THE WRITE WAY TO TEACH GRAMMAR:
Using Grammatical Elements to Improve Student Writing

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What Doesn’t Work

- Spend the first six weeks of every school year re-introducing parts of speech, phrases, clauses, types of sentences, punctuation, usage.
- Have the students do sequential exercises in the grammar book.
- They need to do this because they didn’t learn grammar last year (or the year before, or the year before…..)

Why It Doesn’t Work

Multiple research project over the last 75 years have shown that students do not transfer grammar concepts learned in isolation to their writing.

Students see virtually NO relevance in their daily lives or in their future work lives to the labels attached to grammatical concepts, yet most grammar instruction focuses on the *analysis* of language rather than the *use* of it.

Why They Don’t Remember

Students in general do not remember what they learn about grammar from year to year. The reason this happens is because they have not processed the concepts on the levels demanded by Bloom’s Taxonomy. Thus, their processing is temporary and shallow rather than deep and permanent.

They learn grammar only on the “remember” or “knowledge” level but do not progress to “understand,” “apply,” “analyze,” “evaluate,” or “synthesize/create.”

What Does Work

*Use grammar as a tool to help students write better.*

Show students how to practice sentence modeling using inventive syntax from the novels they are reading in class.

Teach students to embed detail, imagery, and figurative language in their writing by using the various types of phrases.

Have students practice sentence construction techniques that include specific grammatical structures.
Making Cool Sentences

**Start with a simple sentence that consists of an article, a subject, and a verb.**

The wombat wobbled.

**Add adjectives and adverbs.**

The wily wombat wobbled weirdly.

**Add prepositional phrases.**

*In the wilderness*, the wily wombat wobbled weirdly *toward the billabong.*

**Add an appositive phrase.**

In the wilderness, the wily wombat, a furry fellow unfortunately named *Poindexter,* wobbled weirdly toward the billabong.

**Add a subordinate clause.**

In the wilderness, the wily wombat, a furry fellow unfortunately named Poindexter, wobbled weirdly toward the billabong *as the monsoon zoomed through the pale Australian sky.*

**Add a triad of absolute phrases.**

In the wilderness, the wily wombat, a furry fellow unfortunately named Poindexter, wobbled weirdly toward the billabong as the monsoon zoomed through the pale Australian sky, *the winds whipping the waves,* *the rain streaming down upon the parched land like confetti,* *the light fading into an ominous darkness.*
Could You Pass This Quiz? My Sixth Graders Can!

**Instructions:** Use your Comma Cheat Sheet and your Phrase Resource Drawer to help you complete these activities.

Write a simple sentence that includes at least one adjective, one adverb, one prepositional phrase, and one appositive phrase.

Write a compound-complex sentence that starts with a participial phrase.

Write a simple sentence that starts with three absolute phrases.

Write a compound sentence that contains an infinitive phrase. Combine the independent clauses without using a conjunctive adverb or a coordinating conjunction.

Write a compound sentence that begins with two prepositional phrases.

Combine the independent clauses using a coordinating conjunction. Punctuate your sentence correctly.

Write a complex sentence that begins with a subordinate clause. Punctuate it correctly.

Write a complex sentence that ends with a subordinate clause. Punctuate it correctly.

Write a compound-complex sentence containing a simile or metaphor.

**Why Teach Grammar?**

Knowing about clauses and phrases is the only way for a person to know the reasons WHY punctuation works the way it does.

Learning to use the different types of phrases (prepositional, gerund, participial, appositive, infinitive, absolute) helps writers construct sentences filled with detail, imagery, and precision.

Teaching students to manipulate sentence structure creates powerful and able writers.
Using Grammar to Write Poetry

Form A

Absolute phrase
Absolute phrase
Absolute phrase

Independent clause split by an appositive phrase

Prepositional phrase
Prepositional phrase
Prepositional phrase
Prepositional phrase
Prepositional phrase

Example:

Thin branches reaching raggedly for the sky,
Chunky roots planted deep inside the soil,
Feathery boughs sheltering the tiny woodland creatures,
The ancient pine tree, tall sentinel of the forest, keeps its vigil

At dawn
In the silvery darkness
Without a word
During the solemn ceremony
Of the sunrise.

Form B

gerund phrase as the subject
finish the sentence with a rhyme.

gerund phrase as the subject
finish the sentence with a rhyme

gerund phrase as the subject
finish the sentence with a rhyme.

gerund phrase as the subject
finish the sentence with a rhyme.
Example:

Reading a book like *Moby Dick*  
takes persistence, tenacity, and a mind that’s slick.

Learning to write like Hemingway  
will take you more than one school day

Mastering the art of argument  
is a talent that is earned, not lent

Using the language with talent and flair  
will keep you from error and utter despair.

Form C

independent clause with an appositive phrase in it
  participial phrase
  participial phrase
  participial phrase
  participial phrase
  participial phrase

The bats, dark demons of the sunset, swirl and flutter  
squeaking their songs of chaos

gathering in patterns of shadow

blocking the sun’s streaking

clustered in nightmare battalions

swooping from their underground lair.

Form D

a subordinate clause
an independent clause
an infinitive phrase and a prepositional phrase
an infinitive phrase and a prepositional phrase
an infinitive phrase and a prepositional phrase
an infinitive phrase and a prepositional phrase

Because cats are wise  
They know these things are good:
To sleep on a sunny afternoon pillow
To point their heads and tails toward the sky
To snuggle on warm laps
To survey the world from high perches
These are the wise ways of the feline.
Phrase Resource Drawer

What is a phrase?

A phrase is a group of words that acts like a single part of speech. A phrase will never have a subject or a predicate.

Why should I learn to use the different kinds of phrases?

Good writers use phrases because they are an economical way to provide details (factual description) and imagery (descriptions of sense impressions). They can also be used to make metaphors (appositive phrases) and similes (prepositional phrases) that add unexpected beauty and interest to your writing.

Below, you will find examples of and definitions for the different types of phrases. Phrases are groups of words that function like single parts of speech. Use these to help you construct sentences of artful beauty and razor-sharp utility.

Prepositional Phrases

A prepositional phrase can act like an adjective or like an adverb. Adjective prepositional phrases modify (add detail and description) to nouns. For example, the phrases “around a shadowy corner,” “in a dark forest,” and “with the gingerbread roof” might describe the noun “house.” These prepositional phrases tell you where the house is located and which one it is.

Around a shadowy corner in a dark forest lay the strange house with the gingerbread roof.

If you wanted to describe or add detail to a verb in the sentence, you might use prepositional phrases that function like adverbs. For example, the phrases “with a cookie in each hand” or “outside the strange house” might describe the verb “stood”; these phrases tell where she stood and how she stood.

The witch stood silently outside the strange house with a cookie in each hand.

A writer can construct a simile (a type of comparison between two seemingly unlike things) using a prepositional phrase that begins with the preposition “like” or “as.”

The eyes of the African princess were like stars shining in the night sky.

His fingers were as plump as carrots.

Appositive Phrases
An appositive phrase is a group of words that provides more information about a noun in a sentence. It could, in fact, be used to replace the noun. Appositive phrases that follow or precede a noun provide a richer description for the reader than if the writer had simply used the noun by itself. Appositive phrases act like nouns. Most of the time, appositive phrases are nonrestrictive (in other words, the sentence would function perfectly well without them), so they are most often surrounded by commas, indicating that these phrases are parenthetical, or extra.

Examples:

Oliver Cranberry, a tall, skinny basketball player with one blue and one brown eye, stepped into the path of a truck hurtling down the road at seventy miles per hour.

A tall, skinny basketball player with one blue and one brown eye, Oliver Cranberry stepped into the path of a truck hurtling down the road at seventy miles per hour.

My dog, a scruffy mutt with an engaging grin, met me at the door with his leash in his mouth.

A strapping giant of a man with vivid tattoos all over his arms, the circus performer strutted down Main Street at the head of the parade.

Appositive phrases like the following ones can also be used to construct metaphors (comparisons that do not use the words “like” or “as”).

The giant pine tree, sentinel of the forest, stood guard in the frosty night.

The huge city, an anthill of human activity, sprawled in the distance as the plane approached.

**Gerund Phrases**

Gerund phrases act like nouns, and they can do anything a noun can do. They can serve as the subjects of sentences or clauses, and they can serve as the object of a verb or of a preposition. They always start with a verb form that ends in “ing.” The strange thing about gerunds is that they are formed from verbs, but they don’t act like verbs. They act like nouns.

Examples:

Subject of the sentence:

*Swinging through the trees* is an activity only Tarzan could feel comfortable doing.

Object of the verb:
Jemima hates swimming in the morning.

Object of a preposition:

I am really not interested in studying calculus for the rest of my life.

**Participial Phrases**

Participial phrases can look a lot like gerund phrases, but they don’t act like nouns; they act like adjectives. Participles are also verb forms, just as gerunds are. But they behave like adjectives. Participles can take past or present forms.

Past participial phrases:

_Parked in a loading zone, mom’s car was demolished by a delivery truck._

Although “parked in a loading zone” might look like a verb phrase, it’s really acting like an adjective, describing “mom’s car.” The VERB in the sentence is “was demolished.”

_Exhausted from the battery of standardized tests, Jim collapsed in front of the TV after school._

Eliza, _elated by the prospect of going to the prom with Poindexter, began designing her corsage._

Present participial phrases:

_Swinging through the trees, Tarzan sped through the jungle to rescue Jane._

_Munching the delightful fresh apricots, Jennifer read War and Peace in the orchard._

**Infinitive Phrases**

Infinitive phrases are easy to spot. They always start with the word “to” plus a verb; for example, “to swim,” “to love,” “to quit,” “to ride,” etc. The word “to” plus a verb is called an infinitive. Infinitive phrases include the infinitive and any words or phrases that modify the infinitive. Infinitive phrases act like nouns. They usually don’t serve as the objects of prepositions, though they often act as subjects of sentences and objects of verbs.

Examples:

_To swim in the sunshine is one of the pleasures of summer vacation._
In this case, the infinitive phrase serves as the subject of the sentence.

In the summer, I love to swim in the sunshine.

In this case, the infinitive phrase is the direct object of the verb. What do you love? I love this thing: to swim in the sunshine.

**Absolute Phrases**

An absolute phrase is composed of a noun plus an adjective or a participle, plus any modifiers that describe the noun or adjective. An absolute phrase is really a tool of concision, allowing the writer to embed a full thought into a phrase that is almost a clause. Basically, to make the absolute phrase, the writer just removes a “to be” verb from the clause.

Example:

Two independent clauses: “Her expression was dejected. Sarah trudged into the room.”

One of the clauses compressed into an absolute phrase: “*Her expression dejected*, Sarah trudged into the room.”

His face was red with embarrassment. Henry withdrew from the room

*His face red with embarrassment*, Henry withdrew from the room.

Her eyes were shining with delight. Polly opened the gift.

Polly, *her eyes shining with delight*, opened the gift.

One of the best ways to use absolute phrases is in triads, or groups of three. Observe the following examples:

*Its tiny wings outstretched, its little voice peeping urgently, its orange feet pattering through the muddy grass*, the baby duck ran toward its mother.

**Here’s another way to do it...**

*The baby duck ran toward its mother, its tiny wings outstretched, its little voice peeping urgently, its orange feet pattering through the muddy grass.*

**Or, you could do a subject/verb split!**

*The baby duck, its tiny wings outstretched, its little voice peeping urgently, its orange feet pattering through the muddy grass, ran toward its mother.*

** WHICH ORDER BEST FITS YOUR WRITERLY PURPOSE? WHAT RHETORICAL EFFECT RESULTS FROM YOUR CHOICES?**
Comma/Punctuation Cheat Sheet

1. **Use a comma before a coordinating conjunction that connects two independent clauses.**

   An independent clause is a group of words that can stand alone as a sentence; like any clause, it has both a subject and a verb.

   A coordinating conjunction is one of the following words:

   for
   and
   nor
   but
   or
   yet
   so

2. **There are three ways to connect two independent clauses.**

   Below are two independent clauses.

   Alex is a good writer.
   He writes vividly about his experiences.

   The first way is to insert a comma and a coordinating conjunction between the two clauses.

   Alex is a good writer, and he writes vividly about his experiences.

   The second way is to insert a semicolon between the two clauses.

   Alex is a good writer; he writes vividly about his experiences.

   The third way is to insert a semicolon, a conjunctive adverb like “however” or “therefore” or “thus,” and a comma between the two clauses.

   Alex is a good writer; moreover, he writes vividly about his experiences.

3. **After an introductory group of words and before the subject of the main clause, use a comma.**

   Insert a comma between an introductory subordinate clause and the subject of the next independent clause.
Note: a subordinate clause is a group of words that has both a subject and a
verb, but it begins with a subordinating conjunction like “because,” “although,”
or “since,” and so it cannot stand alone as a sentence.

Because Alex is a good writer, he writes vividly about his experiences. Although Poindexter broke his glasses, he was still able to complete the test. Although the elephant had lost its tooth, it still ate Albert.

Insert a comma after two or more consecutive prepositional phrases.

In the castle of the monster with the enormous shoes, a beautiful goldfish wept bitterly.

Insert a comma after an introductory participial phrase.

Shivering with anticipation, Poindexter entered the palace of video games.

Insert a comma after a long introductory element of any kind!

Notes on Types of Sentences

Simple sentence: One independent clause.

The silly goldfish swirled stylishly around the frozen pond.

Compound sentence: Two or more independent clauses

Albert burped; he had eaten fourteen pieces of pizza, and he had violent indigestion.

Johann entered the arena ready to rumble; he had his favorite Frisbee in his hand.

Complex sentence: ONLY one independent and AT LEAST one subordinate clause.

When Poindexter saw the math test in the teacher’s hand, he leapt into the air with joy because he loved competing with his classmates.

Although Brenda was unattractive, she was extremely amusing.

Compound-Complex Sentence: At least TWO independent clauses and at least ONE subordinate clause.

If you want to be an astronaut, you must learn calculus, and you must also be physically fit.
Sentence Composing

Sentence Unscrambling

In these exercises, students unscramble sentences that have been broken into meaningful “chunks.” The purpose of this exercise is to practice putting parts of a sentence into a logical sequence.

Example:

he knew
But even as that thought touched his mind
nor any hope of such
that for him
that had bred him
only the shadow
to drift home
and none of the substance
rootless
and without any stake in the country
would be

Original Sentence (from The Eagle of the Ninth, Rosemary Sutcliffe)

“But even as that thought touched his mind, he knew that for him to drift home, rootless, and without any stake in the country that had bred him, nor any hope of such, would be only the shadow and none of the substance of home-coming.”

Sentence Combining

He heard the bees.
The bees were zooming along the bell-heather.
The heather was in the clearing.
He smelled the scents of the birch-woods.
The birch-woods were sun-baked.
The scents were warm and aromatic.
The scent of the birch-wood was overlaying the cold saltiness of the sea.
He singled out one among the wheeling gulls.
He watched the gull until it became lost in a flickering cloud of sun-touched wings.
Original sentence (from *The Eagle of the Ninth*, Rosemary Sutcliffe):

“He heard the bees zooming among the bell-heather of the clearing, smelled the warm, aromatic scents of the sun-baked birch-woods overlaying the cold saltiness of the sea; singled out one among the wheeling gulls and watched it until it became lost in a flickering cloud of sun-touched wings.”

**Sentence Imitation:**

Original sentence (from *The Eagle of the Ninth*, Rosemary Sutcliffe):

“Silence fell between the three, while the daylight grew around them, and the dogs snarled and tussled over their lump of meat.”

**Example of a sentence imitation:**

Tension grew within the group, as the sunset blazed above them, and the mosquitoes hissed and whined in their swampy beds.

**Sentence Expanding with Grammatical Elements**

Original sentence (from *The Eagle of the Ninth*, Rosemary Sutcliffe):

The black mass of the barrow rose above them, *its crest of thorn-trees upreared against the veiled stars.*

**Example of imitative sentence expanding:**

The tall trunk of the tree stood in front of him, *(insert an absolute phrase with nine words in it).*

**Student sentence:**

The tall trunk of the tree stood in front of him, *its crown of green leaves silhouetted upon the autumn sky.*

Original sentence (from *The Eagle of the Ninth*, Rosemary Sutcliffe):

“It was a very still night, with a faint thunder haze dimming the stars, and once or twice as they walked, a flicker of summer lightning danced along the sky-line.”

**Example of imitative sentence expanding:**

She was a very lovely girl, *(insert a prepositional phrase with eight words in it)*, and once or twice as he watched, a glimmer of faint recognition flickered across her face.
One rainy day in June, John Walker was walking down the street when he saw a stray dog sitting under a tree looking miserable. John felt sorry for the dog, so he went over to it and petted it and spoke to it. As he set off for home, the dog followed him. Though John tried to get it to go away, the dog insisted on following him all the way to his home. When he got home, John went into the house and tried to forget the dog, but its whining and barking were impossible to ignore. John finally went out to the dog and dried it off and brought it inside the house. He gave the dog some food and started a fire in the fireplace. John sat down beside the fireplace with a cup of coffee and a book. The dog came over and sat beside him. Because he had been lonely for a long time, John felt contented and happy that the dog had come to live with him. “Welcome home, old fellow,” he said with a smile.

Add the following elements to the skeleton story:

- A triad of absolute phrases in at least one sentence
- an additional prepositional phrase in each sentence
- an appositive phrase in two sentences
- an infinitive phrase
- a gerund phrase
- two participial phrases
- a metaphor or simile
- an adjective to each sentence
- Examine each verb. If a more precise verb is available, use it, and add an adverb
Revised Skeleton Story

One rainy, grey day in June, John Walker, *a man without hope*, was *limping drearily* down the street *toward the bank* when he *spied* a stray dog *with a sad face slouching* under a tree looking miserable, *its tail drooping wetly, its fur bedraggled, its ribs silhouetted against its soggy fur*. *Shivering in his thin raincoat,* John *pitied* the *drenched animal despite its appearance,* so he *approached it warily* and petted it and *spoke to it in a kind voice*. As he set off for home *in the chilly downpour,* the *gaunt* dog followed him. Though John tried to get it to go away, the dog insisted on *tagging along* all the way to his home *in a dark, poverty-stricken part of London*. When he got home, John went into the house, *a tiny cottage with a thatched roof,* and tried to forget the dog *outside his poor dwelling,* but its *insistent* whining and barking were impossible to ignore. But *ignoring the suffering of animals* was not something that *kindly* John could do. *To soothe his conscience,* John finally went out to the dog and dried it off *with a warm blanket* and brought it inside the *small* house. He *offered* the dog some *left-over hamburger in a cracked bowl* and *lit a toasty fire* in the fireplace. *Listening to the dog’s quiet sounds of contentment,* John *hunkered* down beside the fireplace *in the corner of the small room* with a cup of *hot* coffee and a book. The dog came over and sat beside him *in the dim firelight*. Because he had been lonely for a long time *after his wife had died,* John felt contented and happy that the *abandoned* dog had come to live with him. “Welcome home, old fellow,” he said with a *bittersweet* smile that flickered over his face *like a fleeting shadow.*
PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES

on the other side
out of the stable
around the bend
into the apothecary shop
after the storm
before six o’clock in the morning
like fluttering birds
until winter
under the old porch
through the twilight forest
like a shining star
with a nickel in my hand
beyond the meadow
against the enemy
despite her wishes
during the night
astride the horse
upon the green grass
behind the frosty window pane
bereft of hope
toward the orange goldfish in the pond
to the end of the world
with six or seven toads
completely out of gas
madly in love
about Leon and Jenny
at a bitter parting
on coral sands
out of breath
of the minister’s wife
as a watermelon
on Midsummer’s Eve
without a single excuse
down the dark, narrow alley
like a swarm of angry bees
beside the slimy lake
under a huge boulder

SUBORDINATE CLAUSES

if I see you here again
before I go to sleep
as the butterflies clustered around the house
unless you leave me alone
although I was tired
whenever I think of Oscar
after the dwarf left
until my father arrives
because the duck quacked
since I passed the test
when I put on my ice skates
if the prophecy is fulfilled
unless Poindexter finds the emerald
until the princess awakens
although I prefer caviar to herring
as I tiptoed through the spooky castle
because the lightning struck the old tree
although the wombat was too tired to sing
unless the goblet was preserved intact
when he learned of her treachery
as they tumbled down the steep slope
even though the oracle had warned her
because of the mermaid’s wily plan
after the rise of the dark lord
if the evil monk should learn of this
as he donned his thick black cloak
since the dungeon was deserted
although she had been warned often
as the hideous miasma crept over the town

Your task: Write a story using as many of these prepositional phrases and subordinate clauses as you reasonably can. Add others when feasible. Hone your awareness of using these two language structures as you practice this assignment.

This technique (the “image palette”) was originated by Harry Noden in his book Image Grammar.
Writing Loose/Cumulative Sentences

A cumulative sentence consists of an independent clause that serves as a sentence base and which can be moved to the beginning, middle, or end of the sentence, plus its accumulated, parallel, modifiers.

Example:

The raindrops fell against the window, tapping rhythmically against the glass, spattering in all directions from the middle, dripping from the corners of the sill.

This sentence could also be structured in the following ways:

Tapping rhythmically against the glass, spattering in all directions from the middle, dripping from the corners of the sill, the raindrops fell against the window.

The raindrops, tapping rhythmically against the glass, spattering in all directions from the middle, dripping from the corners of the sill, fell against the window.

Another example:

Alone and frightened, I lay still, listening to the sounds of the night, the wind blowing tree branches against the house, the clock's ticking echoing my heartbeat, the leaky faucet dripping monotonously, a train whistle blowing in the distance, a siren's wail on the next block, all these adding to my fear.

We could change this structure to:

Listening to the sounds of the night the wind blowing tree branches against the house, the clock's ticking echoing my heartbeat, the leaky faucet dripping monotonously, a train whistle blowing in the distance, a siren's wail on the next block,
alone and frightened,
I lay still,
all these adding to my fear.

**A third example:**

Her hands sat quietly in her lap
thin and nearly transparent with age
the blue veins forming ridges from the wrist to the knuckles
jutting from the wasted flesh
the crooked, skinny fingers bent around each other in her clasp
like the claws of a bird clutching a tree limb.

1. Identify the sentence base in each of the cumulative sentences above.
2. Choose one of the sentences and write a sentence imitating its structure.
3. Then write a cumulative/loose sentence for the sentence bases listed below:

   The fire raged

   The sunset was beautiful

   The flowers danced in the breeze,

   The engines started with a roar

   She screamed

   The snake slithered toward me

   The parade began

   The dentist began his work

   It began to snow

   The exercise above was adapted from a handout distributed in a long-ago AP workshop, author unknown.
Sentence Imitation: Ray Bradbury, “The Jar”

Below you will find the first paragraph of “The Jar,” broken down into sentences. Choose a different one-word title (“The _____), and write a paragraph corresponding to your title that mimics the sentence structure of this one. The sentences have been broken into chunks to help you.

“It was one of those things they keep in a jar in the tent of a sideshow on the outskirts of a little, drowsy town.”

It was one
of those things (prepositional phrase)
they keep
in a jar (prepositional phrase)
in the tent (prepositional phrase)
of a sideshow (prepositional phrase)
on the outskirts (prepositional phrase)
of a little, drowsy town. (prepositional phrase)

“One of those pale things drifting in alcohol plasma, forever dreaming and circling, with its peeled, dead eyes staring out at you and never seeing you.”

One
of those pale things (prepositional phrase)
drifting in alcohol plasma (participial phrase)
forever dreaming and circling (participial phrase)
with its peeled dead eyes
staring out at you
and
never seeing you.

“It went with the noiselessness of late night, and only the crickets chirping, the frogs sobbing off in the moist swampland.”

It went
with the noiselessness of late night (prepositional phrase)
and
only the crickets chirping (absolute phrase)
the frogs sobbing off in the moist swampland. (absolute phrase)

“One of those things in a big jar that makes your stomach jump as it does when you see a preserved arm in a laboratory vat.”

One
of those things (prepositional phrase)
in a big jar (prepositional phrase)
that makes your stomach jump
as it does
when you see a preserved arm
in a laboratory vat. (prepositional phrase)

Charlie stared back at it for a long time.

Charlie stared
back at it (prepositional phrase)
for a long time. (prepositional phrase)
Student Samples: “The Jar”

The Watch

It was one of those things he kept in the drawer in a cigar box with a broken lid on the top of his old, scarred dresser. One of those shining things, swimming in memories, forever ticking and tocking with its monotonous, eternal rhythm, ticking and tocking and never stopping. It echoed with the memories of yesterday and the young men laughing, the years dropping one by one into the vast lake of time. One of those things in a lifetime that makes your eyes water as they do when you see a faded photograph of someone that you loved long ago. Oscar held it in his gnarled hand for a long time.

The Balloon

It was big and red with plentiful spots, and it hung droopily next to a tree, under its shade, outside of town, in the wilderness of magical happenings. It could have been like one of millions of its kind, deflating into nothingness, drifting off to die alone, away from any watchful eyes, giving up life, giving up trying. But it persisted into the night and throughout the days which followed, only the tree watching, the sky waiting for it to fail. The tree of the forest outside of town that had stood forever until now withered to a stump. The balloon went up in the air, out of sight.

The Bat

It was one of those things that little boys keep in a corner in a closet of their rooms in their homes on their farms in the middle of dusty, desolate nowhere. One of those carved things made from the death of forests, waiting silently with its dull body to be handled and beaten upon something. It was stared at with the eyes of innocence while outside the buzz of locusts, the hum of cicadas, signaled death in their wakes. One of those things in a life that make your memories glow, as they do when you see a picture of your fourth-grade Little League team. John stared at it for a long time.

The Vat

It was one of those things in a witch's brew in a black cauldron over a fire in a shady house on the edge of a steep cliff. One of those evil things overflowing with every stir, drifting down and twining around your feet with its horrible stench lurking behind you but never engulfing you. It went with the darkness of the early morning and the lifelessness of the forest. One of those secret remedies in a lonely vat that makes your stomach drop as it does when you jump off a cliff into the cool lake below. Drew gazed at it for a long time.
The exercise below is adapted from the *Vertical Teams Guide for English*, 2002 Edition.

**Syntax Mad Libs**

She remembered a visit she had once made to some Mexican border towns—the hot days, the endless crickets leaping and falling or lying dead and brittle like the small cigars in the shopwindows, and the canals taking river water out to the farms, the dirt roads, the scorched seascape. She remembered the silent towns, the warm beer, the hot, thick food each day. She remembered the slow, dragging horses and the parched jackrabbits on the road. She remembered the iron mountains and the dusty valleys and the ocean beaches that spread hundreds of miles with no sound but the waves—no cars, no buildings, no nothing. (“I See You Never,” by Ray Bradbury)

In class discussion, the students might identify the many unusual syntactical techniques Bradbury uses to create a drowsy, nostalgic, hypnotic tone. The many types of repetition, including anaphora, impress the reader with the similarity of each day in the character’s past, the way each day seemed to resemble the last. The wavelike triadic patterns of the last few phrases are resonant with the sound of the sea and bring to mind a life in which every day has the same pattern as the waves—slightly varied, but monotonous in its regularity. The use of polysyndeton also reinforces the feeling of fullness and lethargy created by the images of “hot thick food,” “warm beer,” the “parched jackrabbits,” and “slow, dragging horses.”

**“Mad-Libs” Sentence**

She remembered the (adj) (plural noun), the (adj) (noun), the (adj) (adj) (noun) each day. She remembered the (adj) (verb + ing) (plural noun) and the (adj) (plural noun) on the road. She remembered the (adj) (plural noun) and the (adj) (plural noun) and the (adj) (plural noun) that (verb past tense) hundreds of miles with no (noun)—no (plural noun), no (plural noun), no (noun).

**Student Variation**

She remembered the shadowy woods, the shy forest animals, the long, relaxing walks each day. She remembered the fiery, scarlet trees and the cool woodland pools and the grey mountain peaks that ranged hundreds of miles with no end but the sky—no limits, no rules, no fences.
Phrase Writing Activity

Sixth Grade

Instructions: Write a sentence in each blank that contains the appropriate type of phrase. Your sentences should all be related to the description of a family member or a classmate. Underline the phrases you include in your sentences.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Prepositional phrase example:</th>
<th>My mother has been known to do the laundry with a frog in her right pocket.</th>
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<td>Appositive phrase example:</td>
<td>Example: My mother, an active, curious seventy-five-year-old with a long white braid hanging down her back, is a great inspiration to me.</td>
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<td>Gerund phrase example:</td>
<td>Riding her unicycle on biking paths and at White Rock Lake is one of Mom’s favorite ways to keep her figure svelte.</td>
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<td>Participial phrase example: Cooking apple strudel in her sunny yellow kitchen, my mom often talks on the telephone to friends and relatives while she bakes.</td>
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<td>Absolute phrase example:</td>
<td>Her feet squeezed into pointy lizard pumps, my mom goes dancing every Tuesday.</td>
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<td>Infinitive phrase example:</td>
<td>Mom loves to dance the Charleston and the Bugaloo at neighborhood discos.</td>
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Complex and Compound-Complex Sentences

Before You Begin:

An independent clause is a group of words that has a subject and a verb and can stand alone as a complete thought.

Examples:

John gave Susan a rose.
John and Jim gave Susan some roses.
John gave Susan and Sarah some roses.
John called Sarah and asked her to the movies.
John and Sarah went to the movies and ate some popcorn.

In several of these examples, the independent clauses have multiple subjects or multiple verbs, or both. The subjects are both doing the action of the verb, or the subject is doing two or more different things.

A dependent, or subordinate, clause consists of an independent clause that has been altered by the addition of a subordinating conjunction (a word like “unless,” “since,” “if,” or “although”) which makes this group of words dependent on some other thought to be complete.

Because John gave Susan a rose...
Although John and Jim gave Susan some roses...
When John gave Susan and Sarah some roses...
If John called Sarah and asked her to the movies...
Whenever John and Sarah went to the movies and ate some popcorn...

Notice how these groups of words are now unable to form sentences. The thoughts they express are incomplete.

Note: a dependent clause can also be formed when the writer adds a relative pronoun (that) to an independent clause; i.e., “That John gave Susan a rose...(was a sign of his love.”) This kind of clause is called a NOUN CLAUSE because it acts like a noun.

Complex Sentences

Complex sentences consist of ONLY ONE independent clause and AT LEAST ONE dependent/subordinate clause. If the dependent clause comes at the beginning of the sentence, it is followed by a comma that separates it from the subject of the independent clause.
Examples:  

*Because John gave Susan a rose, she kissed him.* (One introductory dependent clause followed by a comma; one independent clause) 

*Susan kissed John because he gave her a rose.* (One independent clause followed by a dependent clause) 

*Although Susan did not know that John was going to give her a rose, she was delighted when he did so because she loved flowers.* 

An introductory dependent clause ("although Susan did not know") followed by a noun clause ("that John was going to give her flowers") followed by a comma, an independent clause ("she was delighted"), another dependent clause (when he did so), and another dependent clause ("because she loved flowers")

**Compound-Complex Sentences**

Compound-complex sentences consist of TWO OR MORE independent clauses—and AT LEAST ONE dependent clause.

Examples:  

*After he danced a jig, the bear devoured a tortilla, and the tortilla disappeared.* 

*After he danced a jig, the bear devoured a tortilla; the tortilla disappeared.* 

*After he danced a jig, the bear devoured a tortilla; consequently, the tortilla disappeared.* 

*The bear devoured a tortilla, but the wombat scrabbled for artichokes in the dirt because he did not like tortillas that had been touched by bears.* 

Independent clause ("the bear devoured a tortilla"), comma and coordinating conjunction ("but"), independent clause ("the wombat scrabbled for artichokes in the dirt") dependent clause ("because he did not like tortillas"), noun clause ("that had been touched by bears")
Your Assignment: Write a paragraph describing your own family car or your pet. Your paragraph should be 12 sentences long, have a topic sentence at the beginning that makes a general statement about your car or pet, and should be structured like this:

Sentence 1: simple
2. compound
3. complex
4. compound/complex
5. simple
6. compound
7. complex
8. compound/complex
9. simple
10. compound
11. complex
12. compound/complex

Type your paragraph.
Practice with Clauses

The independent clause: I saw the cat

The subordinating conjunctions: because, although, if, unless, when, after, whenever, wherever, before, since

The Dependent (Subordinate) Clauses:
1. Because I saw the cat,
2. Although I saw the cat,
3. If I saw the cat,
4. Unless I saw the cat,
5. When I saw the cat,
6. After I saw the cat,
7. Whenever I saw the cat,
8. Wherever I saw the cat,
9. Before I saw the cat,
10. Since I saw the cat,

Instructions: write an original independent clause for each of the dependent clauses above, thus making the group of words into a complete sentence. For example, if the dependent clause says “Because I saw the cat,” follow it with an independent clause like “I avoided disaster,” thus making the sentence read, “Because I saw the cat, I avoided disaster.”

Note: Introductory subordinate (dependent) clauses are followed by a comma.

Next, write a dependent clause to follow each of the following independent clauses. Remember that a dependent clause that comes at the end of a sentence does NOT have a comma before it. For example, after your contribution, the first sentence might read,
“Ernest had a tantrum although his aunt gave him some chocolate candy to help him relax.”

1. Ernest had a tantrum (insert dependent clause here).
2. Penelope lost her pocket protector (insert dependent clause here).
3. Oscar went to the Antarctic (insert dependent clause here).
4. Poindexter changed his hairstyle (insert dependent clause here).
5. The fairy princess sat on the toadstool (insert dependent clause here).
6. Fiddling madly, the frog prince danced on the lily pad (insert dependent clause here).
7. Todd came to disaster (insert dependent clause here).
8. Olivia pranced around the tennis court (insert dependent clause here).
9. The Gila monster snapped greedily at the helpless infant (insert dependent clause here).
10. The ipod's battery slowly died (insert dependent clause here).
11. In spite of the raging storm, the brave doggie ventured out of the house (insert dependent clause here).
12. In the castle of the monster with one eye, a dragon slept warily (insert dependent clause here).
13. Screeching with laughter, the children sprinted down the forest path (insert dependent clause here).
14. The elephant sadly swung her tail (insert dependent clause here).

Next, write another independent clause for each one given below. Connect the two independent clauses with a comma followed by a coordinating conjunction (and, but, for, nor, or, so, or yet).

1. The old man spit on the ground (insert a comma, a coordinating conjunction, and another independent clause here).

Example: The old man spit on the ground, and a policeman gave him a dirty look.
2. The pickle fermented in the jar (insert a comma, a coordinating conjunction, and another independent clause here).
3. Veronica gave a forlorn sigh (insert a comma, a coordinating conjunction, and another independent clause here).
4. The spy peeped into the old mansion (insert a comma, a coordinating conjunction, and another independent clause here).
5. The student gave the classroom turtle a quizzical wink (insert a comma, a coordinating conjunction, and another independent clause here).
6. Superman swooped down from the skyscraper (insert a comma, a coordinating conjunction, and another independent clause here).
7. Mr. Forteith handed Peter yet another detention (insert a comma, a coordinating conjunction, and another independent clause here).
8. The platypus gave a little hop of joy as he climbed up the flowery bank of the river (insert a comma, a coordinating conjunction, and another independent clause here).
9. The striped suit fitted him badly and made him look like a buffoon (insert a comma, a coordinating conjunction, and another independent clause here).
10. The razor-sharp blade whistled through the air (insert a comma, a coordinating conjunction, and another independent clause here).
Each of the sentences below comes from the beginning of the novel *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeleine L’Engle.

1. It was a dark and stormy night.

   Pronoun (It)
   past tense linking verb (was)
   an article (a)
   an adjective (dark)
   a coordinating conjunction (and)
   another adjective (stormy)
   A predicate nominative (night)

   Write your own sentence, using the sentence above as a model.

2. In her attic bedroom Margaret Murry, wrapped in an old patchwork quilt, sat on the foot of her bed and watched the trees tossing in the frenzied lashing of the wind.

   This sentence has several prepositional phrases that tell where, when, or how something is happening or which describe nouns or pronouns. The prepositional phrases are italicized.

   Rewrite the sentence, substituting different prepositional phrases for the ones in the original sentence.

3. Behind the trees clouds scudded frantically across the sky.

   This sentence, too, begins with a prepositional phrase. After “Behind the trees,” add two more prepositional phrases that would make sense.

   Every few moments the moon ripped through them, creating wraithlike shadows that raced along the ground.

   Replace the two verbs in the sentence (*ripped* and *raced*) with different verbs that share an initial consonant sound.

4. The house shook.

   Add an adjective and an adverb to the sentence above. Then add a prepositional phrase to begin the sentence and one to end it.

5. Wrapped in her quilt, Meg shook.
This sentence begins with a participial phrase—a group of words that uses a past or present *participle*—as an adjective. Participles also form parts of verb phrases—groups of words that function as verbs but have one or more helping verbs—as in the phrase *has been running* or *had been closed*. The “ing” and “ed” verb forms are the participles. In a participial phrase, the past or present participle acts like an adjective, modifying a noun or pronoun in the sentence. The phrase “wrapped in her quilt” tells the reader something about Meg. Write another sentence that begins with a past or present participle.

6. She wasn’t usually afraid of the weather.

How would the sentence above have a different effect on the reader if the writer had not used a contraction?

7. –It’s not just the weather, she thought.

8. –It’s the weather on top of everything else.

In sentences 7 and 8, the author has used repetition for emphasis. Write two original sentences with the same structure as those above, using repetition to extend a thought.

9. On top of me.

10. On top of Meg Murry doing everything wrong.

Sentences 9 and 10 are sentence fragments. Why might the author have chosen deliberately to use fragments rather than complete sentences?

These sentences also use repetition to continue the pattern set in sentences 7 and 8. Write a series of four sentences imitating the use of repetition in sentences 7, 8, 9, and 10.
Using Models to Imitate Style

A writer’s style is his or her characteristic way of using language. A talented writer will have a style as distinct as a fingerprint, easily recognizable to the skilled reader. Some characteristics of style are:

- Selection of detail
- Selection of words (diction)
- Use of figures of speech (metaphor, simile, personification)
- Use of sound devices like assonance, consonance, alliteration, and onomatopoeia
- Use of dialect or regional speech
- Use of imagery
- Use of certain kinds of sentences
- Use of short and simple or long and complicated words
- Use of informal or formal diction
- Use of certain kinds of punctuation

One way to figure out what a writer’s style is like is to imitate it.

Choose one chapter of *A Wrinkle in Time*. From that chapter, make notes on the author’s characteristic use of detail, diction, figures of speech, sound devices, dialect, imagery, syntax, and punctuation.

After making careful notes on the author’s style, choose a paragraph from the chapter that has in it many of the author’s characteristic stylistic devices. Then write a paragraph modeled on the paragraph in the novel. Choose for your paragraph a subject completely unrelated to the book.

You may also want to try writing an additional chapter of the book, using the author’s style and adding to the plot appropriately or changing the ending of the book. Share your style imitations with the rest of the class.