Sentence Variation Models

A Guide to Using the Student Resource

ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

Many student writers are unaware of the huge variety of sentence beginnings and syntactical constructions available to them. One way to assist these writers in collecting a repertoire of sentences for use in their own writing is to have them use sentences of professional writers as models for their own original sentences. The list included in the Student Resource consists of sentences with varying sentence structures and sentence beginnings. The corresponding models use sentences taken from both literary and nonfiction texts.

This resource is included in Module 4: *Moving Beyond the Literary Text.*

TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

Teachers can use the Sentence Variation Models with students in a variety of ways. Some of these include:

- printing out the Sentence Variation Models on colored paper and having students keep this handout in their notebooks as a resource that they can refer to when writing essays.
- choosing several (two or three) different sentence beginnings and having students include at least one sentence of each type of construction in a writing assignment. Students should highlight the sentence and identify the type of beginning in the margin.
- using the models to teach grammar. Sentence modeling is also an effective way to learn grammar. Choosing certain grammatical and syntactical elements for purposeful

arrangement can provide many teachable moments for mini-lessons in grammar, lessons that will stay with the students for much longer than will drill and practice on a worksheet or in a grammar book.

- providing opportunities for students to use the sentence structures in a variety of ways.
  - Each day, have students practice writing a sentence with a different structure. Ask students to model their sentences exactly on the pattern of the original, but write about a different topic. You may want to incorporate this activity into a daily journal writing assignment.
  - Give background information on the grammatical structures (such as the different types of phrases) required in some of the sentence variations. Often, though, students can become familiar with the names of these structures just by practicing them in their own sentences.
  - Have students break the model sentence down into grammatical units, identifying each.
  - Once students have become familiar with the sentence structures and have practiced them, assign certain types of sentences to be included in a piece of writing.
  - For fun, try writing a "Round Robin" story. In this activity, each person in the row writes a sentence in turn, using the different structures modeled in the handout.
  - As students become more familiar with grammar and syntax, they may make up their own sentence patterns.
  - When revising essays, stories, or poems, individually or with a writing partner, have students rewrite some of the sentences in the original draft by using these models. This focus on sentence structure will help to develop plenty of interesting sentence variations in their writing.
  - Post these sentence models around your classroom to give students ideas for ways to vary sentence structure while they compose their writing pieces.

Sentence Variation Models

Student Resource

1. Begin with the subject.

Ships at a distance have every man's wish on board.

—Zora Neale Hurston, Their Eyes Were Watching God

2. Begin with an article and the subject.

A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts.

—William Strunk

3. Begin with an adjective and the subject.

Old Mr. Shimerda is dead, and his family are in great distress.

—Willa Cather, My Antonia

4. Begin with an adverb before the subject.

Eagerly, we settled onto the muddy forest floor and waited.

—Mildred D. Taylor, Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry

5. Begin with a prepositional phrase used as an adverb.

After breakfast, Billy got out his best knife, the one with a needle point.

—John Steinbeck, The Red Pony

6. Postpone the subject.

In a hole in the ground, lived a hobbit.

—J.R.R. Tolkien, The Hobbit

7. Begin with a conjunction.

But now, for the first time, I see you are a man like me.

—Erich Maria Remarque, All Quiet On The Western Front

And people laugh at me because I use big words. But if you have big ideas you have to use big words to express them, haven't you?

—Lucy Maud Montgomery, Anne of Green Gables

8. Begin with a transitional word or phrase.

Now, facing the bull, he was conscious of many things at the same time.

—Ernest Hemingway, "The Undefeated"

9. Begin with a subordinate clause.

Because its primary reason for existence was government, Maycomb was spared the grubbiness that distinguished most Alabama towns its size.

—Harper Lee, To Kill a Mockingbird

10. Begin with two or more prepositional phrases.

Through the fence, between the curling flower spaces, I could see them hitting.

—William Faulkner, The Sound and the Fury

11. Write a sentence in which repetition plays a role.

There is no influence like the influence of habit.

—Gilbert Parker, The Translation of a Savage

12. Begin with an appositive phrase.

One of eleven brothers and sisters, Harriet was a moody, willful child.

—Langston Hughes, "Road to Freedom"

13. Begin with a verb.

Look at that sea, girls—all silver and shadow and vision of things not seen.

—Lucy Maud Montgomery, Anne of Green Gables

14. Write a sentence in inverted order so that the predicate comes before the subject.

Across the street from their house, in an empty lot between two houses, stood the rock pile.

—James Baldwin, "The Rock Pile"

15. Begin with an adverbial clause.

Although they lived in style, they felt always an anxiety in the house.

—D.H. Lawrence, "The Rocking-Horse Winner"

16. Write a periodic sentence in which the sentence base (independent clause) comes last.

At six forty-five one summer morning, a red London bus was crossing Waterloo Bridge.

—Jeanette Winterson, Tanglewreck

When the doorbell rings at three in the morning, it's never good news.

—Anthony Horowitz, Stormbreaker

17. Begin with an infinitive as the subject.

To say that Bilbo's breath was taken away is no description at all.

—J.R.R. Tolkien, The Hobbit

18. Begin with a present participial phrase.

Taking the stairs two at a time, he didn't even notice me following behind.

—Olive Ann Burns, Cold Sassy Tree

19. Begin with a past participial phrase.

Amazed at the simplicity of it all, I understood everything as never before.

—Alphonse Daudet, "The Last Lesson"

20. Begin with a gerund or gerund phrase as the subject.

The teaching which you have heard . . . is not my opinion, and its goal is not to explain the world to those who are thirsty for knowledge.

—Hermann Hesse, Siddhartha

21. Write a sentence in which normally unassociated ideas, words, or phrases are placed next to one another (juxtaposed), thus creating an effect of surprise and wit.

It was the saddest and most cruel April of the five. It had held out an almost unbelievable joy and had then struck out in fury at those whose hands were outstretched.

—Irene Hunt, Across Five Aprils

Wilbur didn't want food, he wanted love.

—E.B. White, Charlotte's Web

22. Write a sentence ending with three parallel elements: words, phrases, or clauses that have the same structure.

Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty.

—John F. Kennedy, Inaugural Address

Seeking means to have a goal; but finding means to be free, to be receptive, to have no goal.

—Hermann Hesse, Siddhartha

23. Write a sentence beginning with three parallel elements: words, phrases, or clauses that have the same structure.

Hostile to the past, impatient of the present, and cheated of the future, we were much like those whom men's justice, or hatred, forces to live behind prison bars.

—Albert Camus, The Plague

24. Write a sentence using polysyndeton, the deliberate use of many conjunctions for special emphasis—to highlight quantity or mass of detail, or to create a flowing, continuous sentence pattern.

She looked fresh and young and very beautiful. I thought I had never seen anyone so beautiful.

—Ernest Hemingway, A Farewell to Arms

Oh, my piglets, we are the origins of war—not history's forces, nor the times, nor justice, nor the lack of it, nor causes, nor religions, nor ideas, nor kinds of government—not any other thing.

—James Goldman, The Lion in Winter

25. Write a sentence using asyndeton, the deliberate omission of conjunctions in a series of related clauses.

Bombardment, barrage, curtain-fire, mines, gas, tanks, machine-guns, hand-grenades—words, words, words, but they hold the horror of the world.

—Erich Maria Remarque, All Quiet On The Western Front

26. Begin with a noun clause.

What most people don't seem to realize is that there is just as much money to be made out of the wreckage of a civilization as from the upbuilding of one.

—*Margaret Mitchell*, Gone With the Wind

27. Write a sentence using anaphora, the repetition of the same word or group of words at the beginnings of successive clauses.

We are a people in a quandary about the present. We are a people in search of our future. We are a people in search of a national community.

—*Barbara Jordan, 1976 Democratic Convention Keynote Address*

Perhaps you can feel if you can't hear. Perhaps kind thoughts reach people somehow, even through windows and doors and walls. Perhaps you feel a little warm and comforted.

—*Frances Hodgson Burnett*, A Little Princess

28. Write a sentence using epistrophe, the repetition of words or phrases at the end of successive phrases, clauses, or sentences.

Everything's a story. You are a story. I am a story.

—*Frances Hodgson Burnett*, A Little Princess

29. Begin with an absolute phrase (or more than one).

His hands raw, he reached a flat place at the top.

—*Richard Connell, "The Most Dangerous Game"*

His head aching, his throat sore, he forgot to light the cigarette.

—*Sinclair Lewis*, Cass Timberlane

30. Write an antithetical sentence that contains two statements which are balanced but opposite.

Nothing is hopeless; we must hope for everything.

—*Madeleine L'Engle*, A Wrinkle in Time

31. Ask a rhetorical question.

Do I walk? Have I feet still?

—*Erich Maria Remarque*, All Quiet On The Western Front

32. Write a sentence or a series of sentences using anadiplosis, the repetition of the last word of one clause at the beginning of the following clause.

Once you change your philosophy, you change your thought pattern. Once you change your thought pattern, you change your attitude. Once you change your attitude, it changes your behavior pattern and then you go on into some action.

—*Malcolm X*, The Ballot or the Bullet

33. Write a sentence using antimetabole, in which the arrangement of ideas in the second clause is a reversal of the first.

We do not stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing.

—Benjamin Franklin

Fair is foul, and foul is fair.

—Shakespeare, Macbeth

34. Write a sentence using epanalepsis, the repetition at the end of a clause of the word, or a form of the word, that occurred at the beginning of the clause.

The time must come. It's enough—enough to go to cemeteries, enough to weep for oceans—it's enough.

—Elie Wiesel, Speech at Buchenwald Concentration Camp

35. Create a balanced sentence in which the phrases or clauses balance each other by virtue of their likeness of structure.

Ma, a mouse has to do what a mouse has to do.

—Avi, Ragweed

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.

—Charles Dickens, A Tale of Two Cities