

# Exercises in Style: Grammar in the Vertical Alignment + Teaching Parallel Structure

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# Overview

## Why fuse grammar into the teaching of writing?

- Research supports that teachers can improve the syntactical maturity of student writers by practicing and applying the use of a variety of grammatical structures.

### References:

- Connor and Glen. *The St. Martin's Guide to Teaching Writing*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition.
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  - Daiker, D.A., A. Kerek, and M. Morenberg. *The Writer's Options: Combining to Composing*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Harper & Row, 1990.
  - Degen, Michael. *Crafting Expository Argument: Practical Approaches to the Writing Process for Students and Teachers*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Dallas: Telemachos, 2002. [www.telemachospublishing.com](http://www.telemachospublishing.com)
  - Elbow, Peter. "The Challenge for Sentence Combining." *Sentence Combining: A Rhetorical Perspective*. Eds. D.A. Daiker, A. Kerek, and M. Morenberg. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985. 232-45.
  - Killgallon, D. *Sentence Composing for Middle School*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1997.
  - Killgallon, D. *Sentence Composing for High School*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1998.
  - Noden, Harry R. *Image Grammar: Using Grammatical Structures to Teach Writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1999.
  - Walpole, Jane. *Understanding Written Grammar*. Dallas: Telemachos, 2001. [www.telemachospublishing.com](http://www.telemachospublishing.com)
- During peer editing, students need to know HOW to make revisions.
  - AP readers want to see and recognize sophistication.
  - More importantly, understanding and using repeatedly specific grammatical structures—clauses and phrases—creates a writer more skilled in composing elegant prose.
  - Grammar in isolation does not improve writing; grammar fused with writing can because students will continuously see immediate connections between what they're taught and what they're expected to use when they write.

## Key Points

1. Grammar instruction is never done in a unit by itself.
2. Taught structures should appear as requirements in **every** subsequent writing assignment.
3. When teaching a structure, include
  - its form
  - its function
  - what the structure contains
  - where the structure is located
  - what information the structure provides
  - how one punctuates the structure
  - time to practice using the structure for sentence combining.
4. **Repetition.** Teach the structure all year, require it in all writing assignments, continually ask students questions about the structure, both informally and formally, as quick quizzes, demonstrating to students that we will be using this structure all year, that we will not be dropping it.
5. Periodically test students.
6. When peer editing, have student editors check the required grammatical structures.
7. Other grammar-related issues—capitalization, pronoun-antecedent agreement, subject-verb agreement, use of the apostrophe with possessives, punctuating titles, etc.—can be handled on a when-needed basis.

# Scope & Sequence

**Class Time** to introduce each structure:

**Day One:** Introduce structure/ teacher model / class practice / assign homework

**Day Two:** [1/2 period] Correct homework

**Day Three +** Structure appears as a requirement in written work

## Possible Vertical Assignments

### Grade 9

- √Adverb subordinate clause
- √Adjective subordinate clause
- √Present & past participial phrases
- √Absolute phrase
- √Appositive phrase

### Grade 10

Reinforce previous structures and add the following:

- √Noun subordinate clause
- √Gerund phrase
- √Infinitive phrase
- √Compound sentences with conjunctive adverbs
- √Compound sentences with solo semicolons

### Grade 11

Reinforce previous structures and add the following:

- √Repeat-word modifiers
- √Analysis modifiers
- √Sentences with parallel structure

Directions Write \_\_\_#\_\_\_ sentences with \_\_\_\_\_. Follow these additional guidelines:

1. Label the structure. (CEA 133-142)
2. Identify the sentence type: simple, complex, compound, compound-complex. (CEA 132, 136)
3. Do not repeat a sentence type more than three times.
4. Subject matter: the current novel, poem, or play most recently studying or studied.
5. Follow correct punctuation rules for the structure. (CEA 133-142)

Sample Orwell's voice, [ranging from one more restrained to one more explicit--prpp], condemns the complex totalitarian methods of Big Brother. [Simple sentence.]

### Scoring

Each sentence is worth 5pts, one point awarded for each of the above directions. Your final score on any given assignment will be recorded as a percentage. For example, if you are assigned four sentences, the total possible points are 20. If you earn 18 out of 20, I will record a score of 90% in my grade book.

Directions: 1) arrange each bulleted group of words into a sentence; write out this sentence; 2) write your own sentence imitating the syntactical pattern of Faulkner's sentence.\*\*

- the saw against his leg
- he stops in the middle of the floor
- his face composed
- his sweating arms powdered lightly with sawdust

\*\*Killgallon, Don. *Sentence Composing for High School*. Portsmouth, NY: Boyton/Cook Heinemann, 1998

## Absolute phrases AbP\*

**function** Modify all or part of the sentence to which it is connected.

**contain** a noun that is immediately followed by an adjective, often—but not always—a participle or participial phrase.

**location in a sentence** The AbP is frequently found either at the beginning or at the end of a sentence.

**punctuation rule** The AbP is separated from the rest of the sentence by a comma.

- The boy stares into space, his face being white with fear.
- His strength invincible, Beowulf undertakes the formidable challenge.
- The act of violence having been committed, Macbeth shakes with terror.
- "Ronald Reagan appears out of the darkness, his head bowed in conversation with a vaguely familiar man in business."-U.S. News, Jan.'96

### Sentence Combining with Absolute Phrases

- Removing the "be" verb from the sentence creates an absolute phrase.

Original

Julia listened in stunned silence. Her smile was vanishing from her face.

Revision

Julia listened in stunned silence, her smile vanishing from her face.

Original

The furnace was broken. We huddled under blankets and waited for dawn.

Revision

The furnace broken, we huddled under blankets and waited for dawn.

- Turning a regular active verb into a participle creates an absolute phrase.

Original

She looks up and smiles at her uncle. Long strands of silky hair fall limply on her face.

Revision

She looks up, long strands of silky hair falling limply on her face, and smiles at her uncle.

**Directions** Combine the following sentences by creating an absolute phrase out of one sentence in the pair and joining that phrase to the other. Underline or highlight the absolute phrase.

1. She cheerfully punches the keys T-H-E E-N-D and looks up with a proud crescent stretching across her lips. Her eyes gleam brightly as she reads over the masterpiece.
2. My mother keeps bellowing names, and soon her friends and relatives converge on the house. Her voice draws life from the dream's dark corners. (from Bernard Cooper's *Maps to Anywhere*)
3. John waited in the classroom. His fingers tapped on the desk nervously.
4. The community was restored. Prospero decides to throw away his magic staff and leave his recent past behind him.
5. The bank robbers fled the scene within minutes. The security guard saw part of the license plate numbers.
6. Mrs. Jones stared at the class. She had two research papers in her hand. She gritted her teeth.
7. John knelt on the fifty-yard line. He looked up at the tied score. He realized the team only had ten seconds.

\* Degen, Michael. *Crafting Expository Argument: Practical Approaches to the Writing Process for Students and Teachers*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Dallas: Telemachos, 2002. [www.telemachospublishing.com](http://www.telemachospublishing.com)

## \*\*EXTENDING ELABORATION WITH MODIFICATION

(Exercises, p. 161)

### **Analysis Modifiers**

**Method** End the original sentence with a comma, *choose a noun* (with or without modifiers) *that emphasizes details you have just cited*, and then continue your analysis. Study these examples.

- The Pardoner tries to sell a “holy relic” even to the “widow who mightn’t have a shoe,” a *defilement* of Christian theology that provides further evidence of the Church’s corruption.
- Joe extends his “restoring touch” unto Pip, “aiding and comforting [him]...by giving [Pip] gravy,” a *benevolent deed* that demonstrates not just his concern for Pip, but his willingness to help and care for him.

### **Repeat Word Modifiers**

**Method** End the original sentence with a comma, *repeat a key word*, and then continue extending your elaboration. Study these examples.

- By omission, the narrator implies that she possesses something beyond the physical realm that warrants his love, *something* intangible to the five senses.
- Hester chooses to live in the town in which she has sinned, *live* despite the daily ridicule not only from townspeople but also from clergymen.
- The Pardoner is both deceptive and greedy, *deceptive* in his selling of false relics to naïve believers, *greedy* in his desire to make a profit using his position in the church.

### **Sample Modifications**

- **Duke Theseus represents a leader who attempts to balance the feminine and the masculine.**

#### **Elaboration with repeat word modifier**

Duke Theseus represents a leader who attempts to balance the feminine and the masculine, the *masculine* that restores the order King Creon disrupted, the *feminine* that grants clemency to Arcite and Palamon.

#### **Elaboration with analysis modifier**

Duke Theseus represents a leader who attempts to balance the feminine and the masculine, a *combination* that allows him to maintain an image of strength along with compassion, a *combination* that places love before violence.

- **While living with Pap, Huck is in a dangerous situation.**

#### **Elaboration with repeat word modifier**

While living with Pap, Huck is in a dangerous situation, a *situation* that requires quick thinking and imagination if he is to survive.

#### **Elaboration with analysis modifier**

While living with Pap, Huck is in a dangerous situation, an *environment* that often involves physical and mental abuse.

Adapted from Williams, Joseph M. *Ten Lessons in Clarity & Grace*. Boston: Scott, Foresman, 1989. 131–132.

\*\* Degen, Michael. *Crafting Expository Argument: Practical Approaches to the Writing Process for Students and Teachers*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Dallas: Telemachos, 2002. [www.telemachospublishing.com](http://www.telemachospublishing.com)

***Sentence Combining: Repeat Word Modifiers/Analysis Modifiers***

**Directions:** Combine each group of sentences using one or more *repeat word* or *analysis* modifiers. Underline or highlight the modifiers created. You may delete extra words if necessary.

1. They sit in front of a large bay window, where these souls pensively sit. They hope if they look over their shoulders their family, bearing gifts, will burst through the door. These are not material gifts, but gifts one cannot find at Macy's. These are gifts of affection, love, and compassion.

2. Adding to this self-inflicted torture, Dimmesdale battles Chillingworth. He is a physician who does not abate Dimmesdale's pain but is a "chief actor in the poor minister's interior world." He is able to "arouse him with a throb of agony."

3. Scrooge disdainfully comments about his nephew's monetary status: "You're poor enough." This shows how Scrooge evaluates individuals by their monetary value.

4. Near this prison rests "a portion of the virgin soil...a cemetery." Cemeteries often remind one that death might affect this community, too.

OUR FOUNDING FATHERS, FACED WITH PERILS WE  
CAN SCARCELY IMAGINE, DRAFTED A CHARTER TO  
ASSURE THE RULE OF LAW AND THE RIGHTS OF  
MAN, A CHARTER EXPANDED BY THE BLOOD OF  
GENERATIONS.

BARACK OBAMA, 2009 INAUGURATION

LESS MEASURABLE BUT NO LESS PROFOUND IS A  
SAPPING OF CONFIDENCE ACROSS OUR LAND Ó A  
NAGGING FEAR THAT AMERICA'S DECLINE IS  
INEVITABLE, AND THAT THE NEXT GENERATION  
MUST LOWER ITS SIGHTS.

BARACK OBAMA, 2009 INAUGURATION

I  
PUT MY SACK DOWN  
AND  
SET OUT ACROSS THE FIELD TOWARD THE STILE,  
THE DACHSHUND FOLLOWING,  
EXPECTANT,  
FULL OF AN INSTINCTIVE NOTION  
THAT SOMETHING MIGHT BE UP  
AND  
THAT IT MIGHT INVOLVE SHEEP.

E.B. WHITE ÌTHE FLOCKS WE WATCH BY NIGHT.Î

## USING PARALLEL STRUCTURES IN YOUR WRITING

• When a writer repeats the same grammatical structure [a part of speech, a phrase, or a clause] within a sentence, those structures are said to be parallel. These grammatical structures are joined by various types of words, such as coordinating conjunctions, correlative conjunctions, and other words that naturally link or compare specific words, phrases, or ideas.

### COORDINATING CONJUNCTIONS

and, but, or, for, nor, so, yet

### CORRELATIVE CONJUNCTIONS

either...or, neither...nor, not only...but also, not...but, more...than, both...and, whether...or, as...as,

### WORDS OF COMPARISON

while, than, as well as, also, rather...than; from...to; instead of ; less...than; with...without; for...against

### LINKING VERBS

is, am, are, was, were,

• No matter the joining word or words a writer selects, **the first requirement for parallelism to work in a sentence is that the same grammatical structure be repeated.**

Writers can make parallel the same parts of speech (nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc.), the same type of phrase (gerund phrases, infinitive phrases, etc.), and the same type of clauses (noun subordinate clauses, adverb subordinate clauses, etc.).

### A. Correlative Conjunctions and Nouns

Parallel: Michael enjoys all types of activities, from *sports* to *music*. [Here the correlative conjunctions from...to join two nouns.]

Not parallel: Michael enjoys all types of activities, from *sports* to *playing music*. [The gerund “playing music” is not the same form as the single noun sports.]

Parallel: Michael enjoys all types of activities, from *playing sports* to *playing music*. [Here two gerund phrases are parallel.]

### B. Correlative Conjunctions and Adverbs

Parallel: The new president of the student council spoke not only *eloquently* but also *passionately*. [Here two adverbs are joined by correlative conjunctions.]

Not Parallel: The new president of the student council spoke not only *eloquently* but also *with passion*. [The single adverb *eloquently* cannot be parallel with the prepositional phrase *with passion*.]

Parallel: The new president of the student council spoke not only *with eloquence* but also *with passion*. [Here two adverb prepositional phrases are parallel.]

### C. Coordinating Conjunctions and Predicates

Parallel: Tiffany *read the text message, shared it with her friend, and responded to it*. [Here three predicates are joined by commas and the coordinating conjunction **and**.]

Not parallel: Tiffany *read the text message, shared it with her friend, and her response was sent*. [The parallelism is broken when the writer substitutes an independent clause for a third predicate.]

**Each grammatical structure must be in balance with any other grammatical structure with which it is parallel. The completed sentence should reflect a sense of stylistic harmony and wholeness, with all parts of the sentence in rhetorical equilibrium.**

### D. Linking Verbs and Infinitive Phrases

Parallel: *To walk in this rain with neither a raincoat nor umbrella is to invite a reprimand from your mother and ridicule from your father*. [Here infinitive phrases are parallel. Note how each infinitive phrase is balanced appropriately on either side of the linking verb **is**. Note, as well, the parallelism within the infinitive phrases, in the first, the correlative conjunctions **neither...nor** joins two nouns; in the second, the coordinating conjunction **and** joins two noun phrases functioning as the direct object of the infinitive *to invite*.]

Not parallel and out of balance: *To walk in this rain with neither a raincoat nor umbrella is an invitation for your mother to reprimand you and to invite ridicule from your father*. [The balanced parallelism of the infinitive phrases is disrupted when, after the linking verb **is**, the writer introduces the noun *invitation* before an infinitive phrase.]

### E. Words of Comparison and Gerunds

Parallel: *Moving an army by train* was, of course, much faster than *moving one by foot*. [Gerund phrases joined by the linking verb *was* and the word of comparison **than** are parallel.]

Not parallel and out of balance: *Moving an army by train* was, of course, much faster than *the army's previous custom of walking*. [The gerund phrase before the linking verb has no parallel grammatical structure after the linking verb..]

Parallel: *The army's movement by train* was, of course, much faster than *its progress by foot*. [Here two nouns, *movement* and *progress*, modified by adjective prepositional phrases, *by train* and *by foot*, are parallel.]

## H. Coordinating Conjunctions and Clauses

Parallel: *Although Patrick fumbled the football four times during the game and although he fumbled three of those times in the red zone*, his team still managed to eek out a 7 – 6 victory. [Two adverb subordinate clauses are parallel.]

Not parallel and out of balance: Patrick fumbled the football four times during the game, and three of those times the ball was lost in the red zone, but his team still managed to eek out a 7 – 6 victory. [This sentence contains three independent clauses. Observe that the subjects of each clause have little or no relation to each other and that the passive voice verb in the second independent clause is not parallel with the active voice verbs in the other clauses.]

Parallel: Patrick, *who fumbled the football four times during the game and who lost the ball three times in the red zone* but *who did manage to carry the ball over the goal line once*, was likely the main reason for a tough 7 – 6 victory over what had been considered a pretty weak opponent. [Three adjective subordinate clauses are parallel.]

## J. Semicolons and Infinitive Phrases

Parallel: *To play the fool because you are a fool* is one matter; *to act it when you are not*, another indeed. [Two infinitive phrases. Note that the second independent clause omits the verb *is*, the comma implying its existence.]

Not parallel: *To cheat on the test because you did not study* is one thing; *that you deny it after having bragged about it to your friends*, quite the other. [Make the grammatical structure to the right of the semicolon parallel to that to the left. Now that you've done that, make the grammatical structure to the left of the semicolon parallel to that to the right.]

### Exercise

1. Complete this sentence with a series of clauses that begin with *who*. Make sure that clauses are in balance.

He is my best friend, a friend who...

or

She is my best friend, a friend who...

2. Finish this sentence with a series of clauses that begin with *if*. Make sure the clauses are in balance.

I will agree to do what you ask if...

or

The teacher has agreed to reconsider your failing grade if...

3. Compose a sentence that ends with a noun modified by two present participial phrases. Make sure the phrases are in balance.

4. Finish this sentence with a series of infinitive phrases. Make sure the phrases are in balance.

The point guard for our basketball team tried to...

or

The prosecuting attorney asked the jury to...

or

The student in the last row suddenly decided to...

5. Finish this sentence with a series of clauses that begin with *that*. Make sure the clauses are in balance.

When he finally reached the police station, he declared that....

or

After everyone had left, she noticed that...

or

When they arrived home from the parent-teacher conference, my parents told me that....

6. Compose a sentence that begins with a series of gerund phrases followed by *are my primary goals for this year*. Make sure the phrases are in balance.

9. Compose a sentence modeled on **Example J**, but be sure to use different infinitive phrases.

10. Finish one of these sentences by ending it with a series of prepositional phrases that begin with one of the following prepositions: *with*, *about*, or *to*.

Within minutes, it was clear to me that his sermon would be about...

or

At last, I left home for good with...

or

Overjoyed by the news, Stacy told it to...

11. Compose a sentence in which a series of vivid verbs and their predicates are parallel and balanced.

12. Compose a sentence that contains structures out of balance and provide an explanation for the error.

13. Write a sentence that contains multiple parallel structures. Identify each area of the sentence that contains similar grammatical structures that are parallel.

Body paragraph for essay on *Romeo & Juliet*

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Shakespeare's ingenious utilization of bird imagery creates lucid pictures of man's physical and emotional qualities. The importance of physical appearance quickly becomes apparent **as we observe people being judged based upon their beauty or their lack of it [adv.clause]**. Soon after we learn that the maiden Rosaline will not reciprocate Romeo's love, we witness Benvolio, **Romeo's companion [appositive phrase]**, encouraging him to attend a party **held by the Capulets enemies of Romeo's family [past participial phrase]**. Benvolio assures Romeo that Rosaline will resemble a crow instead of a swan when compared to "all the admired beauties of Verona" (1.2.86) Shakespeare's clever choice of a repulsive crow invents a vision of ugliness that contrasts with the pulchritude of a swan. Romeo, however, denies that he could ever see Rosaline as anything but the most beautiful maiden. **Having heard Romeo's declaration of undying love [present participial phrase]**, we find it surprising and a bit amusing when a fickle Romeo views Juliet at the party and claims she is "a snowy dove trooping with crows" (1.5.49). **Selecting a snowy dove to portray Juliet elicits notions of pure and elegant beauty; we can just imagine her niveous complexion [compound sentence w/solo semicolon]. Since Rosaline is now among the maidens that Romeo considers crows [adv.clause]**, his adamant vow to forever declare her lovely is broken. Indeed, he now thinks of her as an unsightly, vexatious bird. Later, when Friar Lawrence learns of Romeo's new love, he scolds Romeo and other young men for having love that "lies not truly in their hearts, but in their eyes." (2.3.67-68) Friar Lawrence, **having lived long and learned much [present participial phrase]**, considers Romeo weak since his change of heart seems to be based on Juliet's outward appearance rather

than her inner beauty. Likewise, even in today's world, it is true that many people esteem physical attractiveness above strength of character.

In addition to the artistic use of the dove and the crow to contrast the beauty and the ugliness of women, Shakespeare employs bird imagery to describe the physical attractiveness of men. **Characterized by Juliet's nurse as a lovely gentleman (3.5.220) and having greener, quicker, and fairer eyes than an eagle [past participial phrase]**, Paris is chosen by Lord Capulet, **Juliet's father [appositive phrase]**, to marry his daughter. Selecting an eagle to demonstrate the physical attributes of Paris proves successful. Undoubtedly, his eyes attract the attention of women because of their stunning appeal. **The eagle, having keen sight above all birds, is a symbol of powerful beauty; Paris, having eyes more astounding than an eagle portrays an even more exquisite image [compound sentence w/solo semicolon].** Truly, Shakespeare includes many examples of beauty and its significance. Similarly, early mythological writings emphasize the merits of physical beauty. In the story of Cupid and Psyche, we behold the power of Psyche's loveliness as throngs of men worship her beauty and neglect Aphrodite, another example of literature shaping our understanding of beauty.

I always thought this was business, this was the way to confront the thing, this was the way to take the foe by the throat.

Charles Dickens. *Great Expectations* (257).

At these moments, America has carried on **not** simply because those in high office have displayed skill or vision, **but** because we the people have remained faithful to the ideals of our forebears and true to our founding documents. 9/18/09

pre/ap

Barack Obama, 2009 Inaugural Address

But what meant most to Kenyon—and Bob, too—was their weekends, overnight hunting hikes along the shores of the river: wandering, wrapping up in blankets, listening at sunrise for the noise of wings, moving toward the sound on tiptoe, and then, sweetest of all, swaggering homeward with a dozen duck dinners swinging from their belts. [In *Cold Blood*, Truman Capote]

We passed by in a boat,  
remembering when the place was full of  
life,  
the keeper tending his light and drawing his  
pay,  
his wife hanging out flannel drawers to the  
sea breeze,  
his children, like Captain January's daughter,  
roving the island,  
watching the ships. AP 9-14-09

E.B. White “Technological Progress” 1935

Create your own sentence, imitating the pattern of Strachey's.

The glare and the heat of that southern atmosphere,  
the movement of the crowded city,  
the dark-faced populace,  
the soldiers and the suppliants,  
the reawakened consciousness of power,  
the glamour and the mystery of the whole strange  
scene—  
these things  
seized upon him,  
engulfed him,  
and  
worked a new transformation in his intoxicated heart.

Strachey, Lytton. *Eminent Victorians*.

But Duncan has boosted his game, too: he has ten games with at least twenty points, ten rebounds and five assists -- something LeBron James has done eight times this season, Chris Bosh four times, and no one else in the NBA more than three times. SI

Top 10 NBA MVP Candidates

While Harden played poorly for the second game in a row and the star post player Jeff Pendergraph toiled in foul trouble all game, the Sun Devils still made things interesting. NY Times By PETE THAMEL, March 22,

2009

Sabathia has taken teammates to three Orlando Magic games, gone fishing with Brian Bruney and Nick Swisher, and taken the Toy Story Mania! ride at Disney World with Joba Chamberlain. By

[TYLER KEPNER](#)

Published: March 22, 2009 NY Times

Looking towards the open window, I saw light wreaths from Joe's pipe floating there, and I fancied it was like a blessing from Joe—not obtruded on me or paraded before me, but pervading the air we share together.

Dickens, *Great Expectations*

He sits front and center in the dark trailer, insulated from the sunshine and the roar of the crowd, taking the fragments of sounds and moving images and assembling the broadcast on the fly, mediating the real event into the digital one.

Mark Bowden, "The Hardest Job in Football." Atlantic Monthly, Jan/Feb 2009

He scans the dizzying bank of screens to select the next shot, and the next, and the next, layering in replays, graphics, and sound, barking his orders via headset to his crew, plugging into a rhythm that echoes the pulse of the game.

Mark Bowden, "The Hardest Job in Football." Atlantic Monthly, Jan/Feb 2009

He was leaning up and out of his swivel chair, choosing shots and barking orders, arms elevated, snapping his long fingers loudly with each new command.

Mark Bowden, "The Hardest Job in Football." Atlantic Monthly, Jan/Feb 2009

She was dressed to play golf,  
and  
I remember thinking she looked like a  
good illustration, her chin raised a little,  
jauntily,  
her hair the color of an autumn leaf,  
her face the same brown tint as the  
fingerless glove on  
her knee.

*The Great Gatsby*

Aeneas came up first with long,  
menacing strides,  
head tossing his heavy helmet,  
his charging shield to defend his chest,  
and shook his bronze spear.

*Iliad* (Bk 20; 191-192)

Then Hygelac swooped on the Swedes at  
bay,  
his banners swarmed into their refuge,  
his Geat forces driven forward to  
destroy the camp.

From *Beowulf*. Trans. Seamus Heaney.

Isiah Thomas

sat for the television cameras,  
strolled Madison Square Garden's lower  
corridors and patrolled the Knicks'  
bench

— a walking, breathing place-holder with  
a cloud over his head and an expiration  
date to be determined.

Howard Beck, "Funny Thing Happens to Knicks on the Way to the Lottery." NY Times, March 26.

# An Example of Interweaving Grammar and Writing

When teaching grammar, from the outset emphasis is placed on the grammatical keys to the sentence: the clause and the phrase. Throughout the school year, depending on the skills of my students as one receives them, students are taught how to make various clauses and phrases a part of their writing equipment—tools, if you will. By the end of the year, these students should be familiar with using in their writing many, if not all, of the following structures (*the order here is not written in stone, and many teachers have success with a different order, but this is the order for this example*):

- Present participial phrases
- Compound and compound-complex sentences, their independent clauses joined either by correctly punctuated conjunctive adverbs or simply by semicolons
- Past participial phrases
- Adjective subordinate clauses
- Appositive phrases
- Analysis & repeat-word modifiers
- Absolute phrases
- Noun subordinate clauses
- Gerund phrases
- Adverb, adjective, and noun infinitive phrases

The sequence—and rapidity—of grammar instruction depends, of course, on your students' basic knowledge when they come to you. The example here is one followed with English I students who have already had at least two years of immersion in parts of speech and parts of the sentence as part of their previous English instruction. This does not mean that they are experts in the field; it means that most of them are, at least, fairly familiar with those basic concepts. The teacher's intention here is to have them see grammar from a different point of view—that the chunks, or groups, of words known as clauses and phrases are tools they can use in their writing, and the more comfortable they are with these tools, the better able they will be to make decisions about their use in their writing.

## First Writing Assignment

The teacher begins the first day of the school year by explaining their first composition assignment, a brief "Writing to Show" assignment [from *Crafting Expository Argument*] or whatever writing assignment the teacher chooses. For this, there are no structural concerns. The task is to have students learn *to elaborate details fully and to do so by controlling verb tense and using vivid verbs*.

## Present Participial Phrases

Before the second assignment, however, the first grammatical structure—the present participial phrase—is introduced. The teacher begins with this because it is a dynamic structure that is fairly easy for most of these students to master (although mastery is nothing anyone expects to occur within a mere day or two, or even one or two weeks). Their first grammar assignment is to combine related sentences by turning one into a present participial phrase. The idea is to help students move away from a reliance on simple sentence structures and adding a present participial phrase actually becomes a fun way to do it.

Since the teacher focuses on these “Writing to Show” [*Crafting Expository Argument*] assignments during the first weeks of school, each of which is heavily narrative/descriptive and, thus, provides an ample opportunity to encourage vibrant writing, specific structural requirements are gradually introduced into their writing. Therefore, with their second composition assignment, another brief one, the teacher adds this requirement: *that students must use two present participial phrases, that they must be highlighted so that the teacher will know that they know what they are, that they must be punctuated correctly, and that one must be located before the noun it is modifying and one located after.*

#### Teach the Punctuation Rule for the Particular Structure

From this point forward, students will be required to use present participial phrases in all of their writing assignments *and to punctuate them correctly*; I always teach the punctuation rules with the specific structure. This is important. Rather than throwing all of the punctuation rules at them at one time and expecting that a unit on punctuation will make an appreciable difference in their use of correct punctuation in their writing, experience demonstrates that teaching the specific punctuation rule with a specific structure—and repeatedly asking students to explain what that rule is with that structure throughout the year—will be much more likely to ensure compliance.

The difference with future composing assignments will be that, along with the present participial phrase, other sentence structures will be added to the requirement list—and their correct punctuation will have been taught and expected. *Other requirements to this second assignment remain the same: extensively elaborate each concrete detail and use vivid present tense verbs.*

#### Adverb Subordinate Clause

Between their second and third assignment, the adverb subordinate clause is introduced. Why the adverb clause? First, the teacher has already told students that they will be working with phrases and clauses throughout the year; to introduce one of the clauses fairly early shows them that such a statement has meaning. Secondly, the adverb clause is the subordinate clause that most of these young writers use already. The teacher wants them to know what it is they are using and that, as with the present participial phrase, they can begin taking two sentences and turning one into an adverb clause and attaching it to another independent clause to make a longer, more elegant sentence, a complex one that they can intersperse among their simple sentences.

For their third writing assignment, another brief “Writing to Show” composition, *their list of requirements is a bit longer: extensively elaborate each concrete detail and use vivid present tense verbs, highlight two present participial phrases, and two adverb subordinate clauses.* All future compositions will require that these two structures be employed, along with any others that have been taught by then.

Some students may very well be ready to have another concept introduced—past participial phrases, for example. However, with these students the instructor wants to make sure that the two structures they are learning are structures they are feeling increasingly comfortable with. There’s no reason for these students to have to start juggling more structures when they have only been formally learning these—and expected to use them—for a few days. With that in mind, an in-class preparation for the fourth assignment [see *Crafting Expository Argument*]—where the teacher pretends to be someone eating his lunch in the park—a fairly ordinary action—takes place. The teacher carries a lunch sack (a banana or apple, a turkey sandwich inside) and a *Time* magazine into the “park” (the front of the classroom where the “bench” awaits), and the students become silent observers who record every action by writing each one down in the form of a present participial phrase. After five minutes of “performance,” the students start saying aloud what they saw—and they say each action as they wrote them, in the form of present participial phrases. This leads up to their fourth “Writing to Show” assignment, in which they must elaborately—in minute detail—show a specific person doing something absolutely ordinary. The power of their writing will make something so ordinary exciting. And yes, *both present participial phrases and adverb subordinate clauses are again required to be highlighted.*

### The Semicolon and the Conjunctive Adverb

By now the teacher is ready to have students explain what they know about compound sentences. Most of them remember that a compound sentence is two sentences (or independent clauses, as I emphasize to them) joined by a comma and a coordinating conjunction. (This begins the quest to have them remember the seven coordinating conjunctions and that a comma always goes before them only when two independent clauses are being joined.) Quite a few students seem to know that a semicolon can be used, but the teacher has not seen any of that knowledge at work in their writing thus far. Therefore, the use of the solo semicolon is stressed and required from thenceforth. This provides a good time to show students the third way of joining two independent clauses together, the conjunctive adverb, preceded by a semicolon and followed by a comma. Both forms of joining independent clauses will be added to the requirements for compositions.

### The Revision Process

At a certain point—usually after four “Writing to Show” compositions, students are asked to select one to thoroughly revise. This provides an opportunity to teach the revision process with a piece of writing that they have chosen and want to improve. In peer editing, the following areas are covered: *ways to elaborate extensively each detail* *And to eliminate any unnecessary telling; using more vivid verbs and concrete nouns; maintaining present tense; and correct usage and punctuation of present participial phrases, adverb subordinate clauses, solo semicolons, and conjunctive adverbs.*

### The Body Paragraph and the Past Participial Phrase

After these series of “Writing to Show” assignments, students begin their study of literature. Their first major paper involving literature will be a single body paragraph. Before assigning a major essay, the instructor wants to be sure that students can work effectively with a body paragraph and use the “Writing to Show” elaboration techniques when they write about literature. This first assignment will give them another opportunity to employ the structures already taught. Here’s where a new structure is introduced—the past participial phrase. Students observe the similarities of the past participial phrase to the present participial phrase, they practice combining sentences by turning one into a past participial phrase and attaching it appropriately to the other sentence. For the body paragraph assignment, all structures taught up to this time are required: *present and past participial phrases, adverb subordinate clauses, the solo semicolon, and the conjunctive adverb.*

### The First Essay and the Adjective Subordinate Clause

When students are ready for their first major essay assignment, we continue our work on creating well-written body paragraphs but we also work on the “Showing-Telling Introduction” and the non-summary concluding paragraph, both of which are explained in detail in this text. Sometime prior to this assignment, the teacher will have introduced the adjective subordinate clause. Again, students work with sentence combining exercises involving adjective clauses, they work on learning where adjective clauses are located in relation to the word being modified, and they work on correct punctuation of nonessential adjective clauses. Once they are comfortable with the idea of using adjective clauses, they practice distinguishing between the use of *who* and *whom* as well as *that* and *which*. In this first major essay assignment, the structures that must be highlighted are as follows: present and past participial phrases, adverb and adjective subordinate clauses, the solo semicolon, and the conjunctive adverb. An x number of each structural tool is required to be highlighted and color-coded in the rough draft process, for review in the editing/revision stages, and on the final draft.

### The Appositive Phrase

Before the end of the first semester, we will go over appositive phrases in a fashion similar to instruction for previous structure, and these will be added to the list of required structures for future compositions in what remains of the semester.

### Writing Compositions Continue in Second Semester and The Absolute Phrase

As the first semester began with the participial phrase, the second semester grammar instruction begins with a close relation, the absolute phrase. This allows for a review of present and past participial phrases and a smooth, logical connection to the absolute phrase, which involves the noun + the participial phrase combination. The reading of literature and the writing of various expository arguments concerning literary themes and characters takes place at various times throughout the remainder of the school year. The first of these compositions in the second semester *will include the use of all structures learned in the first semester, plus the absolute.*

### Noun Subordinate Clause and the Gerund Phrase

At a certain point with these students, the instructor explains that we are going to take a slight step back in order to take a number of steps forward. Both noun subordinate clauses and gerund phrases will be present one after the other since both function as nouns; however, in order to do this in a way that allows the students to connect this new information that they will be expected to use with information learned in previous years, we *review the functions of any noun in the sentence*. They practice a number of exercises to remind them (or teach them at long last, one hopes) how to tell the difference between subjects, direct and indirect objects, predicate nominatives, and appositives. Once they are comfortable with their knowledge of these noun functions, the teaching of noun subordinate clauses proves to be relatively easy. Students are used to clauses by now; they watch for the *subject-verb combination—the sign of a clause*—and they apply what they know about the functions of a noun (the location of each function, for example : predicate nominatives follow linking verbs, indirect objects—if there are any—exist only between action verbs and direct objects, etc...) when they make their own sentence combinations. The next goal is to have them use noun subordinate clauses in their writing, but working with the gerund phrase occurs before the next writing assignment. Why? Because once students have learned noun clauses, they soon figure out how alike they are to gerunds, so they become more comfortable in their knowledge level of both structures. The major problem with the learning of gerunds is their similarity to present participles. However, this not only gives the instructor an excuse to go back over participles but also allows everyone to see how one determines if a phrase is a present participial phrase or a gerund phrase simply by what it is doing in the sentence. Another reason why teaching the noun clause and the gerund in close proximity to one another is relatively simple is because the punctuation rules are refreshing. With the exception of noun clauses and gerunds that function as nonessential appositives, no commas are ever used to separate these two structures from the rest of the sentence. Students like that.

All writing now requires the following: *present and past participial phrases, gerund phrases, appositive phrases, absolute phrases, and all three types of subordinate clauses, as well as the use of the solo semicolon and the conjunctive adverb.*

### The Adverb, Adjective, and Noun Infinitive Phrases

The final major structure is the infinitive phrase. Here the students are asked to take another step backward. These students recognize prepositional phrases from their previous years in grammar instruction; some, though not all, can distinguish between the adjective and the adverb prepositional phrase. What the teacher has his students do is look again at the prepositional phrase in order to focus on exactly how to tell the difference between an adverb and an adjective phrase and then apply what they have learned to what they have already been taught this year concerning

adverb and adjective subordinate clauses. Where are the adverb and adjective prepositional phrases usually located? What questions might adverbs and adjectives answer, whether they be single words, clauses, or phrases? Now, what they've been reminded about concerning these prepositional phrases and clauses is applied to the adverb and adjective infinitive phrase. Finally, the noun infinitive phrase becomes easy to teach because students see how noun infinitive phrases act in the same way as gerunds and noun subordinate clauses.

Student papers during the remainder of the year contain highlighted examples of everything taught: *present and past participial phrases; gerund phrase; adverb, adjective, and noun infinitive phrases; appositive phrases; absolute phrases; all three types of subordinate clauses; as well as the correct usage of the solo semicolon and the conjunctive adverb.*