

Workshop schedule

Overview: What we'll do, how to ask Qs during session

Promise: Learn one technique for your writing toolbox to help you revise.

MATERIALS NEEDED: Excerpt, pens & highlighters or Word doc open.

1. Excerpts: Read/compare some paragraphs/intros from famous writers for an overview of variety.

EXERCISE 1: Sentence lengths. Count words in sentences. (5 min)

2. Review: The 4 sentence types in English, varying beginnings and subjects.

EXERCISE 2: Underline subject-verb pairs & identify sentence type. (10 min)

3. Compare: A noun-heavy vs verb heavy paragraph (effect)

EXERCISE 3: Highlight all nouns & verbals. (5 min)

4. Reflect: Discuss, share, Q&A

How to check your writing

Find an excerpt of approximately 10 sentences or 200 words (a solid paragraph or two).

1. Count the number of words per sentence.
2. Identify subject-verb pairs, and then determine sentence types.
Look for repeated subjects and beginnings. Check proximity of subjects and verbs.
3. Highlight nouns and verbals.

Do you have any patterns? What might you revise for effect?

Two examples

Which of these two examples do you prefer?

1	<p>Running up the stairs, Katie yelled to her mom that she needed new shoes. Reaching her bedroom, she pulled off her school uniform and sat on the bed. Angry about everything that day, she cried into her pillow. Sometimes the kids were so mean to her. Wondering how she might get just one to befriend her, she thought it was useless. She would have been better off if they hadn't moved here in the first place.</p>	2	<p>As she ran up the stairs, Katie yelled, "Mom! I need new shoes!" Her voice cracked with anger. She yanked off her school uniform and flopped half naked, exposed, on her unmade bed, and then she wept into her pillow. The kids here were mean. She pounded the bed. Mean! No one would ever be her friend—it was useless to try—and everything would have been better if they had never moved here in the first place.</p>
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Let's look at the sentence types, sentence lengths, and the nouns and verbs used in each:

Complex	Running up the stairs, Katie yelled to her mom that she needed new shoes.
Simple	Reaching her bedroom, she pulled off her school uniform and sat on the bed.
Simple	Angry about everything that day, she cried into her pillow.
Simple	Sometimes the kids were so mean to her.
Complex	Wondering how she might get just one to befriend her, she thought it was useless.
Complex	She would have been better off if they hadn't moved here in the first place.
Complex	As she ran up the stairs, Katie yelled, "Mom! I need new shoes!"
Simple	Her voice cracked with anger.
Compound	She yanked off her school uniform and flopped half naked, exposed, on her unmade bed, and then she wept into her pillow.
Simple	The kids here were mean.
Simple	She pounded the bed.
Fragment	Mean!
C/C	No one would ever be her friend—it was useless to try—and everything would have been better if they had never moved here in the first place.

Noun or verb heavy?

How do these excerpts feel to you as you read them?

Type	# words	Sentence
Simple	35	The late summer sun sunk behind the rolling hills, tinting the valley grass, the grazing cows, the old wooden barn, the three metal grain silos, and the crusty old farmhouse in a warm golden glow.
Complex	34	From the black chimney pipe rose a thin line of smoke straight up toward the cloudless sky, only bending eastward once above the valley's borders, as if the waning sunlight were pushing it away.

Noun:verb= 15:5 and adj/adv=21

Notes: Both sentences use verbals (present participles as phrases, ~ing words) and prepositional phrases to build length. Both also use nouns/verbs as adjectives (summer sun, valley grass, rolling hills, waning sunlight). The second sentence is inverted ("rose a line" vs "a line rose").

Type	# words	Sentence
Simple	8	The bat hung loosely in her hand, swaying.
Complex	29	Alex tap-tapped her cleats for luck and stepped up to the plate, holding her hand up to scrape and dig the perfect spot, knowing the waiting aggravated the pitcher.
Simple	13	Gripping the bat, she practiced a swing and settled in, eyeing her opponent.
Simple	4	The ball flashed, blurred.
Complex	40	She swung hard, smacked the ball—crack!—whooshing high and fast, and sprinted toward first, rounding quickly to second, and then slowing, jogging confidently as the crowd roared to its feet to glimpse as the ball plopped over the fence.

Noun:verb=20:25

English has four sentence types, grammatically speaking

Definitions and examples of sentence types.

Type	Definition	Examples
Simple	One subject-verb pair (ignore prepositional phrases) that stands independently. Subject and/or verb may be compound (using and/or). A simple sentence can be quite long if it has a string of prepositional phrases (in, of, from, to...).	In the upstairs bedroom, the small, brown bear from the shopping mall store sits on the shelf over the wooden desk. Sally and Billy loved this bear. After playing with it all morning, they napped together.
Compound	Two or more independent clauses (s-v pairs), typically connected with FANBOYS (comma + coordinating conjunction), but also semicolon or colon or dash.	She won; I lost. The construction site is dangerous, so everyone must wear closed-toe shoes and a hard hat. Her graduate work at Stanford was rewarding, but it was also extremely difficult.
Complex	One independent clause (s-v pair) and one or more dependent clauses (s-v pair with subordinating keyword like when, although, because, if, even though, since, nevertheless, after) or relative pronouns (that, which, who, what)	The book that you bought for me was boring! If we dash down the steps, turn a corner, pass her befuddled father (who cannot see us), and go to the little table that she loves so well, the one by the window, she is not there! (Source: Jesse Ball)
C/C	Compound-complex sentences . combine compound and complex in varying forms: They have two or more main clauses and one or more dependent clauses.	That he was not well there could be no doubt, but he went to the doctor who could cure him. When they were younger than I am, they traveled to Europe, but they didn't go for long.
Fragment	Any incomplete thought.	When we go to the store. Because I said so.

Order in the sentence

Cumulative sentences start with the main clause and then accumulate additional information:

He dove into the pool, pulling his arms down and kicking frantically until he reached the surface.

Periodic sentences begin with additional information or clauses and end with the main clause:

After the doves coo, when the owl has returned to her nest, when the dark sky fades to gray and the hummingbirds arrive at the feeder, I drink my first cup of coffee.

Inverted sentences reverses the normal word order:

Inverted: What was to happen as a result of the trial, no one could say.

Normal: No one could say what was to happen as a result of the trial.

Purpose of the sentence

Sentences have three purposes:

Declarative: A statement. She lives here. This class is exciting. I'm learning a lot.

Interrogative: A question. How do you vary sentences? What effect does this have for the reader?

Imperative: A command. Lie down! Sit here. Run around the block a few times, why don't ya?

Handling long sentences

Adapted from: <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/sentences.htm>

The following sentences demonstrate a variety of ways to organize ideas. You can combine these patterns with various sentence types (simple, compound, complex) to create a variety of sentences.

Use Initial Modifiers:

- Dependent Clause: *Although Larry wasn't done with the analysis*, Margo filed the documents.
- Infinitive Phrase: *To please shareholders*, the board of directors increased profit sharing.
- Adverb: *Quickly and surreptitiously*, Rita patched the torn pants.
- Participial Phrase: *Hoping to impress her*, Marco baked an apple pie.

Using Mid-Sentence Modifiers:

- Appositive: Bill, *a father of four*, worked two jobs.
- Participial Phrase: Raymond, *hoping to win the top prize*, practiced three times a day.

Using Terminal Modifiers:

- Present Participial Phrase: Mary bought the cloth, *hoping to sew three masks by Friday*.
- Past Participial Phrase/Adjectival Phrase: The markets closed up slightly, *lulled by the third straight posting of reasonable job growth*.
The stock price dropped nearly 9% today, *reflecting marketing unease*.

Combining Modifiers:

- *Quickly and quietly*, Maria, the CFO, met with the CEO about the merger.

A riddle, or a lesson on misplaced modifiers

Have you seen this on the internet?

1 rabbit saw 9 elephants while going to the river. Every elephant saw 3 monkeys going to the river. Each monkey had 1 tortoise in each hand. How many animals were going to the river?

A lot depends on how you read and interpret the participial phrases. (These are the phrases “while going to the river”.) Is the rabbit going to the river when it sees 9 elephants? That is, the rabbit alone goes to the river? Or is the rabbit witnessing 9 elephants that are the ones walking to the river while the rabbit is stationary? It doesn't say that each and every elephant sees 3 distinct monkeys, so you could say all of the elephants collectively see only 3 total monkeys that are (or are not?) also walking to the river. The only clear sentence here is that each monkey carries 2 tortoises (one in each hand), but then I know people who might say monkeys have paws, not hands....

I'd argue that this writer has to revise their writing for clarity! You want to put your participles (the ~ed and ~ing verbs) close to what they modify. What if it were written:

While walking to the river, a rabbit saw nine elephants. Those elephants saw three monkeys that were going to the river. Each monkey held two tortoises, one in each hand. How many animals were going to the river?

This revision makes it clear that the single rabbit and the 3 monkeys and the 6 tortoises are going to the river, but the elephants are not. So, ten total animals.

Some levity (jokes)

- An Oxford comma walks into a bar where it spends the evening watching the television getting drunk and smoking cigars.
- A dangling participle walks into a bar. Enjoying a cocktail and chatting with the bartender, the evening passes pleasantly.
- A bar was walked into by the passive voice.
- An oxymoron walked into a bar, and the silence was deafening.
- Two quotation marks walk into a “bar.”
- A malapropism walks into a bar, looking for all intensive purposes like a wolf in cheap clothing, muttering epitaphs and casting dispersions on his magnificent other, who takes him for granite.
- Hyperbole totally rips into this insane bar and absolutely destroys everything.
- A question mark walks into a bar?
- A non sequitur walks into a bar. In a strong wind, even turkeys can fly.
- Papyrus and Comic Sans walk into a bar. The bartender says, "Get out -- we don't serve your type."
- A mixed metaphor walks into a bar, seeing the handwriting on the wall but hoping to nip it in the bud.
- A comma splice walks into a bar, it has a drink and then leaves.
- Three intransitive verbs walk into a bar. They sit. They converse. They depart.
- A synonym strolls into a tavern.
- At the end of the day, a cliché walks into a bar -- fresh as a daisy, cute as a button, and sharp as a tack.
- A run-on sentence walks into a bar it starts flirting. With a cute little sentence fragment.
- Falling slowly, softly falling, the chiasmus collapses to the bar floor.
- A figure of speech literally walks into a bar and ends up getting figuratively hammered.
- An allusion walks into a bar, despite the fact that alcohol is its Achilles heel.
- The subjunctive would have walked into a bar, had it only known.
- A misplaced modifier walks into a bar owned a man with a glass eye named Ralph.
- The past, present, and future walked into a bar. It was tense.
- A dyslexic walks into a bra.
- A verb walks into a bar, sees a beautiful noun, and suggests they conjugate. The noun declines.
- A simile walks into a bar, as parched as a desert.
- A gerund and an infinitive walk into a bar, drinking to forget.
- A hyphenated word and a non-hyphenated word walk into a bar and the bartender nearly chokes on the irony.