Building Sentence Sense in Struggling Writers

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Visit wvced.com to download Van Cleave’s complete writing handout.
INTRODUCTION

Writing coherent paragraphs and essays involves engaging in a number of activities simultaneously:

- motor component: whether students print, write in cursive, or type an assignment, part of the brain is engaged in this process.
- spelling: even if students are not penalized for spelling, they must still sound out and spell the words they choose so that the reader can understand what is being written.
- syntax (sentence construction): students must write coherent sentences, including appropriate variety, structure, and punctuation.
- vocabulary: students must use words that convey intended message and vary those words to reflect the development of ideas.
- text structure (paragraph/essay): students must apply what they have learned regarding introductory, supporting, and concluding sentences/paragraphs.
- recursive processes (planning/revising/editing): students must proofread and edit their work, taking into account conventions of spelling, punctuation, sentence construction, and idea development.
- content: topics chosen from students’ own experiences contain the most simple and direct content; eventually, students must write on topics assigned by content-area teachers.
- audience: students must determine the purpose of the assignment, the intended audience, and the approach to be taken in order to match written piece with intended audience.

The skills included in this scope and sequence involve knowledge in four stages. A student has achieved “mastery” only when he/she is able to engage with the concept at all four stages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages of Knowledge</th>
<th>Idea Generation</th>
<th>Parts of Speech</th>
<th>Sentence Parts</th>
<th>Paragraph/Essay Parts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition</td>
<td></td>
<td>learn definition</td>
<td>learn definition</td>
<td>ability to discuss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification</td>
<td></td>
<td>recognize in text</td>
<td>recognize in text</td>
<td>recognize in text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create in Isolation</td>
<td>generate/categorize list</td>
<td>provide examples in isolated sentences</td>
<td>provide examples in isolated sentences</td>
<td>create using known topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create in Application</td>
<td>generate/categorize list for content-based assignment</td>
<td>use in paragraphs</td>
<td>use in paragraphs</td>
<td>create using content-based topic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**GRAMMAR INSTRUCTION**

**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 grammar exercises involve students writing sentences containing/practicing various grammatical concepts.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part of Speech</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Noun</td>
<td>Names a person, place, thing, (idea)</td>
<td>John, school, bench, (peace)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verb</td>
<td>Action word (also can be linking or helping)</td>
<td>jump, (is, were, will be)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronoun</td>
<td>Takes the place of a noun</td>
<td>he, you, they, me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjective</td>
<td>Describes a noun or pronoun (includes articles)</td>
<td>ugly, sleepy, blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverb</td>
<td>Describes a verb (or adjective or other adverb)</td>
<td>quickly, soon, never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preposition</td>
<td>Begins a phrase (trick: anything you can do to a box)</td>
<td>in, through, around</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conjunction</td>
<td>Joins 2 words or 2 groups of words</td>
<td>and, whenever, if</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article</td>
<td>Teach in adjective family</td>
<td>a, an, the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interjection</td>
<td>Expresses emotion - inessential</td>
<td>whoa!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part of Speech</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>What’s doing the action (the “doer”)</td>
<td>The old man went to the store.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple Subject</td>
<td>Subject without modifiers</td>
<td>The old man went to the store.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predicate</td>
<td>Verb plus its baggage (the “do”)</td>
<td>The old man went to the store.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple Predicate</td>
<td>Verb without modifiers</td>
<td>The old man went to the store.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clause</td>
<td>Group of words with subject and predicate</td>
<td>the old man went to the store if the athletic woman wins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Clause</td>
<td>Clause that can stand by itself</td>
<td>I the old man went to the store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent Clause</td>
<td>Clause that cannot stand by itself</td>
<td>D if the athletic woman wins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple Sentence</td>
<td>One independent clause</td>
<td>I The old man went to the store.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compound Sentence</td>
<td>2 independent clauses joined by comma + for, and, nor, but, or, yet</td>
<td>I,I, I.c,I John went to the store, but it was closed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complex Sentence</td>
<td>1 independent clause and 1 or more dependent clauses</td>
<td>I,D, I.JD John went to the store because he needed milk.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>D,I, D.I When John went to the store, he forgot his wallet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I,D,I John, who was angry at himself, stomped to his car without the milk.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## 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. |

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*taken from Van Cleave’s* Writing Matters: Developing Sentence Skills in Students of All Ages
## Parts of Speech Introductory Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noun</th>
<th>Classroom Naming/Labeling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nature/Street Walk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Categorization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verb</td>
<td>Classroom Naming/Labeling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nature/Street Walk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conjugation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yesterday/Today/Tomorrow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Verb Charades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronoun</td>
<td>Family Tree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjective</td>
<td>Classroom Naming/Labeling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nature/Street Walk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Object Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coloring/Counting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sense Exploration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverb</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preposition</td>
<td>Student/Chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Plane/Cloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paper/Words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conjunction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Plus Sign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Humans Holding Hands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Walk/Direction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Grammar Builder Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>adjective</th>
<th>common noun</th>
<th>prepositional phrase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ugly</td>
<td>toad</td>
<td>on the mossy rock</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Use grammar vocabulary cards for instruction. Display your cards using the layout at right, and have the students organize them similarly until they are able to do so independently. Doing so will help students understand the relationships between parts of speech as they learn to recognize examples in context.

Descriptive Writing Planner: Modify the planner below to generate ideas about something you wish to describe. Underneath the chart, younger students should draw a picture of what they have described.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What are you describing?</th>
<th>What do you...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>See...</td>
<td>Hear...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smell...</td>
<td>Taste...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Common Sentence Templates**

**Simple Sentence**
1 independent clause

Many have a single subject and predicate.

Mac went to the store.

On Tuesday Will visited our grandmother at her cottage in the next town.

Others have compound subjects and/or predicates.

Wes and Ethan often play tennis on Saturdays.

Logan saw an excellent movie and then went to dinner with friends.

*For a group of words to be a clause, it must have its own subject and predicate. It cannot share either with another clause.*

**Compound Sentence**
2 independent clauses

joined by comma and coordinating conjunction...

Jackson went to the store, but it was closed.

Tickets for the final game were scarce, yet Drew still got seats.

I love to jog through the park, and Isabelle often joins me.

I do not want to go to the movies, nor do I feel like playing baseball.

...or joined by a semi-colon.

A number of recent inventions have changed the way the world functions; cell phones and the internet are two of the most obvious.

The game got rained out; however, the coaches rescheduled it for the following Saturday.

*Words such as however are conjunctive adverbs rather than conjunctions; these adverbs often begin the second clause of a compound sentence that uses a semi-colon and are always followed by a comma.*

**Complex Sentence**
1 independent and 1 (or more) dependent clauses

using subordinating conjunction...

While Rob was pulling out of his driveway, he accidentally bumped into another car. (D,I)

Even though the movie ran late, Charles still got in before curfew. (D,I)

Luke spent an extra $50 on his computer because it came with a printer. (ID)

Our mom banned drinks in the den after Jeb spilled soda on the good table. (ID)

...or using relative pronoun.

Taylor, who has played competitive sports since fourth grade, started at free safety this fall.

Jack loved any book that could hold his attention.

*The first of these adjective clause (or D-wedge) sentences uses the clause to define the subject. The second uses it to define the object.*
A. Clause/Phrase Activities

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):

_____ after our visit to the zoo
_____ as I was walking the dog this morning
_____ on the street corner beside the mailbox
_____ just as the boy reached the finish line
_____ now that you have arrived
_____ underneath the seat in front of you
_____ whenever I study carefully

_____ as soon as we pack for the trip
_____ to my left on the playing field
_____ before the television show starts
_____ before sunset
_____ during the long, boring game
_____ once I figure out the answer
_____ always ahead of time

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

_____ I charged my iPhone this morning
_____ now that you won the championship
_____ plants need water to survive
_____ after I bought a candy bar
_____ President Kennedy was shot in 1963
_____ when President Reagan spoke
_____ before Huck Finn faked his own death

_____ unless the game goes into overtime
_____ Jackie Robinson joined an all-white team
_____ Al Capone was nabbed for tax evasion
_____ if you take your sister with you
_____ Betsy Ross sewed the first American flag
_____ though Gregor Mendel discovered genetics
_____ even if you clean your room

B. Sentence Part Matching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Object</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The wild gorilla</td>
<td>used</td>
<td>a cane to cross the street.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The tidal wave</td>
<td>found</td>
<td>his troop in a nearby clearing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The elderly gentleman</td>
<td>devastated</td>
<td>the small coastal town.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The boy’s kick</td>
<td>sent</td>
<td>the icy sidewalk.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shovelling</td>
<td>created</td>
<td>the ball out of bounds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The window fan</td>
<td>did not improve</td>
<td>a nice breeze.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
C. **Sentence Unscrambling**

1. **At the word cluster level:**
   1. in our house we discovered much to our surprise $10,000
   2. to get ice cream we rode at noon our new bicycles to the store

2. **At the word level:**
   1. frog brown rock under a crawled the large
   2. 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. Combine the information into a single 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:
   - The new video game hit stores yesterday. We were the first ones to get it. (and)
   - 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)
   - 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**

The students complained.

**expand the subject**
- what kind? _______________________
- which one? _______________________
- how many? _______________________

**expand the predicate**
- when? _______________________
- where? _______________________
- how? _______________________
- why? _______________________
- concession... _______________________

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Conjunctions

**coordinating** (for compound sentences): I, fanboy I

- for
- and
- nor
- but
- or
- yet

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

- **time:**
  - after
  - as
  - as soon as
  - before
  - just as
  - now that
  - once
  - since
  - until
  - when
  - whenever
  - while

- **place:**
  - where
  - wherever

- **cause:**
  - as
  - because
  - since
  - as though

- **manner:**
  - as
  - as if
  - as though

- **purpose:**
  - as in order that
  - so that

- **condition:**
  - as long as
  - even if
  - if
  - unless

- **comparison:**
  - just as
  - than

- **concession:**
  - although
  - even though
  - though

- **prepositional phrases - grouped by meaning:**
  - **time:**
    - after
    - as
    - because
    - since
    - as though
    - as in order that
    - so that
    - as long as
    - even if
    - if
    - unless
  
  - **place:**
    - where
    - 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):

- additionally
- also
- furthermore
- likewise
- moreover
- similarly
- in addition
- however
- nevertheless
- nonetheless
- on the contrary
- on the other hand
- still

- accordingly
- as a result
- consequently
- hence
- therefore
- thus
- actually
- certainly
- indeed
- in fact
- at the same time
- meanwhile
- simultaneously

- afterwards
- later
- next
- subsequently
- then
- alternatively
- instead
- for example
- for instance
- certainly
- clearly
- 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

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### Signal Words for Reading, Writing & Notetaking

#### Direction Change & Contrast:
A change in ideas to follow.
- alternatively
- although
- as opposed to
- at the same time
- but
- conversely
- despite (the fact that)
- different from
- even so
- even though
- for all that
- however
- in contrast
- in spite of (the fact that)
- instead
- nevertheless
- nonetheless
- notwithstanding
- on the contrary
- on the other hand
- or
- otherwise
- rather
- still
- though
- unlike
- whereas
- while
- yet

#### Addition:
Similar ideas, additional support, or evidence to follow.
- additionally
- again
- also
- and
- another
- as an example
- as well
- because
- besides (that)
- equally important
- following this further
- for example
- for instance
- for one thing
- further
- furthermore
- in addition
- in light of the...it is easy to see
- in particular
- in the same vein
- in the same way
- just as
- likewise
- more (than that)
- moreover
- namely
- next
- other
- pursuing this further
- similarly
- specifically
- then
- to illustrate

#### Conclusion, Summary & Emphasis:
Conclusion, summary, or emphasis to follow.
- accordingly*
- after all
- all in all
- as a result*
- because*
- certainly
- clearly, then*
- consequently*
- finally
- for the reason (that)*
- generally
- hence*
- in a word
- in any event
- in brief
- in conclusion
- in fact
- in final analysis
- in final consideration
- in general
- in short
- in sum
- in summary
- in the end
- indeed
- last
- lastly
- naturally
- of course
- on account of*
- on the whole
- since*
- so*
- therefore*
- thus*
- to be sure
- to conclude
- to sum up
- to summarize
- truly

(* indicates cause and effect)

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**Note:** The bent arrow signifies a change in direction while the two straight arrows represent words that continue in the same direction. The arrow on the right crosses a line to indicate an end point.

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