

Sentence Composing for High School

**A Worktext on Sentence Variety
and Maturity**

Don Killgallon

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To Bob Boynton:
For the spunk and the savvy that paved the way,
the gentle demurrers that saved the day.



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Preface

When it comes to language, nothing is more satisfying than to write a good sentence.

—Barbara Tuchman

This series—*Sentence Composing for Middle School*, *Sentence Composing for High School*, and *Sentence Composing for College*—emphasizes the most neglected unit of written composition: the sentence. Using four sentence-manipulating techniques—*sentence unscrambling*, *sentence imitating*, *sentence combining*, and *sentence expanding*—these books teach students structures they seldom use in their writing but should, and can easily use once they become familiar with them through many examples and practices.

Each book concentrates on such structures, by means of model sentences by professional writers. The rationale is based on the widely accepted mimetic theory of *oral* language acquisition, applied here to *written* language acquisition, in the belief that continual exposure to structures used often by professionals in their sentences will produce attention to, understanding of, and, with practice, normal use of such structures by students in their sentences.

The books are exercises in applied grammar, with the theory and terminology of grammar subordinate to the major goal: composing sentences. The naming of parts and the parsing of sentences, the goals of traditional grammar study, are exercises in dissection. The practices in *Sentence Composing* are exercises in production.

The sentence-manipulating techniques are easily learned. The practices based on them are interesting and challenging, and they can be done by any student. In addition, the teacher can readily give attention to the sentences students compose, with quicker, more constant, and more thorough feedback than with longer compositions.

Since the practices have proved successful for the great majority of students who have used them in all kinds of schools, it is demonstrably true that *Sentence Composing* can work anywhere, in any school, with any student.

DON KILLGALLON

Baltimore, Maryland



Introduction

How Sentence Composing Works

When you or a professional write, you both choose words and arrange them in sentences, but often with different results: variety and maturity in sentences written by professional writers are much more evident than in sentences written by students. Unlike professional writers, students tend to write sentences similar to sentences they speak.

The big difference in variety and maturity is what this worktext is all about. The idea of *sentence composing* is to bridge that gap, so that your sentences more closely resemble in structure those written by professional writers. Throughout the worktext, you will see how professional writers write their sentences. You will learn and practice writing similar sentences by using four easy-to-learn techniques: *sentence unscrambling*, *sentence imitating*, *sentence combining*, and *sentence expanding*.

You will learn by imitating the pros. Just as you used imitation as a child to learn to speak by imitating experienced speakers like your parents, you can learn to write better sentences by imitating how professional writers use written language.

Nothing in the worktext is difficult to learn. You don't have to know a lot about grammar. You don't have to learn lots of terms. You don't have to study to take tests. But you do have to want to improve the sentences you write. This worktext will show you how.

First you have to learn something, and then you can go out and do it.

Mies van der Rohe

***H*ow to Use This Worktext**

All practices in this worktext use model sentences written by professional writers. Throughout the worktext you will practice sentence unscrambling, sentence imitating, sentence combining, and sentence expanding to learn to write sentences that have the kind of variety and maturity in the model sentences.

You can learn a lot about writing in general through the practices in this worktext, not just about how professionals write their sentences. Even though you will be working with sentences—the backbone of all writing—you can learn skills that will help you improve any kind of writing: paragraphs, essays, short stories, reports, and research papers.

The References section at the end of the worktext contains the original sentences by professional writers used as models in the practices throughout the worktext. Don't consider them the answers in the back of the book, as in a math textbook.

When you look up the original sentences you may decide that the professionally written sentence is better than yours; if so, study the difference. You may, however, decide that yours is just as good; if so, congratulate yourself. You may even decide that yours is better; in that case, take a bow.

1

Tools for Better Sentences

Here you will learn the skills that professional writers use to compose sentences. Think of them as tools to build better sentences.

Skill 1

Appositive Phrase

Identifying the Appositive Phrase

Here's a list of sentences, all written by professional writers, but with some parts deleted.

1. It went away slowly.
2. The land that lay stretched out before him became of vast significance.
3. However, I looked with a mixture of admiration and awe at Peter.
4. That night in the south upstairs chamber Emmett lay in a kind of trance.

Now compare those sentences with the originals. Notice that the additions account for the distinctiveness of the original sentences.

- 1a. It went away slowly, **the feeling of disappointment that came sharply after the thrill that made his shoulders ache.**

Ernest Hemingway, "Big Two-Hearted River: Part I"

- 2a. The land that lay stretched out before him became of vast significance, **a place peopled by his fancy with a new race of men sprung from himself.**

Sherwood Anderson, Winesburg, Ohio

- 3a. However, I looked with a mixture of admiration and awe at Peter, **a boy who could and did imitate a police siren every morning on his way to the showers.**

Robert Russell, To Catch an Angel

- 4a. That night in the south upstairs chamber, **a hot little room where a full-leaved chinaberry tree shut all the air from the single window,** Emmett lay in a kind of trance.

Jessamyn West, "A Time of Learning"

The **boldface** phrases are appositives, one of the sentence parts that differentiate professional writing from student writing. They're frequently used by professional writers but rarely by students. Appositive phrases are an efficient way to combine related ideas in one sentence.

Characteristics of the Appositive Phrase

Appositives are noun phrases that identify adjacent nouns or pronouns. They can occur as sentence openers, subject-verb splits, or sentence closers. Examples are boldfaced.

Sentence Openers

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

Langston Hughes, "Road to Freedom"

2. **A balding, smooth-faced man**, he could have been anywhere between forty and sixty.

Harper Lee, To Kill a Mockingbird

3. **A short, round boy of seven**, he took little interest in troublesome things, preferring to remain on good terms with everyone.

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

Subject-Verb Splits

4. Poppa, **a good quiet man**, spent the last hours before our parting moving aimlessly about the yard, keeping to himself and avoiding me.

Gordon Parks, "My Mother's Dream for Me"

5. A man, **a weary old pensioner with a bald dirty head and a stained brown corduroy waistcoat**, appeared at the door of a small gate lodge.

Brian Moore, The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne

6. Van'ka Zhukov, **a boy of nine who had been apprenticed to the shoemaker Alyakhin three months ago**, was staying up that Christmas eve.

Anton Chekhov, "Van'ka"

Sentence Closers

7. The boy looked at them, **big black ugly insects**.

Doris Lessing, African Stories

8. Hour after hour he stood there, silent, motionless, **a shadow carved in ebony and moonlight**.

James V. Marshall, Walkabout

9. He had the appearance of a man who had done a great thing, **something greater than any ordinary man would do**.

John Henrik Clarke, "The Boy Who Painted Christ Black"

Practice 1

Unscrambling

Each scrambled sentence has one or more appositives. Identify them. Then unscramble the sentence parts and write out the sentence, punctuating it correctly. Compare your sentences with the originals on page 117 in the references.

- 1a. struggled as usual
- b. she
- c. to maintain her calm, composed, friendly bearing
- d. a sort of mask she wore all over her body
- 2a. an old, bowlegged fellow in a pale-blue sweater
- b. the judge
- c. and was reading over some notes he had taken
- d. had stopped examining the animals
- e. on the back of a dirty envelope

Jessamyn West, "The Lesson"

- 3a. the tyrannosaur
- b. with huge flaring nostrils
- c. a long snuffling inhalation that fluttered Baselton's trouser legs
- d. gave Baselton a smell

Michael Crichton, The Lost World

- 4a. talked continually of virginity
- b. the son of a jeweler in Winesburg
- c. one of them
- d. a slender young man with white hands

Sherwood Anderson, Winesburg, Ohio

- 5a. went over to Tom Willy's saloon
- b. in the late afternoon
- c. Will Henderson
- d. and editor of the *Eagle*
- e. owner

Sherwood Anderson, Winesburg, Ohio

- 6a. and the jingle of trace chains
- b. was louder
- c. drag of brakes
- d. the sound of the approaching grain teams
- e. thud of big hooves on hard ground.

John Steinbeck, Of Mice and Men

- 7a. with the butt of a teamster's whip
- b. once Enoch Bentley
- c. old Tom Bentley
- d. struck his father
- e. and the old man seemed likely to die
- f. the older one of the boys

Sherwood Anderson, Winesburg, Ohio

- 8a. with devil-may-care eyes and a long humorous nose
 - b. Mr. Mick Malloy
 - c. tall cashier with a dignified face
 - d. a nice sort of fellow
 - e. tall, young secret gambler
 - f. a gentlemanly bank clerk
 - g. became Mr. Malloy
- Brian Moore, The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne*

Practice 2

Imitating

Unscramble both lists of sentence parts to make two sentences that imitate the first model. Then, imitate the same model by writing your own sentence. Finally, write imitations of the other models, making all of your sentence parts like those in the model.

Model: Beside the fireplace old Doctor Winter sat, bearded and simple and benign, **historian and physician to the town.**

John Steinbeck, The Moon Is Down

Scrambled Imitations

- 1a. president and valedictorian of the senior class
- b. by the podium
- c. intelligent and composed and smiling
- d. scholarly Henrietta stood
- 2a. beaming and affectionate and happy
- b. bride and groom in their finery
- c. they danced
- d. under the canopy

Other Models

1. **A tall, rawhide man in an unbuttoned, sagging vest**, he was visibly embarrassed by any furnishings that suggested refinement.

Conrad Richter, "Early Marriage"

2. His car, **a perfectly maintained 1960 Thunderbird that was his pride and joy**, stood in the driveway.

Stephen King, Needful Things

3. Sara watched him as he walked, **a small figure for his ten years**, wearing faded blue jeans and a striped knit shirt that was stretched out of shape.

Betsy Byars, The Summer of the Swans

Practice 3

Combining

Study the model, and then combine the sentences that follow into one sentence that imitates the model. Change the first sentence to resemble the first sentence part of the model, the second sentence to resemble the second sentence part of the model, etc. Compare your sentences to the ones on page 118 in the references. Finally, write your own sentence that imitates the model.

Example

Model: Mr. Cattanzara, **a stocky, bald-headed man who worked in a change booth on an IRT station**, lived on the next block after George's, above a shoe repair store.

Bernard Malamud, "A Summer's Reading"

Sentences to Be Combined

- a. This is about Jan Carter.
- b. She is an unabashed, suntanned flirt.
- c. She had smiled at him in the cafeteria line.
- d. She transferred to the department near Tom's.
- e. She transferred for a "chance" meeting.

Combination

Jan Carter, **an unabashed, suntanned flirt who had smiled at him in the cafeteria line**, transferred to the department near Tom's, for a "chance" meeting.

Imitation

Tom Zengler, **the slower, more heavy-handed pianist who had studied under Professor Samione for a decade**, performed in the recital hall near Jacob's, with an obvious competitive attitude.

1. *Model*: Among the company was a lawyer, **a young man of about twenty-five**.

Anton Chekhov, "The Bet"

- a. She was near the statue.
- b. She was an obvious tourist.
- c. She was an oriental lady.
- d. She had a Kodak camera.

2. *Model*: Sady Ellison, **the daughter of Long Butt Ellison**, worked as a waitress for Turkey Plott in a defiant and condescending fashion.

Wayne Kernodle, "Last of the Rugged Individualists"

- a. This is about *Gone with the Wind*.
- b. That is the movie with the most reissues.
- c. It originated as a novel.
- d. The novel was of the old South.
- e. The novel was by someone who was unglamorous.
- f. The someone was also unknown.
- g. The someone was an authoress.

3. *Model*: Captain Bentick was a family man, **a lover of dogs and pink children and Christmas**.

John Steinbeck, The Moon Is Down

- a. "Missouri" is a casserole.
- b. The casserole is special.

- c. It is a blend of several ingredients.
 - d. It has potatoes.
 - e. It has tomatoes.
 - f. The tomatoes are stewed.
 - g. It has hamburger.
4. *Model*: He was close to twenty and had needs with the neighborhood girls, but no money to spend, and he couldn't get more than an occasional few cents because his father was poor, and his sister Sophie, who resembled George, **a tall, bony girl of twenty-three**, earned very little, and what she had she kept for herself.
- Bernard Malamud, "A Summer's Reading"*
- a. We were far from our destination.
 - b. In addition, we were making good time on the interstate.
 - c. But there was no time to squander.
 - d. In addition, Dad wouldn't stop more than twice a day.
 - e. Although we kids were itchy, he wouldn't stop.
 - f. In addition, Mom was the one who kept the peace.
 - g. She was a shrewd, gentle arbitrator.
 - h. She had Solomon's mind.
 - i. She circumvented some flare-ups.
 - j. And she did something with those she couldn't circumvent.
 - k. She left those to Heaven.

Practice 4

Expanding

At the slash mark, add an appositive phrase. In Part 1, the first few words are provided and the number of words omitted from the original is noted in brackets after the slash mark.

Approximate that number. In Part 2, add whatever seems appropriate. Compare your appositive phrases with the originals on page 118.

Part 1

1. Thus, one noontime, coming back from the office lunch downstairs a little earlier than usual, he found her and several of the foreign-family girls, as well as four of the American girls, surrounding Polish Mary, **one of the** / [8], who was explaining in rather a high key how a certain "feller" whom she had met the night before had given her a beaded bag, and for what purpose.

Theodore Dreiser, An American Tragedy

2. The rest were standing around in hatless, smoky little groups of twos and threes and fours inside the heated waiting room, talking in voices that, almost without exception, sounded collegiately dogmatic, as though each young man, in his strident, conversational turn, was clearing up, once and for all, some highly controversial issue, **one that** / [12].

J. D. Salinger, Franny and Zooey

3. Out in the distances the fans of windmills twinkled, turning, and about the base of each, about the drink tank, was a speckle of dark dots, **a herd of cattle** / [13].

Glendon Swarthout, Bless the Beasts and Children

4. Perhaps two or three times a year we would come together at a party, one of those teen-age affairs which last until dawn with singing and dancing and silly games such as "Kiss the Pillow," or "Post Office," **the game which** / [18].

Henry Miller, Stand Still Like the Hummingbird

Part 2

1. My bed was an army cot, /.

James Thurber, "The Night the Bed Fell"

2. He, /, had fled because of superior perceptions and knowledge.

Stephen Crane, The Red Badge of Courage

3. I had hardly any patience with the serious work of life which, not that it stood between me and desire, seemed to me child's play, /.

James Joyce, "Araby"

4. There was Major Hunter, /, /. (two appositive phrases)
John Steinbeck, The Moon Is Down

Putting the Appositive Phrase to Work

Write sentences containing two appositive phrases that identify two different objects, persons, or places within the same sentence. Each of the two phrases must be at least ten words long.

Example

Elvis Presley, **the famous king of 50s rock and roll who achieved fame overnight**, made his first national appearance on the "Ed Sullivan Show," **a live television music and variety program during which the camera man was given special directions for shooting the Presley performance.**



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