation may have been appropriate for the time period in which the text was written but isn't now. Sometimes different genres have differing expectations for punctuation. It's good to teach students that punctuation rules change through time and among genres—a helpful and useful thing to know. But some alternate use of punctuation goes back to meaning: Sometimes writers use unexpected punctuation to draw attention to an idea. By not doing what's expected, readers have to slow down, pay attention, interpret. For example, using the following paragraph from Wiesel's (2007) essay “Why I Write: Making No Become Yes” draw students' attention to the three compound sentences listed below the paragraph, each of which is punctuated differently.

Where was I to discover a fresh vocabulary, a primeval language? The language of night was not human, it was primitive, almost animal—hoarse shouting, screams, muffled moaning, savage howling, the sound of beating. A brute strikes out wildly, a body falls. An officer raises his arm and a whole community walks toward a common grave. A soldier shrugs his shoulders, and a thousand families are torn apart, to be reunited only by death. This was the concentration camp language. (2007, p. 23)

- A brute strikes out wildly, a body falls.
- An officer raises his arm and a whole community walks toward a common grave.
- A soldier shrugs his shoulders, and a thousand families are torn apart, to be reunited only by death.

After reading the paragraph and paying specific attention to these three sentences, ask students why Wiesel might have used commas in both expected and unexpected ways: Meaning is enhanced by punctuation. My students' answers astounded me with their insight. With regard to unexpected punctuation use, students should also realize, however, that being a student writer and being a published writer are two different things. Sometimes readers have different expectations of each type of writer. It's not fair, necessarily; it just is how things are.

Usage

Writing Letters to Different Audiences

In working with children of migrant workers in his classroom, Shafer (2001) found that traditional lessons on usage and language didn't engage his students. He learned that

language lessons needed to be a part of “authentic language experiences that directly touched the lives” of his students (p. 38). Interestingly, instead of simply teaching usage as a standard, which is how some teachers might approach such a situation—even if teaching grammar in the context of writing—he taught language as flexible, as responsive to situation. Dunn and Lindblom (2003) argue that a flexible approach is more effective:

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In discussing her own usage practices, Battistella (1999) notes that “my usage follows long habit that I have had no social reason to change” (p. 18). If our students have had no social repercussions for using their informal usage, what does that tell them about “rules” and the social nature of usage? If they see situations where repercussions may occur—and if those situations matter to them—then they will want to pay attention to the usage expectations in those situations. Our instruction can prepare them for necessary usage shifts.

To combat these barriers to upward mobility, students do not need to know “the rules” for writing successfully. What they need is the ability to communicate effectively with people in all kinds of contexts for all kinds of purposes.... Pretending that grammar rules provide a smooth, toll-free road to economic success is a harmful myth. (p. 45)

For Shafer, teaching effective communication meant that “each assignment, then, would probe the worthiness of the language used and the reason why it was successful” (2001,

p. 39). This lesson idea follows Shafer’s experience somewhat.

1. Have students start by writing a short letter to a friend or relative, one that they will read in class but that is a legitimate letter—one they will actually give or send to the person. After they have written their letters, have students share them as a way to begin to understand how language responds to situation. Have students look for usage that is unique to the relationship—for example, shortcuts of language or signal words that might not mean the same thing outside of the relationship. Students should definitely note the informal usage that is more like speech that often pervades letters to friends or family.
2. Next, have students write a letter to a prospective employer. I have also had students write to businesses to complain or compliment products or services (Dean, 2000). Either way, students first need to analyze the situation and consider the audience: How is this audience different from the one they had previously written to? What do those differences entail in terms of language? As students work through the writing process on these letters, they explore the answers to these questions.

When they realized the different levels of usage that were expected in the different situations, Shafer (2001) explains that his students “discussed the place of power and the way it tends to define what is ‘standard’ or ‘correct’” (p. 40). Dunn and Lindblom (2005), referring to Lippi-Green’s research, assert that “the advice to use ‘appropriate’ language for each situation, while better than ‘proper’ or ‘correct,’ continues to give students the message that their home language is not ‘good’ enough to be used in academic or formal situations” (p. 193). Although there is a risk that teachers’ talk of appropriate usage could alienate some students, the reali-

ty often is that certain situations place expectations on language use. Power is a factor in U.S. society. For better or worse, the way people use language in certain situations plays into power relationships. To be accepted, to have our ideas matter, to have people pay attention to our requests—all of these require some conformity of language to situational expectations. And that applies to both formal and informal situations. That conformity can have some flexibility, though. It isn't completely rigid.

Students seem to move instinctively to more formal language in some situations, even if they don't know all about correctness. For example, when they write to a business person they don't know and want something from, they automatically make some adjustments with language. As Shafer notes, and as I also observed, when writing these letters students pay more attention to issues of correctness. We should help students note this attention and the shifts in usage they make as they write for different purposes to different audiences, and we should build on their instinctive shifts, creating an authentic purpose for learning more about usage issues. Students come to an important understanding about language as they work through writing experiences that use different levels of usage and pay attention to the language differences.

Analyzing Grammar Rants

Grammar rants are found all around us. They are writers' observations and opinions about language, usually focusing on some aspect the writer finds interesting or bothersome. The recent bestseller *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: Why, Commas Do Make a Difference!* (Truss, 2006) might be considered a lengthy grammar rant—the introduction definitely is one. Dunn and Lindblom (2005) explain an idea for analyzing grammar rants that helps students learn about usage issues and develop into what they call “savvy writers” (p. 192). Their rationale for these analyses is one I endorse: “If we continue to teach students that there is such a thing as a single, correct English, we continue to perpetuate a myth that is harmful to students and their potential as writers” (p. 193). To Dunn and Lindblom's idea of analyzing grammar rants orally, I add a writing component to encourage reflection and longer lasting learning. Here's how I teach their idea.

1. To prepare students for the world of grammar rants, share with them the satirical rant “What Is and Ain't Grammatical” (Barry, 1993). In this essay, Barry raises (in a humorous way) some of the issues underlying grammar rants. I use the essay to start a discussion about attitudes toward grammar so that the rants students read later have some context.
2. Next, provide students with some grammar rants. Have students work in pairs and read the rants. These rants can be found in newspapers or magazines. Many local papers have a language column that could be used for this activity, or teachers could

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The beginning of Barry's essay (1993) gives an idea of how it pretends to be a rant, but isn't: "I cannot overemphasize the importance of good grammar. What a crock. I could easily emphasize the importance of good grammar. For example, I could say: 'Bad grammar is the leading cause of slow painful death in North America,' or 'Without good grammar, the United States would have lost World War II'" (p. 191). Students enjoy Barry's humorous take on a topic about which they have opinions.

search online for "grammar columns" or "grammar rants." As students read, ask them to look for the following points:

- The "problem(s)" about which the writer is ranting
- What the writer sees as the problem with the "problem"
- Why the writer is so unhappy about the "problem"

As students read and discuss their articles, encourage them to place the rants in a larger, cultural context. What does it say about language and people that there are writers who write about these issues? When students share their findings with the whole class, help them see that us-

age issues (most often the subject of the rants) have moral overtones as well as implications about power and relationships.

3. Next, using Schuster's (2003) proposal of analyzing the way language is actually used, have students hunt for examples of published writing that violates the "rules" that were the subject of the rants. When they have some evidence (and it's all around us), have them work in their same partnerships to write a rebuttal to the rant. In this rebuttal, they can cite the places and authors that "break the rule" to show that usage expectations are situational or that they change with time. I agree with Dunn and Lindblom (2005) that analyzing grammar rants (and researching the subject of the rant so that students can respond to the charges) can "make both teachers and students more sensitive to the particular pet peeves of professional and amateur grammar guardians everywhere, making students more careful shapers of language for each rhetorical situation" (p. 203). When students respond to the rants with "rants" of their own, they develop as critical thinkers about language.

Writing Stories to Develop Language Sensitivity

Usage often relies on students' hearing. We can aid students in acquiring an "ear" for standard usage with their own talk in the classroom by calling attention to the differences between informal and formal usages in the texts that are read aloud in class. One way to generate texts for students to practice different varieties of usage with is to have them write the stories of wordless picture books. Table 2 contains some titles that work for this practice.

1. Have students work in pairs first to "read" the pictures and develop the general plot of the book they have selected, using talk before writing to create the basics of the storyline. Fravel (2005) believes that talking "plays a crucial role and impacts the writing of all students regardless of their native language because language acquisition depends on social interaction" (p. 74). I agree. Talk also prepares students

TABLE 2. Wordless Picture Books for Developing Language Sensitivity

- Armstrong, J. (2006). *Once upon a banana*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Blake, Q. (1995). *Clown*. New York: Henry Holt.
- Briggs, R. (1978). *The Snowman*. New York: Random House.
- Collington, P. (1995). *The tooth fairy*. New York: Knopf.
- Day, A. (1989). *Carl goes shopping*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Ludy, M. (2005). *The flower man*. Windsor, CO: Green Pastures.
- Macaulay, D. (2005). *Black and white*. New York: Walter Lorraine Books.
- MacGregor, M. (1988). *On top*. New York: William Morrow.
- Melling, D. (2004). *The ghost library*. Hauppauge, NY: Barrons.
- Nygren, T. (1987). *The red thread*. New York: R & S Books.
- Panek, D. (1979). *Catastrophe cat at the zoo*. Scarsdale, NY: Bradbury Press.
- Prater, J. (1986). *The gift*. New York: Viking Penguin.
- Priceman, M. (2005). *Hot air: The (mostly) true story of the first hot-air balloon ride*. New York: Atheneum.
- Rogers, G. (2004). *The boy, the bear, the baron, the bard*. Brookfield, CT: Roaring Brook Press.
- Rohman, E. (1994). *Time flies*. New York: Crown.
- Weisner, D. (1988). *Free fall*. New York: HarperTrophy.
- Weisner, D. (1991). *Tuesday*. New York: Clarion Books.
- Weisner, D. (1999). *Sector 7*. New York: Clarion Books.
- Weisner, D. (2006). *Flotsam*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- Weitzman, J.P., & Glasser, R.P. (1998). *You can't take a balloon into the Metropolitan Museum*. New York: Dial Books for Young Readers.
- Weitzman, J.P., & Glasser, R.P. (2002). *You can't take a balloon into the National Gallery*. New York: Penguin.
-

with ideas to write. The wordless picture books provide a frame for the story—but no two finished stories are ever exactly the same—which allows students a chance to focus more on the telling of the story than on developing a plot. As such, they are able to focus on language.

2. Consider requiring students to include both informal and formal language in the story, perhaps using characters' dialogue in informal, speech-like language and narration in more formal usage. In this way, students get to practice a variety of language levels in writing as they tell their stories. They can use novels and picture books as mentor texts if they need help with this dual use of language in the same text.
3. After the stories are written, have students share them in small and large groups. Discussion about the stories should focus on how language was used effectively to tell the stories. Have students reflect on the kinds of usages that are easier for them to write, on how the different levels of usage worked to accomplish different purposes in their stories, and on how they knew to adjust for the different purposes. From this reflection, have students consider other writing situations that have expectations for certain levels of usage, and discuss how they know the expectations and what they can do to achieve them.

Language Change

Writing Advertisements

When students listen to advertisements, they may not be attentive to the language being used to influence them or connect to them. When they have to write their own ads, though, they become much more sensitive to language used to connect or to change perceptions and behavior.

1. Begin by having students analyze the language of oral advertisements. I start with oral ads so that students will focus on language more than the visual appeals that play into ads on television, the Internet, or in print. Have students bring in the texts of ads they hear on the radio or the words from television ads without the accompanying visuals. Encourage students to find advertisements that don't mention price directly, that are more subtle in their use of language. Strongly worded promotional ads don't always use the most effective language, relying instead on price or economics as the sales tool: "Call now and we'll throw in a second _____ absolutely free!" Some soundtracks for ads can be obtained from the Internet. For example, www.beefitswhatsfordinner.com/ads/radio.asp is a site with ads from the Beef Industry that may be familiar to students. I favor these advertisements because they are not the typical promotional ads with which students are more familiar. The language of these ads is used to connect with consumers and to encourage positive feelings toward the product, not necessarily to sell it. This more subtle use of language can help students see how effective language can be used to make connections between consumers and products—and has nothing to do with economics, which is the aspect of advertising language our students are more familiar with.
2. When students have their scripts for the ads, guide them as they investigate the language, specifically looking for the way language is used to persuade listeners. They might want to look at the imagery in word choice, the level of formality, the use of pronouns, or the use of sentence types (imperative, interrogatory, exclamatory, or declarative) as well as the way the words are spoken to see how the writers of the ads appeal to their selected audiences. Considering the audience should be a major part of this exploration and analysis.

In the ads on the site just mentioned, for example, the script for one of the ads is as follows:

Twilight lingers over your backyard. The charcoals turn from black, to red, to white. It's time. Four perfect steaks hit the grill, making a sizzling sound that says "Summer is here." The cicadas hit their crescendo. They're saying, "Welcome back, friend. We missed you." The feeling is mutual. Beef. It's what's for dinner.

Courtesy of the Beef Checkoff Program.

The ad uses declarative sentences to describe a scene that writers hope will appeal to listeners. The variety of sentence lengths seems more like spoken language, like a friend is talking to us. With students, discuss how the word choice creates an emotion—nostalgia, longing—that makes the product appealing, even if the listeners might not ever have grilled steaks in their backyards at twilight to a cicada serenade. The use of imagined dialogue between “friends” draws us in even more.

The words create an ideal image, maybe borrowed from movies or television, which connects the audience emotionally to the product being advertised, without ever mentioning a price. This is the hard part for students. They are more used to direct persuasion, the kind that says, “All of this for only \$39.95!” To help them see the difference, have students compare ads like the Beef Industry ad to the ones with which they are more familiar, especially because those exclamation point-filled texts tend to be the kind students write when *they* want to be persuasive. After exploring several ads and analyzing the way writers use different varieties of language, including how the speaker in the beef ads sometimes drops his g’s (to sound more friendly than sophisticated), students come to see how advertisers use varieties of language—formal and informal, descriptive and commanding, personal and impersonal—to create appeal for the product in the target audience.

3. After analyzing several ads and how they use language to persuade, have students write an ad. To begin, modifying an idea by Fuchs (1991), I have my students create a product from six items I give them: a piece of tag board, a paper clip, a rubber band, a popsicle stick, a brass fastener, and a piece of felt. They can add decorations and one other item of choice to the provided items to create their products.

After students have a creation, they should name it. Perrin (2007) offers ideas for teaching language through product names. Having students work through his short lesson will give them ways to use “the power of language” in naming their own products (p. 36). When they have made the product and named it, have them write a short ad to persuade their classmates to *use* the product. I encourage them to avoid trying to “sell” the product because then they get into cost wars, worrying about prices without paying attention to persuasive aspects of language. If students have analyzed a variety of ads effectively, they usually have several appropriate strategies they can use to write the ads for their products.

4. Finally, have them present their ads to the class. As they read their ads and show the product, have the class analyze the techniques of language employed and determine the effectiveness of the choices. The analysis, the writing, and the evaluation of peer ads all work to develop sensitivity to language. And the benefit to the students, as consumers who are more knowledgeable of the techniques used to entice them, will be significant.

Writing Dialogue

Although we teach students about ethos in persuasive writing, Napoli (2005) asserts that even in fiction, writers need to be believed. Some of what makes a story believable—what makes the storyteller trustworthy—is the language used by the characters. And it's hard, even for more experienced writers, to make the language of characters sound natural, in part because of the difference between speech and writing. When students are writing creatively, they need to understand how to add credibility to their stories by creating effective dialogue.

1. According to Napoli (2005), some of the aspects of speech that are difficult to imitate in writing are as follows:
 - Pitch
 - Intensity
 - Duration of sounds
 - The way individuals pronounce the same word differently
 - The way several people may speak at once or overlap
 - The syntax of dialects

Help students look for how writers represent these aspects effectively by identifying and analyzing a variety of texts. For instance, reading aloud the beginning pages of *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 1925) allows students to hear a particular

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In writing about creating dialogue, Napoli (2005) acknowledges that “there are many things that happen in spoken language that cannot happen in the same manner on the page. The job is not to reproduce spoken language faithfully, but to play the game so well that no one notices the gulf between the written word and the spoken word” (p. 211). Having students listen to language, try to replicate it in writing, and then notice how authors do it will help them as writers at the same time as it generates interest and curiosity in language—both written and spoken.

kind of speech—more formal than today's speech, perhaps, but still more like a variety of spoken language than written. That specific speech-like quality is partly a function of word choice (*rather, indeed*), punctuation (lots of dashes and commas), and syntax (lots of appositives and long sentences): “It was on that slender riotous island which extends itself due east of New York—and where there are, among other natural curiosities, two unusual formations of land” (p. 10). As students read texts, help them notice the characteristics of written language that translate into sounds for oral language. Another book—a picture book—that helps students develop a sense of how oral language can be represented in print is *Kibitzers and Fools* (Taback, 2005). In one of the stories in the book, we can hear the Jewish intonations in the printed word:

“So...I'm here!” said the waiter.

“Taste this soup!” said the customer.

"Twenty-five years we have been making chicken soup," answered the waiter.
"Nobody has ever complained—"

Students can see that punctuation (ellipses for pauses and exclamation points for emphasis) as well as syntax (putting "Twenty-five years" first instead of last) help to create the sound of real voices on paper. As students study novels and stories to see how the authors they read use spelling and punctuation to help readers "hear" the voices on the page, they will gain more ideas for writing their own dialogue—and develop sensitivity to the diverse ways individuals use language all around them every day.

2. Next, students need to have conversations they can practice translating into written texts. Taping conversations might create legal problems, so simply have students pay attention to conversations around them in public places and then jot down snippets of what they hear to work with more carefully in class. Crowe told me that in his preparation for writing *Mississippi Trial, 1955* (2002) he visited the South. He said he walked around the town, listening to the language as it surrounded him. Then he would write down some of the phrases and sentences he heard, trying to replicate the sounds and rhythms of speech that would be true to the place (C. Crowe, personal communication, April 26, 2005).

Because students can't travel, using movie clips allows them to hear different patterns of speech they might be able to use for characters. Have them listen to clips of actors from old movies and hear the drawl of John Wayne; or the more formal, crisp speech of Vincent Price; or the lilting speech of Cary Grant. Then have students compare them with clips of more current speech patterns of actors like Brad Pitt or Hugh Jackman to see other speech qualities they can try to replicate in writing. Paying attention to the ways different speakers speak develops students' sensitivity to language.

3. As a class, practice how to replicate some of those different qualities to develop that sensitivity even more—and also develop students' understanding of how written and oral language differ and how written language can be used to (partially) represent speech. Have students play around with using punctuation (ellipses to show pauses, for example) or spelling (repeating letters to show duration of sounds, as in *Wha-a-a-at?*). Have them "hear" the difference between *Pleeeeease* and *Puh-lease*. Napoli (2005) also suggests using "a dash between words" or italics, to indicate stress (pp. 212–213). After practicing as a class, have students practice individually to create "voices" that they can have peers read and identify.
4. Also teach students about using dialogue tags to overcome some of the challenges of creating effective voices in written text. Many students (at least among my classes) depend so heavily on the tags or misuse them that they diminish the credibility of the writer rather than aid in revealing the characters in the story. Napoli (2005)

encourages writers to use tags that reveal the “intensity of the overall utterance,” using words such as *yell*, *whisper*, *murmur*, and so on (p. 214). She rejects using tags that don’t give information about intonation (such as *giggled*, which is an act that occurs, usually, before or after the comment). Tags that give information evident from the text (*asked*, *repeated*, *replied*) aren’t useful. Giving students some hints about these overall intonation cues can help them write dialogue more effectively.

Rhetorical Grammar

Using Sentence Structures to Reflect Meaning

Reading aloud helps students learn about the ways sentence structures contribute to meaning—and music can help students understand rhythms of sentences.

1. When introducing students to the 1920s as a background to *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 1925), include music of the era, namely, jazz. Students need to hear some jazz, particularly if they are unfamiliar with it. *Jazz: My Music, My People* (Monceaux, 1994) can provide background information to this listening activity, as it introduces the artists whose music influenced the time period of the novel. Be sure to have students listen to music by Duke Ellington as part of this sensory introduction so that the writing that follows will connect.
2. When students have some experience with jazz, read aloud *Duke Ellington* (Pinkney, 1998). This book provides interesting information at the same time as it allows you to teach about how the technical aspects of language—sentence structure and its effect on rhythm—can enhance our reading experience. After reading, ask students what they notice about the sound of the language. Because the book is carefully crafted so that the rhythm of the sentences sounds like jazz, students should recognize that musical element. When they do, show them some selected sentences, such as those I’ve included, to indicate how Pinkney created the sound through her use of punctuation. Early in the book, we don’t hear the jazzy rhythm because Duke was encouraged to play traditional piano by his parents:

But his piano playing wasn't always as breezy as his stride. When Duke's mother, Daisy, and his father, J.E., enrolled him in piano lessons, Duke didn't want to go. Baseball was Duke's idea of fun. But his parents had other notions for their child. (n.p.)

Contrast that rhythm with later in the book when we hear the jazz in full swing:

Yeah, those solos were kickin'! Hot-buttered bop, with lots of sassy-cool tunes. When the band did their thing, the Cotton Club performers danced the Black Bottom, the Fish-Tail, and the Suzy Q. (n.p.)

Although word choice plays a part in the rhythm (something students should note), they should also see that the sentences vary greatly in length, lending themselves to the rhythm that is reminiscent of the jazz music they have been listening to.

3. Be sure to consider with students why these choices might have been made. In fact, contrasting the book *Duke Ellington* with the page about him in *Jazz: My Music, My People* (Monceaux, 1994) will encourage students to see the difference. The writing by Monceaux is lovely, but it isn't jazzy: "Growling, muted brass instruments, liquid clarinets, and smooth saxophones all had a place in his band, and were blended together with skill and subtlety. He used his piano to drive the rhythm of the piece and provide harmonies" (p. 27). Have students compare the different rhythms and determine how they are created to understand how sentence structure contributes to fluency.
4. Next, have students apply this concept to their own writing by choosing to write about a topic and matching the sentence lengths and rhythm to the subject—long and slow to write about a drive through the country or a walk in the park (for example), or quick and jumpy to describe the last minutes of a riveting basketball game or a wild ride at the amusement park.

If students still need examples of sentences and rhythm, have them find text passages or picture books that use sentence rhythms effectively and imitate them. One book they could use is *Come on, Rain!* (Hesse, 1999). Students can contrast the heavy, slow sentences that portray the hot weather before the rain with the faster (relieved!) sentences that appear after the refreshing rain comes. I also use the passage in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960) where Jem is creeping onto the Radley's porch to look in the window. The sentences where he is creeping up have a rhythm that follows his slow, careful movements. The sentences where he runs back, though, read much faster (p. 53). Have students look at the word choices and sentence constructions to see how Lee makes the rhythm match the content so that they can use similar strategies in their own writing.

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Micciche (2004) quotes Didion about the power of sentences: "All I know about grammar is its infinite power. To shift the structure of a sentence alters the meaning of that sentence, as definitely and inflexibly as the position of a camera alters the meaning of the object photographed" (p. 721). This feeling of the ability of sentences to shape perception is exactly what I hope students gain from working with sentences in my class.

Alternative Suggestion: Students may have questions about the sentences Pinkney uses that are not traditional, complete sentences. As I mentioned in chapter 2, teachers should be prepared to address the issue of "minor sentences" (Weaver, 1996a, p. 252) as a stylistic choice that creates an effect. Too many writers use fragments effectively for us to tell students that they are always wrong (Schuster, 2006). Fragments or minor sentences might be inappropriate in some genres, or ineffective, or not serve a rhetorical purpose, but fragments aren't simply an issue of right and wrong. I agree with Schuster, who urges that "we must not forever exclude this writerly choice from students' revision tool kits" (p. 83).

Growing Sentences

In a recent report published by the Alliance for Excellent Education, Graham and Perin (2007) conclude that 11 practices are effective in helping students improve writing. One of those is sentence combining; in fact, they explain that sentence combining can “provide an effective alternative to traditional grammar instruction, as this approach improves students’ writing quality while at the same time enhancing syntactic skills” (p. 21). Sentence combining is an activity that encourages students to combine ideas into complex syntactic structures, through one of two methods: open-ended or cued.

Open-ended combining asks students to use any method they can to combine kernel sentences into longer, more syntactically complex sentences. The advantage of this method is that students can use many options in how they combine the ideas; the disadvantage is that students are often limited to the options they know. Cued combining, conversely, is designed to give students clues so that they can combine sentences into certain constructions. The advantage is that students can be directed to build constructions they wouldn’t ordinarily construct; the disadvantage is that the cues constrain (to a certain degree) the options available, which is not true of real writing. That is, when we write, we don’t have cues directing us to combine our sentences in certain ways. On the other hand, once I learn about creating participial phrases or absolutes through cued sentence combining, I might then use them when I write my own sentences.

1. Begin by using open-ended combining, giving students sets of kernel sentences and asking them to combine them *in more than one way*. This is important. If they combine them only one way, they don’t learn that sentences are flexible—and they might get the false idea that this is a right-and-wrong kind of activity. That is not what they should learn from sentence combining. After they’ve written different versions, have them make a star beside the one they like best. Then have students share their favorites and discuss the reasons they like some sentences better than others. Discussion of the sentences and the reasons why some constructions are favored over others is essential for students to gain the benefits that can accrue from work with sentence combining. These discussions develop students’ sensitivity to sentences and how sentence construction can enhance meaning. These discussions also enlarge students’ understanding of rhetorical effectiveness. When students are sensitive to the rhetorical effect of sentences, when they understand why some constructions appeal more than others or why some are better suited than others, they are really on the road to becoming effective writers.
2. As students continue to combine sentences, they need to have new options that extend their existing repertoires. This is the best time to introduce cued combining, selecting sentences that help students develop constructions they don’t regularly use. Use the same procedures with cued combining as with open-ended: Have students combine sentences in more than one way, mark a star by the one they like best, and discuss the reason for their choices with others. The practice with cued

combining, alternating with opportunities for open-ended combining allows students to build syntactic awareness and skill. Students may not be able to name the structures they are constructing, but they can use them in their writing beyond the practice with sentences they do in the class, especially if teachers encourage such use by expecting the constructions in polished writing.

Open-ended sentences can be found in a number of sources, but I prefer to make my own out of sentences my students will read in class materials. I take a sentence I think has an interesting construction that my students can practice or learn, and I break it down into its kernel sentences. I deconstruct or “de-combine” it. Sometimes I have students do this, too, so that they begin to see how many ideas can be embedded in a sentence—and sometimes they do a better job of de-combining than I do. As an example of my own de-combining, following are some kernel sentences I used with my students (shown with their original sentences, from *An Interview With Harry the Tarantula*, Tyson, 2003):

I looked up out of the bottle.

I looked up when she opened the lid.

I looked up with my eight eyes.

I saw a huge face.

The face was staring right at me.

Original: When she opened the lid, I looked up out of the bottle with my eight eyes and saw a huge face staring right at me. (n.p.)

I can paralyze a cricket.

I can do it in one bite.

The poison will turn the cricket into something.

It will turn it into a morsel

The morsel is very juicy.

Original: In one bite I can paralyze a cricket, and the poison will turn it into a very juicy morsel. (n.p.)

For cued combining, I use some examples from books, but I have also created my own as needed. Examples of cued combining follow. The directions are to eliminate the words in italics and use the cues in parentheses to combine:

The construction crew worked steadily. *They* stopped only for a quick break. (Use *-ing*.)

Alexander the Great was king of Macedonia. *He was* one of the greatest generals in history. (Use commas.)

(*McDougal, Littell English*, 1989, p. 148)

EXTENDING YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Ray (1999) provides a series of steps for students to follow as they find structures in published writing that they might want to use in their own writing:

1. Notice something about the craft of a text.
2. Talk about it and *make a theory* about why a writer might use this craft.
3. Give the craft a *name*.
4. Think of *other texts* you know. Have you seen this craft before?
5. Try and *envision* using this craft in your own writing. (p. 120)

Teaching students to notice and imitate effective structures in published writing can help them develop understanding about language effectiveness as it also helps them gain confidence and improve as writers.

Students are more likely to create specific constructions through this method than they are with open-ended combining. However, if they don't already have the desired constructions in their sentence repertoire, then they will gain new ways of writing from this approach. After working over a period of time with both kinds of sentence combining and being expected to apply their learning to their writing, students' writing does improve its syntactic effectiveness.

Using Mentor Sentences

Imitation has a long tradition in writing instruction. I suggest it here as a method that helps students consider language in ways that benefit them as writers. With this long tradition, it will be obvious that I am not the only person to recommend the methods that follow. Many educators today—including Ray (2006), Ehrenworth and Vinton (2005), and Angelillo (2002)—advocate imitation of mentor texts as a way for students to gain understanding about

language that improves their effectiveness as writers.

1. Introduce the concept of imitation by sharing good writing with students and asking them to notice sentences. When they do, ask them why they are drawn to a particular sentence. When I use mentor texts with the whole class, I have ideas of particular sentences that I hope they will see, but I try to let the experience be one that allows students to explore language, finding structures that fit their needs and appeal to them as writers. To that end, students need to know how to look for sentences and structures, so we practice in class and then they work on their own. I have found the text from *Scarecrow* (Rylant, 1998) an effective way to begin. The first few pages of the book contain these sentences:

His hat is borrowed, his suit is borrowed, his hands are borrowed, even his head is borrowed.

And his eyes probably came out of someone's drawer.

But a scarecrow's life is all his own. (n.p.)

By reading the text a few times and then looking at the way the sentences are structured, students notice many things (even from these beginning lines) that they can use in their own writing. They don't know the "names" for what they observe, but they identify the repetition of ending elements (epistrophe) and the use of a differ-

ent phrasing to emphasize an idea. They don't always notice the lack of conjunction in the first series of joined clauses (asyndeton), but sometimes they do. In later sentences in the book, they will notice the repetition of initial words (anaphora), the elimination of that initial repetition (ellipsis), and lists. After students find structures that they like, discuss the effects of the different structures. It's important that this isn't seen as just "find and copy." Discussion of the effect of the choice is essential to students' growth as writers.

2. When students understand how the structures work and what they do for the writing, have them find places in their own writing where they can experiment with those structures. Growth as writers doesn't happen all at once, but, eventually, students' sensitivity to language manifests itself in their writing as they implement the structures they've imitated from published writers who use language in interesting ways.

Alternative Suggestion: Imitation can extend beyond the sentence level, too, as students develop their abilities to recognize, consider, and use textual structures and elements that are effective. For example, in *Mississippi Trial, 1955*, Crowe (2002) uses language effectively to describe a place:

Coffee. When I was at Gramma and Granpa's house, I woke up every morning to the smell of coffee. The nutty aroma floated up the back stairs and into my room through the transom window above my door. Once I was awake, I tried to separate the other aromas of my grandparents' house: Some mornings the meaty, spicy scent of sausage came up the stairs; other days the sweet fragrance of fresh muffins. Behind those morning smells lingered the mellow scent of mildew, wood, and Ivory soap. To this day, if you dropped me blindfolded at my grandparents' home, I'd know I was there as soon as you opened the door. (p. 9)

When we reread the passage, we can see the effective use of adjectives, as well as alliteration and specific details. I help students prepare to write a descriptive passage that imitates this one using these steps:

- Think of a place you have good memories of. Write down where it is.
- Put yourself in that place. Look around. Now smell. Brainstorm all the smells you associate with the place.
- Choose the most significant smell. What is it? Write down the word, just the word. Now explain why that smell is significant. Then talk about the other important smells with this beginning: *Other times....* Then list the least noticeable smells with this start: *Behind those smells....* Finally, end with this sentence and complete as appropriate for your place: *To this day, if I were taken blindfolded to _____, I'd know I was there as soon as I _____.*

Here's the way I completed the imitation—and I share it to show how the imitation allowed me to use effective language to explore a memory that I hadn't thought about for years but that is significant to me.

Cinnamon. That was first when we opened the door from the cold into Grandma's oven-warm kitchen. It blew in steamy gusts that accompanied us as we entered. After we unbundled ourselves, leaving coats and boots and hats and scarves and mittens in a pile by the door, I would notice the other smells: coffee first, then grandpa's cigars. Behind those, especially when I'd spend the night, I would notice the lemon polish and the musty smell of wet wool from our snowy boots soaking the rugs. To this day, if I were taken blindfolded to my grandparents' house, I'd know I was there as soon as I smelled cinnamon.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What writing assignments do you currently give students that could be adjusted to include a component that enhances your students' language learning?
2. How can you make writing and grammar more integrated in your classroom?
3. Where in other places of the writing process, besides editing, can you include language lessons that will benefit your students as writers?