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## The Teaching of Writing: Methods, Resources, Plans, and Analysis

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The Teaching of Writing:  
Methods, Resources, Plans, and Analysis

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A Final Portfolio

Submitted to the English Department of Bowling Green  
State University in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in the field of English

14 August 2019

Dr. Heather Jordan, First Reader  
Ms. Kimberly Spallinger, Second Reader

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### Worth the Ride

My journey to earn a Master's degree in English followed a much curvier path than I originally imagined. When I set out in search of the perfect program, my goal was to become a qualified instructor of the college writing class at our high school, but I was also considering a potential future career shift to a more business-related position. I began working toward a degree in professional writing at BGSU in the spring of 2016 and planned to finish quickly while continuing to teach high school English.

However, less than a year later, I found out I was pregnant with twin girls, and a significantly high-risk pregnancy left me arranging my winter final exam ahead of time given the great likelihood for preterm delivery and a stay in the NICU. After my girls were born healthy and vibrant, I took a semester off from my Master's classes here and there throughout the next couple of years. During this time, I realized my goal of a professional writing degree no longer felt like the perfect option, so I switched to the individualized track to better accommodate my schedule. My personalized degree outline encompasses both professional writing and the teaching of writing. I greatly appreciated the variety of courses and topics this option has provided, allowing me to take professional and technical writing and editing courses, along with many classes related to composition instruction.

Compiling this portfolio has been much more challenging than I expected because I had such a strong vision for conveying the diverse insight and skills I have gained through my unique program track. My envisioned portfolio captured my separate capabilities both as an educator, with innovative lesson ideas and strong pedagogical analysis, and also as a professional writer, with enhanced technical communication ability and a clear understanding of rhetoric. However, similar to my struggles deciding which degree course of study was the best option, I was again

finding it difficult to determine my greatest strengths and interests. I wrestled with which of my essays and papers would be the very best candidates for this portfolio and kept feeling like I lacked any particularly perfect options. Eventually, I simply gravitated toward the ones I felt the most connected to, knowing I could revise them and hoping they would be strong enough pieces in the end. By coincidence, my four portfolio selections all reflect my deep interest in the teaching of writing. They appear in an order that begins quite broad and narrows in focus: an overview of my approach to the teaching of writing, a comprehensive list of writing instruction resources, an individual unit plan to implement as a composition instructor, and an analysis related to one very specific but overall significant aspect of teaching writing.

The first selection in my portfolio is a reflective narrative about how I teach writing and why. My classroom lesson plans constantly transformed while I was working toward my degree because I was always learning new and improved instructional methods. I had to significantly revise this particular piece for the portfolio because I ended up gaining more and more insight into best practices for teaching composition through other relevant courses during my time in this program. I chose to include a writing instruction narrative in my portfolio because I like how it organizes my approach to teaching writing and also helps tie the remaining portfolio pieces together. I also wanted an example of my writing that was a bit more creative and stylistically uninhibited.

The original assignment was essentially to respond to several questions related to composition instruction pedagogy and methodology for Dr. Lee Nickoson's course called The Teaching of Writing (ENG 6200). I reframed the narrative to solely be an overview of my personal beliefs and practices, sort of like a teaching philosophy but with a narrow scope. After significantly reorganizing the structure of this essay, I think I have created a much clearer focus.

I realized I was answering several individual questioning prompts rather than creating a cohesive outline. Other than these substantial structural changes, I noticed many areas of weak syntax throughout and attempted to incorporate more sentence variety in my revised version. Dr. Nickoson offered many great suggestions for places where I could add examples or more detail, and I tried to do so as much as possible. I ended up removing some of the areas where she gave related feedback, but I applied her comments in a general way by being more specific throughout and spending a bit more time on certain ideas. After submitting this piece for peer review and discussing its effectiveness with my portfolio advisor, Dr. Heather Jordan, I decided to incorporate more pedagogical support and source citation to add credibility to my views. My original draft included references to the course textbook, but I removed them in fear they disrupted the flow. However, after carefully reincorporating a greater variety of source support, I feel it is a much stronger overview but still maintains a smoother focus. This selection is potentially very personally useful in that I now have a single, organized document featuring my composition instruction philosophy.

The second piece in the portfolio, my substantive research submission, is an annotated bibliography that was also originally developed as part of The Teaching of Writing (ENG 6200) course with Dr. Lee Nickoson. The assignment involved creating any type of research-supported project we would find personally valuable, and an annotated bibliography was a popular option. I focused my research on developing a list of sources teachers could use in their efforts to successfully reach young writers, particularly those in middle school. During my revision process, I altered the concentration because I wanted teachers to find this list of instructional ideas more applicable for a variety of ages instead of only middle schoolers, and I also decided to highlight how to reach reluctant writers in particular. My motivation for this specific scope was a

recognition of where my teaching weaknesses currently lie and what would likely be most beneficial for my own potential use. I have experience tutoring at a campus writing center and, in the future, might have more opportunities as a writing tutor, so I also wanted something that could be manipulated and utilized in that context as well.

My revisions for this piece mostly involved improving my summary responses for the entries by adding more reflection, analysis, and application to each. I worked to apply Dr. Nickoson's feedback, such as expanding on thoughts and offering specific examples, as much as possible, although some of it no longer applied to my modified theme. One piece of feedback that directly affected the updated version was Dr. Nickoson's question about beginning the writing traits lesson idea with instruction about what each trait involves. I decided to switch the original source for an entire unit plan instead of a list of activities.

The final version of the annotated bibliography features many new sources, and I deleted several articles that either only offered data or did not apply to reluctant writers. In the end, this annotated bibliography demonstrates the significant research I conducted in my efforts to learn how to better meet the needs of reluctant writers. Because I want this document to be readily accessible for any user, I purposely kept the sources very easy to access and quick to read; I avoided any large PDFs or articles involving too much research to wade through. Most of the resources briefly explain any background context necessary and then offer a few solutions or ideas for working with students who tend to struggle with various aspects of writing and the writing process. After sifting through many sources and working hard to approach the topic from several different angles, I have a lengthy list of valuable resources and useful ideas. I hope classroom instructors (composition as well as other disciplines) and writing tutors find this

annotated bibliography to be a beneficial list of effective instructional methods and engaging lesson ideas.

Although no pedagogical piece is required for a Master's degree on the individualized track, I have created many unit plans throughout my education-related courses. My third selection for the portfolio is a unit plan I created for Teaching Grammar in the Context of Writing (ENG 6220) with Dr. Cheryl Hoy. It aims to help teachers arm students with grammar tools they can use to develop more dynamic writing. The overarching goal of sentence variety is concealed in lessons on absolutes, appositives, adjectives out of order, participial phrases, parallel structure, periodic sentences, and purposeful repetition. I worked hard on this unit from the very beginning and wanted it to be something I could actually use. However, I felt that the final copy of it was rushed. I was eager to go back and make sure it was comprehensive and polished.

I knew I needed to improve the methods of evaluation used with each individual lesson, so I focused quite a bit on being more specific and thorough in my explanations of each assessment. I made changes to the narrative portion of the unit by refining my sentences and reworking the content and organization in a few spots. Also, I corrected several areas of ineffective word choice or weak sentence structure. Throughout the individual lesson plans, I ended up noticing many proofing mistakes, and I found parts that needed clearer explanation of the directions and more interactive instructional components. After additional feedback from Dr. Jordan, I also worked to improve my teaching of grammar in the context of writing by asking students to apply the topics to the essay drafts they would be working on. Overall, if I ever return to teaching, I would be very enthusiastic about utilizing this unit plan.

My final piece for the portfolio began as a book response that was written for Introduction to Linguistics (ENG 6150) with Dr. Sheri Wells-Jensen. We were assigned to summarize, analyze, and reflect on a book from a themed list of options, and I chose to respond to *Does Spelling Matter?* by Simon Horobin. He covers a vast volume of information but ends up arguing that correct spelling should be enforced. During my initial revision process of this selection, I separated my response into more paragraphs, fixed sentence structure issues throughout, and added a bit more elaboration to some of the points. After peer review input and additional discussion with Dr. Jordan, I realized the book review did not demonstrate strong research or analysis. Since I have always been highly interested in the debate about spelling, I decided to transform the basic response into an argument about whether or not spelling actually matters. However, after completing a great deal of additional research and reframing the entire essay, I was surprised to discover I did not feel exceptionally drawn to one side or the other; instead, I ultimately decided to convey the importance of understanding context when determining the necessity of correct spelling.

In the end, what has been perhaps the most important realization after compiling this portfolio, revising each piece, and reflecting on the process is the awareness that I will always be interested in helping others become better writers. I resigned after six years as an English teacher, and I now work part time from home as a communications specialist for a private company. When I left teaching, I did so mostly for more family time and a bit less stress, but I also have always felt drawn to the business world. While I enjoy my current position, I am grateful for the wide array of career possibilities this degree might help facilitate because I have come to understand through this portfolio process that part of me will always be drawn to the teaching of writing. So, I cannot confidently say what my career future might look like in the

coming years, but I can say that the positive impact of my experience in this program will be beneficial no matter the circumstances. As I believe this portfolio demonstrates, working to achieve my Master's degree has made me more curious, resilient, analytical, informed, and ambitious. Even though I sometimes struggled deciding which road to take, and despite the path being longer and more winding than anticipated, I am certain it was worth the ride.

### Methods of Authentic and Engaging Writing Instruction

Writing has been a passion of mine since I decided to write a short book about a horse when I was in second grade. I crafted uninteresting poetry and journaled quite a bit during my childhood and adolescent years. As a high school senior, I enrolled in College English, and it was not until then that it finally hit me: I like to write more than most people. It was my favorite hour of the day, and I was excited for each and every paper we were assigned. That class helped me realize I had a unique passion for writing, but I also learned that writing could potentially be one of my main strengths. Ultimately, it was an appetite and aptitude for writing that led me to become an English teacher.

Throughout my years as an undergraduate, I eagerly worked to improve my writing skills while simultaneously learning how to teach others to do the same. Rather than continue as an office assistant at my much higher paying campus job in the Dean of Business's office, I opted to work at the campus writing center. This proved to be an invaluable opportunity for me because I gained experience with a wide range of writing levels in a large variety of content fields and contexts. More importantly, it made me realize how effective a one-on-one tutoring approach is in the instruction of writing. I took my experience and approach as a writing center tutor and brought it with me to my role as a high school English teacher.

As a teacher with students who have a wide variety of skill levels all within one class, I believe there is a clear standout on the list of best practices: writing conferences. Utilizing a more individualized approach allows me to start where each student is at and proceed appropriately. When I conference with students, we can review their personal error tendencies, and they are also more likely to participate in the process of improving their essay. Of course, seeing myself as more of a writing tutor than merely a teacher is not always a plausible approach

and certainly requires abundant planning and efficiency. Offering students careful feedback and meeting with them independently to review their progress is vital, but it can very time-consuming. I aim to keep conferences to five minutes, and that goal can be achieved by preparing for each in advance and asking my students to do the same (Krulder). Students respond to a quick list of prompts to help them plan ahead regarding questions they would like to ask and areas where they are struggling. In addition, technology can be a major benefit to the conferencing approach. Google Docs allows me to offer students instant feedback on developing drafts and chat with them about questions via the comment feature. Whether through computers or in person, writing conferences better ensure my students are being adequately supported during the entire development of their writing assignment, and this emphasis on the writing process is another key feature in my composition instruction philosophy.

Rather than merely conveying the main goal for a final written product, I give students an understanding of how the steps taken to get there are equally important. Asking students to write an essay and then failing to scaffold the assignment can leave many of them behind and force them to complete the essay haphazardly; therefore, they are not building applicable, universal writing skills. Instead, I want students to be prepared to tackle any future writing assignment by employing a personally effective process. This idea links to a discussion of rhetoric: once a successful writing process is developed, students can apply that to process, with tweaks at times, to write for any given purpose or audience (“WWC Recommendation”). By first teaching them the traditional writing process, they are given a clear map to the destination, but I then encourage them to approach these phases in ways that will be individually fitting. In other words, I offer several successful methods to choose from or to at least model from, but they can ultimately decide what works best for them. For example, requiring proof of prewriting helps students

develop the important skills of working through ideas and planning organization, but allowing them to select their own prewriting forms, such as looping, questioning, or mind-mapping, ensures they consider and utilize what will be personally successful. At the same time, Principle 3.2 of the National Council for the Teachers of English states, “However, collecting those strategies is not enough; writers need practice not only in choosing a strategy to fit a particular purpose and context, but they also need practice in explaining why they made the choices they did” (“Understanding and Teaching Writing: Guiding Principles”). In order for students to effectively decide and develop their own unique way of applying the writing process, I require significant amounts of reflection.

While reflection throughout the entire writing process is important, I find it most pertinent when applied to revision. In “Reflective Writing and the Revision Process,” Sandra L. Giles says, “One of the most important functions of reflective writing in the long run is to establish in you, the writer, a habit of self-reflective thinking” (202). I always want my students to think about the choices they make and the impact those choices have on the final product. It is also important to use guided questions to help prompt students as part of reflection to give them a starting point and promote greater thoughtfulness in responses (Moussa-Inaty 107). Overall, utilizing a well-planned, metacognitive approach to facilitate learning of my students’ individual writing processes allows them to become not only effective but also adaptable writers.

This emphasis on reflection carries beyond my focus on the writing process and into my approach to teaching grammar. Grammar instruction is a tough but necessary feature of being an English teacher. However, Constance Weaver, popular grammar instruction expert, states, “When taught in isolation, neither traditional nor other kinds of grammar were effective in improving writing” (14). Rather than asking students to complete worksheets and memorize

supposed rules, she views grammar instruction as a way to equip students with methods and strategies they can use to enhance and enrich their writing. Weaver suggests, “Decide what aspects of grammar are really worth teaching and then teach them well--throughout the production of one piece of writing and over a period of weeks, as needed” (64). A more authentic approach to teaching grammar in the context of writing can be achieved by incorporating real-world applications of the topics, using samples of literature to have students recognize grammatical patterns, and asking them to come up with their own example sentences. Students should apply new knowledge directly to the actual essay assignments I ask them to complete. So, I do not focus on terminology, but I do spend time asking students to question how different grammatical choices can change the effectiveness and impact of their sentences. I give them options for creating dynamic sentence structure and adding variety to their writing, all while pointing out the fluid nature of grammar. While most of my students may not be able to correct identify a direct object as well as might be required by standardized tests, I am content in that they are able to produce a higher quality of written work.

Finally, one of the most important, and also more specific, factors of my approach to writing instruction is the use of creative writing. While it might be a less obvious or less prevalent factor for some, I found its impact to be undeniably favorable. Without realizing it, I have always integrated creative writing activities within all of my unit plans. For example, I assign a character backstory with *Romeo and Juliet*, which allows students to creatively demonstrate understanding and also apply what they have learned about characterization. My students create menus when learning about adjectives and use online prompt generators to make quick stories incorporating novel vocabulary words correctly. The positive influence creative writing opportunities have had on my students is undeniable. Creative writing can make the act

of writing a more connected one since the writer feels attached to the work rather than distanced or uninterested, which often creates resistance (Anonioua and Moriarty 159). Not only does creative writing facilitate practice and repetition, it builds confidence and encourages enjoyment in writing.

A goal of mine as an English teacher is, of course, to see my students improve academically. I want to have made a positive impact on them in many ways, but I especially hope I have opened their minds to the value of writing. When my students pack up their backpacks and shuffle out the door of my classroom for the last time, I worry whether or not I met with them often enough about their progress on essays. I consider how well they have each developed their own writing process. I am proud to have helped facilitate a group of highly reflective thinkers. And I will never forget some of the creative sentences, stories, and poems they came up with. In the end, though, I feel most accomplished simply when my students are able to write something they are proud of.

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## Resources for Reaching Reluctant Writers

### 1. Overview

This annotated bibliography features a list of valuable resources and ideas to more successfully meet the needs of students who are reluctant writers. Each source overview offers a brief description and analysis of the information and instructional methods suggested. The resources provided would be most useful to writing tutors and English teachers of any grade or age group.

### 2. Annotated Bibliography

“3 Keys to Teaching Kids to Write.” *U.S. News*. U.S. News & World Report L.P., 2 Oct. 2014, [www.usnews.com/news/articles/2014/10/27/3-keys-to-teaching-kids-to-write](http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2014/10/27/3-keys-to-teaching-kids-to-write). Accessed 5 Jun. 2019.

From *US News*, this article offers information particularly of value for those who teach beginning writers. One of the first points is that students need to write more, and by doing so they will naturally improve. The next tip is to have students use computers, which, according to the article, had the most impact on middle school students. Being able to easily edit as they write and avoiding the hindrance of writing their work by hand proved to positively impact results. Lastly, the article commented on the common theme of traditional grammar instruction often being irrelevant. However, it also noted one concept did seem to be a persistent benefit to students: learning how to combine two simple sentences into correctly punctuated compound ones. Teaching sentence variety is an excellent, naturally-differentiated lesson; more advanced writers can work on creating complex structures and less experienced writers can practice correctly combining more basic parts.

“30 Ideas for Teaching Writing.” *National Writing Project*, 2003,

[www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/resource/922](http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/resource/922). Accessed 5 Jun. 2019.

Published by the National Writing Project, this article offers teachers thirty first-rate ideas to encourage students to write. The source begins by noting that the NWP does not claim there is only one correct way to teach writing; instead, they highly encourage a combination of various techniques. Because the list involves quite general topics, the ideas can be applied to a variety of age groups, experience levels, or lesson goals. Two particularly useful tips are “Spotlight language and use group brainstorming to help students create poetry,” which emphasizes collaboration when approaching poetry, and “Think Like A Football Coach,” which encourages writing teachers to focus on positive feedback and motivating students. These two ideas are especially applicable to reaching reluctant writers, but the list is a resource that can be returned to and referenced for many different lesson ideas throughout any course or program.

“7 Strategies for Inspiring Reluctant Writers.” *Shmoop*. Shmoop University,

[www.shmoop.com/teachers/subjects-grades/humanities/strategies-for-inspiring-reluctant-writers.html](http://www.shmoop.com/teachers/subjects-grades/humanities/strategies-for-inspiring-reluctant-writers.html). Accessed 9 Jun. 2019.

This *Shmoop* resource offers great insight into the thoughts and attitudes of reluctant writers. The article’s unique approach also includes unique suggestions. While many sources advocate for more prewriting activities, this one suggests eliminating extra

phases of the writing process once in a while to make the task more approachable and less overwhelming. This is an astute idea that many composition instructors likely have not considered. The article also encourages the use of more multi-modal methods, such as visual writing prompts or online 3D mind mapping to organize thoughts. Being aware of students' individual learning styles is a highly effective way to not only engage them but also better ensure they will understand the information.

Alrubail, Rusul. "Strategies to Help Struggling Writers." *Edutopia*, 30 Nov. 2015, [www.edutopia.org/blog/strategies-to-help-struggling-writers-rusul-alrubail](http://www.edutopia.org/blog/strategies-to-help-struggling-writers-rusul-alrubail). Accessed 5 Jun. 2019.

This article by Rusul Alrubail focuses on teaching struggling writers. Alrubail begins by noting how four out of five students are not proficient in writing, and she helps explain where those students are coming from and why they are reluctant. The ideas she offers are based on her experiences teaching first-year college students, but the emphasis on a student-centered approach is relevant for any age. She particularly encourages the use of blogs. While this might not be feasible in all circumstances, it would certainly promote engagement. Maintaining on-going feedback with students is also a key tip from this resource. After checking in and commenting once, it is important to check in again and see how students are applying the feedback.

Berne, Jennifer. "Help Students Generate Ideas Through Prewriting." *LD OnLine*, WETA, 2009, [www.ldonline.org/article/36070/](http://www.ldonline.org/article/36070/). Accessed 5 Jun. 2019.

Jennifer Berne provides a list of methods to guide students' thinking about what and how to write. She notes how starting a piece is generally the trickiest road block for students who tend to struggle. They often spend an excessive amount of time in the planning stages without actually getting much planned. In order to help them generate ideas and feel ready to write, she offers suggestions such as free writing or imaging. She also advocates for the use of mnemonic device approaches to writing assignments. For example, a RAFT (Role-Audience-Format-Topic) can help writers organize the task and keep focused on the goal, making it less daunting.

Cutler, David. "To Teach Effective Writing, Model Effective Writing." *Edutopia*, 14 Jul. 2015, [www.edutopia.org/blog/teach-and-model-effective-writing-david-cutler](http://www.edutopia.org/blog/teach-and-model-effective-writing-david-cutler). Accessed 8 Jun. 2019.

This *Edutopia* article from David Cutler offers a list of short yet extremely beneficial methods any teacher or tutor can easily adopt into their own curriculum. He focuses on the importance of modeling; showing students personal examples, both of ideal results and attempts that fell short, humanizes the experience and makes the process a little less intimidating. This is also especially key for students who need concrete examples of what is expected. For writer's workshop, Cutler has the class working at various places, but he assigns students to lead certain stations. For example, a student who is particularly good at topic sentences also serves as the topic sentence go-to help station. This is an excellent way to challenge certain students while maintaining an efficient classroom structure. The

last key take-away from this resource is the value of students seeing writing in the real world. Utilizing writing examples from professionals in the community is an excellent tactic to help students put the information into practice and realize the importance of quality writing, which takes them to a higher level of thinking and learning.

De Vise, Daniel. "Guest post: Four ways to teach students to write." *The Washington Post*, 2 Nov. 2011, [www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/college-inc/post/guest-post-four-ways-to-teach-students-to-write/2011/11/01/gIQARk8mfM\\_blog.html?utm\\_term=.aa1dbaf82c18](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/college-inc/post/guest-post-four-ways-to-teach-students-to-write/2011/11/01/gIQARk8mfM_blog.html?utm_term=.aa1dbaf82c18). Accessed 9 Jun. 2019.

While this guest post for *The Washington Post* is a bit older, the critique of current writing practices and the need for readjustment is still relevant. In de Vise's opinion, too many students enter higher education systems lacking the basics of composition, and he offers very practical suggestions to better meet the needs of struggling writers. Instructors should set more realistic goals that students feel are actually applicable to their lives and future endeavors. Using test scores as motivation is not a positive or beneficial approach. Besides assigning longer writing pieces, de Vise also emphasizes the importance of teaching students to summarize before tackling analysis and of guiding students through the revision process.

"Efficient Ways to Improve Student Writing." *University of Wisconsin – Whitewater: Learn Center*. UW Board of Regents, [www.uww.edu/learn/improving/restiptool/improve-student-writing](http://www.uww.edu/learn/improving/restiptool/improve-student-writing). Accessed 9 June. 2019.

The first and most significant point in this article states, “View the improvement of students’ writing as your responsibility.” Most resources related to reluctant writers do not include the teacher’s attitude in the list of ideas or methods. This point is particularly significant because the resource is intended for faculty from all disciplines. One component of better reaching reluctant writers is that it cannot be the sole responsibility of the English department. In addition, honestly expressing the values, purposes, and challenges of writing to students is a main emphasis in this article, as is the importance of assigning even small writing tasks on a daily basis simply to get students to practice. Another helpful tip is to check with colleagues about what methods they have found effective.

Finkle, David Lee. “Writing Extraordinary Essays.” *Scholastic Teachers*. Scholastic Inc., 2016, [www.scholastic.com/teachers/articles/teaching-content/writing-extraordinary-essays/](http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/articles/teaching-content/writing-extraordinary-essays/). Accessed 8 Jun. 2019.

Author David Lee Finkle seems to have a good understanding of one of the biggest challenges inexperienced writers inevitably face: what to write about. Teachers find this frustrating because it is often a small aspect of the overall assignment and goal. Finkle discusses the importance of appealing to students’ actual interests. He advocates for intermixing audience and purpose in order to create a more authentic writing experience, rather than merely practicing for a standardized test. One example of this could be having students write letters to a representative in congress about issues they are passionate

about. Instead of offering a vague prompt and asking students to start writing, it is essential to take into consideration what habits students are forming and what they are interpreting as real-world writing uses or values. By employing the methods Finke promotes in this article, students will gain a deeper understanding of the reasons to write, while also improving their skills and furthering their interests.

Fuglei, Monica. "Share Your Story: Teaching Strategies That Reach Reluctant Writers." *Room 241: A Blog by Concordia University- Portland*, 17 Mar. 2016, <https://education.concordia.edu/blog/classroom-resources/teaching-strategies-reluctant-writers/>. Accessed 9 Jun. 2019.

This article begins by acknowledging the common student myth that good writers are simply born that way. It then moves on to how to dispel that myth by assigning more creative writing. Fuglei, a composition and creative writing instructor at a community college, explains how powerful creative writing can be by allowing students to share their story or create an entirely new one. Creativity in lesson planning also contributes to the success of this approach. The article offers multiple simple yet effective ways to uniquely scaffold an assignment. The first is to give students a word bank of terms they must include in the story. This is also a way to expand vocabulary and even practice the parts of speech. Another appealing idea is to give students the beginning and end to a story or poem, asking them to recreate the middle. Lastly, students can create a piece of drama by using the existing stage directions and characters from a popular play. These effectively designed assignments give timid students enough framework to get started and to feel a

clearer sense of direction. In the end, students are excited about their creative pieces and proud of what they accomplished, without realizing how much writing practice they received and how much they likely learned.

McLary, Rita. "Writing Traits Instruction." *Scholastic*. Scholastic, Inc.,

[www.scholastic.com/teachers/contributors/site-contributors/rita-mclary/](http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/contributors/site-contributors/rita-mclary/). Accessed 8 Jun. 2019.

This *Scholastic* resource is specifically intended for grades 9-12, but writing instruction based on the traits can be applied to students in any grade. Designed as a unit plan, each set of suggested methods includes tips for all phases of the lesson, and the resource also ensures students begin with a foundational understanding of the traits. A main component of McLary's approach is utilizing literature to serve as various sources of examples. This engages students, requires them to use higher level critical thinking skills, and creates a more authentic learning experience. The resource is very encompassing and thorough since it also includes additional ideas for assignments, assessments, and extensions.

Ojalvo, Holly Epstein. "10 Ways to Develop Expository Writing Skills With The New York Times." *The New York Times*, 8 Jul. 2010,

[https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/learning/issues\\_in\\_depth/10WritingSkillsIdeas.html](https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/learning/issues_in_depth/10WritingSkillsIdeas.html). Accessed 8 Jun. 2019.

*The New York Times* offers excellent sources for composition teachers, and the focus of this particular article is how to teach expository writing. Like much of the research on reaching reluctant writers indicates, Ojalvo emphasizes using authentic writing examples and assignments that engage students' interests. The article also offers ways to better support students throughout the writing process, such as information about how to add detail and how to write introductions and conclusions. Students tend to struggle quite a bit with these particular features of writing a longer essay. By providing several links to other *New York Times* articles and sources, this resource is dynamic planning tool.

“Ten Ideas That Get Kids Writing.” *National Writing Project*, May 2003,

[www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/resource/nwp/ten-ideas.html](http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/resource/nwp/ten-ideas.html). Accessed 8 Jun. 2019.

Closely linked to the purpose and goals of the National Writing Project, this page is an outstanding resource for how to motivate students to write. With each idea offered, there is a link to read more about the concept. The suggestions on this list emphasize how writing is a social act that needs to be done with each other and to each other, and students should see how writing fits in the greater context of the outside world. One the most poignant suggestions, “Writing need not begin and end at the classroom door,” prompts teachers to take their class outside or to a museum for writing inspiration. Drawing stronger connections between writing and real-world situations is clearly another significant approach to more effectively reaching reluctant writers in particular.

Teller, Joseph R. “Are We Teaching Composition All Wrong?” *The Chronicle of Higher*

*Education*, 3 Oct. 2016. [www.chronicle.com/article/Are-We-Teaching-Composition/237969](http://www.chronicle.com/article/Are-We-Teaching-Composition/237969). Accessed 9 Jun. 2019.

In this honest interpretation about the ineffectiveness of current composition instruction practices, Joseph R. Teller highlights how some of the pedagogical pillars, such as the interweaving of reading and writing, are not always practical in the classroom. Many students still leave without mastery of the intended objectives, which can cause them to become even more reluctant as the years go by. After breaking down the issues, the article does offer a few encouraging alternatives. Teachers should refocus on the very core of what they are there to do, which is to help students write better sentences and express themselves effectively through writing. Teller asserts that revision and peer review are generally vital components, but they might actually not be necessary for every assignment. One of the most important recommendations is that students need to write very frequently throughout the course, and that feedback needs to occur promptly and regularly.

Warren, Alex. "Games to Make Grammar Fun." *National Geographic Learning: in focus*.

National Geographic, 1 Aug. 2017,

<https://ngl.cengage.com/infocus/index.php/2017/08/01/games-make-grammar-fun/>.

Accessed 8 Jun. 2019.

This clever source offers several engaging grammar-based games to get kids moving and interacting. Warren keenly notes the importance of appealing to what students find

amusing and also acknowledges the need for teachers to have many options at their disposal. The activities listed in the article would be great for most contexts because the level of difficulty can be modified. In particular, reluctant writers tend to be particularly stubborn participants in class discussions and activities, but utilizing a game approach makes learning about grammar a bit less intimidating and bit more fun.

Wasserman, Laurie. "Motivating Reluctant Writers With Journals." *Education Week Teacher*.

Editorial Projects in Education, 14 Aug. 2012,

[www.edweek.org/tm/articles/2012/08/13/tln\\_wasserman\\_journals.html](http://www.edweek.org/tm/articles/2012/08/13/tln_wasserman_journals.html). Accessed 9 Jun. 2019.

Once a reluctant writer herself, Laurie Wasserman's ideas for reaching hesitant students are particularly sensitive and encouraging. A clear theme of this article is appealing to students through engaging, relevant prompts, such as a short video clip or a children's book, that will help get students interested and thinking. Journaling and modeling, which are common suggestions for teaching all types of writers, are especially useful tools for continuously building confidence in those who tend to be most resistant. Wasserman suggests modeling by reading one's own work to the student, group, or class, and then analyzing areas of weakness or possibilities for improvement out loud. This allows students to hear and see not only a final result but also the vital processes of reflection and revision.

## A Grammar and Dynamic Sentence Variety Unit Plan

### **1. Rationale**

Throughout my years as a high school English teacher, I have taught many types and levels of writing, and I have also had experience working at a campus writing center as an undergraduate. One recurring trend that always stood out to me was how vital sentence variety is to effective writing and its overall impact. Although it is a relatively simple feature to improve, I have found it is so often overlooked. Developing variation in structure and rhythm throughout a piece of writing helps keep the reader stay engaged, but it also demonstrates a greater mastery of grammar. As teachers, we generally have the expectation that students will utilize a wide expanse of sentence formations and facets, but we sometimes fail to actually teach what we expect. Some teachers approach sentence variety by focusing on the types of sentences, such as compound or complex, which is partly what I used to do. I also simply encouraged students to vary their sentence openings and lengths. However, I realize now that I gave them almost no tools to help them actually implement these suggestions. Effective grammar instruction involves teaching concepts in the context of writing and asking students to apply learning directly to assignments as part of the writing process. While the grammar-based approach of this unit might seem more indirect, I believe I would see much more effective results through my students' use of dynamic sentence variety.

### **2. Unit Overview**

This unit was designed for an advanced English class of high school students in grades 11 and 12 who are on the college track. The class meets daily for fifty minutes. Because these students are at top of their class, they are typically quite driven and capable of managing more

than most students in a general education class. This type of higher-level course hugely impacted my decisions for content as well as instructional methods. Due to the strict requirements students must meet in order to be enrolled in this course, such as having a class rank near the top of the class, obtaining teacher approval, and maintaining a high GPA expectation, there is generally minimal linguistic diversity affecting student learning and typically few special education modifications or accommodations needed for students with learning disabilities. Therefore, I have not scaffolded these lessons, and the activities and assessments are much more independent and rigorous than they would be for a younger age group or general education class with a greater span of abilities. However, the methods and assessments would of course be differentiated appropriately to meet the needs of students as necessary. The standards applied in this unit are based on the Common Core Standards for English/Language Arts instruction in Minnesota. If offered as a concurrent enrollment option for high school students to earn college credit, I would also include the standards from that particular cooperating university.

All of the lesson plans in this unit work to approach grammar instruction in an effective, authentic way, which is through the context of writing. Teaching grammar only through lectures and workbooks will simply not elicit the desired results in student writing and will not foster an engaged, eager classroom environment. My unit is based on the idea that grammar should be seen as a tool to improve writing. Utilizing real-world examples and also offering students ample opportunity to apply knowledge in a variety of ways are vital components of this unit. The individual lesson assessments involve observing how well students understand the topics by identifying them in existing texts, such as literature or journalism, and also applying them to various writing activities. Students will also be asked to practice implementing some of the techniques in the essay drafts they are working on. Assessment for each lesson is essentially

twofold. I will be observing understanding through the assignments and writing activities accompanying each topic, which is the assessment form I noted with each lesson plan. But a more summative evaluation of the concepts will occur through the grading of their essays, particularly the final essay.

Rather than a ten-day unit where the lessons take place consecutively over the course of two straight weeks, my plan involves a cohesive goal applied over any amount of time. Ideally, these lessons would be implemented as needed throughout the year, most likely based on relevancy. If I notice a certain type of error in a majority of essays for one particular assignment, I could pull that corresponding lesson from this unit. I could also utilize a specific lesson based on the type of essay I believe it fits well with. For example, parallel structure and periodic sentences would be an effective lesson to pair with an argumentative essay unit. By the end of the year (or semester), students should be well-equipped to develop thoughtful sentence variety. The last lesson of the unit will involve a review and unified implementation activity involving all of the topics covered.

### **3. Pedagogical Theory**

The overall concept of this unit and some of the individual lesson ideas are largely derived from Harry Noden's *Image Grammar* approach. According to Noden, there are five basic brush strokes that writers have as options in their creative process, and some of the lessons in this unit were based on a couple of those topics. Similar to Noden, I have always believed in the importance of teaching grammar as a type of toolbox for writers. Although it can still be a controversial assertion, employing grammar in the creation of an effective piece of writing often does not involve a "right" or "wrong" answer. Grammar is much more flexible and personal than

many people think. The decisions I have made in designing this unit do not take a prescriptive, authoritative angle. Instead, students will be exposed to the grammar options they have and will be asked to consider how their choices impact the effectiveness of a sentence or passage. The theories and ideas found in Constance Weaver's *Grammar to Enrich & Enhance Writing* align with my beliefs and also greatly influenced this unit. While I was greatly inspired by concepts discussed and approaches suggested in Weaver and Noden, I designed the lessons and utilized my own ideas for the engagement methods, handouts, assessments, and most supplementary materials. Overall, Weaver nicely sums up the overall philosophy this unit is based on: "Empower students to draw on those aspects of grammar that will enrich and enhance their writing" (3).

#### 4. Lesson Plans

##### LESSON 1: Participial Phrases

**Overview:** In this lesson, students will learn what a participle is in the context of understanding the function of participial phrases. They will be asked to connect the topic to what they see in their own writing and also practice applying it using creative writing.

**Objectives:** Students will be able to

- Define participle and participial phrases
- Locate examples of participial phrases in fiction and identify their parts
- Create their own sentences that effectively utilize participial phrases to enhance meaning and vary structure

##### **Standards:**

11.7.4.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

##### **Materials:**

- Essay drafts
- Independent reading books
- Writing utensil and paper
- Whiteboard, marker, and eraser

- Participial Phrase Sentences list (Appendix A)

**Lesson Part 1:**

Prior to the lesson, have Sentence 1 and Sentence 2 (from the Participial Phrase Sentences list in Appendix A) written on the whiteboard. When students arrive, ask them to take a minute and read the two sentences. Casually discuss which one they think is better and why. Explain that Sentence 2 begins with what is called a participial phrase. Underline the participle in the sentence and define participle. Talk about the difference between present and past participles. Show students how they function as part of the participial phrase. Explain how the phrase can be added to different places in the sentence. Write out Sentence 3 and discuss the same ideas. (20 minutes)

Write Sentence 4 on the board. Have students turn and talk about what participial phrase could be added to improve it. Ask one student to come up and add to the sentence. Point out and discuss the participle added as well as how the phrase adds to the sentence. Erase the phrase(s) and have another student write theirs. Talk about how there are many options and how it changes the meaning. Continue the discussion and the same process for Sentence 5. (15 minutes)

Have students take out their independent reading books that they should have with them at all times. They should find three examples of sentences containing participial phrases. Have students copy them to paper, underlining the phrases and circling the participles. This is to be handed in as an “exit slip” on their way out the door. (15 minutes)

The lesson will continue the next day.

**Lesson Part 2:**

Have students come up with a participial phrase (not the whole sentence) and be prepared to share. Then, ask students share with small groups based on the peers in their rows. They should select one sentence from each group to write on the board. (15 minutes)

Discuss the text examples on the board as a class, identifying the participles and phrases and talking about how they affect the sentence. Today, particularly note how it changes the structure of the sentence. Ask students how punctuation comes into play, and have them notice the need for commas. Discuss how participial phrases illustrate one of the main uses of commas and be sure they know they are expected to use them correctly in their participial phrase assignment. (20 minutes)

Their assignment for the remainder of the hour is to pull up the essay draft they are working on. They should spend time reading through their sentences and revising to add participial phrases in different spots to improve sentence variation throughout. This is also a time to ask the teacher questions and get input from peers. (15 minutes)

**Assessment:**

Formative assessment will occur throughout each of the lessons based on discussion observations and practice answers that students share. A beneficial (but ungraded) formative assessment will also occur after day one when students hand in their marked sentences from their independent reading book. If any student had a particularly tough time with the exit slip on day 1, be sure to spend extra time checking in with that student on day two.

A more formal assessment will occur when the essay drafts are graded. This is done with a rubric, and one of the components will be sentence variety with a specific reference to the use of participial phrases.

## **LESSON 2: Absolutes**

**Overview:** In this lesson, students will be exposed to absolute phrases and their function in order to provide them with another way to add better details and vary their sentence structure. They will begin by practicing absolute combinations and creating details. The second part of the lesson is spent practicing applying it to a short piece of writing.

**Objectives:** Students will be able to

- Define absolute
- Understand absolute phrase combination options
- Practice incorporating absolutes into their writing

### **Standards:**

11.7.3.3: Write narratives and other creative texts to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

d. Use precise words and phrases, telling details, figurative and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

### **Materials:**

- Absolutes handout (Appendix B)
- Chromebooks for each student
- Socrative app or access to website
- Smartboard
- YouTube clip from the NBA: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Q6n5NE6Cb4>
- Blank Google Doc
- Paper and writing utensil

### **Lesson Part 1:**

Have students answer the following prompt with their Chromebooks using Socrative: “I absolutely know that an absolute is \_\_\_\_\_.” Encourage them to make a legitimate guess. Pull up the results (without showing names) on the board. Students will likely find the guesses entertaining. Explain how absolutes often seem more confusing than they really are. Go over

what an absolute is and what its purpose is in writing, explaining the connection between them and participial phrases. (15 minutes)

Pass out the Absolutes handout. Talk about each of the formula options as students fill them in with examples. Ask students to share their examples and discuss. Once the table has been filled in, read the reminders to the students. Ask them to keep those reminders in the forefront of their minds when they begin the activity. Give them the instructions and let them take enough time to do the activity. Call on students to share their sentences. Point out how they took the sentences in different directions and how critical absolutes can be to better conveying meaning and more vivid imagery. (35 minutes)

The lesson will continue the next day.

### **Lesson Part 2:**

Begin today by posting the same question in Socrative as the previous day. Give them time to respond and then show students the results. Review the correct response and what they learned the day before. Take questions about what might still be confusing to them and make sure everyone is ready to move on to the next activity with absolutes. (10 minutes)

This activity will start out with the whole class. Students will see how to involve absolutes in their writing or create them during editing. Show them the basketball YouTube clip (maybe more than once). Have them list brief sentences about what happened out loud as a whole class. As they list, type the sentences on the Google Doc, which should be pulled up on the Smartboard for everyone to see. When they have enough sentences to work with, leave the Doc pulled up and ask them to combine the sentences into a paragraph. However, they will also need to reduce the total number of sentences so that they have about half as many. As a part of combining the sentences, students should use a variety of formula options to include absolute phrases. They should write on their own paper and hand it in at the end of the hour. (40 minutes)

### **Assessment:**

The assessment for this lesson will be based on their sentence combinations that utilize absolutes: 10, 5, or 0 based correct use of a variety of the formula options.

## **LESSON 3: Appositives**

**Overview:** Students will learn what appositives are and how they add meaning to a sentence. They will read nonfiction through finding examples of appositives in journalism, and they will utilize creative writing for an appositive poem assignment.

**Objectives:** Students will be able to

- Define appositive
- Identify examples of appositives in journalism
- Understand how appositives enhance a description

- Create appositives in a poem form

**Standards:**

11.7.2.2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content

d. Use precise language, domain-specific vocabulary, and techniques such as metaphor, simile, and analogy to manage the complexity of the topic.

**Materials:**

- Chromebooks
- Post-Its
- Understanding Appositives worksheet (Appendix C)
- Socratic quiz with the questions from the worksheet

**Lesson Part 1:**

Tell students they will be doing an independent lesson to introduce appositives. Following the directions on the worksheet, have students independently research what an appositive is. When Googled, there are multiple good sources that show up right away with quality information and examples. Encourage them to verify credible sources, read through more than one source, and synthesize the information into a solid understanding. They should complete the Understanding Appositives worksheet on their own and be prepared to share their answers with the class. Once the time is up, have students share their answers for each. Discuss and elaborate as needed. (25 minutes)

Working in pairs, students should then use the internet to search credible news sources for at least two nonfiction examples of appositives. They should write the sentences (along with a brief notation of the source) on their Post-Its and hang them up on the board. (15 minutes)

Review and recap by reading some of the examples on the Post-Its and discussing as a class. (10 minutes)

Take the posters down after class. This lesson continues the next day.

**Lesson Part 2:**

To review, have students begin by taking the Socratic quiz (not graded) that asks the same questions they researched yesterday. They should not be allowed to use their worksheet; instead, they should try to answer in their own words the best that they can based on what they remember. As they are working, check their responses to see which questions you might need to spend a couple of minutes reviewing after everyone is finished. (10 minutes)

In order to practice for their assignment and to get their creativity flowing and to prepare for the day's activity, tell students they need to come with an appositive about themselves (inspired by

“I am” statement activity from Weaver p. 104). For example, “I am an abstract painting, difficult to understand but artistic and inventive in nature.” Give them time to think, as this might be a challenge for some. They will be going around the room and sharing the appositive aloud without any additional explanation or commentary from the teacher. (15 minutes)

Then, for their assignment, students will get to be even more creative with appositives by writing a poem. Their poem should be based on a holiday and should list at least 7 objects associated with that holiday. Each object should include an appositive to help shape it and give it detail. Again, show them the example below (my own) or create one to share. Give them the remainder of class time to work. (25 minutes)

I am a tree, a beacon of the season.

I am bow, a button on the box of excitement and joy.

I am a cookie, a reminder of your younger years with Grandma.

I am snow, a glittering explosion of crystal coating the landscape with beauty.

I am a fire, a gift of warmth for all.

The assignment is due the following day. Students could be asked to share their poems aloud and have others determine which holiday it was about as well as simply appreciate the creative appositives used by their peers.

#### **Assessment:**

The poem assignment will be graded holistically out of 15 possible points.

For an extra credit opportunity, students can find additional examples of absolutes, but this time in fiction sources. They will receive one bonus point per example of found in a published fictional text. They will be required to share the example (both physically show proof and read it out loud to the class), and they may earn up to five points of extra credit.

#### **LESSON 4: Adjectives Out of Order**

**Overview:** This lesson involves reviewing comma use with adjectives and learning about the effect of adjectives out of order. Students will practice applying the technique to their own essay drafts.

**Objectives:** Students will be able to

- Correctly use adjectives as a part of speech
- Use commas correctly with adjectives
- Understand how adjective placement affects impact and variation
- Create and revise sentences using adjectives out of order

#### **Standards:**

11.7.3.3: Write narratives and other creative texts to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

d. Use precise words and phrases, telling details, figurative and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

**Materials:**

- Computer with projector
- Khan Academy video on commas and adjectives:  
<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/grammar/parts-of-speech-the-modifier/adjective-order-and-commas-with-adjectives/v/commas-and-adjectives>
- Projected sentence examples from Dia Calhoun's *Firegold*, 1999, as listed in Weaver p. 97. Note→ If this text is unavailable, use any published text that exemplifies adjectives placed out of order.
- Paper and writing utensil

**Lesson:**

*Before students enter the room, have many examples of adjectives written all over the whiteboard.*

When class begins, ask students which part of speech the words on the board are and review the use of adjectives. Show them the Khan Academy video about commas and adjectives. After watching the video, review again when and where commas should be placed with adjectives, taking questions as needed. (10 minutes)

After students have an understanding of commas and adjectives, move on to a discussion about where they typically see adjectives placed. Show students the sentence examples from Weaver's text. Have them notice and analyze the placement of adjectives. Talk about the effect that approach has versus placing them directly before the noun every time. Pay close attention to the commas. (20 minutes)

For the remainder of the class period, students should begin working on their assignment, which is to pull out their draft of the current essay they are working on. They should locate five sentences where adjectives are used traditionally. After copying those to their own paper, they should rewrite each sentence using an alternative adjective placement method. Explain to students that they are not required to revise their essays based on this activity because it is mostly for practice. They can decide whether or not to make the permanent switches within the essay based on if the sentences with adjectives out of order are more effective. They will hand this in at the end of class. (20 minutes)

**Assessment:**

The assessment for this lesson will be an informal check for understanding based on observation during worktime and review of their essay revision based on the concept. Completion points for the revised sentences will be either 5 or 0.

## LESSON 5: Sentence Rhythms of Parallel Structure and Periodic Sentences

**Overview:** This lesson begins with a review of parallel structure and a discussion of how writing and sentence structure relates to rhythm in music. Students will then learn about periodic sentences and practice implementing the technique, using examples from literature as models.

**Objectives:** Students will be able to

- Explain the connection between music and sentence structure rhythm
- Define parallel structure
- Define a periodic sentence
- Create a variety of periodic sentences

### Standards:

11.7.3.3: Write narratives and other creative texts to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences:

b. Use literary and narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, rhythm, repetition, rhyme, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

c. Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole and build toward a particular tone and outcome (e.g., a sense of mystery, suspense, growth, or resolution).

### Materials:

- Chromebooks
- Smartboard or projector
- Sentence Rhythms worksheet (Appendix D)
- YouTube video of drumroll: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=itAOGriYRLI>
- Thought Co. article: <https://www.thoughtco.com/periodic-sentence-grammar-and-prose-style-1691607>
- Khan Academy video: <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/grammar/syntax-conventions-of-standard-english/dangling-modifiers-and-parallel-structure/v/parallel-structure-syntax-khan-academy>

### Lesson:

When students are entering the classroom, have music playing. When class begins, ask them how they think the structure of music can represent or relate to the structure of sentences and writing. Talk for a while about different ways this occurs. Show the Khan Academy video to review, and suggest they take notes if needed. When the video is over, be sure they understand parallelism and how it relates to the musical quality of writing. (10 minutes)

Move on to a discussion about a more specific musical quality of writing: a drumroll. Play them the YouTube video clip. Ask them how they think the sentence will be structured or what features it might have in order to be associated with a drumroll. Tell them this type of sentence is

called a periodic sentence and explain what that means. Ask students to read through several examples from literature found on the Thought Co. webpage. Give them some time to read through the examples. Then, pull up the page on the Smartboard to point out the features and discuss as a class. (20 minutes)

Using their parallel structure notes and the Thought Co. example article as a reference, students should spend the remainder of the hour working on the Sentence Rhythms worksheet assignment, which is due the next day. (20 minutes)

**Assessment:**

The Sentence Rhythms worksheet is graded out of 10 possible points for correct completion.

**LESSON 6: Purposeful Repetition**

**Overview:** This lesson involves the purposeful use of something “wrong” in grammar. Students will consider when repetition can enhance writing and be used effectively. They will practice this more advanced technique in a creative writing activity.

**Objectives:** Students will be able to

- Consider the potential flexible nature of grammar
- Recognize effective repetition in examples from literature
- Create effective repetition in a creative paragraph

**Standards:**

11.7.3.3 Write narratives and other creative texts to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences:

b. Use literary and narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, rhythm, repetition, rhyme, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

**Materials:**

- Smartboard or projector
- Online story starter generator: <http://writingexercises.co.uk/firstlinegenerator.php>
- YouTube video clip of the Simpsons: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yHMDFvVUwBQ>
- Excerpt passage from “The Tell-Tale Heart” by Edgar Allan Poe (from Noden p. 59) either printed and copied or projected: *I talked more quickly--more vehemently; but the noise steadily increased. I arose and argued about trifles, in a high key with gesticulations, but the noise steadily increased. Why would they not be gone? I paced the floor to and fro with heavy strides, as if excited to fury by the observation of the men--but the noise steadily increased.*
- Excerpt passage from “In Another Country” by Ernest Hemingway (from Noden p. 109) either printed and copied or projected: *In the fall the war was always there, but we did*

*not go to it any more. It was cold in the fall in Milan and the dark came very early. Then the electric lights came on, and it was pleasant along the streets looking in windows. There was much game hanging outside the shops, and the snow powdered in the fur of the foxes and the wind blew their tails. The deer hung stiff and heavy and empty, and small birds blew in the wind and the wind turned their feathers. It was a cold fall and the wind came down from the mountains.*

### **Lesson:**

At the start of class, show students the video clip from the Simpsons to introduce the topic of repetition. Then ask students to take out a draft or essay copy that has feedback written on it (from a writing conference rough draft or a peer review session). Have them search for an area marked as repetitive word choice or phrasing. Talk about why they think it is a negative feature in those instances and why they think repetition is a common area of weakness in student writing. Ask students if they ever think it is OK to use repetition, and when/why that would be. (15 minutes)

Explain how the purposeful use of literal repetition can create a strong impact on a reader when done mindfully. Show them the excerpts from each piece of literature. Discuss the use of repetition in each, specifically noting how it occurs and what effect it creates. (15 minutes)

Offer students the remainder of the hour to work on their assignment, which is a creative writing activity that utilizes purposeful repetition. Using the online generator, give students the first line to a story. Have them write a paragraph or two that continues the story, but it does not have to end the story. They should incorporate repetition to add emphasis and effect, similar to the model examples discussed as a class. The creative piece will be due the following day. (20 minutes)

### **Assessment:**

Points for the assignment will be based on observable effort and effective use of repetition: 10, 5, or 0.

## **LESSON 7: Review Showcase**

**Overview:** This lesson is a comprehensive review of the topics covered throughout the unit spanning the time of the course. While students were likely unaware during the course that these individual lessons were geared toward an overarching goal, it will be brought to their attention at this point. The lesson involves a brief review of each topic as well as an activity for students to show off their skill at implementing the techniques and observe how others have done the same. This lesson should be used at the end of the year during work time for the final essay.

**Objectives:** Students will be able to

- Recall the various grammar topics covered throughout the year
- Effectively implement the topics in a writing assignment
- Understand how grammar contributes to effective writing as a tool for sentence variety

- Observe and analyze the techniques of other student writers

### **Standards:**

11.7.10.10 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences. a. Independently select writing topics and form.

### **Materials:**

- Google Slides or PowerPoint with the Review Showcase Questions on them (Appendix E)
- Markers
- Separate poster papers labeled with the following titles: Participial Phrases, Absolutes, Appositives, Adjectives Out of Order, Parallel Structure, Periodic Sentences, Purposeful Repetition
- Tape

### **Lesson:**

Begin by talking about how much sentence variety has been emphasized with each essay assignment. Explain to students that many of the individual lessons they participated in throughout the year were actually part of a goal to give them tools they could use to develop more dynamic sentence variety in their writing. Go through the Slides to do a type of “lightning” review where students quickly answer the questions, and briefly discuss each as a class. This review should take no more than five minutes, but be sure to offer a chance for students to ask follow-up questions as needed. (15 minutes)

Have students pull up their draft of the final essay. Students should locate one example of each of the topics covered in the mini-unit throughout the year. If they cannot find an example of a topic, they should select a sentence to rewrite using the technique. As before, they can decide whether or not to substitute the revised sentence into the essay. Students should copy down these sentences on the corresponding posters. With any time left, they can quietly read how others in the class utilized the techniques or a few impressive examples could be read aloud to the class and briefly discussed. These posters can be left up for the remainder of work time on the final essay as a reminder and inspiration. (35 minutes)

### **Assessment:**

The assessment for this activity is low stakes because it is essentially a review lesson. Completion/participation points (either a 5 or a 0) may be given for carrying out the requirements and participating appropriately. The more formal assessment of this lesson will be when grading their final essay assignment.

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Appendix A

**Participial Phrases Prepared Sentences**

Sentence 1

The lion pursued its prey.

Sentence 2

Gliding silently through the tall grass, the lion pursued its prey.

Sentence 3

The race car, flying around the old track, kicked up dust.

Sentence 4

The man shivered in the cold.

Sentence 5

The doctor performed surgery.

## Appendix B

**Absolutes**

**Practice**→ *For each of the formula options below, come up with an example phrase. Write your example in the box next to it. (Formulas from Christensen, 1968, as cited in Crovitz and Devereaux p. 118)*

Noun + -ing, -ed, or -en verb	
Noun + adverb	
Noun + adjective	
Noun + preposition	
Preposition + noun + any of the above variations	
Possessive pronoun + noun + any of the above variations	

- - - - -  
*\*Remember, absolutes can be placed in different spots in a sentence.*

*\*Also remember, commas always set apart the absolute, no matter where it is at in the sentence.*

**Activity**→ *Using absolute phrases, create good detail sentences to describe a subject. You will not know what the subject is, but you are given one bad detail about it. Decide what you think the subject is, and then create a really good detail about it using an absolute phrase. Try a different formula for each and be prepared to share!*

**Bad detail-** It zooms across the sky.

**Good detail-**

**Bad detail-** He dug furiously.

**Good detail-**

**Bad detail-** It waited.

**Good detail-**

## Appendix C

### **Understanding Appositives**

*Use Google to learn about appositives. You should use several reliable sources and make sure you have a well-rounded understanding. For each question, though, you must find and copy down a source (website name will suffice) to support your response.*

What part of speech is an appositive?

What is the function of an appositive?

Where does the appositive typically fall in the sentence?

When do you need commas with an appositive?

Where do those commas go?

Why do you think appositives could be considered a positive element to use in a sentence?

## Appendix D

**Sentence Rhythm Practice**

Rewrite the following confusing sentences using clear parallel structure. \_\_\_\_\_/10

- 1.) The abandoned kitten was scared, hungry, and had dirt all over it.
  
- 2.) The baker said chocolate cake must be moist, not have lumps, and rich in flavor.
  
- 3.) My grandma prefers to ride along rather than driving.
  
- 4.) He didn't want to go because it was stressful, required so much time, and not cheap.
  
- 5.) Amanda likes singing, basketball, and to hang out with friends.
  
- 6.-8.) Create three of your own sentences that effectively use a periodic sentence structure.
  - 
  
  - 
  
  -
  
- 9.) Why is using parallel structure a feature of quality writing? (In other words, what makes a sentence that is not parallel less effective?)
  
  
- 10.) Explain how periodic sentences can contribute to better sentence variety.

Appendix E

**Review Showcase Questions**

What is a participial phrase?

Where can a participial phrase fall in a sentence?

What is an absolute?

Give me one example of an absolute phrase.

How is an absolute different from a participial phrase?

What is an appositive?

Give me one example of an appositive.

Why use adjectives out of order?

How does parallel structure give a sentence rhythm?

What is a periodic sentence?

How can repetition be used purposefully?

## The Argument About Spelling

The English language is often considered perplexing because it contains many potentially confusing features such as homophones, silent letters, and constantly changing slang. Although schools in the United States maintain Standard English expectations, the English language is questioned for not being standard enough; exceptions to rules and variations abound. Because of this, discussions about changing current English orthography have occurred throughout history, and a modern debate about the importance of spelling remains evident. There is a valid mounting argument that questions the significance of spelling in today's world, and while most experts agree that correct spelling matters, what is perhaps more important to consider is *when* spelling matters.

In May of 2019, *The New York Times* published an article by Niraj Chokshi called "Getting the Spelling Right on 46 Million Bank Notes? It's a Big Responsibility" that highlights a serious blunder by the Australian government: a misspelling of the word *responsibility* on their new fifty-dollar bill. Under the "Student Opinion" section of *The New York Times*'s education-based platform, *The Learning Network*, author Shannon Doyne references the article and asks students to consider the following questions: "Are you a good speller? Do you tend to notice misspellings? In your opinion, how much does correct spelling matter?" Before beginning the discussion of whether or not correct spelling matters, it is necessary to start with Doyne's underlying assumption that most people inherently tend to identify themselves as either a good or a bad speller. Why do people feel compelled to classify themselves as one or the other? How accurate are they? And where do the standards for these identifiers come from? Some individuals announce their lack of spelling ability as a way to preemptively account for any potential mistakes, possibly enabling them to feel a bit less liable when an error occurs since they have

already convinced themselves it simply is not one of their strengths. On the other hand, some people have far too much confidence in their spelling ability when they might actually be deficient. Part of the explanation for this particular occurrence might relate to the Dunning-Kruger Effect, which essentially means people who are incompetent fail to recognize this and inaccurately feel they are completely competent (Murphy). While the individual reasons to self-identify as a good or bad speller might vary, the fact remains that society is keenly mindful of the difference between good and bad spelling.

As demonstrated by the attention Australia received from the spelling mistake on their newly printed currency, one of the most convincing pieces of evidence for the necessity of correct spelling is society's reaction to error. In *Does Spelling Matter*, Simon Horobin presents a thorough analysis of whether or not a system of standard spelling should be enforced. His convincing argument that correct spelling is inescapably essential begins with an anecdote involving Dan Quayle, former Vice President of the United States. Quayle mistakenly corrected a student while presiding over a school spelling bee—he noted that the student needed to add an *e* to the end of *potato*. Once this misstep was released in the press, society erupted in criticism, and it drastically affected his future political career. Horobin states, “The potato incident is a nice example of the way that spelling mistakes are treated today” (3). Incorrect spelling clearly has several undesirable implications for the communicator. When an individual misspells words, judgements are made about their credibility and character. Such mistakes carry a significant negative stigma since they are often interpreted by society as a sign of low intelligence; people tend to assume the individual either does not know the correct spelling of the word or did not have the forethought to proofread the text. In addition, there is an inclination to view misspellings as signs of sloppiness, potentially making the individual seem lazy or unreliable.

Besides adversely impacting an individual, spelling mistakes can misrepresent entire organizations and businesses. Entrepreneur Charles Duncombe notes that a simple spelling error can cause a company to experience a massive drop in revenue (Horobin 229). The public tends to observe a spelling mistake from a business as a sign of an untrustworthy source, possibly even a scam, and people often turn to a more seemingly respectable option instead. For example, research shows that a potential customer who spots a spelling mistake on a website will likely leave the page (Morrison). Furthermore, an unclear message caused by a misspelling can also mean dollars lost for a company after correcting the error or managing the disorderly situation caused by the miscommunication. Customers rely on direct, clear messaging and correspondence, so overlooking spelling would significantly impact a company's success. In this way, correct spelling is seen as an obligation for businesses.

For an employee of a company, misspellings might result in fewer positive notice opportunities like bonuses or promotions and could reduce one's chances of being hired in the first place since individuals who make spelling errors are often viewed as irresponsible and less detail-orientated (Barker and Puente). For instance, a small French study observed and recorded recruiters' responses to applications with spelling errors; they found a correlation between the initial negative reactions that recruiters had to applications containing errors and to their final overall rating of the application (Martin-Lacroux). Because the general population often interprets a spelling error as a direct indicator of competence or character and because one small slip can lead to loss of business, spelling can unquestionably impact an individual's professional success.

The expectation for correct spelling is so deeply engrained in society that even educators, who are often well-aware of the importance of emphasizing higher order concerns like

comprehension and analysis, still tend to be swayed by students' spelling. Evidence shows that teachers who are asked to assess two or more examples of writing that mainly differ in number of spelling mistakes will generally give the versions with spelling errors lower scores (Graham et al.). In addition, spelling affects education in that students who are better spellers tend to have an easier time writing; they can spend less time feeling stuck by how to spell words and more time focusing on expressing ideas (Treiman). Therefore, those students might also be more likely to find writing more enjoyable and feel more confident in their writing ability, which could lead to a more positive academic experience overall.

Although learning correct spelling remains a dominating feature of education in the United States, the relationship between spelling and intellect is not as straightforward as much of society has been led to believe. Correctly spelling words does not correlate to increasing vocabulary or communicative ability, and knowing how to spell well does not necessarily indicate an authentic understanding of what the words mean or how to use them correctly (Horobin 7). Intelligent individuals sometimes struggle with spelling. For example, those whose first language is not English might have a very strong grasp of material even if they are not able to express it using perfect English. This means the negative assumptions made about an individual and even a business in relation to spelling errors are not necessarily reasonable. Like many stereotypes, these judgements might be true at times but certainly cannot be considered absolute.

The flexible nature of the English language and how it adapts as it modernizes also lends itself to the argument that spelling is perhaps somewhat arbitrary. Horobin says, "Furthermore, standards of spelling have changed over time, so that what we consider to be incorrect today may well have been viewed as acceptable in the past" (4). The evolving nature of our language shows

how popular acceptance of a word over time eventually eliminates the original notion that it was ever considered wrong or nonconforming in the first place. Erin McKean's popular TED Talk, "Go ahead, make new words!" explains how the dictionary expands as certain words become increasingly implemented in language. This means that words, no matter how silly or unnecessary they might seem, are constantly being added to the English language based on use. With this in mind, adaptations of spellings, such as *cellphone*, and popularly accepted misspellings, such as *alright*, could therefore also be viewed less as erroneous and more as progressive.

A major influence on the constant evolution of the English language in today's world is technology. While society still often deems spelling errors as egregious mistakes in the education setting and in business scenarios, people tend to be far more tolerant on social media platforms, and the overall impact of technology on communication has penetrated various aspects of language use. Proper punctuation is generally an equally enforced societal expectation. However, because so much of daily communication is hastily carried out using email and text messages, individuals tend to leave out punctuation. Even so, the general message typically remains intact (Mallady). The same can be said about spelling errors in modern communication methods. If a general audience is able to understand most social media messages, emails, or text messages without correct punctuation or spelling, it begs the question of just how necessary those expectations really are. This point can be illustrated by a quick glance at the consistent effectiveness and impact of Twitter, even with its abundance of abbreviations, spelling mistakes, and lack of punctuation.

In an article published in early 2019 from *The Washington Post*, Rebekah Denn calls the importance of spelling into question largely because of technology's influence. She begins with

concern about her young son, who, along with much of his generation, seems to struggle with spelling but not with school. She wonders whether or not it matters. Denn reports that correct spelling has become less critical in standardized tests since, according to the College Board, errors are not even counted against students on the essay portion of the SAT. Her conclusion is that technology has had a significant role impacting the decreasing importance of correct spelling and that, while spelling matters in some cases, it is not the determining factor for success. In reference to the infamous Quayle blunder, Denn states, “I’m afraid to ask if [my son] can spell ‘potato,’ but — even without a spelling trophy — he might still be president one day.”

As Denn so aptly notes, there is a time and place for correct spelling. The balance therefore lies in a concept commonly discussed in composition classes: rhetoric. In an interview for an article in *USA Today*, Sandra Wilde, a Hunter College education professor and elementary section chair of National Council of Teachers of English, says that an important factor in the discussion of correct spelling is that people simply need to think about the context when deciding whether or not spelling matters (Barker and Puente). If a spelling error does not cause confusion and does not negatively represent an individual or business in any directly damaging way, then it might not be as significant of an issue. To-do lists and text messages to friends are example situations where spelling mistakes are likely harmless and when attention to correct spelling is not entirely necessary. Another instance when spelling should not matter is early in the writing process. Most English teachers with a strong pedagogical background in effective composition practices focus more on guiding students through the development of an essay, not simply grading the final product, so spelling would not be a major consideration for students until the end during proofreading. This allows students to more freely express ideas and focus on higher-order concerns like organization and idea development (Gonzalez). Arming students with the

understanding that spelling does matter but not all the time facilitates a higher level of thinking and a more genuine learning experience overall.

The complexity of the English language facilitates room for debate in several areas, and the importance of correct spelling is certainly a fascinating facet. Society deems spelling an indicator of competence and character, schools uphold strict standard expectations, businesses know the importance of avoiding mistakes, and an individual's professional future often hinges on correctness. At the same time, spelling is not directly correlated with intelligence and cannot be a guaranteed predictor of success. The English language evolves, and technology has greatly impacted the discussion about the importance of spelling. Continuing an examination about whether or not spelling matters might very well be a waste of energy. Does spelling matter? Yes. Should spelling always matter? Not necessarily. But what matters most is understanding *when* spelling matters.

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