

**Writing from the Sentence Up**

A writing curriculum for the Heights Lower School.

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## Acknowledgments

The author stumbled upon the idea for a method of writing instruction that combined observational skills with a focus on the sentence, when, by chance, he happened to sit in on the class of a colleague, James Erickson, who was teaching Natural History. Aspects of Erickson's presentation on the staghorn sumac, combined with the author's seemingly unrelated problem of how to really teach prose writing without taking time away from Language Arts, Literature, and Poetry crystallized into an idea. Later on, perhaps the same day, the author ran the germ of the idea past two other teachers, Michael Ortiz and Tom Cox. Michael Ortiz made suggestions and gave encouragement, and Tom Cox, who was already working with sentence building and rhetoric with his middle school students, allowed the author use portions of his own rhetoric notes on figures of speech, made some helpful editorial recommendations, and directed the author toward Brooks Landon, a professor at the University of Iowa City who teaches a course specifically on building excellent sentences, and whose work is referenced multiple times below. Aspects of Landon's method of sentence building helped the author to develop his own method for the Lower School.



## **Part 1: Method**

This section serves as a general introduction to a sentence-based writing curriculum designed for the Lower School at the Heights School in Potomac, Maryland. This is not the sort of introduction you can skip. This section explains the method of instruction for which the lessons and exercises are provided in Part 2, also known as the Workbook, as well as explaining that method's theory of style and of prose construction. In the second part this material is arranged and delivered in the form of cumulatively arranged exercises, and each of these exercises is preceded by a detailed lesson. Nevertheless, it is important for the instructor to read through this Part 1 (Method) first, both in order to have a bird's eye view of the methods here described, and because this section contains elements that are presupposed by Part 2 (Workbook), or to which the Workbook refers.





A writing teacher succeeds when he ignites a passion in his students for speaking the truth well, when he establishes in them the habits of meticulous craftsmanship, and when he provides them with a tool-box of practical writing strategies. But there are several ways writing instruction fails.

Writing instruction fails when it reduces a writer's work to mere mechanics—properly grammatical sentences, the five-sentence paragraph, the five paragraph essay, the injunction to cut out unnecessary words, etc., —or, conversely, when it encourages mere flowery verbiage, or merely showing off one's personality, or otherwise makes the writer the focus of his writing.

Writing instruction also fails when it consists largely of “not-to-do” lists, or when it fails to distinguish between punctuation and syntax errors on the one hand, and rhetorical impotence on the other. Spelling and punctuation errors need to be corrected, and disagreements in gender, tense and number certainly cannot be passed over, but writing instructors should aim to establish more than proper punctuation and spelling. They should primarily be concerned with the matter that includes and subsumes all these other considerations, namely, of igniting in students an abiding passion for speaking the truth well, a passion which is supported by good habits of observation, and by a toolbox of strategies for getting the maximum effect out of words.

Finally, writing instruction fails unless each student has concrete goals for improving his writing from class to class, and this presupposes that the teacher can grade each student's writing in a timely manner, turning it over relatively quickly while at the same time providing focused, personalized critiques. What is needed, then, is a method of teaching writing that:

- focuses specifically on prose writing and rhetorical skills (style)—as opposed to mere mechanics—as a means to convey truth.
- tethers style to substance, so that writing stays in contact with reality
- gives *positive* instruction, things *to do*, as opposed to merely *don'ts*
- makes writing well attractive and shows that it is achievable for any determined person
- teaches good habits of observation
- provides students with a toolbox of “tricks”, specific strategies for using words well
- teaches the whole class, and yet is highly “personalizeable”
- makes use of a medium of optimal size: compact enough to be graded quickly and returned quickly, but also expansive enough to include all, or nearly all, that one wants to teach specifically relating to *prose construction*.

One can satisfy all of these conditions handily by teaching writing *from the sentence up*. In the space of a single sentence, one can teach almost all the strategies of prose writing. The sentence is the *microcosm* of the whole work—the little backyard workshop in which a student learns, on a small scale, the meticulous habits of craftsmanship, which, once acquired, invariably affect any writing project or assignment the student may undertake. In the following pages the reader will find:

- 1) A general note on all writing assignments, and on style.
- 2) Several basic methods, which can be endlessly tweaked according to a teacher's need. Several variations of increasing complexity are described.
- 3) How to coach writing in a way that involves the entire class, while giving students individualized instruction as well.
- 4) How to grade writing relatively quickly, so that within one class period, your students know where they need to improve.
- 4) A brief explanation of the rhetorical forms and devices that are integrated into this plan of study.
- 5) Various sentence forms with their respective preferred uses.
- 6) A style sheet consisting of coaching principles and guidelines for crafting good sentences.

Finally, Part 2 of *Writing From the Sentence Up* contains a month-by-month plan for the study method described in Part 1.

## 1) General Note

Students need clear parameters so that their writing can be evaluated according to standards. Each student needs concrete writing goals for each assignment. When introducing a writing assignment, whether it involves sentence building or creating alternative sentences, always give students a clear *goal* and some clear *guidelines*.

For example, when the assignment is to write a sentence about some object of interest—a model grandfather clock, for instance—the teacher might give as a *goal* to describe the clock model with such care that a person not in the room would be able to see it accurately in his mind. As a *guideline*, the teacher might say, “Include three of the five senses in your description,” or “Describe it in an orderly manner, from top to bottom, or from bottom to top.” By giving the students a goal and some guidelines, you teach them to approach subjects in an orderly manner, and their writing will be much better as a result. The style sheet is a good place to look for guidelines.

One *goal* that applies to all writing is the goal of being accurate, of telling the truth. Another goal, on an equal footing with the first as far as a writer is concerned, is to tell the truth *well*, that is, in a manner or style that reflects the truth. Good writing has both elements: truth and beauty.

As an illustration of style, consider the design of a tiger. The tiger’s appearance, its movements, and its profile all reveal its nature. Its features are exquisite, but they are not gratuitous. Its physical characteristics and particular movements all serve purposes *and* reveal what the tiger fundamentally *is*. Its modifications—its adjectives and adverbs—describe and limit it, yet these modifications simply reveal what sort of being is a tiger. They do not feel “tacked on” or “piled up” on the tiger. On the contrary, there would *be* no tiger without the distinctive actions and attributes, verbs and modifiers, that reveal it.

What is true of the tiger is true of writing. When students construct prose, they should always have a clear subject, which may be abstract, textual, or physical, and all their description should be rooted in that subject. A student should not be allowed to get away with saying that such and such a thing was “awesome” or “amazing” unless that is truly the best word for describing the entity or event in question. Students should be helped to see the *weight* of words, and the obligation of trying to use exact words.

A large part of this method is grounding writing in subjects, or models. For example, in sentence building, the teacher may either bring an object to class that is likely to spark student interest, or take the students to some location outside that can serve the same purpose. An old gnarled tree might be a good subject, for example. All of the description, modification and predication of this entity should be actually rooted in it

(no pun intended.) The goal is to have the students derive all modifiers and verbs *from the subject in question*, rather than to have them sit around and try to *think up* an elegant description of the subject.

Below the reader will find several methods for grounding writing instruction in the true and the beautiful, that is, the *real*, and for doing so in a timely manner.

## 2) Basic Methods

I. Sentence Building: This is any exercise that involves taking an original sentence and making a series of changes in order to produce a superior sentence. The exercise starts with a "base sentence" or "base clause", usually provided by the teacher, from which starting point the students build. The class is given some parameters, and, guided by the teacher (who gives the students style principles to employ), the students compete to arrive at new sentence. The example below shows how a sentence might be built up, element by element, following the teacher's instructions:

Base Sentence: The old tree was leaning over the creek.

Step 1: Change verb (The old tree *was bent* over the creek)

Step 2: Modify subject (The *ancient* tree *was bent* over the creek.)

Step 3: Modify prep. Phrase (The *ancient* tree *was bent* over the *burbling* creek.)

Step 4: Modify verb (The *ancient* tree *was bent* *cumbersomely* over the *burbling* creek.)

Step 5: Finishing Touches? (*That ancient cracked willow bent cumbersomely* over the *burbling* creek.)

At each stage of modification, the teacher asks the students to provide the word for the change in question, and he provides a principle to help students offer an appropriate word. The teacher's main job is to ask if the words offered are good examples of the writing principle given, and to select the best word from among those offered by students. Here we might imagine the teacher asking, "Are there any other, more detailed, more specific verbs for "leaning"?" At the "Finishing Touches" stage, you can imagine the teacher asking, "Is there anything we can do to give more life to this sentence? What are some figures of speech we could use? Personification? Good idea, Smith. How would you personify the tree without altering much of what we've done so far."

There are several possible variations on Sentence Building, which are given in particular below. In Part 2 these variations are integrated into a cumulative series of lessons.

-*Individual Sentence Building*: starting with a base sentence, parameters for change and some principles, students compete to generate their own sentences, in class or for homework, which the teacher then evaluates in class.

-*Complex modification*: In this case, some of the steps include modifying with adjectivals, verbals, phrases, clauses and other more complicated structures.

-*Sentence Lengthening/Shortening*: Students are given a long, ornate sentence and told to shorten the sentence, capturing essentially the same information, but more concisely, or, perhaps, impressionistically.

-*Imitation*: Students are given a subject and told to write a sentence, or a paragraph, about it in the style of their current Literature author.

-*Sentence Building According to Type*: There are various types and forms of sentence, like the cumulative sentence or the periodic sentence. Each has its own preferred uses. An assignment along these lines might be, “Write a left-branching coordinating cumulative sentence about a guy trying to crack a safe.”

-*Long and Short*: Write several sentences on a related subject, but of varying lengths. Use the balance and the contrast between the sentence lengths to create rhythm and emphasis.

II. Alternative Sentences These exercises, more useful early on in the year, involve altering the word order or syntax of a sentence, without altering the words (much), in order to create a new sentence that is basically equivalent to the first in general meaning, but different in its emphasis. The teacher pulls a sentence out of the current Literature text, and writes it on the board. Students are expected to come up with a certain number of alternatives, usually three, in an attempt to improve on the original sentence, or explore it in a different light. See the example below:

Original: In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit.<sup>1</sup>

Alt 1: In the ground there lived a hobbit in a hole.

Alt 2: There lived a hobbit in a hole in the ground.

Alt 3: In the ground in a hole there lived a hobbit.

With twenty students a teacher will certainly get these three alternatives, and possibly more versions that hadn't even occurred to him. You do have to watch out for changes that actually alter the meaning of a word; for example, saying “there in the ground”, which would change “there” from an expletive (justifying the verb/subject reversal) to an adverb (specifying where Bilbo lived.) The three alternatives above are the sort the teacher should be looking for. The real question is: do the other three versions lack anything possessed by the original? Arguably, these alternative versions are inferior, for the following reasons:

-Of the three, the original hooks and leads the reader best: If there is a hole, it has to be a hole in *something*. It's a hole *in the ground*. What, like an animal hole? Yes, because *there lived* something there. What? Something called a *hobbit*.

A hobbit, being the strange, unknown part of the sentence is rightly given the terminal slot, the end spot that receives natural emphasis.

-Of the three, the original has the best *cadence*, the best musical repetition of sound: ih ho ih g li ho.

Many complicated sentences have this quality of changing their *felt meaning* when different words are emphasized. The writing instructor should simply make a note of these kinds of sentences as he comes across them during class reading. A well-picked sentence can yield subtle variety in meaning when its original order is altered. This is a great way to teach students the important role structure plays in the actual *meaning* of a sentence, and the importance of agonizing over just the right structure, not merely the words. A sentence can be assigned at the end of the day, and the students' responsibility would be to copy it down and to find three or four alternatives, choosing their favorite version to be read to class.

III. Rewrite Any exercise that involves taking an original piece of text, and—preserving its *meaning*—rewriting it, building new sentences in place of existing sentences, or altering the existing sentences.\* This exercise requires previous experience with building and re-arranging sentence order (*Alternatives*). Unlike *Alternatives*, the goal is to try to say the “same thing” in as original a way as possible. This is a difficult exercise to do well, because it requires that the student read a sentence, really apprehend its meaning, and find an entirely new way of solving the same problems the original author solved. *This is an excellent way to teach the very necessary habit of revision.* When used with paragraphs, it is an excellent way to show the movement or flow of a good paragraph. The teacher pulls a sentence, or a paragraph, out of the current literature text, and the students are expected to come up with several rewrites, or only one in the case of a paragraph. There are imitation and rewriting exercises in the Workbook section of this book.

-*Paragraph Rewrite* : See next section.

\*This is a great way to imitate great writers, and learn their craft. However, it seems very necessary to explain the dangers of plagiarism here.

#### IV. Several Ways to Teach the Paragraph

Some of the traditional ways of teaching the paragraph are excellent. One should emphasize the standard five-sentence paragraph, demonstrating that is like a mini-essay with an intro, three body sentences, and a transition or conclusion sentence. However, the weakness of this approach taken by itself is that it can encourage cookie-cutter writing that doesn't feel natural, and doesn't flow. A paragraph isn't always five sentences long, nor should it be. Arguably, there are circumstances under which a paragraph can be only one sentence long! Or longer than seven. Like a sentence, a paragraph has something of the quality of a complete thought, but unlike a sentence, that thought is really a compound thought made up of discreet thoughts, which together constitute a whole point, or which share the same goal. It is not as easy to give a fail-safe definition for what makes a proper paragraph, as it is to define a sentence. For this reason, and because paragraphs develop and unfold, any exercise which lets students get a *feel* for paragraphs can only help develop the

students' sense of how to arrange their complete thoughts (sentences) into these larger groupings of complete thoughts (paragraphs). Here are several ways to teach the paragraph:

*-Paragraph Rewrite* This exercise is *invaluable!* Select a paragraph of manageable size from the literature book, and have the students rewrite it sentence by sentence. They must preserve the meaning of each sentence, and each sentence must lead to the next sentence. The paragraph must arrive at the same place.

*-Sentence Alternates in a Paragraph* Similar to the paragraph rewrite, but far less demanding. Students go sentence-by-sentence, not rewriting the sentences, but creating alternate sentences (according to the definition given in Section II.)

*-Natural Progressions* Take an event that has a built-in beginning-middle-end structure, and, taking care to specify what goes where, have the students write a sentence for each point in the event. For example, the teacher could have the students write a paragraph about sledding down a hill. The first sentence has to be about what happens at the top of the hill, the last sentence about the end of the ride, and the middle sentence or sentences about what happened in between. By floating the paragraph on top of an event that has a built in progression, students imbibe the natural rhythm of a paragraph.

*-Paragraph Study* To be done with the previous three paragraph exercises: read the first and last sentences of the paragraph, so students get a sense of where it starts and where it finishes. How does the author progress from the beginning to the end? If it's an argument of some kind, what sorts of things will he have to say in the middle sentences to arrive at the last sentence? If it's a narrative paragraph, what sorts of things will fill the middle space? Teachers, it is worth taking the time to find paragraphs that have a particularly well-defined progression. Teach the students to think of every sentence as a step advancing toward a goal, and likewise, every paragraph as a larger step—a giant's step—advancing toward a large goal.



### 3) Coaching Writing

No one is ever “finished” becoming a writer; one can and should constantly improve. To do that and to arrive at a point where they are at least competent, would-be writers need direction. Very much like soccer, there are certain general rules (“shoot with your instep, and get over the ball”/“use a more specific verb”) that everyone must learn if he wants to be competent. And, just like soccer, each “player” has a different set of strengths and weaknesses. One player might excel at dribbling and shooting, but lack field vision. Just so, one writer may have a great vocabulary, but consistently tend to undermine his writing by exaggerating or overstating, or being too general when he ought to be specific, or any number of things.

The coach on the field sees the “big picture”, and how each player could step up his individual game. No one has ever improved as a player because, after coming off the field, the coach listed one hundred things the player did wrong, and no writer improves merely because he receives many corrections on a paper, without some constructive way forward. To really improve, writers need constructive criticism; they need to know what they are already doing somewhat right, what they’re not doing right, and, especially, what concrete, positive steps make for progress. Also, this has to take place in the course of a classroom setting.

In sports, one of the incentives for doing well is the experience of triumph that comes along with getting it right, finally. There’s also a lot of joy that comes with triumphing in the presence of one’s peers. Of course, failing in front one’s peers is also an important part of the process. Competition, against oneself primarily, and against one’s peers secondarily—the latter as a means for achieving the former—is a strong incentive to improve. In writing it’s the same: allowing the boys a way to compete, both against themselves and each other, can help them improve enormously as writers. What follows are specific lists of dos and don’ts for coaching writing:

Do...

...let each boy pick his best sentence or paragraph and let him read it out loud.

...encourage everyone to do this, but be cautious about laying the hammer down right away. This style works best if all the students are involved, but there’s a warming up period, because many boys don’t want to read their writing.

...be natural. Let a student see if you really like the sentence he wrote, and don’t pretend to like it if you don’t. Not that you should insult it, but don’t be false for the sake of being “nice”.

...point out when two students have used the same strategy to solve the same problem, or when two students have used markedly different, seemingly opposed strategies for solving a problem.

...call out a student when you’re *sure* he is capable of better work.

...always say one thing the student did well, and one thing he must improve. Try to stick to just one thing, and when you grade him next, hold him to that thing.

...be very specific with your criticisms.

Do Not...

...praise students because you like their writing. Evaluate their writing, not them. Do not pat yourself on the back or assume you're doing well just because some of your students already have a certain talent for writing. This is one way writing teachers deceive themselves. If writing can be taught, then the poorest writers must show improvement (assuming they're actually working.)

...give only negative criticism, unless the student clearly blew off the assignment or wrote something inappropriate. If you can justly do so, try to reinforce something the student is doing well.

...let a student get away with repeatedly making the same error. Hold him to the improvements you've previously brought to his attention. You'll find people tend to repeat the same errors, and need to form new writing habits.

#### 4) Grading Writing

This approach lends itself to quick and easy grading for most assignments. For all sentence and paragraph-based assignments, the grading can take place as follows: Every time the class does corrections, the teacher hands out red pencils to every student. When a student reads his work, the teacher makes two comments, one mentioning one task performed well, and one mentioning one area for improvement. The student is responsible for writing these down right then and there, in the notebook. As a teacher, you may want to keep some kind of record of what criticisms you've made of this or that individual student, so that you can monitor his progress week by week, or preferably, assignment by assignment. The idea is that once a problem area has been identified, the student should be *immediately* working to correct it, not making the same mistake again. Even though a student may be doing ten things wrong, it is preferable to only be working on one or two errors at a time, but you must really follow through and make sure the student stops making that mistake.

For many of these assignments—the vast majority—you are grading for completion and on overall improvement. Is the student implementing the critiques? Does he show improvement throughout the quarter? The answer should be “yes”, if he's doing the work, because you are giving him concrete, specific areas of improvement. You're not saying, “Write more elegantly!” You're saying, for example, “Describe physical objects in an orderly manner, not jumping around randomly.”

For longer assignments, like stories or essays, grade in the “standard way”, but take great care to distinguish between procedural errors—spelling mistakes, periods and so on—and errors in craft. The latter are more important, and are the focus of a prose writing curriculum, although, of course, the former should also be graded. It is strongly recommended that you use different colored ink or some other method for distinguishing between these kinds of corrections.

## 5) Rhetorical Forms

Rhetoricians have enumerated many schemes (figures of speech) and tropes that can be used in writing or in speech to create certain effects that convey or reinforce meaning. This text simplifies the subject, including only thirteen of these strategies, at least one of which, parallelism, is very involved. Rather than reinvent the wheel, the definitions below, except where stated, have been all been taken from the sources referenced in the endnotes. The examples and reflections are the author's own.

1) Simile: A figure wherein two distinct things are said to be like each other.

Example: The large bearded man stood there *like a bear* guarding its lair.

Reflection: Similes compare two "unlike" things, and yet, paradoxically, a simile only works when the unlike things are alike in some way. If the things compared seem to have nothing in common at all, the author should follow with another phrase explaining how they are alike. "He was like a teapot, silent and harmless until the last second." This second case is almost an analogy.

2) Metaphor: A figure wherein one thing is said to be another thing.

Example: The large bearded man *was a bear* guarding his lair.

Reflection: Similar to a simile, but a much stronger statement. Also, the writer shouldn't have to explain the metaphor, since the metaphor itself is supposed to be explaining by illustrating.

3) Analogy: "[An] analogy...sets one hypothetical example beside another for purposes of comparison...In complex analogies, two examples exhibit a similar relationship among their elements."<sup>2</sup>

Example: Bears are large, powerful, furry creatures that don't like to be bothered at their lairs when hibernating. That large powerful man, who hates to be bothered, at his home is taking a nap. So I shouldn't bother him.

Reflection: Analogy, as the etymology of the word implies, is a more logical, more precise form of comparison than either similes or metaphor. If an analogy is tight enough, one can draw real conclusions from it. On the other hand, analogy is very closely related to a form of extended metaphor, allegory, in which the qualities of one thing are used to make extended, insightful comparisons to the qualities of another.

4) Parallelism: Balanced and Serial Syntax: See the relevant section, which starts on page\_\_\_\_\_.

5) Personification: A figure that either confers features of personality on sub-personal beings, or one that confers living qualities on non-living things.

Examples: "April is the cruelest month..."<sup>3</sup>; "And all the trees will clap their hands."<sup>4</sup>; The dark mountain glowered down at him, its slanted eyes narrow under silver-haired peaks.

Reflections: Personification is a form of comparison, but not merely of comparison. Personification is a form of truth-telling that relies upon the fact of a nested hierarchy of being within nature. The world of forms is charged with life, with the grandeur of personality, to paraphrase Gerard Manley Hopkins. Personification rings true when it touches upon some real analogy in being. It is not "mere rhetoric" to say to call rain weeping; in some sense, it is weeping.

6) Antithesis: In antithesis, contrary or contradictory ideas are expressed in phrases that are grammatically alike. (AR230)

Examples: i) The man walked like an angry bear, but he spoke like a canary. ii) "Float like a butterfly; sting like a bee."<sup>5</sup>

7) Alliteration: In alliteration, sounds are deliberately repeated in order to create a patter of balance or emphasis.

Examples: i) He lay listlessly and languidly on the bronze beach. ii) She paddled through the swamp, plowing

slowly through the vines, plucking lilies on the surface.

Reflection: Alliteration, when used properly, has the power to confer a lyrical quality on ordinary prose. When used improperly, alliteration can make prose sound strange and silly. Repeat the same sound again and again, and you risk creating a bizarre, irritating effect. On the other hand, repeated sounds, especially when broken up by intervening words can be an excellent way to create a mood or impression.

8) Onomatopoeia: Using words to suggest sounds.<sup>6</sup>

Examples: The *drip drop* of water, the *click* of a typewriter, a horse *neighing* and then *champing* on the grass.

Reflection: Smart writers make use of onomatopoeic effects when they want to create an impression that goes beyond the literal meaning of the text. This trope naturally goes along with alliteration, because the sounds must be repeated to leave an impression.

9) Anaphora: A figure wherein the same word is repeated at the beginning of several successive phrases, clauses and sentences.<sup>7</sup>

Example: "First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen..."<sup>8</sup>

10) Epistrophe: i) A figure wherein a rhetor repeats the last word in successive phrases or clauses.<sup>9</sup>

Example: I will not stand for that. You will not stand for that. No one in this blessed country will stand for that! ii) "...government of the people, by the people, and for the people..."<sup>10</sup>

Reflection: Particularly strong, because the last word is repeated.

11) Synecdoche: A trope wherein a part of the whole is referred to as though it were the whole.<sup>11</sup>

Example: i) There wasn't a dry eye in the building. ii) The instructor said, "Begin," and twenty-nine pencils stood up and started moving. (That's also personification.) iii) The White House still has not responded to the questions.

12) Litotes: A deliberate understatement, sometimes stated as affirmation in the form of a double negative.

Example: i) He is not unintelligent (He is intelligent.) ii) You are no spring chicken. (You are far from young.) iii) Charitable isn't the exact word I'd use to describe him. (This suggests he is uncharitable.) iv) You don't exactly stink at sports. (You're really good at sports.)

Reflection: Litotes is a way of emphasizing something by downplaying it. Sometimes the meaning of a litotic expression depends on the context. Does "He is not unintelligent" mean "He is smart" or simply "He's a little intelligent, but not necessarily a genius." Context supplies the answer.

13) Chiasmus: A scheme wherein two initial words or expressions are mirrored, that is, repeated in reverse order.

Example: i) I didn't go to Paris to see France. I went to France just to see Paris. ii) We don't find flowers beautiful because they're useful, we find them useful because they're beautiful. iii) Beauty did not love the Beast because he was lovable; he became lovable because she loved him.

## 6) Sentence Forms (and Other Syntactic Patterns)

To write well at an advanced level, one must strive for a better understanding of the basic kinds of sentence syntax, and the circumstances in which they are ideally used. Although writers naturally adopt certain syntactic strategies based on what “sounds good”, it helps a great deal to have a theoretical understanding of the various sentence “types”, so that one can use the best form for a given situation. *Note: In the definitions and examples below, the reader should remember that a phrase is a group of words lacking either a subject or its verb (e.g. “...going to the store...”), while a clause has both a subject and a verb (“...because I feel like it...”):*

*-The Periodic Sentence* - A sentence that delays its subject, its predicate, or the completion of its “main point” until its physical end, is said to have periodic syntax. The periodic sentence works well for persuasion and for creating suspense, the latter for obvious reasons, the former because it allows the writer to build up to a conclusion. Here are two ways to construct a periodic sentence:

- i) subject (of base clause) → explanatory phrases or clauses → predicate (of base clause) (ex: That child, whose perfectly innocent eyes were framed in wild, unkempt curls matted with spaghetti sauce, placed his sweet, inculpable, Ragu-covered, red right hand upon the just completed tax forms.)
- ii) Explanatory phrases or clauses → Subject + Predicate (of base clause) (ex: In the event that the time machine *does* work, and you find yourself in the Cretaceous period, and, as you emerge from the smoking front door, before you stands a hungry Tyrannosaurus Rex, you have my permission to panic.)

Because they build, because they progress, because they aim at a goal, which is only found, in completed form, at the end, periodic sentences have a reputation—not unwarranted, but not entirely justified either—for being long. Use them, or the closely similar left-branching cumulative sentence, to build suspense, to make an argument, or to lead to a sudden and shocking conclusion.

*-The Cumulative Sentence*- The cumulative sentence delivers the base clause all at once, trailing it with details, with phrases, with modifying adjectivals and verbals, covering the same ground over and over, honing in, focusing, refining, specifying. Cumulative syntax, like that found in the previous sentence, is loose. Its effect is achieved by circling the main point, and piling detail upon detail. Cumulative sentence can be left-branching, middle-branching, or right-branching. The direction of the branching refers to where, in relation to the base clause, the string of modifying words and phrases are placed. A *base clause* is a subject+verb group that is the subject of modification. Cumulative syntax uses *free modifiers*, words or phrases that modify the base clause but lack *rigid designators* like “that” or “which”. These sentences can be *coordinating* or *subordinating* (or *mixed*.) See the examples below:

A) The Coordinating Cumulative Sentence- The coordinating cumulative sentence is the looser form of what Strunk & White call the “loose sentence.” It consists of a base clause preceded by, followed by, or interspersed with modifying words or phrases that independently modify the base clause. Consider the examples below:

i) base clause→modifying words and/or phrases (ex: “He wore a bird’s mask, sign that he was a wind god, a red beak surmounted by a crest, the face painted yellow, the tongue lolling out.”<sup>12</sup>) Notice this is a *right-branching* cumulative.

ii) modifying words and phrases→base clause (ex: Casting nervous glances over his shoulder, jumping at every vibration, sweating, straining, imagining the hot breath of the guard just behind him, prisoner 71241 broke through to the open tunnel.) This is a *left-branching* cumulative. Notice that it bears some similarity to a periodic sentence.

Brooks Landon argues that there is no *essential* difference between the two, so that we must speak of periodic and cumulative sentences as partaking in “degrees of suspensiveness.” Without arguing about terminology, I will simply draw the reader’s attention to the fact that periodic sentences typically have parts of the grammatical subject or predicate mixed in with the “left-branching” portion of the sentence, whereas left-branching cumulatives, though they may have a periodic *feel*, keep the entire base clause (subject and predicate) together.

B) The Subordinating Cumulative Sentence- The subordinating cumulative sentence is a cumulative sentence in which the modifying phrases move down levels of specificity by modifying the modifying phrases themselves, as opposed to the coordinating cumulative (above) in which each word or phrase independently modifies the base clause. As Brooks Landon puts it, the “[c]oordinating levels keep the sentence running in place as more information is added to its load...” while “[s]ubordinate levels move the focus of the sentence forward, moving from general to specific, zooming in like a movie camera. They can also break the whole into its constituent parts...”<sup>13</sup> Of the two versions, the subordinating cumulative is the sharper instrument. One of its strengths is that it can be effectively used to combine the qualities of the periodic sentence with those of the cumulative sentence, becoming more exact while adding information, making distinctions while progressing, seeming to talk and to walk, purposefully, progressively, peripatetically. Consider the examples below:

i) base clause→modifying word or phrase→subordinate modifying word or phrase (ex: Sarah threw her head back and laughed, a mocking laugh, her chin lifted apishly, her eyes wide and red and imbecilic, the eyes of an amused ape, a she-monkey pitying a man.) Notice that "a mocking laugh" modifies "laughed", while "the eyes of an amused ape" modifies "eyes wide and imbecilic", and "a she-monkey pitying a man" goes down a further level.

-Parallelism Parallelism refers to any marked pattern of repetition or contrast between or among the sounds, words, meanings, or structures that compose a piece of writing. Parallelism is a regular feature of human speech, occurring in numerous expressions, proverbs, schemes and idioms. When used deliberately it can be a potent tool for artful expression. Naturally, there are an infinite number of potential ways to repeat or contrast sounds, words, meanings, or grammatical structures. Some of these are known *schemes*, and some of these

schemes have names, and some of these names can be found in the “Rhetorical Forms” section of this document. For our purposes, the important thing is, firstly, to recognize that most instances of parallelism in prose occur in patterns of two (balanced syntax) or three (serial syntax), and, secondly, to provide some representative samples of each, recognizing that we are necessarily standing on the tip of a rhetorical iceberg:

A) Balanced Syntax: Any structure that places two elements in a mutual relationship. The relationship can be one of harmony, or of tension. The elements can be meanings, sounds, words, phrases, clauses, or whole sentences. The important point is that the elements create a certain symmetry, even if it is only the symmetry of contradiction. See the examples below. In some cases, I have underlined balancing elements:

i) “If the Lord be God, follow him; but, if Baal be God, then follow him.”<sup>14</sup>

ii) “I don’t know half of you half as well as I should like; and I like less than half of you half as well as you deserve.”<sup>15</sup>

iii) There are two kinds of people: the fast and the hungry.

iv) Do what you can, and pray for what you cannot yet do.

v) “But evolution really is mistaken for explanation. It has the fatal quality of leaving on many minds the impression that they do understand it and everything else; just as many of them live under a sort of illusion that they have read the Origin of Species.”<sup>16</sup>

vi) “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men, even when they exercise influence and not authority, still more when you superadd the tendency or the certainty of corruption by authority.”<sup>17</sup>

vii) “He is the one person who has to be at a Dylan concert and the one person who can’t go to a Dylan concert.”<sup>18</sup>

viii) “He was showing them contingencies when they showed him to the street.”<sup>19</sup>

B) Serial Syntax: A series is a sequence of three or more parallel structures; usually just three. As with balance, there are endless uses for triple patterns. It seems that in writing the numbers two, three, four, five, and seven make frequent appearances. Balances are patterns of two, and series are patterns of three or more, but three has obvious advantages over larger numbers: It is easy to keep track of even a very complex pattern built on threes, and triplicity seems to suggest completeness, because it corresponds to the beginning, middle, and end of a thing. As with balanced forms, the parallel elements in a series can be meanings, sounds, words, phrases, clauses, or other structures, but serial, much more than balanced syntax, gives a sense of progression and completeness. Obviously, all complex writing involves arranging information in series, but these series should always have some kind of intrinsic order, even if the order is some deliberate element of dissonance and planned chaos, otherwise a series will read like a shopping list. See the examples below:

i) Grimacing, gurgling, and gasping, Tommy gulped down the noxious stew.

ii) “First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen.”



- iii) “Not a nasty, dirty, wet hole, filled with the ends of worms and an oozy smell, nor yet a dry, bare, sandy hole with nothing in it to sit down on or to eat: it was a hobbit-hole, and that means comfort.”<sup>20</sup> (Notice two three-part lists, each punctuated by a balanced form, and notice that the whole sentence is a three-part serial.)
- iv) He swung the bat, with all his hope, with all his hate, with all his desperation.
- v) “Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially whenever my hypos get such an upper hand of me, that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people’s hats off—then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can.”<sup>21</sup> (This is a series of four parts, each beginning with *whenever*. It’s also a fine example of a periodic sentence.)

There are more ways to arrange sentences than those arrangements reviewed here, but any student who by practice becomes familiar with the structure and rhythms of periodic, cumulative, balanced, and serial sentences will read and write with much greater care and effectiveness.

## 7) Style Sheet

As mentioned in the “General Note” section, students should always write with a goal in mind, and should be given one or more guidelines to follow. These guidelines are writing principles, which the teacher can draw from his own experience and from this section. Not only do these principles of style help the student think constructively about how to accomplish the writing task at hand, they also provide an objective standard against which the teacher and student can judge the student’s writing. Judging a student’s written work is as simple as answering the questions: “Did he achieve the goal(s)?” and “Did he follow the guidelines?” The guidelines below are written in the form of principles of style arranged according to category:

### Description

- i) When describing objects, follow some kind of mental plan. Go from top to bottom, or from bottom to top. Describe the outside then the inside, or the sounds, then the colors, etc. Don’t jump around randomly, as this has a haphazard feel.
- ii) Along the same lines, don’t just list features, one after the other. Order the features. For example, when describing a tree seen through a window, name the window’s style (if you know it), then describe the frame and its molding, then the glass and its color, then the yard beyond and the tree in the yard, the squirrel in the tree, and so on.
- iii) Take you reader on a journey through space. Pan over the subject, like a movie camera.
- iv) Describe a complex object using its basic shapes.
- v) Use some or all of the sense in your description. How much detail can you squeeze out of each sense?
- vi) Find the exact word or phrase to describe the object (which is “showing”; see below
- vii) Does the object of description have a single feature that seems to stand out and dominate the others? In that case, make the dominant feature stand out for the reader.
- viii) If the object makes an emotional impression, try to determine and describe what features make that impression.
- ix) Try to use mostly action verbs when describing an object, even when it's not technically in motion. Use words like resting, sitting, hanging, posing, reclining, etc. Use being verbs when naming or defining something.

### Showing vs. Telling

“Show more than you tell” is a universal principle of good writing, but both showing and telling are necessary.

- i) In general, anything that is a special object of focus should be shown. For example: “Bill turned over the important handout from the important presentation, and on the back, with his pen, began drawing a perfect likeness of the Arc de Triomphe.” This sentence shows that Bill is bored by his job, is a talented artist, has a great memory, and is somewhat cultured.
- ii) "He decided to go for a walking tour around the estate, and after digging through his luggage for a good ten minutes, he finally made it downstairs and set out." The author doesn't bother describing all the digging around

in the suitcase, or why it took ten minutes. He just *tells* us about it. He wants to *show* us the walk, not the luggage.

iii) In general, telling is for facts that are to be taken “on faith” from the writer, because they are not themselves the main focus, but are only part of the general background. Telling is the frame; showing is the photo.

### Predication and Modification

i) Verbs and modifiers reveal who or what a thing is, either by defining its being or by expressing its distinctive forms of action.

ii) Carefully select your verbs, trying to use the verb which expresses the precise actions being predicated of your subject. ex: John lunged into the door. (John is trying to knock the door down.) vs. John ran into the door. (Because he’s clumsy?)

iii) The verbs you select give their subjects a certain character. ex. The college students whooped loudly. (Very likely) vs. The frosty-haired, calculating bankers whooped loudly. (Less likely.)

iv) As with verbs, be careful to select the most exact adjectives or adverbs. Consult a thesaurus, if necessary.

v) Vary your verbs and modifiers. Similar verbs can give different dimensions of the same action.

v) Don’t forget about adjectivals, adverbials, verbals, gerunds, prepositional phrases, nouns used as adjectives, and phrases, all of which can modify.

vi) It is difficult for a reader to follow very long sentences with many rigid designators (*that, which*), but easy to follow even long sentences, which use free modifiers.

vii) On the other hand, free modifiers should be used carefully, since they can be added indefinitely without any natural stopping point.

viii) Order needs to be imposed upon the free modifiers in a cumulative sentence so that the sentence doesn’t feel too loose or out of control. A good way to do this is to make use of the principles of balance and serial syntax, making sure that cumulative sentences are never “loose” in the sense of mere running information dumps, mere lists.

### Using the Active and Passive Voices

Sentences written in the active voice feature a subject performing an action. Sentences written in the passive voice feature a subject that is acted upon by the verb. Since the latter grammatical situation usually distorts, conceals or renders unclear the actual information underlying a sentence, it is usually a mistake to write this way. Observe the following instances of the active and passive voice:

-Active: I threw the bat.

-Passive: The bat was thrown by me. (If the bat was thrown, then it should be the direct object, but here it’s the subject.)

-Active: We made mistakes.

-Passive: Mistakes were made. (Mistakes can't "make" anything.)

However, in cases where the subject isn't known or isn't important, or in cases—such as scientific papers—where the subject's action is assumed but excluded by convention, it is correct to use the passive voice:

-An important announcement will be made today in Washington, D.C. (We don't know exactly by whom.)

-The whale was found washed up on the shore. (We don't know who found it.)

### Using the First and Last Slots

This is very simple and powerful: The two most important slots in a sentence are the first and last.

i) To emphasize a word or phrase, put it first.

ii) To emphasize a word or phrase even more, put it last.

iii) If the whole base clause (subject + verb) comes first, the initial slot gets the emphasis, but if there are any modifying phrases after the base clause, the last word or phrase also receives special emphasis.

iv) You can double-up on emphasis by putting the predicate in the terminal slot and building up to it.

v) You can give extra emphasis to a modifier by placing it first or last. ("Quick, please get me a doctor!" or "Please get me a doctor, quick!" vs. "Please quickly get me a doctor!")

vi) In series of four, the second item receives less emphasis. As series grow, middle items receive progressively less emphasis, because they build up to the terminal slot.

## Part 2: Workbook

The Workbook contains a series of lessons and exercises designed to facilitate the method of writing instruction described in Part 1: Method. Part 1 describes the method's basic elements, while the Workbook delivers this content as a curriculum. The following exercises present the material month-by-month and cumulatively.

There are nine chapters, corresponding to the nine months of school (May and June are combined.) Each chapter contains: 1) a theme, which introduces a basic element of writing, 2) one or more rhetorical forms (schemes and tropes), and 3) 10-12 exercises. The themes are studied separately, month-to-month, but naturally there is some overlap among them in the actual practice of writing; one cannot really separate “Seeing Like a Writer” from “Thinking Like a Writer”, for example. The rhetorical forms, once learned in a particular month, should be carried over to the next month, having been permanently incorporated into a student’s “writer’s toolbox.” There are ten to twelve exercises per month, because the author’s experience is that one can only have, at most, three writing classes per week, and still have time left over for all of the other elements of Literature and Language Arts. Those three classes must also include time for the quick grading described in the *Method* section of this document.

### Materials

All that is needed in the way of materials are the following:

- 1) Every student should have a dedicated **Writing notebook**. This notebook should be distinct from his Literature and Language Arts notebooks. Every entry in this notebook should have a specific heading (e.g. *Sentence Building # 3, 9/14/15*). This allows the teacher and the students to keep track of the work, and it also makes notebook grading much easier at the end of the quarter. It is not a good idea to use the same notebook for Writing class that one uses for related subjects, because there may not be enough room, because it makes it much harder for both students and teachers to find the exercises completed or still in progress, and because mixing these discourages the student from thinking of Writing as a distinct discipline.
- 2) This Writing workbook provides a series of exercises, examples, descriptions and rhetorical forms all in one place and arranged cumulatively for the teacher. It is necessary that the teacher have it, at least for reference, although he need not follow it religiously, since there are many different approaches to writing, and a teacher is likely to teach best what he is most comfortable with. It is not necessary for students to have this workbook, although the teacher may find that it saves time to photocopy and distribute the lesson and rhetorical form for that month, rather than teach it all from the board, and there are a few exercises, such as those involved in the five-paragraph essay, where the instructional material addresses the student himself. For convenience the author has always placed the lessons and rhetorical forms on a separate page(s) from the exercises.
- 3) Many lessons call for **study subjects**. Just as the noun is, grammatically speaking, the first and most important of the parts of speech, so is descriptive writing in some way the bedrock of all good writing. A writer who can write about *things* in an orderly and elegant manner will have no difficulty learning to do the same for more abstract subjects. *Study subjects*, or just subjects for short, are models used to facilitate descriptive writing. The teacher should bring these in, or bring the boys outside to find some. The more interesting and unexpected the subject, the better.

This entire approach to teaching writing assumes that writing is like portrait or still life drawing; that the writer is trying to *see correctly* and then, making use of his writer's toolbox, to select, order, and arrange what he sees in such a way that it can also be seen by another. Finally, since subjects have real natures and properties--they are a particular way, no matter how I may feel about it--this approach to writing keeps style rooted in substance, teaching students to see rhetoric as important, but ultimately deriving its value from the truth it serves. True, brilliant writing makes us admire the brilliance of the writer, but unless it also makes us see the truth brilliantly illuminated, it's at best a wasted or partially wasted effort in service of ego, and in the worst cases, it's something like black magic. Think of the rhetorical "brilliance" of certain dictators, or of the persuasive humbug found in any number of advertisements and politicians' speeches. Writing that is aesthetically beautiful can be used to tell the truth, or to tell lies that seem true, because they have been made to seem beautiful. That is why, in teaching writing, style must always be tethered to substance, if possible, by the instruction method itself.

### Overview of the Plan of Study

#### 1) September: **Seeing Like a Writer**

- i) Look carefully
- ii) The value of sentences, short *and* long.
- iii) Some important elements of modification and predication.
- iv) Sentence Building
- v) Rhetoric: Simile and Metaphor

#### 2) October: **Thinking Like a Writer**

- i) The four questions to ask yourself before writing.
- ii) Information/Propositional Content vs. the "Felt Idea"
- iii) Sentence Alternatives
- iv) Rhetoric: Analogy

#### 3) November: **Putting Order in Your Writing**

- i) Topical
- ii) Sensory
- iii) Spacial/Environmental
- iv) Structural and Auditory Effects
- iv) Rhetoric: Parallelism: Balanced and Serial Syntax

#### 4) December: **Coordinating Cumulative Sentences I (Grammatical Foundation)**

- i) Basic overview of compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences; adjectival and participle phrases.
- ii) Free-modifiers vs. bound-modifiers.
- iii) How coordinating cumulatives work: right-branching, left-branching.
- iv) Rhetoric: Personification

- 5) January: **Coordinating Cumulatives Sentences II (Optimal Uses)**
  - i) Right-branching
  - ii) Left-branching
  - iii) Optimal uses; limitations.
  - iv) Rhetoric: Antithesis, Alliteration, Onomatopoeia
- 6) February: **Subordinating Cumulatives**
  - i) Explanation and comparison with coordinating cumulatives
  - ii) Optimal uses; limitations
  - iii) Rhetoric: Anaphora, Epistrophe
- 7) March: **The Periodic Sentence**
  - i) Explanation
  - ii) Contrast with left-branching cumulatives
  - iii) Optimal uses; limitations
  - iv) Active vs. Passive Voice
  - v) Eliminating Unnecessary Words
  - vi) Rhetoric: Synechdoche
- 8) April: **Writing Natural Paragraphs**
  - i) Paragraph Study: Getting from here to there
  - ii) The nature of order in paragraphs vs. that of sentences
  - iii) Getting the rhythm of a paragraph
  - v) Rhetoric: Litotes
- 9) May-June: **Seeing the Whole Picture: Writing from the Sentence Up**
  - i) Sentences as steps in a paragraph; paragraphs as steps in a work
  - ii) From the organism to the cells; from the cells to the organism
  - iii) The five paragraph essay (even a robot can write one!)
  - iv) Rhetoric: Chiasmus





## September: Seeing Like a Writer

i) Look Carefully: All good writing proceeds from good vision. Whether it is fiction or nonfiction, poetry or prose, a piece of writing succeeds to the extent that it makes its reader to clearly perceive something the author first perceived. That something may be the conclusion that follows from certain premises, or the story that results when a particular character is forced to face a particular obstacle, or a truth about human existence implicit in the movement of a dead leaf on the grass. Writers are people who aspire to see what is true or interesting about things, and to convey that interest to other minds. Everyone who chooses to write about a subject is implicitly claiming the subject is interesting, true, beautiful or good.

ii) The Value of Sentences, Short *and* Long: Strong sentence writing is an essential building block of strong writing. While it is true that sentences must finally be assembled together according to the plan of a complete work, it is equally true that the coherent whole cannot come to be without the sentences. Good pieces of writing are invariably characterized by strong individual sentences. A piece of writing such as a novel, or even a persuasive essay, which is characterized by good sentences will almost inevitably be an effective piece of writing. This is so even if it is somewhat lacking in its macrostructure. On the other hand, there are any number of “well-structured”, logical, five paragraph essays, which obey all the mechanical rules of grammar and the formal rules of essay order, but which, in the end make for repellent reading. Who cares if the argument is technically correct or if the story concept was good? Realistically, if it is not well delivered, few will read it.

The value of the sentence, then, lies firstly in its being the most basic, and therefore first unit of meaning in a piece of writing, and, secondly, in its being an excellent microcosm in which virtually all of writing's rhetorical strategies can be practiced. Also, since sentences are significantly shorter than paragraphs or essays, they make an ideal unit for minute, individualized writing instruction. The teacher who focuses on excellent sentence writing is like the soccer coach who focuses meticulously on perfect form in shooting, with this all-important difference: sentences, by their very nature contain almost all the elements of writing *in potentia*, whereas shots are more discrete, specialized units of action, which *do not* contain all the elements of soccer. A writing *coach* who coaches sentences “gets a lot more bang for his buck” than a soccer coach who only teaches his players how to shoot. Finally, the student who learns to craft his sentences with great care and precision, who learns to choose every word carefully, who learns to think hard about each sentence's order and arrangement, and who, to put it plainly, learns to obsess about the words he puts down on paper, is learning how to see and think like a writer with every sentence.

Since, as has been illustrated above, sentences are valuable and indispensable in themselves, we reject the relatively recent claim that sentences should be “shaved down” as much as possible until they contain only the barest amount of functional information. Reacting against the long, ornate sentences of 19th century writers like Melville and Dickens, modern English and American authors have tended more and more to emphasize precision to the point of terseness. Short and “to the point” sentences are in vogue today, although there is evidence that the literary pendulum may be swinging back. In any event, it is not a matter of sentences needing to be either short, or long. A sentence ought to be as long as necessary for the task it is performing. Sometimes a sentence is very long because the author is trying to cram together too many discrete thoughts that were better expressed separately. At other times, however, a sentence is very long simply because the complete thought it expresses is more complex than certain readers have the patience or interest to follow. So much the worse for

them. The literary Occam's Razor, often expressed in the injunctions “Cut out unnecessary words,” and, “Kill Your Darlings”, have been taken to an extreme, perhaps because of a certain, very recent Anglo-American obsession with reductionism and the wrong kind of simplicity. Moreover, in our experience, young would-be writers rarely have the problem of having *so much* ornate, lovely prose that it has to be cut down and brought into line. They usually have the opposite problem: that of not knowing what to write about, which is another way of saying, they haven't learned to see things, to find them interesting, to think about what they are seeing, and then to agonize over the correct approach to relating what they've seen. It goes without saying that the terse or minimalistic approach has its place, and, when done correctly, is a great achievement, but very young writers must first learn to fall in love with words, rhythms and sounds, and their relation to real things.

iii) Some Important Elements of Modification and Predication: Every sentence must have a subject, which is to the sentence like the protagonist to the story. The protagonist is not interesting, or even intelligible as a protagonist, apart from his accidents (his modification) and his actions (what is predicated of him). On the other hand, attributes cannot stand alone—they must modify someone or something; and there are no actions without an actor. The whole business of modification and predication then are to *reveal* and *express* the subject, as well as the objects with which it relates or interacts. When we keep this in mind, it is easier to see why some sentences work and others don't. Modification works well when it gives us just the right information about a thing to reveal what its nature and properties are. That means choosing modifiers that carry *precisely* the meaning we intended, not a near equivalent. It also means not including modifiers, even technically true ones, that, in context, ring false, or have no bearing. Predication works well when it either relates an action typical of the subject in question, something that flows from its very being, or when it relates action (or shows being) that is particularly relevant in context. This means choosing precisely the correct verb, not a near equivalent. For example, we could describe the action of a sparrow by saying the sparrow *flits* from feeder to feeder, but it would be strange to say an eagle *flits*. Good word choice, as much as, if not more than parsimonious word use, is a crucial element of effective modification and predication.

Word order is grammatically important in the English language, but beyond the grammatical importance, the overall order of a sentence is rhetorically important. The following elements are particularly important: 1) The first and last positions in a sentence receive automatic emphasis. 2) Whatever is in the middle of a sentence is most easily forgotten. 3) The terminal slot, the last part of a sentence, naturally receives the greatest emphasis; usually even greater than the first position. A writer can more effectively utilize a sentence's structure when he keeps the above in mind. That being said, given the facts above, and given the universal subject-predicate structure of every sentence, the most natural and fail-safe way to write an effective sentence is simply to start with the subject and follow with the predicate, reinforcing the logical structure with the rhetorical rhythm. There ought to be a good reason for selecting other sentence arrangements. Two common reasons for selecting atypical word order are the need to create suspense, or the need to build toward a conclusion that only comes at the physical end of the sentence.

iv) Sentence Building: This basic method outlined below, with additional complications and variations, is used throughout the year. It is described in detail in the Method section of this document, to which we refer the reader. At first, as shown above, the student is given a base clause and is told what kinds of changes to make (change the verb, add an attributive adjective, etc) and, a model of some kind is used so that that student is forced to reconcile his word choice with what is actually there. At the initial stages sentence building is mostly

about word choice. Is it better to say *deer* or *buck*? Which noun gives more information about the model? Does it *sit* on the wall or *hang* on the wall? Is it a *wall* or a *marker-board*, or, more specifically, *the top right corner of the marker-board*, *on a hook*. At this stage, we are not so much worried about perfect concision or about the most effective arrangement of the word order. The idea is to thoroughly acquire the habit of careful observation and meticulous word choice. Students will also very quickly get used to the grammatical properties of modifiers and verbs this way, because these things stop being logical abstractions and become necessary rules in a fun game.

Teach the method first, having the whole class participate in building a sentence, raising their hands to suggest the best possible verb, adjective, etc. (according to the categories of change you specified in advance.) Each time you accept or reject a word, explain why the word worked, would not have worked, or would not have worked as well. The answer will usually have something to do with the word meaning exactly the correct thing, being more information rich (*buck* vs. *deer*; *dash* vs. *run*, etc.), being more specific (if specificity is what's called for), or one of the other considerations listed on the Style Sheet. The point is to give the boys *principles* of good writing.

v) Rhetorical Forms: Simile and Metaphor: After teaching sentence building, introduce similes and metaphor perhaps halfway through the month. It is extremely helpful to take these directly from whatever text you're currently reading in Literature class, or from a poem. There should be numerous examples in both. Make a habit of highlighting these things as you read them in your class prep or when you read out loud as a class. See the Rhetorical Forms sheet for definitions of each item. Nothing so enriches or so immediately improves an already decent sentence as a well-placed figure of speech. The purpose of these devices is *not* just to prettify prose, but to add or reveal depths of meaning.

Exercises: Here are twelve sample exercises. Each of these samples, and many of those that follow in other sections, presuppose one or more study subjects (models). Since it is unlikely that every teacher has at his disposal precisely the model(s) mentioned, these exercises are intended by way of illustration. The teacher making use of these exercises can easily substitute another model and make use of another base sentence, leaving most everything else intact. Please note, Class Sentence Building means the teacher places a base sentence about a given subject on the board, and then guides the class through every change in the manner previously described. Individual Sentence Building means *either* that the teacher writes the base sentence about a given model on the board and lets the students sentence build individually, according to the changes listed below it, *or* that the teacher allows the student complete freedom to write a well-structured sentence(s) about the given model. The teacher should ensure that students understand what is expected of them. For example: “You’ve got twenty minutes to produce five high quality sentences about the vase I’ve placed in front of you. You must start with the base sentence and make at least those changes I’ve indicated. I will check to see that you’ve completed them, and we’ll let you read your best one to the class for an oral critique.” Finally, feel free to choose to do any ISB as a CSB.

1) **Base Sentence:** A deer head is on the wall. [Class Sentence Building (CSB)]

- i) Modify the subject.
- ii) Change the article.
- iii) Use an action verb.
- iv) Modify object of preposition.
- v) Change noun functioning as adjective.

Finishing Touches:

2) **Base Sentence:** A clock ticks. [CSB]

- i) Modify the subject.
- ii) Change the article.
- iii) Modify the verb (use an adverb).
- iv) Modify the verb (us a prepositional phrase).

Finishing Touches:

3) **Base Sentence:** An oak tree is leaning. [CSB]

- i) Modify or change subject
- ii) Change the verb
- iii) Modify the verb with a prep. phrase
- iv) Modify the verb with a temporal adverb

Finishing Touches:

4) **Base Sentence:** The squirrel jumps from tree to tree. [CSB]

- i) Modify or change a prep. phrase
- ii) Modify or change a prep, phrase
- iii) Add a simile
- iv) Modify the subject

Finishing Touches:

5) **Base Sentence:** Lots of kids go to the school. [CSB]

- i) Change the subject (eliminate the slang)
- ii) Change verb/prep phrase (eliminate the slang)
- iii) Modify new subject
- iv) Modify new verb
- v) Modify new direct object (if applicable)

Finishing Touches:

6) **Base Sentence:** A mosquito is on the water. [CSB or Individual Sentence Building (ISB)]

- i) Change the verb
- ii) Change obj. of preposition
- iii) Modify the subject
- iv) Add a simile

Finishing Touches:

7) **Base Sentence:** The rabbit sat on the wall eating. [CSB or ISB]

- i) Modify the subject
- ii) Change 1st verb
- iii) Modify object of preposition
- iv) Modify 2nd verb
- v) Add a simile

Finishing Touches:

8) **Base Sentence:** The student ate his lunch. [CSB or ISB]

- i) Change subject
- ii) Modify subject
- iii) Change verb
- iv) Modify direct object
- v) Add a metaphor (for the student)

Finishing Touches:

9) **Base Sentence:** A sparrow landed on the feeder. [CSB or ISB]

- i) Modify subject (what species of sparrow?)
- ii) Modify verb
- iii) Modify verb with a simile

Finishing Touches:

10) **Base Sentence:** The poem was extremely difficult. [CSB or ISB]

- i) Change subject (name poem's title and author)
- ii) Change verb to "had" and list as its objects several *specific* difficulties. Eliminate "extremely difficult"
- iii) Use simile to describe degree of difficulty.

Finishing Touches:

11) **Base Sentence:** My little baby brother is very cute. [CSB or ISB]

- i) Eliminate unnecessary/repetitive adjective
- ii) Use the appositive to say brother's name
- iii) Eliminate entire phrase "is very cute", and replace with the verb "has" followed by several specific features that *are* cute.
- iv) Add a simile or a metaphor
- v) Finishing Touches:

12) **Base Sentence:** The fish swam in the aquarium. [CSB or ISB]

- i) Change subject (what species?)
  - ii) Change verb (find a verb for movement that gives a sense of *how* it swam) **or** if you can't think of one, modify the verb
  - iii) Add a simile
  - iv) Add a metaphor
- Finishing Touches:

## October: Thinking Like a Writer

i) The Four Questions To Ask Yourself Before Writing:

- 1) Who will be reading this? (Intended Audience)
- 2) What am I trying to say? (What is the overall impression, message, information, I want to convey? If you are writing a factual report, or an article, this also includes details about Where and When events/facts took place, etc.)
- 3) How can say it? (What strategies, tools, figures of speech can I use to communicate in this case? What is the logical and/or temporal structure?)
- 4) Why am I writing this? (Is there a great purpose to my work? Can I use that to help motivate myself to do all the little things necessary to write something worthwhile? Do I love what I'm writing, or, at least *why* I'm writing?)

ii) Informational/Propositional Content vs. the “Felt Idea”: Every sentence contains one or more propositions, which are substance or the “what” of what is being said. The sentences: “I am John”, “John am I”, and “John I am” all express the same proposition. However, as sentences become more complex, it becomes apparent that the order and arrangement of a sentence can alter the information content expressed. There are actually two issues here: On the one hand, the structure of a sentence can optimize, or undermine, the writer’s intentions, but on the other hand, ultimately this is *because* changing the structure really means subtly adding or subtracting information. Consider the differences between these two sentences:

- a. “Fingers shaking, sweat creeping into the corners of his eyes, heartbeat sounding in his ears more loudly than the heavy fall of the approaching guard’s boots, Silus heard the tell-tale *click*, and the safe swung open.”
- b. “Silus heard the tell-tale *click*, and the safe swung open, fingers shaking, sweat creeping into the corners of his eyes, heart beat sounding in his ears more loudly than the heavy fall of the approaching guard’s boots.”

Sentence **a** is clearly the better sentence, not only because the modifying phrases become somewhat awkward when they come after the base clause, but primarily because in the first sentence their placement builds up tension, whereas in the second they do not. One way of referring to the overall effect achieved by phrasing is to call it the *felt idea*. One could also refer to it simply as the overall effect. Whatever the preferred terminology, the reality is apparent to everyone upon reflection: sentence order matters.

iii) Alternatives Sentences: Along with sentence building, arranging alternative sentences is a great exercise for helping students get a sense of the tension described above between informational content and felt idea. This requires forethought and planning on the teacher’s part. The best approach is to find sentences from your current Literature book that are complicated enough that their order can be rearranged, while still conveying the same basic meaning. The goal will be to help the students see that some ways of arranging a sentence sound better than others. This exercise works best when the teacher carefully selects sentences that seem to have a preferred arrangement. He should also have foreseen the possible arrangements that the class will come up with for a given sentence, and have already thought about what makes one stronger, another weaker, and so on. Also, it is very important to keep words in their own respective phrases and clauses when doing this exercise. *The point is to change the order of words, phrases, and clauses that are already individually coherent, not to substitute words in one phrase or clause for those in another.* When explaining this to students, it helps to draw

vertical lines between self-contained phrases and clauses, so that the students understand the rules. See the example below:

In a hole |in the ground | there lived a hobbit.

iv) Rhetorical Forms: Analogy (See the Rhetorical Forms section)



Exercises: Here are twelve sample exercises. Each of these samples, and all those that follow in other sections, presuppose one or more study subjects (models). Since it is unlikely that every teacher has at his disposal precisely the model(s) mentioned, these exercises are intended by way of illustration. The teacher making use of these exercises can easily substitute another model and make use of another base sentence, leaving most everything else intact. Please note: Alternative Sentences to be completed as a class are labeled CAS. Alternative Sentences to be individually completed and orally critiqued are labeled IAS.

1) **Base Sentence:** The fort is made of logs. [CSB]

- i) Modify subject
- ii) Change verb
- iii) Modify, change, or add to object of preposition
- iv) Use a simile

Finishing Touches:

2) **Base Sentence:** The bird lands on the feeder, and it starts eating. [CSB or ISB]

- i) Modify or change subject (Be more specific)
- ii) Change verb (What verb means “lands” when speaking of birds?)
- iii) Modify object of preposition (What kind feeder?)
- iv) Rephrase second clause
- v) Use a simile

Finishing Touches:

3) **Base Sentence:** I really don't like to go in the water when it's very cold. [CSB or ISB]

- i) Simplify “really don't like”
- ii) Simplify “to go in the water when it's very cold”
- iii) Emphasize by adding a subordinate clause that uses metaphor
- iv) Finishing Touches:

4) **Base Sentence:** “In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit.” [CAS]

- i)
- ii)
- iii)
- iv)

5) **Base Sentence:** “Turning and turning in the widening gyre, the falcon cannot hear the falconer.”<sup>22</sup>[CAS]

- i)
- ii)
- iii)
- iv)

6) **Base Sentence:** “If any hobbit stooped for a stone, it was well to get quickly under cover, as all trespassing beasts knew very well.”<sup>23</sup>[IAS]

- i)
- ii)
- iii)
- iv)

7) **Base Sentence:** Spinning on its own axis, chaotically catching and scattering the midday sun, uttering an argument-ending *shunk!*, the tomahawk met its target. [IAS]

- i)
- ii)
- iii)

8) **Base Sentence:** “Far less than halfway to the hamlet, very little beyond the bottom of the hill, we must come forth into the moonlight.”<sup>24</sup>[IAS]

- i)
- ii)
- ii)

9) **Base Sentence:** A dog is like a best friend. [ISB]

- i) Modify the subject
- ii) Expand on the simile, using one or more analogies.

10) **Base Sentence:** A good student is a marathon runner. [ISB]

i) Continue the sentence using an extended metaphor or analogy. These need not be phrases or clauses in the same sentence, but may simply be additional sentences.

11) **Base Sentence:** The tree branches hung down over the shed, as if... [ISB]

- i) Change subject (species?)
- ii) Change verb (and adverb, if necessary)
- iii) Modify object of preposition
- iv) Complete with a complex, inventive simile

Finishing Touches:

12) **Base Sentence:** The children played on the wood chips...[ISB]

- i) Modify or change subject
- ii) Modify or change verb
- iii) Use a simile or a metaphor
- iv) Complement simile or metaphor with an analogy

Finishing Touches:

## November: Putting Order in Your Writing

Whatever succeeds in a written work does so ultimately because it has been well ordered. This is true whether it is an article written in the most specialized language in a scholarly journal, or a successful piece of poetry. Chaos means unintelligibility, or a lack of unity, and readers reject chaos whenever they detect it. All good writing is orderly writing. It remains, then, to discuss some of the categories of order in writing.

i) Topical: Even in a poem or a story, there is some kind of topical arrangement of the material. The characters, setting, protagonist, antagonist, objective, conflict, and resolution must all be placed before the reader in an orderly manner, and in just such a way that he can take it all in, bit by bit, in intelligible pieces that hang together. The poet also leads the reader, through a series of images, ideas, anecdotes, repetitions, and so on to the whole reality he is trying to communicate. Fiction and poetry each have their own methods for achieving these ends, but the fundamental truth remains: there must be a topical order to things. We are most familiar with topical order, however, in non-artistic articles and books. It is useful to look at some universal features of topical order:

- a. Logical Development: The material's arrangement is designed to draw the reader to a highly reasonable conclusion. The various divisions within the piece, whether they are paragraphs, stanzas, scenes, or chapters, are like premises in an argument. Anything aspiring to be good writing must at least not violate logic, otherwise the reader will feel, or should feel, that he has been manipulated. In an argumentative piece, the facts must establish the premises, and the conclusion must follow from the facts. If the facts don't clearly correspond to the premises they're meant to establish, or if the premises aren't made clear, the conclusion will seem less certain, and will probably *be* less certain, since that is a likely indication the author has not really thought clearly about the material, or, in the worst case, that prejudice or a dishonest motive have led him to muddy the waters. Believability is an example of logic's application in fiction: this character would, or just wouldn't do this or that thing. The bottom line is this: A writer is not a dictator; much less is he God. He cannot make material do whatever he wants it to do; rather, he must be obedient to and respectful of the intrinsic logic of the subjects he writes about, and the logic of relationship that obtains among them.
- b. Logical Grouping: There are various divisions within the whole work, such as line, stanza, scene, chapter, act, part, paragraph, intro, body and conclusion. Very simply then, all the "raw materials" must be grouped according to kind. They must appear within the appropriate division of the greater piece, along with related materials belonging within the same division. This is obvious in a story, and fairly obvious in a poem. A story necessarily involves scenes, and the scenes can only involve whoever is in them. Sometimes it's not obvious to students that poems are also structured in such a way that each stanza, and each line within a stanza tends to develop a new phrase or new facets. Also, within the stanzas, these elements are grouped according to their similarity or unity.

Students often struggle to impose order in expository and persuasive essays and reports. For example, when a student is given the task of writing an expository essay on a mole cricket, he will often feel overwhelmed by all the facts he has assembled in his research, and will simply write those facts down in whatever order he finds them arranged, or in whatever order he tends to think of them while glancing from his notebook paper to his information sheets. The result will tend to be at one of two extremes. Either the material will appear to have been randomly assembled, or the paper will appear to have been plagiarized from the sources, which in some cases, it will be. In any event, students will be

much more capable of writing in an orderly way if they are first taught to read in an orderly way. A teacher can do a lot for the student by taking students through a well-written article, paragraph by paragraph, in order to reveal its logical order and its logical internal groupings. The same can be done for other genres of writing. One useful exercise for helping students, especially young students, to group like material together is to first have the student write down everything he knows on one piece of paper, then look at the information and mentally discern several categories within it. Then, after writing those categories down as headings on a separate piece of paper, he should begin transferring the data, piece by piece, into the appropriate categories, crossing it out from the first piece of paper after it is transferred. From there it is much easier to decide what kind logical order obtain *within* the categories, and *among* the categories. The last chapter contains several detailed exercises along these lines, but the teacher will have to make adjustments based on his age group.

ii) Sensory: Making use of the senses is very important in any kind of descriptive writing. Historians, biographers, poets, and novelists must all be able to capture an image or experience on paper. Whenever descriptive writing is called for, the writer must make use of as many senses as he reasonably can. Obviously sight is usually the most important, and the sense to which everyone naturally defaults. Details about color, shape, relative size, density, and physical effect on surroundings are all very helpful. Similes are very useful in physical description because they are often more evocative and economical than bare description. Include details about sound in any description of a subject that characteristically produces sound, and so on. When using the senses, the rule is that the more essential a particular physical characteristic is to the subject described, the more effective and economical it is as a descriptive device. Try to focus on what is unique about the subject, especially if aiming for a highly economical style.

iii) Spacial: Just as abstract subjects must be approached in an orderly manner, so must physical subjects. Whatever is physical is also physically extended (takes up space), and occurs within a greater space, and has a spatial relationship to other entities within that space. Without “spacial context” physical description becomes unbelievable, and/or, too difficult to follow. The descriptive writer’s job is to guide the reader to imagine the same scene that the writer sees. This happens by laying down the setting in an orderly manner at some point before, or directly after describing the subject of special attention. First decide what elements to include in your description, and then describe them each in turn, making sure to also identify where they stand in relation to each other. Be conscious of the demands you are placing on your reader’s attention and imagination. In a technical piece of writing, far more detail can be put “in frame” than would be used to establish physical setting in a work of fiction, but in both cases orderliness and precision is absolutely essential for comprehension. In short, do not simply list spacial details at random as they as they occur to you while writing. Consider in advance how to establish physical facts in an orderly manner that makes for pleasant reading.

iv) Structural and Auditory Effects: These are the “special effects” of writing, and just like special effects in a movie, they are best *when not noticed as effects*. These effects include such things as the use of alliteration for repetition or emphasis, the use of sibilance or an evasive manner of speech (in fiction) to suggest that a character is not to be trusted, the use of sentence structures (like the various kinds of cumulative sentence) that emphasize or mirror the subject matter, the various kinds of parallelism and figures of speech that depend on parallels and contrasts of sound or meaning, and any other writing strategy that involves using the physical

properties of words, and their special arrangements—not just their meanings—to reinforce or emphasize meaning. There are many such effects, and the main thing to keep in mind about them is that *the effect should never be a substitute for the substance*.

v) Rhetorical Forms: Parallelism—Balanced and Serial Syntax: For a detailed explanation of the above, please consult Section 5 of the Method section of this textbook. Parallelism is a powerful structural tool in the writer's rhetorical toolbox, and it is easy to begin identifying it and using it in one's writing.

Exercises: Here are ten sample exercises for November. These exercises are designed to be cumulative, building on material from the previous months. Whenever assignments assume the existence of a model, they are meant only by way of illustration. The teacher will have to select his own model, and adjust the assignment accordingly as part of his own prep work.

1) **Base Sentence:** The Pit in the Valley is off limits. [ISB]

i) Modify subject (using a phrase that briefly explains to your audience what the Pit is; assume they don't know.)

ii) Add a simile to the end of the sentence that emphasizes and clarifies the existing sentence

Finishing Touches:

2) **Base Sentence:** The oak leaves are on the ground. [CSB or ISB]

i) Modify (or improve) subject

ii) Change the verb to an action verb

iii) Add one or more adverbs

iv) Improve prepositional phrase (make more precise and match it up with the new verb.)

v) Add a metaphor illustrating the action or current circumstances of the dead leaves.

Finishing Touches:

3) **Base Sentence:** "Hither and thither through the meadows he rambled busily, along the hedgerows, across the copses, finding everywhere birds building, flowers budding, leaves thrusting—everybody happy, and progressive, and occupied."<sup>25</sup> [IAS]

i)

ii)

iii)

iv)

4) **Base Sentence:** "Already the shadows were deepening about them, though far away through the trees and over the black tops of those growing lower down they could still see the evening lights on the plains beyond."<sup>26</sup>[IAS]

i) Modify or change a prep. phrase

ii) Modify or change a prep. phrase

iii) Add a simile

iv) Modify the subject

Finishing Touches:

5) **Sensory Description:** Write one sentence for each of the four items listed below. Each sentence must include at least two of the five senses, and must include at least one simile or metaphor.

- 1) A tulip poplar
- 2) Grass (either a blade or a clump)
- 3) A soccer ball
- 4) One or more fishes

6) **Sensory Description:** Write one sentence for each of the locations listed below. Since locations are complex, with many competing elements, try to select only those sensory details that really get at the essence of the place you're writing about. Each sentence must utilize at least two of the five senses, but there must be at least four total sensory elements in the sentence, which means you may be using some senses more than once. You must also make use of parallelism.

- 1) Toad Hall (or any science or art room)
- 2) A baseball diamond.
- 3) A classroom.

7) **Spacial Description:** Write one sentence for each of the locations listed below. Make sure to select the essential spacial features of each location, to list them distinctly, and to indicate their spacial relationship to each other. While it is not always ideal to do so much in a single sentence, we will continue to practice these techniques in sentence form. Since there are three spacial categories listed above, use parallelism in the form of serial construction. (e.g. "The three primary components of the airplane are the wings, which create lift, the engine, which creates propulsion, and the cockpit, which contains the pilot.")

- i) Chesterton Hall (or any auditorium)
- ii) The Chapel
- iii) The Gym
- iv) The New Log Cabin

8) **Sensory and Spatial Description:** Write one concise, but detailed sentence for each the locations listed below. Put the sentence in order using both sensory and spatial information. Use parallelism, either in the form of balance (groupings of twos) or serial (groupings of threes), and only include the most essential spatial and sensory details. Think of this as an introductory sentence meant to give "the big picture", before subsequent sentences become more specific. (e.g. "The mouth of the cave was small and bordered by sharp stones turned inward like barbs, but once through the door the cave's interior was enormous, its roof covered with white crystals hanging downward like chandeliers.") Once again, it is not always ideal to include so much information in a single sentence, but for our purposes it works well to practice these elements in a single sentence.

- i) The Chapel
- ii) The Valley
- iii) The Old Log Cabin

9) **Topical Order (part 1):** This assignment should be done as a class. Select a subject with many elements that is very well known to all of the boys. The goal of this assignment is to teach the boys to think in an orderly way about a subject. The example subject is soccer, but the teacher should free to select another. The ultimate goal will be to explain the sport to someone who knows almost nothing about the sport. We will take that up in the next assignment.

Step 1: On one sheet of paper, write down everything you know about soccer (or whatever the subject you've chosen.)

Step 2: Come up with at least four, and no more than seven categories in which all of the information you've written can be categorized. (Ex: "Rules", "History", "Famous Players", "Best Teams", etc). Let the students figure out what the categories should be.

Step 3: On another sheet of paper, write down each of the categories with space underneath to list each of the elements in their appropriate places.

10) **Topical Order (part 2):** Now that you have your information in categories, the next step is to prioritize within each category, and among each category. First, within each category, you need to decide as a class how many different sentences you'll need for each category. The fewer sentences, the better, but remember that information should only be grouped together in one sentence if it's closely enough related that the sentence forms a coherent whole. You don't want a sentence going in two or more directions at once, even if it's grammatically possible. Second, you'll have to prioritize *among* the categories, deciding which categories should come first, which second, third, and so on. You can go from most important to least important, or vice-versa, or whatever order you decide upon, but there must be an orderly plan or arrangement.

Step 1: As explained above, figure out how many sentences you'll need for the information within each category. This means prioritizing and arranging the material according to how closely related are the individual elements. Whatever can be combined, should be combined.

Step 2: As explained above, prioritize among the categories, making a note of what principle you're using to organize them, and in what order the exposition should proceed given the relationships among the categories.

11) **Topical Order (part 3):** Write an essay explaining soccer to one who has no concept of it using the research and planning from the previous two assignments. Be concise and make sure that no category exceeds one paragraph. Use the internal order of the prioritized paragraphs to create the essay; don't worry about the introduction, and conclusion paragraphs. These will be addressed later on in the year. In this essay, each sentence must be well crafted: it must be concise, informative, and aesthetically beautiful. To achieve this end, the essay *must* include the following elements:

-At least 4 similes

-At least 1 metaphor

-At least 1 analogy

-Use of parallelism in any sentence in which multiple elements are placed in some relationship with respect to each other, whether it be a comparative, repetitive or antagonistic relationship.

-Meticulous word choice; no approximate meanings.



This assignment is likely to require several writing classes, and parts of it may need to be assigned as homework. It should be assigned as a longer writing assignment with a due date. It should be collected and graded for all of the elements emphasized so far. Students who want to do so should be given opportunity to read their essays for the class.



## December: Coordinating Cumulative Sentences I (Grammatical Foundation)

We've looked at several ways of putting order into one's writing, as well as the importance of thinking like a writer and seeing like a writer. We've also learned a few writing strategies, and some figures of speech. The strategies and figures of speech are tools in the writer's ever expanding toolbox. The sentence forms we'll be studying for the next four lessons are also important and somewhat specialized tools. Students should gain a facility with these sentence patterns, understanding how they work and when to use them. There are many way of structuring a sentence, but cumulative and periodic sentences facilitate writing simply by virtue of their structural logic. Before continuing, the instructor should thoroughly read the appropriate subsection from Part 1. Because lower school students are likely to be weak on the grammatical structure of sentences, but since a basic understanding of these grammatical concepts is necessary in order to use cumulative or periodic sentences, the focus in the short month of December is on laying the groundwork for the actual prose instruction of coordinating cumulative, subordinating cumulatives, and periodic sentences, which follows in January, February, and March, respectively. Please do not skip this part, though it may feel like you're doing more grammar instruction than prose instruction. You'll find it was quite worth the time. For third grade, don't focus so much on the theory and rules, but take a much more concrete approach that emphasizes the patterns of structure and sound in a cumulative sentences. There is a very poetic *rolling* and *snowballing* feel to these sentences, which the eye and ear easily recognize.

i) Basic overview of compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences; adjectivals, participles, gerunds etc: The writing instructor should take several class periods thoroughly explaining how more complicated sentences work. In most cases the students, especially if they are lower school students, will not at first retain all of this information, particularly when it comes to sentences that are for more complicated than anything they'll encounter in grammar until middle school. However, once the students start working with the actual composition of such sentences, the lesson you taught here will suddenly be familiar and useful, making retention much easier. Students must be taught to recognize, and distinguish among:

- a. Subjects and Predicates
- b. Phrases and Clauses
- c. Independent and Dependent Clauses
- d. Any kind of modifying word or phrase (gerunds, participles, adjectivals)

One effective method for teaching these concepts relatively quickly is to start with a basic one clause sentence, and add layers of complication until all the elements above have been incorporated. One can do the same thing in reverse, starting with a complicated sentence and subtracting elements.

ii) Free modifiers vs. Bound Modifiers: Essential to the rhythm of a cumulative sentence is the notion of a free modifier. A free modifier is simply a modifying word or phrase that modifies the base clause, and can be moved about freely. A bound modifier is fixed by words like "which", and "that" into a position of subordination or dependence, preventing its being moved around. This is explained in the section 5 of Part 1. The easiest method for teaching this distinction is to simply write examples of sentences with both kinds of modifiers. Show that you can move around the free modifiers to either be in front of, in the middle of, or after the base clause, but that the sentence stops working or become problematic when you try to move the position of a bound modifier.

iii) How coordinating cumulatives work: right-branching, left-branching, and medial branching: Once you've spent several classes teaching the above concepts, you will now re-introduce those concepts in the context of the coordinating cumulative sentence. Since coordinating cumulative sentences contain all or most of the above elements (except for dependent clauses, usually), and since these sentence forms have a particular rhythm and feel, you'll find that the students' understanding of the grammatical concepts is reinforced by their actual use in the cumulative sentences, making those concepts easier to remember. The important thing in December is that the students get a basic idea of the grammatical structure of a coordinating cumulative sentence. Dependent clauses, while they are not used in the strictest example of a coordinating cumulative sentence, are included because the student must be able to distinguish a modifying phrase from a clause.

Cumulative sentences can branch to the right or to the left, meaning that the modifying phrases are stacked on one side or the other. The essential structure is follows:

[Base clause], (modifying word or phrase), (modifying word or phrase), (modifying word or phrase)

[Tommy ate the cheeseburger], (delighting in the saltiness), (savoring the melted cheddar), (enchanted by a bovine bewitchment.) That was a **right-branching** cumulative, because the modifiers were on the right.

Notice three things about it: 1) We can move modifying phrases anywhere without loss of propositional content (basic meaning), 2) this is not a *list* of modifiers; they all complement each other and build texture and 3) the modifiers are loose or free, meaning we can place them anywhere, including *before* the base clause. If we want to make a **left-branching** cumulative, we simply change the placement of the modifiers:

(Delighting in the saltiness), (savoring the melted cheddar), (enchanted by a bovine bewitchment), [Tommy ate the cheeseburger.]

Finally, we could put some or all of those modifying words or phrases within the base clause, in between the subject and verb, and that would be a **medial-branching** cumulative:

[Tommy], (delighting in the saltiness), (savoring the melted cheddar), [ate the cheeseburger], (enchanted by a bovine bewitchment.)

Please note, the sentence above is called a *coordinating* cumulative sentence. This will be explained in greater detail in the next two chapters, and was also addressed in the Method section. There is another kind of cumulative, called subordinating, which will be addressed in February's lesson.

iv) Rhetorical Forms: Personification (See Rhetorical Forms section)

Exercises: Here are twelve sample exercises for December. These exercises are designed to be cumulative, building on material from the previous months. Whenever assignments assume the existence of a model, they are meant only by way of illustration. The teacher will have to select his own model, and adjust the assignment accordingly as part of his own prep work. Please note that this month's lesson is more heavily focused on grammar.

**1) Sentence Grammar (1): Independent and Dependent Clauses** A sentence must contain at least one independent clause. A clause is formed by a subject (which is a noun, or word or phrase that behaves like a noun) and a predicate (which is the verb expressing the action or being of that noun, and everything else that goes with the verb.)

Five example clauses:

1) John| can run, 2) the old man| can dance, 3) because I| said so, 4) whenever you | want to go fishing, 5) she| told you yesterday.

Notice that 1, 2, and 5 can stand alone. All you have to do is capitalize the first letter and put a period at the end, and you've got a sentence. Not so for 3 and 4; these are clauses, because each has a subject and a predicate, but they cannot stand alone. In a cumulative sentence the base clause is always an independent clause modified by phrases. You can't use cumulative syntax unless you understand the clause/phase distinction.

In your writing notebook, write a list of ten independent clauses, and then write ten dependent clauses. Clearly label your lists. Also, draw a vertical line between the subject and predicate of each clause, as in the bolded example above (please note: by "subject" we mean the complex subject, so: **the old fellow who lived in the sea| was not a merman.**)

**2) Sentence Grammar (2): Clauses and Phrases** There are several different kinds of phrases, and it can be difficult to remember them all. At this point, the important thing is to be able to distinguish a clause from a phrase. Luckily, that's usually pretty easy. A phrase is a group of related words that is missing something. What it's missing specifically is a subject to perform the action of the verb, or a verb to express the action of a noun or noun phrase. These phrases are missing subjects: **running to the store, telling what I know, breaking apart at the last second, hungrily eating, pausing every few seconds to check his watch, jumping up onto the counter**, and so on. You might be thinking to yourself, "I saw a lot of nouns and verbs in there!" That's true, but if you look carefully, you'll notice that there's no noun to perform the actions listed. *Who* was pausing every few seconds to check his watch? *What* was breaking apart at the last second? The following are adjectival phrases: **Old and ornery, discontented with the hotel service, approximately twelve feet tall and ravenously hungry, mildly sweet but rather tangy**. They are not clauses because they don't contain a subject with its own predicate. The phrases you use in cumulative sentences will be like those above. We can easily make a sentence using a base clause and several phrases from the examples given:

[Base clause], (phrase), (phrase), (phrase).

[The monster threw aside the restaurant door,] (ravenously hungry), (discontented with the hotel service), (pausing every few seconds to check his watch).

In your writing notebook, write twenty phrases, using the bold phrases above as a guide. Make the first ten like the first example (with an -ing ending verb), and the second ten phrases like the other (adjectival) phrases.

3) **Base Sentence (hereafter, Base Clause):** The Christmas tree is in the living room. [CSB]  
i) Change verb (make active)  
ii) Modify subject  
iii) Modify base clause with two separate phrases containing -ing verbs (participles)  
iv) Add a third participle phrase that personifies the Christmas tree, or the way that it behaves.

4) **Base Clause:** The squirrel runs up the tree. [CSB] (Right-branching)  
i) Change verb (what is a better, more specific verb meaning “to run”)  
ii) Modify subject  
iii) Modify base clause with three separate phrases, each of which is a simile. One of the similes should personify the squirrel.

5) **Base Clause:** The bird takes off from the branch.  
i) Change subject (what kind of bird?)  
ii) Change verb phrase  
iii) Modify object of preposition  
iv) Modify base clause with three separate words or phrases, each of which is a metaphor

6) **Base Sentence:** [He crossed the finish line], (chin jutting out in front of him), (toes pointed and inflexible), (grimacing), (growling). [CAS] *Note: Brackets and parenthesis indicate base clause and modifying words/phrases respectively. These will be omitted in future Alternative Sentences assignments.*  
i)  
ii)  
iii)  
iv)  
v)

7) **Base Sentence:** She only *tsked*, without looking up from her book, raising one eyebrow almost imperceptibly, distractedly, as one would at a mild disappointment, or a last minute change of restaurant destinations. [IAS]  
i)  
ii)  
iii)  
iv)

8) **Base Sentence:** Leroy snatched the ball, tipping backwards with his feet planted, pinching it all the way at the end of his glove, looking like Ted Williams, shrunk down. [IAS]  
i)  
ii)  
iii)  
iv)

9) **Base Clause:** The winter is here.

i) Change verb phrase to an active verb

ii) Modify the clause with two words or phrases that are metaphors

iii) Modify the clause with another word or phrase that personifies either the winter or its action

iv) Incorporate parallelism in the form of balance (groups of two)

10) **Guided Freewrite:** Write two well-crafted sentences about a subject model, which your teacher will select for you. Each sentence must be a cumulative sentence. The sentences must each include *at least* one metaphor and one instance of personification (they may overlap), and must incorporate parallelism.

11) **Guided Freewrite:** Write two well-crafted sentences about a subject model, which your teacher will select for you. Each sentence must be a cumulative sentence. The sentences must each include *at least* one simile, one analogy (they may overlap), and must incorporate parallelism.

12) **Guided Freewrite:** Write two well-crafted sentences about a subject model, which your teacher will select for you, or of which he approves. Each sentence must be a cumulative sentence. The sentences must each include at least three of the rhetorical forms we've studied so far.





## January: Coordinating Cumulatives Sentences II (Optimal Uses)

*Please consult the Sentence Forms subsection in Part I for a very detailed discussion of the forms below.*

i) Right-branching: The most straightforward way to write a cumulative sentence is to start with the base clause and trail the modifiers. The loose structure of cumulative sentences creates a feeling of running in place, of sweeping back and forth, of layering on. These sentences paint a picture, brushstroke by brushstroke, drip by drip. If the writer want his reader to immediately grasp his basic meaning, then a right branching sentence is preferable.

ii) Left-branching: Occasionally, for his own reasons, which may be very good ones, the writer delays his base clause until the very end. This way of writing a cumulative sentence gives the reader a “climbing up the roller coaster” feel; the very rhythm promises a plunge into meaning at some point in the future. For that reason, left-branching cumulatives are good for creating suspense. They can also be very similar to periodic sentences, a fact that shall be addressed in the appropriate section.

iii) Optimal uses and limitations: In general this sentence style works to create a sense of motion, even when the subject matter is quite stationary or merely factual. The writer who has to speak in a very refined, factual, technical or logical manner should probably avoid this style, preferring balanced and periodic syntax, except occasionally in order to inject some life and flavor into a work that feels a little too schematic.

iv) Rhetorical Forms: Antithesis, Alliteration, Onomatopoeia

Exercises: Here are ten sample exercises for January. These exercises are designed to be cumulative, building on material from the previous months. Whenever assignments assume the existence of a model, they are meant only by way of illustration. The teacher will have to select his own model, and adjust the assignment accordingly as part of his own prep work.

1) **Base Sentence:** “Breathless and transfixed the Mole stopped rowing as the liquid run of that glad piping broke on him like a wave, caught him up, and possessed him utterly.”<sup>27</sup> [IAS]

- i)
- ii)
- iii)

2) **Base Sentence:** “A wide half-circle of foam and glinting lights and shining shoulders of green water, the great weir closed the backwater from bank to bank, troubled all the quiet surface with twirling eddies and floating foam streaks, and deadended all the other sounds with its solemn and soothing rumble.”<sup>28</sup>[IAS]

*Note: These longer sentences are more complicated to restructure. Some of the phrases here modify other phrases, and cannot be moved without seriously altering the meaning of the sentence.*

- i)
- ii)
- iii)

3) **Base Clause:** The clock on the wall makes noise.

- i) Modify subject
- ii) Modify base clause with two words or phrases
- iii) Change verb and object; use onomatopoeia
- iv) Make the modifying phrases balanced

4) **Base Clause:** A hickory tree leans over the steps.

- i) Modify object of preposition
- ii) Modify base clause with three words or phrases
- iii) Incorporate alliteration into your three modifying words or phrases
- iv) Ensure the sound chosen for alliteration suggests or complements the meaning or action of base clause.

5) **Schemes and Tropes:** Here are two famous examples of antithesis. Invent eight more.

- i) “We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools.”<sup>29</sup>
- ii) “When we are happy we are always good, but when we are good we are not always happy.”<sup>30</sup>
- iii)
- iv)
- v)
- vi)
- vii)
- viii)
- ix)

x)

6) **Schemes and Tropes:** Use balance and alliteration together (with a touch of onomatopoeia). Using the example below as a guide, follow the prompts below to create sentences that make effective use of sound and structure. Try to use verbs whose sounds suggest the kind of motion indicated:

Example: The little sparrow flits over to the feeder, then flutters away to her nest.

Prompt 1: A squirrel in action

i)

Prompt 2: A tree on a hill

ii)

Prompt 3: A leaf on the ground

iii)

Prompt 4: A cloud

iv)

7) **Base Clause:** *The heroic prince slowly worked his hands out of the manacles.*

To create a feeling of suspense, make this a left-branching cumulative sentence. Modify the base clause with three preceding words or phrases.

8) Now create your own sentences in the same form. Make use of at least one simile and at least one instance of alliteration.

i)

ii)

iii)

9) **Corrections** The sentences below are grammatically correct, but one or more elements lacks parallel structure. Please rewrite the sentences so that they have parallel construction. You can accomplish this by making sure adjectives balance with adjectives, nouns with nouns, concepts with concepts, and so on.

Example: On Thursday we are going fishing, hiking, and we will snorkel.

Correction: On Thursday we are going fishing, hiking, and snorkeling *or* On Thursday we will hike, fish, and snorkel *or* On Thursday we will fish, we will hike, and we will snorkel.

Prompt: Swimming in the waters of Lake Superior is both refreshing, and it gives you chills.

Correction:

Prompt: If you're supposed to look before you leap, it follows that you shouldn't jump before you've had a look.

Correction:

Prompt: This is one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.

Correction:

Prompt: When it's time for battle, a knight carries a sword. Writers use pencils in their struggle.

Correction:

10) For each of the scenarios below, circle whether a writer should use a left-branching cumulative sentence or a right-branching cumulative sentence, and then write your own cumulative sentence about the scenario from that example. (Differences of opinion are possible, but students should be able to defend their decisions.)

Scenario 1: A baseball player makes a catch, then the action focuses on the details of the catch.

Circle One: left-branching right-branching

Write Your Own:

Scenario 2: A knight swings his sword, slicing off a dragon's head, then the action focuses on the details of the blow.

Circle One: left-branching right-branching

Write Your Own:

Scenario 3: A dragon rears up to strike at a knight, and we aren't immediately sure what's going to happen.

Circle One: left-branching right-branching

Write Your Own:

Scenario 4: The knight has swung at a dragon's neck, and we aren't immediately sure the blow has made contact.

Circle One: left-branching right-branching

Write Your Own:

## February: Subordinating Cumulatives

i) Explanation and comparison with coordinating cumulatives: As Brooks Landon explains in *Building Great Sentences* coordinating cumulatives are good for zooming in, circling around, and running in place<sup>31</sup>. With this kind of sentence, the author makes multiple passes at the same clause, or looks at it from multiple angles at once. However, there is another kind of cumulative sentence, the subordinating cumulative, that permits a writer to achieve a greater level of particular focus within this general sentence pattern. The difference between the two varieties is relatively simple: in a coordinating cumulative sentence the modifying words or phrases independently modify one single element within the base clause, while in a subordinating cumulative the modification goes at least one step further, modifying a word or phrase with yet another word or phrase, or zeroing in on a particular word in the base clause. See the examples below:

Coordinating cumulative: Hands smashed in tight against the knob, keeping his eyes on the ball, Tom swung the bat with all his might.

Subordinating cumulative: Hands smashed in tight against the knob, keeping his eyes on the ball, Tom swung the bat with all his might, that same ashwood Easton he always used when the bases were loaded.

Notice that the phrase beginning with “that same ashwood...” modifies “bat” from the base clause. But we can focus in even further:

Hands smashed in tight against the knob, keeping his eyes on the ball, Tom swung the bat with all his might, that same ashwood Easton he always used when the bases were loaded, that magic moment when he felt most alive.

We can keep “zooming in” like this, and as Brooks Landon points out, the very structure of a cumulative sentence makes it easy to follow the action. However, we do reach a point where the sentence, though grammatically correct and interesting to read, seems overlong. A related but distinct concern is the importance of students (and teachers) being able to distinguish between run-on sentences, which are grammatically incorrect, and overlong sentences, which may be grammatically correct, but are aesthetically displeasing. These two distinct errors are often conflated, because they leave a similarly clumsy impression.

ii) Optimal uses; limitations: As previously noted, cumulative sentences in general are excellent for conveying a sense of motion, and for making several passes at the same proposition, adding layers of meaning every time. The subordinated cumulative is particularly useful for “zooming in” on particular features of the cumulative structure, allowing further distinctions and refinements. As Landon notes<sup>32</sup>, one of the advantages of a cumulative sentence with its free modifiers, over more rigidly structured sentences with their bound modifiers, is that the very structure seems to render the propositional content of the cumulative sentence easier to follow and easier to digest. The reader seems to flow along these sentences until he reaches their end. When we add in the subordinate cumulative opportunities for further refinement, we seem to gain all advantages of more rigidly structured sentences with bound modifiers without losing the advantages of the cumulative structure in general. On the other hand, the very open-endedness of cumulative sentences means that there is no natural, internal stopping point with them. They can keep going and going, unless the writer imposes limitations on them.

iii) Rhetorical Forms: Anaphora, Epistrophe

Exercises: Here are twelve sample exercises for February. These exercises are designed to be cumulative, building on material from the previous months. Whenever assignments assume the existence of a model, they are meant only by way of illustration. The teacher will have to select his own model, and adjust the assignment accordingly as part of his own prep work.

1) **Base Clause:** There is an old gnarled tree leaning over the hill. [CSB]

- i) Change subject
- ii) Modify object of preposition
- iii) Change verb (use a verb that personifies the tree's action)
- iv) Add two modifying phrases to make it a coordinating cumulative.
- v) With another modifying phrase one level down, make it a subordinating cumulative.

Finishing Touches:

2) **Base Clause:** There is a face on the moon. [ISB]

- i) Modify subject
- ii) Add two modifying phrases to make it cumulative. Use a simile in one.
- iii) With another modifying phrase one level down, make it a subordinating cumulative.

Finishing Touches:

3) **Base Clause:** The hawk flew down into the Valley. [ISB]

- i) Modify subject
- ii) Change verb
- iii) Modify verb
- iv) Add two modifying phrases to make it a coordinating cumulative. (Use a metaphor in each)
- v) With another modifying phrase one level down, make it a subordinating cumulative.

Finishing Touches:

4) For each of the examples below, circle whether a writer should use a left-branching cumulative sentence or a right-branching cumulative sentence, and then write your own cumulative sentence on the scenario from that example. (Differences of opinion are possible, but students should be able to defend their decisions.)

A large stone is shot from a catapult, flies through the air, and lands, finally, on a company of knights.

Circle One: left-branching right-branching

Write Your Own:

A waterfall flows and different aspects of the torrent receive focus in turn.

Circle One: left-branching right-branching

Write Your Own:

Something is spinning as it sinks deeper and deeper into the ocean, and we don't know what until the sentence ends.

Circle One: left-branching right-branching

Write Your Own:

5) Below is a famous example of anaphora. Invent, or produce from memory, three more examples. Each example must consist of at least three phrases, clauses, or sentences in order to establish the repetition necessary for anaphora.

“*Charity* suffereth long, *and* is kind; *charity* envieth not; *charity* vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up...*Charity* never faileth: but whether *there be* prophecies, they shall fail; whether *there be* tongues, they shall cease; whether *there be* knowledge, it shall vanish away.”<sup>33</sup>

i)

ii)

iii)

6) Below is a famous example of epistrophe. Invent, or produce from memory, three more examples. Each example must consist of at least three phrases, clauses, or sentences in order to establish the repetition necessary for epistrophe.

“When I was *a child*, I spake as *a child*, I understood as *a child*, I thought as *a child*: but when I became a man, I put away *childish* things.”<sup>34</sup>

i)

ii)

iii)

7) **Base Clause:** He told the truth, heart beating a mile a minute, palms sweaty, breath caught somewhere between his lungs and his throat, muscles tensing at the thought of the repercussions. [IAS]

i)

ii)

iii)

iv)

8) **Base Clause:** Looking around, almost whispering, they conspired together; John the eternal optimist sure that the plan would work, Tommy the perennial pessimist wanting to account for every possible contingency.

[CAS]

i)

ii)

iii)

iv)



9) **Base Clause:** They began digging, hoping the pirates wouldn't come back early, practically drooling at the thought of cold, yellow metal in their hands, Bill windmilling maniacally at the sand with his spade, Dexter digging with more deliberation, and probably more depth. [IAS]

- i)
- ii)
- iii)
- iv)

10) **Guided Freewrite:** Write two well-crafted sentences about a subject model, which your teacher will select for you. Each sentence must be a coordinating cumulative sentence. The sentences must each include *at least* one metaphor and one instance of personification (they may overlap), and must incorporate parallelism.

11) **Guided Freewrite:** Write two well-crafted sentences about a subject model, which your teacher will select for you. Each sentence must be a subordinating cumulative sentence. The sentences must each include *at least* one simile and one instance of alliteration (they may overlap), and must incorporate parallelism in the form of balanced words, phrases, or concepts.

12) **Guided Freewrite:** Write two well-crafted sentences about a subject model, which your teacher will select for you. At least one sentence must be a subordinating cumulative sentence. The sentences must each include *at least* two metaphors and one instance of personification (they may overlap), and must incorporate parallelism in the form of serial construction. The serial construction must utilize either anaphora or epistrophe.



## March: The Periodic Sentence

i) Explanation: A periodic sentence is “a sentence that expresses the main idea at the end.”<sup>35</sup>

Periodic sentences, so called because the point is made near the period, are ideal for expressing very precise thoughts that require some development or lead-up. Periodic sentences lack the meandering, flowing quality usually possessed by cumulative sentences. On the contrary, writing a good periodic sentence, especially one whose premises and details work towards a logical conclusion to be reached at or near the sentence’s end, requires very careful forethought on the writer’s part. Of course all writing should involve careful craftsmanship, but since the periodic sentence arrives at a particular conclusion or leads to a particular end, the order of the preceding elements within the sentence, and their relationship to the end, is necessarily more fixed and exact than in a cumulative or “loose” sentence. Periodic sentences are usually longish, but their quality of suspending their point until the end seems to be a more definitional than length *per se*.

Here are several examples of periodic sentences, or, in the first two cases, of short sentences with periodic syntax:

“The central distinction in Aristotelian metaphysics, without which there can be no such system, is that between form and matter.”<sup>36</sup>

In the last week of summer, when he was scrambling to finish his reading list, Tommy found the magic door.

Because it uses common descent to explain the taxonomical hierarchy, while at the same time using the taxonomical hierarchy as proof of common descent, the argument seems circular.

“Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially whenever my hypos get such an upper hand of me, that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people’s hats off—then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can.” (Moby Dick)

“Whoever exalts race, or the people, or the State, or a particular form of State, or the depositories of power, or any other fundamental value of the human community – however necessary and honorable be their function in worldly things – whoever raises these notions above their standard value and divinizes them to an idolatrous level, distorts and perverts an order of the world planned and created by God; he is far from the true faith in God and from the concept of life which that faith upholds.”<sup>37</sup>

Periodic syntax or periodic style means a style dominated by the kinds of sentences that delay their points until the end. The terms “periodic” and “cumulative” are ultimately stylistic terms, which means that they can probably not be used to indicate a perfect demarcation. The difference between a periodic sentence and a cumulative sentence is not necessarily as clear cut as the difference between a declarative and an interrogative sentence—it is not absolute. Some short sentences, like the first one listed above, have a periodic feel and structure, but lack all of the detail and development that is typically associated with a periodic sentence. On the other hand, left-branching cumulatives can have a periodic style or feel, and arguably *are* periodic sentences

when they reach a certain degree of precision. Nevertheless, there are some general differences, which are considered below.

ii) Contrast with left-branching cumulatives: Both left-branching cumulative sentences and periodic sentences can be used to build towards a conclusion, to create suspense, or to otherwise suspend their main point until the end of the sentence. They look and feel quite similar. Landon argues that they differ only by degree, since a sufficiently suspensive left-branching cumulative would actually be a periodic sentence<sup>38</sup>. The author disagrees, because pure cumulative sentences use free modifiers, whereas sentences termed periodic almost never do. But the point is somewhat academic. The important thing is that one can achieve a periodic effect with a well-designed left-branching cumulative, especially if it is a subordinating cumulative, with its additional capacity for refinement. The latter might even be preferable, since it partakes of both sentence styles at once, and has some of the strengths of both.

iii) Optimal uses and limitations: Nothing delivers a meticulously reasoned statement as well as well as a carefully designed periodic sentence. Any good written work of a logical, critical, or argumentative nature will contain periodic sentences. Along with balanced syntax—syntax that utilizes parallelism between groups of two words, phrases, clauses, images, or ideas—periodic syntax has a particularly authoritative feel. These are not the sentences of spontaneous, unguarded reaction to a flurry of images, as might be appropriate in a more exploratory, narrative, or sentimental context. On the contrary, a periodic sentence is the product of a mind that had observed, pondered, and synthesized the material, placing it in precisely that order whereby it might be received by another rational mind. Periodic sentences mean processed thought.

On the other hand, if the purpose of writing is to say well what is true, to accurately capture reality and reflect it back to the reader, then good writing must include a lot more than these master thoughts, as important as they are. A piece of writing in which most of the sentences were periodic, unless it was a persuasive, or highly technical piece, would likely be too officious or bombastic. It would likely feel mechanical or authoritarian. Even writings as dense and authoritative as Aristotle's contain many simple observations, asides, and commonsensical assertions. We have already noted several times in this document that modern writers have been too quick to favor precision and to be impatient with the longwindedness of 19th century English writers. Nevertheless, in this author's opinion, one of the great advances of the most recent literature and poetry has been precisely this desire to be *real*, to achieve naturalness (on account of which there is an overreaction against the supposed artificiality of the older style). Modern writers and poets excel at painting a quick picture, drawing a quick scene, with a few, stunning, impressionistic strokes. A complete writer strives to do both things well; to capture the raw essence of a thing parsimoniously, and yet to have the capacity to expansively reflect, and finally to arrive at conclusions through this reflection. To achieve balance, then, balance periodic sentences with other kinds of sentences.

iv) Active vs. Passive Voice: The instructor must teach his young writers the difference between the active and the passive voice, as well as the basic principles denoting their proper uses. Unfortunately, the widely read passage in *The Elements of Style* on active and passive voice is confused, or at least confusing, because it seems to give erroneous examples of the passive voice. Since this book is not a critique of Strunk & White's justly famous work, we will confine ourselves to properly identifying the active and passive voices, and, following

Geoffrey Pullum's<sup>39</sup> comments in his widely read article critiquing *Elements*, to further distinguishing between the *grammatically* active and passive and what could be called the semantically active and passive voices.

First, the grammatical: **A clause is in the active voice when its grammatical subject performs the action expressed by the verb, (as opposed to its subject being the recipient of the action expressed by the verb.)** Let the reader note, this means it is impossible to speak of a clause being passive unless there is first an action and a subject performing the action in the sentence.

This sentence is in the active voice: Michael Smith told a story.

These sentences are in the passive voice: A story was told. *or* A story was told by Michael Smith.

The first sentence is active because the *teller* is named as the subject of the clause.

The second and third sentences are passive because *story*, the subject, does not perform the action, but receives the action. This is a passive clause where no agent is named. The second passive sentence has a named agent, but 'Michael Smith' is the object of a preposition, so he can't be the subject. Please note: The grammatically passive status of the second sentences *does not* depend on context—we don't even have to know about a Michael Smith; it depends entirely on the grammatical fact that *story* is not performing any action in the sentence.

Pullum alleges in his article that a whopping three out Strunk & White's four examples of the passive voice are wrong. For example, S & W seem to construe as passive a sentence very similar to the following: "The boy is becoming injured." However, to refer to the same article, "becoming" is not an action verb, and "injured" (or "impaired" in the original) is an adjective here, so the sentence *cannot* be active or passive. One cannot tell active voice from passive voice just by the sound or by the presence of a being verb; they must be distinguished grammatically, which presupposes a good grasp of grammar. Upon rereading the section in *Elements*, however, it is difficult to tell if S & W intend to make the claim that their four examples are specifically passive voice, or just that they are weak sentences. The section is at least confusingly written, and writing teachers should be aware of its problematic examples.

Now, for the semantic dimension: **Some sentences are grammatically active but semantically resemble the passive voice, because the subject to which they attribute the action seems inadequate.** To take an example from the author's classroom, a student once explained the mess around his desk by claiming, "[His] desk exploded!" Besides being a good example of hyperbole, this sentence is an excellent example of what we will call the *suspect subject*. Like the politician who explains away a scandal using the grammatically passive construction, "Mistakes were made", this student diverted blame from himself by claiming his desk was the agent responsible for the mess. But the desk, lacking the necessary incendiary qualities, could not have been the cause of the strewn papers and broken pencil parts that formed a sort of moat around it. Nevertheless, the clause was grammatically active. Had a bomb really gone off in his desk, he would have been stylistically justified in saying, "My desk exploded." When a bomb explodes there is no semantic passivity in saying so; bombs do that sort of thing. While *The Elements* enjoins its readers to "Use the active voice", the authors correctly note that the passive voice has its place.

Rather than making the passive voice a sort of last resort, to be used when the active voice just won't work, the author will follow Strunk and White's injunction to "Put statements in positive form" in order to provide students with a solid rule to follow regarding its use. **The passive voice should be used whenever context makes it necessary for the subject to receive action.** There are four basic situations when this arises: 1) The agent isn't known. Take the sentence: "The crown jewels had been stolen." Who stole them? We don't

know, so the clause is passive. 2) The subject is assumed to be unimportant. Science papers are written this way, on the assumption that greater objectivity is achieved by depersonalizing the action. One might find the clause, “the compound was synthesized at such and such a pressure and temperature.” It doesn’t tell us Dr. Jack Smith was in charge of that particular task. 3) The subject is being deliberately hidden. Either for politeness sake, or, perhaps, to obscure the source of action (i.e. shift blame). Saying “You are being let go”, “You will be charged a \$300 fee”, or “Mistakes were made”, instead of saying “We will let you go,” or “Our company will charge you a \$300 fee”, or “We made mistakes”. 4) The writer wishes to emphasize the subject as the receiver of action. “The school has been receiving calls nonstop all day long.” A related situation, which might arise in a literary context, would be the use of the passive voice to deliberately imply the subject is a passive person, a perpetual victim, or otherwise weak. One can imagine a story opening “The rain was falling hard, and Bill Glum, who worked in Acquisitions, had been rained on all morning.”

To sum up then, the grammatically active and passive voice are distinct from semantically active and passive impressions. The former is entirely a question of grammar, and the latter depends upon meanings of words and on context (e.g. bombs explode; desks usually don’t). Writers can tighten up many clauses by ensuring that the subject performs the action, but context sometimes demands the passive voice. In fact, the meaning of the words in a sentence, and those of the surrounding sentences, as well as the author’s intentions and the needs of his audience *all* form the context that determines whether a particular situation calls for a named subject to act, or to receive action. Ultimately, the writer can resolve the question of which is appropriate in a given context by asking himself the following three questions (which harken back to October’s lesson): 1) What am I intending to say? 2) What *should* I be intending to say? 3) To whom am I saying it? The answers cannot be boiled down to a simple, mechanical rule.

v) Eliminate whatever detracts from or overwhelms meaning: “Omit needless words,” commands *Elements*, which is very good advice if you are talking about the sort of constructions those authors reject. Every writing student should be familiar with that kind of wordiness, and strive to eliminate it from his own prose. On the other hand, this injunction can be easily confused with the very kind of literary reductionism to which this author has already referred in Part 1. One sees its manifestation in the attitude that truth is found by “boiling things down”, “cutting out the fat”, and so on. It is vivisection, applied to literature, and the result is bland, two-dimensional prose that confuses economy with oversimplification. A writer should strive for directness and parsimony, but he should first strive to capture and deliver truth, beauty, and goodness. To the author it seems that the former is at the service of the latter three. Conceding for the sake of argument that the extremely reduced style preferred by the authors of *Elements* is better than the verbose, wordy, loose, and meandering prose one sometimes encounters, a better choice still is a natural style. By a natural style, the author means prose that is focused and clear, but also correspondent to the actual contours of reality, and the needs of the human ear. Beauty should not be put in an artificial tension with clarity, and certain authors’ stylistic preferences should not be received as if they enjoyed equal authority with grammatical rules.

vi) Rhetoric: Synecdoche

## Exercises

1) **Base Clause:** The student learned a great deal during the cold month. [CSB]

- i) Change subject
- ii) Modify object of preposition
- iii) Change verb (find an unexpected and interesting but still accurate verb that could mean “learned”)
- iv) Change direct object
- v) Add two modifying phrases to make it a coordinating cumulative.

Finishing Touches:

2) **Base Clause:** The writer tapped at his keyboard, trying to get his ideas on paper. [ISB]

- i) Modify subject
- ii) Change verb
- ii) Add one or two modifying phrases to make it cumulative. Use a simile in one.
- iii) With another modifying phrase one level down, make it a subordinating cumulative.

Finishing Touches:

3) **Base Clause:** The winter would not go away. [ISB]

- i) Modify subject
- ii) Change entire phrase “would not go away” (personify the winter’s action)
- iii) Add two modifying phrases to make it cumulative. (Use a metaphor in each)
- iv) With another modifying phrase one level down, make it a subordinating cumulative. Now incorporate alliteration.

Finishing Touches:

4) **Periodic Sentence:** For each of the groups below, put the elements in the order that is most logical or which creates the most suspense in order to arrive at either a conclusion or a high point at the end. Write these as periodic sentences, feeling free to make changes of tense or number, and to add or subtract commas, conjunctions and pronouns as grammatically necessary.

Group 1: we must dig a well, the children are thirsty, this drought won’t end, promised support from the state has not come, our plants are dying.

Sentence:

Group 2: passing through a strait near the tip of South America, voyaging on behalf of Spain, though he was Portuguese, only to die in the Philippines, crossing Pacific Ocean, almost dying of starvation, Magellan sailed

Sentence:

Group 3: law requires a common authority, no person can provide physically or spiritually for all that he needs to thrive, persons come to be within families, villages and towns are composed of families, society requires a common law, it is necessary for human thriving that people live in a state, common authority requires a common ruler, neither a town nor a village is sufficient unto itself

Sentence:

5) Below are several examples of synecdoche. Invent, or produce from memory, seven more examples.

- i) All *hands* on deck!
- ii) Sir Galahad commanded thirty *swords*.
- iii) The man rolled down his window to talk to the intimidating *brimmed hat with a badge*.
- iv)
- v)
- vi)
- vii)
- viii)
- ix)
- x)

6) Carefully study the extended metaphor below, and produce your own. Notice that extended metaphor works particularly well because the two things are analogous; they are not only like each other, but like each other in many of the same ways.

“Nature’s Grand Hotel has its Season, like the others. As the guests one by one pack, pay, and depart, and the seats at the *table-d’-hote* shrink pitifully at each succeeding meal; as suites of rooms are closed, carpets taken up, and waiters sent away; those boarders who are staying on, *en pension*, until next year’s full reopening, cannot help being somewhat affected by all these flittings and farewells, this eager discussion of plans, routes, and fresh quarters, this daily shrinkage in the stream of comradeship.”<sup>40</sup>

Write Your Own:

7) **Base Clause:** “On either side and in front wide fens and mires now lay, stretching away southward and eastward into the dim half-light.”<sup>41</sup>[IAS]

- i)
- ii)
- iii)
- iv)

8) **Use the Active Voice:** Rewrite each of the following sentences so the subject performs, rather than receives the verb’s action. If no agent is specified, then for the purposes of this exercise, you should invent one. (Example: “The pizza was eaten” becomes “Bill ate the pizza.”) You may also need to drop an extraneous word.

- i) Poor little Sarah was bitten by a Tiger.  
i)
- ii) A great deal of thought went on Mark’s part went into the this room’s design.  
ii)
- iii) He was told by his landlord that he only had fifteen days to move out.  
iii)
- iv) Congressman Milton was called out on the House floor for his deviations from the truth.  
iv)
- v) People are stung to death by bees every year.  
v)



9) **The Suspect Subject:** Each of the sentences below has at least one clause in the active voice, but in one or more clauses there is a problem with the subject performing the action. Read the sentence carefully and thoughtfully, and then write a concise sentence in the active voice explaining what is wrong with the original sentence.

i) Mom! We were throwing the ball around outside, and the downstairs window shattered.”

ii) Mr. Smith! There was a stick fight in the woods, and my stick hit Billy in the face and accidentally cut him!

iii) Some have said that the congressman’s tax policy would be too easy on the rich.

iv) But experts are saying that the senator’s bill would render America defenseless.

10) **Guided Freewrite:** Write two well-crafted sentences about a subject or concept, which your teacher will select for you. One sentence must be a coordinating cumulative sentence, and the other a periodic sentence. One of the sentences must use two balanced metaphors, and both must incorporate parallelism of words, phrases, or concepts.

11) **Guided Freewrite:** Write two well-crafted sentences about a subject or concept, which your teacher will select for you. One must be a subordinating cumulative sentence, and the other periodic. The sentences must each incorporate parallelism in the form of balanced words, phrases, or concepts.

12) **Guided Freewrite:** Write two well-crafted sentences about a subject or concept, which your teacher will select for you. Both must be periodic. Between the two sentences, there must be at least two analogies, one instance of synecdoche, and the sentences must incorporate parallelism in the form of a serial (balance of three). The serial must utilize either anaphora or epistrophe.



## April: Writing Natural Paragraphs

i) The nature of order in paragraphs vs. that of sentences: Both paragraphs and sentences are groups of words united by a common purpose. Each has a principle of unity, a discernible end or purpose that sets its limits. Each is aiming at a kind of completeness. Each sentence is a complete thought, composed of parts that are not complete thoughts, whereas each paragraph is a compound thought composed of parts that *are* complete thoughts. It is interesting to note that the unity in a sentence is naturally tighter than that in a paragraph, while, paradoxically, the unity of a paragraph is fuller, and in that sense more complete, than the unity of a sentence. The challenge of writing good paragraphs lies in placing discrete, semi-autonomous sentences in such a relation to each other that together they form one tight whole, greater than the parts, and yet resultant from them.

ii) Paragraph Study: Getting from here to there: Even with the best planning, the degree of unity that is really desirable in paragraphs, and among them as parts of a whole work can only be fully achieved in revision. Only after the writer has done the painstaking work of building up a work paragraph by paragraph, and of building each paragraph sentence by sentence, can he catch a full glimpse how it all goes together. He must then tweak this and change that, rephrase this and delete that, until the real structure can be revealed. That work is made much easier, however, if at each level the writer builds with a plan that makes unity a natural consequence of the very process of writing. However, before illustrating several methods for rendering unity natural and easy, let's take a careful look at how a paragraph works.

The key to paragraph structure is that paragraphs always have a beginning and an end, even if the end is only a transition sentence. A paragraph should never be a mere aggregate of five to seven sentences; if so, it is not a proper paragraph. When students are learning to properly write paragraphs, they ought to study paragraphs specifically as paragraphs. Any kind of well-written work, whether it be expository, descriptive, persuasive, or narrative, provides numerous opportunities to study what a paragraph done correctly looks like.

Suppose one is studying a descriptive paragraph about a whaling boat in which the entire description is contained within one paragraph; the teacher can very effectively proceed with the students by asking: 1) How many sentences are in this paragraph? 2) What did the author accomplish, overall, in the paragraph? 3) What does the first sentence establish? 4) What does the second sentence establish, the third, and so on. By studying the descriptive paragraph this way, with a fine-tooth comb, the student learns that it has a deliberate, comprehensible structure that is both accessible and imitable. The same can be done in a narrative paragraph, where a character begins in one place or in one psychological state, and ends in another, or in a persuasive paragraph, where the author begins with assertions, or facts, or premises, and ends with a further implication or a conclusion. The basic approach to paragraph study is always the same: let us see just how this talented author was able to get from here to there.

iii) Getting the rhythm of a paragraph: In fact, as poet Josephine Miles<sup>42</sup> and others have noted, in writing getting from here to there is a matter of taking steps. When a writer keeps constantly in mind that he is headed somewhere, and when he realizes that every sentence he puts down is either a step toward or away from his ultimate destination, that writer works with a much greater clarity, economy and intrinsic order than if he were to write down thoughts as they came to him. The more he gets used to writing in deliberate steps, the better he becomes at discerning what steps to take, and when. A natural unity grows "from the sentence up", until it forms mostly unified paragraphs, whose internal order is not so much a consequence of thinking the whole thing out in every detail ahead of time, as it is the consequence of putting like with like at every small step. With

practice, the same kind of rough unity and natural progression obtains stepwise from paragraph to paragraph, so that the later act of revision becomes more a matter of trimming an already functional garden, than of trying to impose civilization on a swampy jungle of facts, threads, and assertions.

In addition to teaching the paragraph as a series of related steps and to studying other writers' well-written paragraphs, the author recommends two more helpful techniques: paragraph rewrites, and writing natural progressions. A paragraph rewrite, which is described in Part 1, involves studying a paragraph from one's literature text and carefully attempting to rewrite it as well as the original author. The idea is to use the author's structure and progression, imitating his *strategies* very closely, and trying to arrive at the same end, but using one's own substance. For example, if the author used a balanced sentence with two metaphors, the student should do the same. He is trying to achieve the same overall meaning, but he cannot use the same images. This is learning by imitation, but it will be necessary to speak to the students about plagiarism (which is stealing substance, not imitating strategies.) Writing natural progressions, which I've also found to be very helpful, means choosing an object or an event with a built-in structure of three parts—beginning, middle, and end—and having the students write one sentence for each part (or up to three for the middle section), resulting in a whole paragraph with a built-in unity. For example, one can write a paragraph about sledding down a hill in which the first sentence sets the scene at the top of the hill, the middle sentence(s) narrate the trip down, and the last sentence arrives at the bottom. This very effectively impresses on students the *feel* of a proper paragraph. See the instructions in the exercises below, as well as further developments on this point in the last chapter.

iv) Rhetoric: Litotes

## Exercises

1) **Base Clause:** The winter is ending and the spring is beginning.[ISB]

- i) Add an interjection
- ii) Modify subjects of both clauses
- iii) Change verbs to personify but don't change essential meaning
- iv) Modify the verbs
- v) Add two modifying phrases to make it a coordinating cumulative

Finishing Touches:

2) **Base Clause:** The flowers of the redbud tree are among the first to emerge, and they disappear earlier than the others. [ISB]

- i) Improved the sentence's phrasing so it has a pleasant, balanced structure
- ii) Improve one or both verbs
- iii) Add one or two modifying phrases to make it cumulative. (Use a simile in one, set in contrast with a simile in the other.)

Finishing Touches:

3) **Base Clause:** Birds were heard singing in the trees. [ISB]

- i) Use the active voice
- ii) Make it a balanced sentence with two clauses, each of which specifies a particular bird in a particular tree.
- iii) Modify each clause with a separate subordinate phrase. The phrases should both modify the same relative element (the bark of each tree, the feathers of each bird, etc).

Finishing Touches:

4) **Periodic Sentence:** For each of the groups below, put the elements in the order that is most logical or which creates the most suspense in order to arrive at either a conclusion or a high point at the end. Write these as periodic sentences, feeling free to make changes of tense or number, and to add or subtract commas, conjunctions and pronouns as grammatically necessary.

Group 1: behind the leather couch, for what the Easter Bunny had left them, even inside the dryer, in every cabinet, the children looked, and the loveseat, with a joyful, frantic energy

Sentence:

Group 2: captured by goblins, he saved the day in the end, though he was not very adventurous, rescued his friends from the wood elves' dungeon, and was smaller than a dwarf, he was not the one who slayed the dragon

Sentence:

Group 3: or who can shout the loudest, since athletes have difficulty being objective when they're involved in a play, so that players and coaches are free to focus on the game, to ensure that rules actually count, any important game must have a referee, and that it's not a matter of who has the bigger players

Sentence:

5) Below are two examples of Litotes. Invent, or produce three more examples from memory.

- i) Well Bob, my father has his PHD in philosophy from Fordham, so I hope you'll concede he's not completely uneducated.
- ii) With its transparent blue waters, and white sands, the tropical beach wasn't at all unpleasant.
- iii)
- iv)
- v)

6) Carefully study the narrative paragraph below, paying attention to the way the narrative progresses stepwise from the first sentence to the last. Notice how each sentence advances the action. Answer the questions below, and then, following the instructions, imitate the author's technique to produce your own well-crafted paragraph.

“He looked at the ‘black emperors’ for a long time, and enjoyed the feel of the breeze in his hair and on his face; but at length the cries of the dwarves, who were now simply stamping with impatience below, reminded him of his real business. It was no good. Gaze as he might, he could see no end to the trees and the leaves in any direction. His heart, that had been lightened by the sight of the sun and the feel of the wind, sank back into his toes: there was no food to go back to down below.”<sup>43</sup>

Questions: (Answer these as concisely as possible)

- i) What do we know learn about the viewpoint character's external circumstances by the end of the paragraph?
- ii) What do we learn about the viewpoint character's internal circumstances by the end of the paragraph?
- iii) How does the viewpoint character's perspective change from the beginning of the first sentence to the end of the last sentence?
- iv) How does the viewpoint character's perspective change from the beginning of the first sentence to the end of the first sentence?
- v) How does the author convey a sense of emotional tension in the scene?
- vi) How does the author emphasize the contrast between the viewpoint character's initial sentiments and his last sentiments?
- vii) The first sentence is relatively long, while the second is quite short. How is a reader affected emotionally by this long-short juxtaposition?

Write Your Own: A band of pirates has finally arrived at the treasure's alleged location, and one young man has jumped down into hole and has been furiously digging in the sand for several minutes. Write a narrative paragraph mirroring the one above that begins with the young pirate's furious digging and ends with a moment of discovery, either of the treasure, or of its absence.

7) Carefully study the masterful descriptive paragraph below, paying attention to the way the author lays in details, refines those details, and creates patterns of balance within and among the sentences. Notice how each sentence adds more texture, so that the combined effect is entrancing. Answer the questions below, and then, following the instructions, imitate the author's technique to produce your own well-crafted paragraph.

“The floor was well-worn red brick, and on the wide hearth burnt a fire of logs, between attractive chimney-corners tucked away in the wall, well out of any suspicion of draught. A couple of high-backed settles, facing each other on either side of the fire, gave further sitting accommodation for the socially disposed. In the middle of the room stood a long table of plain boards placed on trestles, with benches down each side. At one end of it, where an arm-chair stood pushed back, were spread the remains of the Badger's plain but ample supper. Rows of spotless plates winked from the shelves of the dresser at the far end of the room, and from the rafters overhead hung hams, bundles of dried herbs, nets of onions, and baskets of eggs. It seemed a place where heroes could fitly feast after victory, where weary harvesters could line up in scores along the table and keep their Harvest Home with mirth and song, or where two or three friends of simple tastes could sit about as they pleased and eat and smoke and talk in comfort and contentment. The ruddy brick floor smiled up at the smoky ceiling; the oaken settles, shiny with long wear, exchanged cheerful glances with each other; plates on the dresser grinned at pots on the shelf, and the merry firelight flickered and played over everything without distinction.”<sup>44</sup>

Questions: (Answer these as concisely as possible)

- i) Descriptive paragraphs can be quite long, since their function is to colorfully set the stage for the subsequent action. How many sentences compose this paragraph?
- ii) List several examples of personification from the paragraph.
- iii) The paragraph may seem extremely complicated and “random” at first, but read it through again carefully and notice that each sentence describes a different aspect of the room. Very briefly explain what basic category or categories of detail are described in each sentence.
- iv) Looking at their subject matter, explain how the third sentence naturally leads to the fourth, and the fourth to the fifth.
- v) Read the first sentence, and then read the last sentence. Which elements are in balance?

Write Your Own: Using a classroom, section of woods, or any other self-contained physical setting for a model, construct a detailed descriptive paragraph. Make sure your paragraph does not feel like a “random” pile of facts, or a shopping list of information. Instead, like the author above, make every sentence do a particular job, creating a total picture that hits the reader in an orderly manner. Imitate the author's stepwise progression, and the way he balances the first and last sentences, reinforcing the whole image.

8) Carefully study the author's summary of a philosopher's argument, paying attention to the way the argument progresses stepwise from the first sentence to the last. To make an argument an author asserts (or puts forward as true) certain claims, then tries to show what follows (what can be logically inferred or deduced from) those claims. He may also cite facts, and may call upon dependable authorities for support. Besides drawing conclusions from facts or truths that are available to or accepted by both parties to the argument, arguers must also respond to best arguments against their side. However, developing these different elements requires multiple paragraphs, and any single paragraph can only be devoted to one of these elements. Answer the questions below, and then carefully follow the instructions to construct your own.

“The Greek philosopher Parmenides (c. 515-450 B.C.) notoriously held that change is impossible. For a being could change only if caused to do so by something other than it. But the only thing other than being is non-being, and non-being, since it is just nothing, cannot cause anything. Hence, though the senses and common sense tell us that change occurs all the time, the intellect, in Parmenides view, reveals to us that they are flatly mistaken.”<sup>45</sup>

Questions: (Answer these as concisely as possible.)

i) The author only requires four sentences to explain Parmenides argument; this is a good example of concision/verbosity. (Circle one)

ii) The logical parts of an argument are called premises. What follows from premises is called the conclusion. For example, the following argument has two premises and one conclusion: “All men are mortal (P1); Socrates is a man (P2); Therefore, Socrates is mortal (Conclusion). What is the conclusion of Parmenides argument?

iii) What are the premises of Parmenides argument?

iv) Beside the conclusion contradicting all experience, what do you think is actually wrong with the argument?

Write Your Own: Your friend, Zeek the Geek, who thinks he knows everything, doesn't believe that squares are parallelograms. He says, “Names are signs we use to refer to things. If squares were parallelograms, they would be called parallelograms, not squares. But every time a teacher says ‘parallelogram’, he draws a picture of one of those four-sided slanty things that looks like my Dad's slide-rule. Therefore, squares are not parallelograms.” Using what you've learned in Math class, construct an argument in one paragraph proving that squares are parallelograms. Write your clear, concise sentences in the active voice.



9) **Persuasive Paragraph Continued:** Your friend, Zeek the Geek, thinks he knows everything, but he won't concede (acknowledge) that whales aren't fish. He argues, "As all intelligent people know, fish are creatures that live underwater. Fish have tails, with which they propel themselves, fins, with which they slice through water, and streamlined bodies designed for underwater life. Whales also have all those features. They are also called "fish" by some of the most ancient authorities, as Herman Melville notes in *Moby Dick*. Until relatively recently, in fact, the word "fish" was used for all creatures bearing that distinctive, ellipsoid, pisciform body, and since we received the word from people who invented it, and since they used the word to refer both to the creatures we call fish and to the creatures we call whales, and since words should be used properly according to their intended meaning, we all ought to admit that whales are fish."

Questions: (Answer these as concisely as possible.)

i) What strikes you as the most persuasive part of his argument?

ii) Which part strikes you as the least persuasive?

iii) What is (or seems to be) wrong with the least persuasive part of the argument?

Write Your Own: Using what you've learned about mammals and fish from Natural History class, as well as your logic and common sense about the meanings and purposes of words, write a paragraph that

- 1) acknowledges the apparent strength of, yet refutes (denies or disproves), the strongest part of his argument,
- 2) but proves that whales are mammals, and not fish. You may use two paragraphs, if necessary, but be concise.

10) **Natural Progression:** Write a paragraph about the sledding down a hill. Use the first sentence to establish the scene at the top of the hill, the middle sentences to narrate the ride down, and the last sentence to end the action at the bottom, and close out the scene.

11) **Natural Progression:** Write a paragraph about the growth of a tree, from acorn to oak. Use the first sentence to establish its planting in the ground, the middle sentences to narrate the stages of growth, and the last sentence to describe its final state.

12) **Guided Freewrite:** In one or two paragraphs, argue for the truth of something you know about and care about. It could be something very obvious, like, "My parents love me," or it could be an opinion of which you are personally convinced, such as, "There will be at least some dogs in heaven." Either way, you must clearly state your premises and your facts, you must clearly use reason to connect those things to a conclusion, and that conclusion must be clearly stated. Make sure you move from the known to the unknown by using facts or premises which any reasonable person would have to admit, and then draw out the conclusion that a reasonable person would have to admit *after you show the connections*. Remember, your job as a writer is mostly to *show*, not tell; to illustrate, not simply assert.



## May-June: Seeing the Whole Picture: Writing from the Sentence Up

i) Sentences as steps in a paragraph; paragraphs as steps in a work: As already noted, each sentence in a paragraph should be going somewhere or doing something specific. Paragraphs are not lists of sentences, just as sentences are not lists of propositions. Granting that the unity of a paragraph can be somewhat loose, there must be some reason those sentences are grouped together. Each sentence must be related to and a part of the “big picture” of the paragraph—you might call this being vertically oriented. Moreover, the sentences within the paragraph should also be written, or revised, so that they anticipate, balance, emphasize, or otherwise fit nicely with their neighbor sentences—you might call this being horizontally oriented. When a reader finishes a paragraph, it should seem to him that he has arrived somewhere. If at any point the reader feels as if he is collecting the writer’s sentences and “lugging them around”, the writer has probably failed. As a writer never deceive yourself, and as a reader, never be deceived: if writing is consistently obtuse and difficult for a reader in its *intended audience* to follow, *this is the writer’s fault*. Good writers are often able to make even the most difficult abstractions clear to a reasonably intelligent reader in their target audience, provided the latter is making a reasonable effort to engage. Obviously, readers should sometimes have to struggle, but the struggle should be a consequence of the depth of the subject matter, not a lack of clarity in the writing.

To repeat ourselves, paragraphs are also steps. To the writer, they are the steps he is taking from the opening of his thought, to its closing. For the reader, they are the steps he is climbing, from the bottom of an unknown tower in an unknown land, to its glorious pinnacle, from which every previous step can be seen in miniature, and from whose height the entire landscape is clearly perceived at last. The climber does not need to go back and study each step on the stairway, because he has already arrived at the high platform. At the same time, if he should wish to examine any point, he will see it all the more clearly for what it is and what it does, because now he sees it from the perspective of the whole.

ii) From the organism to the cells; from the cells to the organism:

“Writing means revising!” You’ll find that admonition, or another just like it, in nearly every writing book on the shelves. Writing proceeds by steps, but excellence in writing transcends those steps. In a truly exceptional written work the whole is not only composed of the parts; it subsumes them. In great writing the words, sentences and paragraphs, which must necessarily be laid down sequentially, linearly, temporally, and individually lead to the realization of a whole that is more than a consequence of the parts; it is their cause. Just as the finished tower was the very final form that motivated all the trips to the quarry, all the laying of bricks and mortar and so on, so the finished product in writing is the whole structure, which, though it came about after the process, was always there. As a body is built cell-by-cell, and limb-by-limb according to the plan of a Form that somehow both precedes it and results from it, a finished piece of writing is both the cause and the effect of the writing process. How can this be? How can the motion of words be like the immanent motion of an animate being? That is the magic of writing—the very thing that makes it so fun! It starts in the process, but comes to fruition through revision.

Revision is the second half of writing, and it is as important as the first. Writing that is not revised can sometimes be adequate, especially if it is very carefully and painstakingly crafted, but one cannot expect it to be excellent. To revise means to do “from the top down”, what one has just done “from the bottom up”. It means to fine-tune the parts so that together they achieve the whole whose partial form has already been suggested. It is the act of revising that gives a work the polish and unity the writer never could have achieved were he only to work piecemeal from the bottom. Even a very carefully outlined work will need to be adjusted in some places,

and, of course, one has to look at every sentence, and at every paragraph, and at every sentence within every paragraph in terms of the horizontal and vertical dimensions previously described.

A writer might ask himself the following questions: Did I employ parallel structure? Are there sentences or even entire paragraphs that only serve to detract from the whole? Are there ‘pretty things’ that must be weeded out because they harm the structure? Are there any pleasant asides that should be left in, because they give a certain color, naturalness and flow to the work? Are there any ugly phrasings? Any less-than-perfect analogies? Did I use the passive voice where the active was preferable, or vice versa? What about that word I settled on, knowing it wasn’t quite right? Now is the time to track down the exact word. Did I vary my sentence length? In a work of fiction there may be symbols or themes that spontaneously emerge in the writing; did I draw them out? Even a work of nonfiction, when seen as a whole, may cry out for certain additions the author had never intended.

iii) The five-paragraph essay—even a robot can write one!

The five-paragraph essay is currently the most well known and widely taught standard form of the essay. Mastering this form is essential both for writing and properly reading articles, reports, and test essays. This form’s primary strength is its obviousness. Writing a successful five-paragraph essay requires no great rhetorical skill, only the ability to follow rules and to reason commensensically. For this reason, a convenient table has been provided below, with instructions and style notes. As always, students benefit greatly by reading and scrutinizing strong examples of this form. That will help them to see what the skeleton below looks like “with meat on its bones.”

The five paragraph structure is to essay writing what the periodic or cumulative forms are to sentence writing: a ready-made template the structure of which both suggests and helps to produce a working piece of writing. Its structure is extremely useful for imbuing students with a sense of the logic of an argument and a sense of particular standards in writing. Knowing what is expected in each paragraph, and at each section within each paragraph can and should give the student a lot of confidence that he can write a passable essay, if only he will do his research, be logical, and follow the rubric religiously. Moreover, the student who gains proficiency with the five paragraph essay, suspecting that writing is not as mysterious or impossible as it once seemed, may eventually gain the confidence to delve more deeply into the Craft. Finally, it is extremely useful to have a culturally accepted and widely used norm for essay writing.

Nevertheless, the writing instructor should resist the current tendency in schools to reduce writing instruction to teaching to the five-paragraph essay for the test-taking purposes. This form, which is intended as a convenient minimum standard, should not be seen as the goal of grammar school and high school writing instruction. The problem with minimum standards is that they easily reduce standards to the minimum. If one wishes to uphold a basic standard of decency, he ought instead to aim for the heights. The five paragraph essay, because it so schematic and ready-made, has the unpleasant potential, if made an end in itself, to turn the student from a would-be writer into a literary factory worker, mass producing according to industry standards, which may be adequate, but lack the mark of craft. Yet it is a sign of the times that this “industry standard” is now seen as the golden ideal, the people having forgotten that they once worshiped in cathedrals and kept time by the most ornate and subtle contrivances. The author contends that the approach advocated in this book will, in the long run produce better writers, writers who can both see and think, writers who are craftsmen, writers who are perfectly capable of operating five-levered machines, when strategically necessary, but whose training and preference permits them to delve for deeper beauties, and to fashion them by a hand, one sentence at a time.



	Essential Components	Style Notes
Introduction	<p>A. Grabber Sentence  B. Thesis or Topic Statement  C. Introduce essential points 1, 2, and 3  (D.) Transition sentence</p>	<p>A. Draw the reader with a single, salient fact, assertion, event, or question, which, though particular, is so typical of the essence of what you will be saying that it seems to say everything in miniature. This is usually a short, pithy sentence, or else a long, ornate, beautiful sentence. It should attract your reader like a perfume.  B. Immediately follow your grabber sentence with a strong, precise sentence in the active voice. This can also switch positions with point C.  C. This can either be one sentence with three subdivisions, or three separate sentences. As already discussed, every paragraph has a single governing idea that could be expressed, without details, in a single sentence or phrase. These sentences or phrases, whose unpacking and exposition constitute the body paragraphs, are what is required here.  (D.) Depending on the needs of the essay, you may require a transition sentence here; but usually the introduction suffices.</p>
Body 1	<p>A. Launch into discussion of essential point 1.  B. Supporting facts and/or arguments.  C. Supporting facts and/or arguments  D. Supporting facts and/or arguments.  E. Mini-conclusion and transition.</p>	<p>A. You don't need to reintroduce what you've already introduced; jump right in with a strong assertion.  B, C, D. This is not a list: each sentences has a distinct purpose in the paragraph, and behaves as if it were conscious of the role the other sentences were playing as well as its own.  E. Something follows from what has just been said, or what has been says suggests a further line of questioning; also, this naturally leads to the next paragraph. This "leading in" is called a transition.</p>
Body 2	Same as above (essential point 2)	Same as above
Body 3	Same as above (essential point 3)	Same as above; the last transition signals the end is near.
Conclusion	<p>A. Restate topic or thesis.  B. Recapitulate argument.  C. Send-off sentence.</p>	<p>A. How much your wording here varies from the intro depends on whether the situation calls for a dry academic tone, or permits a bit of variety. Opt for the latter, if possible. The conclusion follows from the arguments in the body, but it is also anticipated in the thesis statement.  B. Paragraphs are steps, remember? In one or two detailed, but concise sentences, show the macro structure of the argument, explaining how essential points 1, 2, and 3 lead to the conclusion. In a persuasive work, use one sentence to show how 1 leads to 2, and 2 to 3. However, there must be a sentence showing that 1, 2, and 3 lead to the conclusion. The position of points A and B can be switched according to need/taste.  D. The send-off is like the grabber: it zeros in on one particular aspect that is essential to the whole, and leaves the reader with a sense of completeness. He feels as if he has seen the heart of the matter, and even further still.</p>

iv) Rhetoric: Chiasmus

## Exercises

1) **Simplify:** The following sentences are too wordy. Rewrite them capturing the same content in fewer words.

- i) The fact that whales are not fish has been a source of confusion to a number of people.  
i)
- ii) The holiday that has been one of my favorites for my whole life is definitely the Fourth of July.  
ii)
- iii) An impression exists in many people's minds that science can answer any kind of question a person could ask.  
iii)
- iv) This watch has the capacity to run in circumstances in which it is totally submerged in water.  
iv)
- v) In light of the fact that your car's radiator has become too hot, you should pull over.  
v)

2) **Base Clause:** Outside the birds are singing. [ISB]

- i) Modify the verb.
  - ii) Improve the subject.
  - ii) Make this a balanced sentence with a second clause that mirrors, reinforces, or stands in contrast to the first.
- Finishing Touches:

3) **Use the Active Voice:** Correct these sentences, which use the passive voice or contain weak phrasing that hides the subject or otherwise obscures causality.

- i) Some of our obligations were not fulfilled, because the information we received from you was lost.  
i)
- ii) My paper was not turned in on time.  
ii)
- iii) The bus seats were cut open when we were poking them with our knives.  
iii)
- iv) Mr. Wilson, some kids were throwing a ball around the room and your marble bust of Cicero fell on the ground and got shattered!  
iv)
- v) Christianity was made legal when Constantine became emperor.  
v)

4) **Subordinating Cumulative:** Look at the example below to refresh your memory of a subordinating cumulative sentence, and then construct your own using the prompts below.

Example: Michael took his shot, a quick shot, his right knee just grazing the mat, that same shriveled up old three-piece mat where Mark had made a name for himself.

Prompt: A student is writing a report, but his mind is on something else.

Prompt: A shark is circling prey amidst coral reefs.

Prompt: A presidential candidate is giving a speech and talking with his hands.



5) Below are two examples of Chiasmus. Invent, or produce from memory, three more examples.

- i) It's not the size of the dog in the fight, it's the size of the fight in the dog.
- ii) "I think one of his spies would—well, seem fairer and feel fouler, if you understand.'...`I see,' laughed Strider. 'I look foul and feel fair. Is that it?'"<sup>46</sup>
- iii)
- iv)
- v)

6) Carefully study the narrative paragraph below, paying attention to the way the narrative progresses stepwise from the first sentence to the last. Notice how each sentence advances the action. Answer the questions below, and then, following the instructions, imitate the author's technique to produce your own well-crafted paragraph.

"Immediately, though everything else remained as before, dim and dark, the shapes became terribly clear. He was able to see beneath their black wrappings. There were five tall figures: two standing on the lip of the dell, three advancing. In their white faces burned keen and merciless eyes; under their mantles were long grey robes; upon their grey hairs were helms of silver; in their haggard hands were swords of steel. Their eyes fell upon him and pierced him, as they rushed towards him. Desperate, he drew his own sword, and it seemed to him that it flickered red, as if it was a firebrand. Two of the figures halted. The third was taller than the others: his hair was long and gleaming and on his helm was a crown. In one hand he held a long sword, and in the other a knife; both the knife and the hand that held it glowed with a pale light. He sprang forward and bore down on Frodo."<sup>47</sup>

Questions: (Answer these as concisely as possible)

- i) This paragraph has ten sentences, but paragraphs are *supposed* to be five to seven sentences long. Should the author have broken it up into two paragraphs? Why or why not?
- ii) Reread the sentence that begins, "Desperate, he drew his own sword..." What is a difference in meaning between "Desperate, he drew his own sword" and "Desperately he drew his own sword".
- iii) In the same sentence, what is the difference in meaning between saying "it flickered red, as if it was a firebrand" and "it seemed to him that it flickered red, as if it was a firebrand"?
- iv) Read over the last three sentences. Now only read sentences eight and nine. Can you tell the dark rider is going to attack Frodo, even before sentence ten? What is it about those two sentences that clues you in on the imminent attack?
- v) This paragraph is an "action scene" and yet the author works in a lot of physical description. How does the author keep the action moving while bring in all this detail? It's not as easy as it looks!
- vi) How does the author emphasize the contrast between the viewpoint character and his attacker?
- vii) The last sentence is very short compared to the previous sentences. What effect does this convey?

Write Your Own: Two Civil War soldiers have charged up opposite sides of a hill that has steep shoulders and a flat apex. They are ten feet apart, bayonets drawn. Write a paragraph that begins with the moment they see each other and ends when they charge each other. The intervening sentences should build up the tension. Closely imitate the writing strategies on display above, trying to use the same “tricks” to build tension and lay in description while keeping the action moving.

7) Carefully study the paragraph below, answer the questions that follow, and then follow the instructions to craft your own paragraph that imitates the author’s strategies.

“All of the hot-dog stands were boarded up with strips of golden planking, sealing in all the mustard, onion, meat odors of the long, joyful summer. It was like nailing summer into a series of coffins. One by one the places slammed their covers down, padlocked their doors, and the wind came and touched the sand, blowing away all of the million footprints of July and August. It got so that now, in September, there was nothing but the mark of my rubber tennis shoes and Donald and Deleaus Arnold’s feet, down by the water curve.”

Questions: (Answer these as concisely as possible)

i) How would you describe the mood conveyed or inspired by this passage?

ii) Without directly saying, what realities of human existence are suggested by the juxtaposition of words like “golden”, and “joyful”, with words like “coffin”, and “slamming”?

iii) How do you feel about the contrast in the third sentence between the verbs “slammed” and “padlocked” in the first half of the sentence, and the verbs “touched” and “blowing” in the second half? How do the verbs differ, and what do they have in common that justifies putting them in the same sentence?

iv) Compare this short paragraph to the long paragraph from “The Wind in the Willows” in last month’s lesson. Each paints a very vivid picture, but the paragraph above is very short by comparison. Which style do you find more attractive: Grahame’s ornate, sumptuous description of the room with the fireplace, or Bradbury’s quick, deft, striking images? Try to explain why?

Write Your Own: Using the above paragraph as a model, construct a good narrative-descriptive paragraph describing one moment of a neighborhood bike ride on the last day of summer freedom before school begins. Try to capture that feeling in several striking images, as the author above has done. Imitate his strategies, sentence by sentence.

For next five exercises we’ll be building a five paragraph essay, paragraph by paragraph, using the rubric provided on page \_\_\_\_\_. You’ll be writing about your favorite sport. Your audience is someone who knows very little about the sport. To prepare to write this essay, we have to do some brainstorming, by which act you’ll be able to generate the raw material of your essay. After brainstorming, you’ll need to arrange the raw material into three general categories. These categories will be essential points 1, 2, and 3 (see rubric.) From these we’ll generate an outline, and from the outline, the essay. It is essential that the teacher guide his students through each of these exercises, not skipping any steps.

8) Brainstorming: First, take out a sheet of loose leaf paper and at the top write “Brainstorming: Baseball” (or whatever sport is your favorite.) Now fill the front and back of the paper with as many baseball facts as you can recall. You won’t necessarily use them all, but anything is potentially useful. This includes rules, positions, famous players, the layout of the field, traditions, records, etc. Don’t bother to write complete sentences here; words or short phrases will do. Try come up with varied facts. Don’t make it all rules, or all famous players. Anything that pertains to your subject will do at this point.

Now take out another sheet of paper, divide it into five sections using horizontal lines, making the three middle sections the widest. These five sections correspond to your essay’s five paragraphs. Set that sheet aside, and focus once again on your brainstorming sheet. Your next task is to read over all of your brainstorming facts, looking for patterns. Within all that data you will likely find several general categories of facts; for example, famous players, rules of the game, traditions, and so on. After discerning these categories—which will take some time—label your facts according to their appropriate category or categories; some facts will overlap. Next, having discerned at least three distinct categories of facts, and having labeled your data according to said categories, decide upon your three strongest or most complete categories; these should each be expressible in terms of single main idea or essential point, and the same shall provide the subject matter of the corresponding body paragraphs.

Now that you’ve arranged your data by category and have assembled the raw material for each body paragraph, decide upon some principle of order for arranging your paragraphs. Keep in mind that the first paragraph must transition into the second, and the second into the third. For example, you might dedicate the first body paragraph to the rules of the game, followed by a paragraph about famous players with examples that reinforce your first paragraph by noting their famous plays, followed by another paragraph that expounds upon the traditions, customs, and sayings associated with the players from body paragraph 2. The move from one paragraph to another is called the *transition*, and it’s particularly important within the body paragraphs. The last sentences of body paragraphs 1, 2, and (often) 3 must smoothly close out its paragraph *and* point toward the next paragraph. Data that overlaps categories is ideal for transition sentences; by placing it last in one paragraph, you effectively place it (logically) first in the paragraph that follows. Identify possible transition data, and now you’re ready to begin the next lesson.

9) Arrangement: In many ways, the hardest part of writing a good five paragraph essay, arranging the material, is halfway done. Bring back the sheet that you divided into five parts. You’ve already decided upon the general content and the order of your body paragraphs. Your next task is to transfer your information from the labeled and partially organized brainstorming sheet to this new sheet. It’s not a matter of just copying, because you must also decide now upon the order in which these facts should appear *within* each paragraph, and, as we’ve already stressed, everything moves by steps. The facts must be arranged logically or topically within each paragraph; you’re not writing a shopping list! Mentally decide upon the fact order within each paragraph, keeping in mind that you may very well change your mind later when you move to the Drafting stage. For now use your best idea of the preferred order to transfer this information in order from the brainstorming sheet to the partitioned sheet in the appropriate corresponding sections. When you’ve done this for all three body paragraphs, you’ll be ready to work on the intro and conclusion paragraphs.

The material for the intro paragraph comes largely from the three body paragraphs, while the material for the conclusion paragraph comes largely from the intro paragraph, but considered in light of the body paragraphs. To construct the intro paragraph, study the rubric on page 82. You already know what essential

points 1, 2, and 3 will be, since they are merely the essential points of paragraphs 1, 2, and 3, which, as noted in the rubric, can either be expressed in the intro in three separate concise sentences, or in one concise sentence with three balanced elements. The topic or thesis, which comes before the essential points, is merely a concise assertion of the single main idea underlying the three essential points, and that is preceded by the grabber sentence, also described above. The conclusion's structure is likewise indicated above, and is really just the introduction seen in a different aspect, i.e. in light of the information preceding it. Now that you've done all this, outlining will be easier.

10) Outlining: So far you've put all the information in the correct approximate order, but you've not decided upon how to arrange your facts into discrete sentences within each paragraph. By doing this ahead of time, you make the task of writing the essay *much* easier. A good outline is like directions you copy down for yourself before a journey: it doesn't say all the details along your route, but it does show all the details that *you* need to know. Directions combine related information into concise statements, as in, "Make your fourth right at the stop light onto Maple Ct." That statement combines four discrete pieces of information into one sentence, because they all go together. In just the same way, in your outline you'll decide how to group those many discrete facts, upon which you've already attempted to impose a logical order, within a smaller number of concise sentences. You'll then ensure that the sentences are still arranged in a logical way. The example below shows you the beginnings of an outline that uses the rubric on page 82:

- I. Introduction
  - A. Grabber Sentence
  - B. Topic or Thesis Sentence
  - C. (or C., D., and E.) Essential points sentence(s)
  - D. (Transition Sentence; not usually necessary here.)
- II. Body 1 (Rules of the game)
  - A. Field layout and number of players.
  - B. Offense: Batting, Baserunning, Positions
  - C. Defense: Pitching, Fielding, Positions
  - D. Special Situations and Rules
  - E. Transition Sentence (Positions→Famous players at each position)
- III. Body 2 (Famous players and plays at each position)
  - A. etc
  - B. etc
  - C. etc ...

11) Drafting: This is the "writing" stage of writing. Now that the blueprints have been drawn up, and the materials, some pre-finished, others in various stages of preparedness, have been assembled, it's time to actually build the house. By following the order of your well-built outline, your mind will be left perfectly free to carefully craft each sentence, making use of the many strategies and tools you've learned so far. True, it sometimes happens in building construction that the architects demand what cannot be built, or what, upon reflection, is better achieved differently than as planned, but having a definite plan is better, by orders of

magnitude, than going into the business unprepared. The outline, properly seen, is not like a straightjacket forcing you to write in a particular way, but instead, it is like a large backyard trampoline upon which you can perform any number of acrobatic feats—as long as you land within the frame.

Have fun with your first draft, and think earnestly about the kinds of syntax and rhetoric that best achieve your objectives, sentence by sentence. Try to achieve a style that is appropriate to your subject matter, clear, and pleasant to read—a natural style. Were you writing a highly technical piece for a highly technical audience, there would be little place for similes, metaphors, and most other figures of speech. The essay above, however, leaves room for some of those rhetorical devices. In general, when describing material of a purely factual nature, such as the rules of a game, use straightforward, unadorned language. But even in those cases figures of speech—a good simile, for example—can be useful to reinforce your explanation. With these considerations in mind, write your first draft, closely following your outline.

12) Revision: As previously discussed, the stepwise “bottom-up” approach, especially when combined with an outline, produces a high degree of internal unity in your work. Even so, the final product must itself constitute a whole greater than its parts. On the one hand this whole emerges from the writing process, on the other hand this whole is only partially revealed after the first draft. Revision is the process by which the author, recognizing the new being that has emerged, draws it out, polishes it up, and reveals its true form. You must consider every paragraph in light of the end toward which it aims, and every sentence within each paragraph. Patterns of balance and tension will emerge, some of which you may not have planned. You’ll need to tighten up your sentences, getting rid of weak phrasing or unhelpful asides that may have seemed like brilliant ideas when you first wrote them, but which are now drawing too much attention away from what you’re trying to say. Also look at sentence length, keeping in mind that a piece of writing reads better when it combines long and short sentences, and when the form of the sentence—periodic, cumulative, balanced, etc.—is varied.

Of course, you’ll also need to edit your work for errors of punctuation and grammar. Keep in mind, however, that editing is distinct from revising, just as mechanics is distinct from writing. Also, it is better to edit when you’ve got the work to an almost finished state, since you may decide to eliminate or drastically alter a sentence that you already took the time to edit. In a certain sense fixing spelling and punctuation errors is the least important part of the revision process, since it involves the least amount of thought and imagination. Nevertheless, too many of these errors dampen the luster of an otherwise brilliant piece of writing, and, inasmuch as they undermine its presentation, they undermine its style.

Once the paper has been revised and edited, hand it to someone with a good editorial sense, and allow him or her to make suggestions. You don’t necessarily have to implement these suggestions, but if several readers independently find fault with the same passage, it may well indicate a real problem. When you’ve done your best in a reasonable amount of time, and have diligently attended to all of the steps above, it is time to stop working. Rest now, and be grateful for what you have accomplished!

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<sup>1</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. The Annotated Hobbit. Ed. Douglas A. Anderson. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002

<sup>2</sup> Crowley, Sharon and Debra Hawhee. Ancient Rhetorics. New York: Longman, 1999 (176).

<sup>3</sup> Elliot, T.S. “The Wasteland.”

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah 55:12

<sup>5</sup> Muhammad Ali

<sup>6</sup> Crowley, Sharon and Debra Hawhee. Ancient Rhetorics. New York: Longman, 1999 (373).

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- <sup>7</sup> Crowley, 367.
- <sup>8</sup> Lee, Richard Henry. "Eulogy for Washington." December 26, 1799.
- <sup>9</sup> Crowley, 370.
- <sup>10</sup> Lincoln, Abraham. "The Gettysburg Address." November 19, 1863.
- <sup>11</sup> Crowley, 376.
- <sup>12</sup> Collis, Maurice. Cortes and Montezuma. New York: New Directions Books, 1999, (55).
- <sup>13</sup> Landon, Brooks. Building Great Sentences. New York: Plume, 2013, (must locate).
- <sup>14</sup> 1 Kings 18:21
- <sup>15</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. The Lord of the Rings. New York: Harper Collins (Finish Citation Later)
- <sup>16</sup> Chesterton, G.K. The Everlasting Man. (Finish Citation Later)
- <sup>17</sup> Lord Acton. "Letter to Bishop Mandel Creighton." April 5, 1887.
- <sup>18</sup> Quoted in Artful Sentences, must track down
- <sup>19</sup> Harry Chapin. "The Rock". (Must finish later)
- <sup>20</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. The Annotated Hobbit. Ed. Douglas A. Anderson. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002 (29)
- <sup>21</sup> Melville, Herman Moby Dick (Must finish later)
- <sup>22</sup> Yates, W.B. "The Second Coming"
- <sup>23</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. The Lord of the Rings. New York: Harper Collins (Chapter 1)
- <sup>24</sup> Stevenson, Robert Lewis. Treasure Island. New York: Atheneum, (33).
- <sup>25</sup> Grahame, Kenneth. The Wind and the Willows. New York: Atheneum, (track down)
- <sup>26</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. The Annotated Hobbit. Ed. Douglas A. Anderson. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002 (track down, chapter 6)
- <sup>27</sup> Grahame, chapter 7 (track down).
- <sup>28</sup> Grahame, chapter 7 (track down)
- <sup>29</sup> Martin Luther King (track down)
- <sup>30</sup> Oscar Wilde (track down)
- <sup>31</sup> Landon, track down.
- <sup>32</sup> Landon, track down.
- <sup>33</sup> 1 Cor 13:4, 8
- <sup>34</sup> 1 Cor 3:11
- <sup>35</sup> Strunk & White, (Track down)
- <sup>36</sup> Oderberd, David S. "Is Form Structure" (finish later)
- <sup>37</sup> Pius XI. "Mit Brenneder Sorge" (finish later)
- <sup>38</sup> Landon, (track down)
- <sup>39</sup> Pullum, Geoffrey. "50 Years of Bad Grammar Advice" (track down)
- <sup>40</sup> Grahame, track down.
- <sup>41</sup> Tolkien, the two towers, chapter 2 or 6 (track down)
- <sup>42</sup> Josephine Miles quote from Landon (track down)
- <sup>43</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. The Annotated Hobbit. Ed. Douglas A. Anderson. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002 (chapter 7).
- <sup>44</sup> Grahame, track down.

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<sup>45</sup> Feser, Ed. Aquinas. Track down, page 9.

<sup>46</sup> Tolkien, Track down quote.

<sup>47</sup> Tolkien, A Knife in the Dark (LOTR), track down later.