

Language and Writing

Matching Content and Context

Teaching language and writing as distinct and separate, making the assumption that students will somehow “naturally” transfer isolated language lessons into personal writing creates a common problem....

Over the decades, high school teachers have complained that students entering the ninth grade insist that they have not been taught about propositions, interjections, semi-colons, etc. Middle school teachers report the same strange phenomenon – students claiming to have no clue as to parts of speech, transitional words, active and passive voice, etc. What's going on?

What has actually happened, is that we've been teaching the parts of speech, the use of punctuation marks, active and passive voice, etc., but often we haven't had the students apply this knowledge in any practical way. Often, we taught the skills in isolation and had students apply their new knowledge to exercises in workbooks. So, transferring these skills into their own “real” writing rarely occurred.

Again, content and context need to match.

New English LA Curriculum Correlations

From: Pushing the Pencil
Edmonton Public Schools

1. Revise and Edit

4.1 Enhance and improve

Suggestions for teaching revision and editing skills within your writing instruction.



Specific outcomes	Introduce through (writing style)	Review and practise through (writing style)
Grade 6		
revise to provide focus, expand relevant ideas and eliminate unnecessary information	14. Mystery story	9. Fantasy
edit for appropriate verb tense and for correct pronoun references	4. Realistic fiction	10. News story
use paragraph structures in expository and narrative texts	7. Persuasive writing	13. Working with information – comparing 14. Mystery story

Grade 7		
revise introductions, conclusions and the order of ideas and information to add coherence and clarify meaning	13. Working with information	4. Realistic fiction 6. Explaining 8. Business letter 10. News story
revise to eliminate unnecessary repetition of words and ideas	6. Explaining	7. Persuasive writing 8. Business letter 13. Working with information
use paragraphs, appropriately, to organize narrative and expository texts	1. Personal narrative	4. Realistic fiction 5. Friendly letter 7. Persuasive writing 10. News story

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2. Capitalization and Punctuation

4.2 Attend to conventions

Suggestions for teaching punctuation and capitalization within your writing instruction.



Specific outcomes	Introduce through (writing style)	Review and practise through (writing style)
Grade 6		
use colons before lists, to separate hours and minutes and after salutations in own writing	8. Business letter	11. Reflection – journal

Specific outcomes	Introduce through (writing style)	Review and practise through (writing style)
Grade 7		
use periods and commas with quotation marks that indicate direct speech in own writing	3. Dialogue	4. Realistic fiction 9. Fantasy 14. Mystery story
use commas to separate phrases and clauses in own writing	1. Personal narrative	All types
use quotation marks to identify information taken from secondary sources in own writing	13. Working with information	10. News story 12. Responding to literature – book review

3. Grammar and Usage

4.2 Attend to conventions

Suggestions for teaching grammar and usage within your writing instruction.



Specific outcomes	Introduce through (writing style)	Review and practise through (writing style)
Grade 6		
use complex sentence structures and a variety of sentence types in own writing	2. Descriptive writing	13. Working with information – summarizing 14. Mystery story
identify past, present and future verb tenses, and use throughout a piece of writing	10. News story	12. Responding to literature – retelling
Grade 7		
use a variety of subordinate clauses, correctly and appropriately in own writing	1. Personal narrative	All forms
use correct subject-verb agreement in sentences with compound subjects	1. Personal narrative	All forms
distinguish between formal and informal conventions of oral and written language, and use each appropriately, depending on the context, audience and purpose	8. Business letter	13. Working with information
identify and use common subjective and objective forms of pronouns, appropriately and correctly in own writing	1. Personal narrative	4. Realistic fiction 5. Friendly letter

Revision Mini-lessons Examples

Vocabulary

Million Dollar Words

Vocabulary in Writing - Cloze (from Graham Foster)

Strong Writing – Vocabulary and Imagery (from Graham Foster)

Word Connotations (from Graham Foster)

Tired Old Words (from Graham Foster)

Stretch-a-Sentence

Bare Bones

Choosing Precise Words

Sentence Structure

Sentence Variety in Writing (from Graham Foster)

Sentence Options (from Graham Foster)

Periodic Sentences (from Graham Foster)

Active and Passive Voice (from Graham Foster)

From Observation to Varied Sentences (from Graham Foster)

Opening Sentences

Opening Sentences

Lead On

Interesting Leads (from Graham Foster)

Show Don't Tell

Show Don't Tell (from Graham Foster)

Show Don't Tell (*from Pushing the Pencil*)

Using Specific Nouns and Precise Verbs

Extending Ideas - For Example

Voice in Writing (from Graham Foster)

Dialogue (mini-unit)

Organization

Paragraph Writing – color-coded

The Hamburger Paragraph

Outlines in Reverse



TEACHING STRATEGY 1 ►►►►►►► Million Dollar Words

The words writers choose to use as they write are a large part of their writing style. Million Dollar Words can make the difference between ho-hum writing and writing with verve. Some writers seem to have a talent for using colorful words. Other writers need to use writing tools such as a thesaurus as they search for strong verbs and precise nouns. When students are aware that they need to try to write with Million Dollar Words, their writing can become much more exciting.



Directions

1. Tell students that when they write they should try to use words that capture the images they have in their minds. Explain that sometimes writers need to search for the right word, because not just any word will do in a given situation. Tell students that they need to try to use Million Dollar Words when they write.
2. Write the following groups of sentences on the chalkboard or on an overhead transparency. Have students read the sentences independently.
 1. He held the bat tightly.
 2. He gripped the bat tightly.
 1. She stared in surprise at the Grand Canyon.
 2. She stared in awe at the Grand Canyon.
3. Ask students to identify the differences between the two sentences in each pair. Encourage students to discuss the more vivid words in the second sentences.
4. Create several Million Dollar Word Posters to display in the room so students have Million Dollar Words easily accessible. To create Million Dollar Word Posters, duplicate and distribute the list of words on the following page. Tell students that all of these words could be used in lieu of the word "said." Explain to students that each word has a slightly different connotation and that the words cannot necessarily be used interchangeably. Instead, the Million Dollar Word Posters list words that have different shades of meaning for the targeted word.
5. Divide the class into groups of three or four students. Have each group develop a Million Dollar Word Poster. You can use the following list of ideas for posters or have students think of the topics for their posters. Tell students that Million Dollar Words can be found in thesauruses and, if possible, secure several for your classroom library.

Million Dollar Words for "nice."
Million Dollar Words for "good."
Million Dollar Words for "went."
Million Dollar Words for "fun."
6. Encourage students to use Million Dollar Words as they write and share examples of students' use of Million Dollar Words in their writing.



Million Dollar Words for "Said"

added	gasped	questioned
admitted	giggled	
agreed	grinned	recited
announced	groaned	remarked
answered	grumbled	reminded
asked		repeated
	hectorated	replied
badgered	hinted	responded
barked	hollered	
begged	howled	screamed
bellowed		shouted
blabbered	informed	shrieked
broadcasted	inquired	sighed
	intimated	snarled
cackled		sniveled
chattered	jabbered	stated
chuckled		stormed
coaxed	laughed	stuttered
commented		suggested
complained	mentioned	
confessed	moaned	taunted
congratulated	mumbled	teased
cried	murmured	told
	muttered	
declared		urged
decreed	nagged	uttered
demanded	ordered	
		wheedled
echoed	persuaded	whined
exclaimed	pleaded	whispered
	proclaimed	
	prompted	yelled
	proposed	yelped
	protested	

Other Commonly Used Verbs

Answered - acknowledged, replied, responded, retorted

Asked - quizzed, questioned, inquired, demanded, queried, requested

Got - obtained, secured, regained, salvaged, gleaned, gathered, accumulated, won, earned, procured, found, gained

Fell - tumbled, collapsed, dropped, descended, toppled, plunged

Flew - soared, hovered, cruised, sailed, glided, coasted, skimmed, winged, flitted, wafted

Help - aid, assist, back, abet, support

Hide - veil, cover, mask, conceal, cloak, camouflage, screen, shroud

Look - gaze, glance, see, seek, peek, peep, peer, glimpse, stare, ogle, eye, gawk, view, survey, study, seek, discover, notice, contemplate,

Love - appreciate, treasure, cherish, esteem, adore, like

Make - invent, construct, design, fabricate, manufacture, produce, build, create, accomplish, form, obtain

Move - loped, plod, lunge, swagger, creep, poke, crawl, inch, shuffle, trot, dawdle, walk, mosey, bound, trip, sprint, run, lag, trail, lumber, stump, trudge, plug, jog, hurry, chase, race, scramble, scuttle, scoot, skedaddle, scurry, scamper, ride, stagger, spin, amble, slip, hobble, glide, saunter, slide, sail, slither, coast, flow, paddle, pace, slouch, wobble, prance, straggle, meander, high-tail, fling, bolt, dart, dash, streak, stride, tear, breeze, whisk, rush, drag, run, flee, escape, rush,

Planned - plotted, schemed, contrived, devised, proceeded, arranged, designed, mapped

Said - told, informed, disputed, denied, assured, contended, notified, advised, disclosed, revealed, explained, related, advised, vowed, announced, protested, jabbered, stammered, stuttered, drawled, lisped, grunted, snorted, hissed, roared, snarled, bellowed, yelped, thundered, sung, boomed, yelled, screamed, shrieked, screeched, squawked, exclaimed, whined, whispered, sighed, mumbled, muttered, stated, asserted, conveyed, delivered, imparted, voiced, articulated, pronounced, taught, instructed, commanded, ordered

Wreck - break, fracture, shatter, smash, crash, demolish, rupture,



Cloze Exercise

A cloze exercise is one in which a piece of writing is presented with certain words or phrases deleted. You are asked to provide the missing words, usually receiving "marks" for correctly guessing them. In this case, you will be asked to choose words that you think create the kind of mood the author is trying to convey, and it is possible that some of your words might be better than the ones the writer used. We return to ***The Time of the Dark***.

"What city?" Gilian wondered confusedly. *And why am I afraid? This is only a dream.*

But she knew. In her heart she knew that this scene of _____ escape was even now being repeated, like the hundredfold reflections on a _____ mirror, everywhere in the city around here. The knowledge and _____ created a chill that _____ along her skin, _____ wormlike through her _____.

Author's word choices: *frantic, doubled, horror, crept, crawled, guts.*

Note also the figure of speech used. What is it? Is it effective? Why or why not?

Assignment

Keeping the lessons learned here in mind, it's your turn to do some writing that features strong description. Choose one of the following scenarios and write a piece that brings it alive.

1. The reaction of the class as the teacher announces a surprise test on a reading assigned the night before.
2. A child delivering his/her report card to parents.
3. The scene in the school's hallways as students are dismissed for lunch, knowing that the local DQ has hamburgers on for 50 cents.
4. A group of bullies walking through the mall.

VOCABULARY IN WRITING

Part One

In the following exercises, you will be challenged to insert appropriate words in to text. You will then compare your version with the original to determine which is more effective. Finally, you will be invited to revise a sample of your own writing to transform ordinary words into precise and vivid words.

1. SUBJECT: A TRAIN RIDE IN WINTER

Many-a-mile, manyamile, manyamile said the iron clank of the train wheels, and we _____, as unaccustomed travellers do, on the edge of the dusty plush seats and looked out of the rattling windows at the winter. The farms were lost and smothered. Emaciated trunks of maple and poplar were black now and the branches were _____ with frost. The sloughs were frozen over, and the snow was banked high against the snow fences and shadowed blue in the sun.

Margaret Laurence

2. SUBJECT: SPRING THAW

I climbed a ridge beside the cabin on the second day and I was _____ by what I saw. Thin sheets of water were sliding out from under the mighty drifts along the shore, and there were already telltale rumblings from under the river ice. Above the ice a good size stream was _____ down upon the bay and spreading a lake above a lake, that was soon too deep to wade across.

Farley Mowat

3. SUBJECT: A RAILWAY YARD

We walked as far as the last grain elevator again, and then sat down on the sheltered side and watched a freight train shunting up and down the yard. A man appeared with a lantern, walking like a pair of legs without a trunk. The headlight for a moment swung on him and made him whole, swung off and left him walking cut in two. The locomotive _____ out clouds of steam and reddened every time the fireman stoked. It started backing up presently, and the dead chugging sound of car on car ran through the night like a mile of falling dominoes . . .

The drizzle _____ till the sound of it on the high expanse of elevator wall was like a great rushing wind.

Sinclair Ross

4. **SUBJECT: SOLDIERS IN BATTLE DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR**

The barrage had lifted and dropped behind them . . . They (the enemy) came in little uneven knots of men, lightly weighted with equipment, but nonetheless stumbling and sliding through down into scummy shell-holes, struggling through the mud that _____ at the legs like glue . . . They withered to the chatter of rifles and Lewis guns like a house of cards when you flip your finger. Then our own barrage came down like a breaking wave and simply _____ them from sight in smoke.

Philip Child

Part Two

Review a sample of your own writing. First, focus on the verbs. Consider revisions which will make them more precise and vivid. Then consider other helpful revisions in vocabulary. Re-copy five sentences which you have revised. Re-copy both original and revised versions of these five sentences.

VOCABULARY IN WRITING

Word Insertions From Original Text

1.
 - perched
 - feathered
2.
 - awed
 - bawling
3.
 - hissed
 - thickened
4.
 - sucked
 - blotted

Suggestion:

Allow students the opportunity to argue that their versions are as effective or more effective than the original version.

CLOZE METHOD

Leave out selected words; words with powerful connotations or comparisons.

A MEMORY SNUG IN MY MIND

I remember a time of coziness,
A time when fire crackled,
A lazy time,
A _____ time,
A slow time.
It was a quiet time
back in the good old days.
I was a family hour,
A time to whisper.
It was an _____ time.
A time of tune,
A time of peace.
It was a wintertime.
It was a happy time;
It was a time _____.

A MEMORY SNUG IN MY MIND

I remember a time of coziness,
A time when fire crackled,
A lazy time,
A hot chocolate time,
A slow time.
It was a quiet time
back in the good old days.
I was a family hour,
A time to whisper.
It was an O'Henry time.
A time of tune,
A time of peace.
It was a wintertime.
It was a happy time;
It was a time remembered.



STRONG WRITING - VOCABULARY AND IMAGERY

In many ways vivid writing can be compared to painting a picture: an artist uses paints of varying hues and values to create an image that somehow seized the eye and mind of the viewer: a writer uses words on the blank page to create images that capture and manipulate our minds and emotions. The successful writer paints pictures with words, not pigment.

Good writers employ a strong vocabulary. This does not mean that they use long strings of fancy, fluffy adjectives: rather, they tend to use fewer adjectives but stronger, more precise verbs and nouns. In addition, they make extensive use of figures of speech such as metaphors, similes, and hyperboles.

Examine the following excerpt from the science fiction novel *Chanur's Homecoming* by C.J. Cherryh:

"The Pride's small galley table was awash in data printout - paperfaxes ringed and splotted with brown gfi* stains, arrowed, circled, crossed out, and noted in red and green ink until they were beyond cryptic. The red pen made another notation and another snaking arrow; and the bronze-pelted Hani fist that held it flexed claws out and in again in profoundest frustration. Pyanfar Chanur sat in this sanctuary gnawing her mustaches and drinking cup after cup of lukewarm gfi amid her scribbles on the navy and log records."

* a drink like coffee

Now ask yourself what image is created in your mind? What 'feeling' do the words evoke?

Let's now examine how the author does this.

1. Pick out seven strong verbs Ms. Cherryh used to create the mental images she wanted you to have.
2. Pick out the metaphor in the selection.

Now let's look at another scene, this time created by Barbra Hambly in her fantasy novel *The Time of the Dark*. Rather than saying that the city was in a panic, regard what she wrote:

"She seemed to be standing at the foot of a flight of green marble stairs, facing into a square courtyard surrounded by tall, peak-roofed buildings. Fleeing people were shoving past her, jostling her back against the gigantic pedestal of a malachite statue, without seeming to be aware of her presence at all; gasping, wild-eyed people, terrified faces bleached to corpses by the brilliance of the cold quarter moon. They were pouring out of the gabled houses, the men clutching chests or bags of money, the women jewels, lap dogs, or children crying in uncomprehending terror. Their hair was wild from sleep, for it was deep night; some of them were dressed, but many were naked, or tripping over bedclothes hastily snatched, and Gilian could smell the rank terror-sweat of their bodies as they brushed against her."

1. List seven strong verbs the author uses.
2. Quote a phrase that worked especially well to create an image in your mind.
3. Find two metaphors. How do they strengthen the work?

By the way, note that the author also invokes our sense of smell in this piece. It's a good idea to appeal to more than one of the senses in your writing.

Word Connotations

Purpose: To encourage students to recognize and to compose connotative language that is appropriate to purpose and audience.

Provide travel brochures or catalogues. Ask students to identify the messages in the brochures - both the explicit and the implicit. Focus students on the effectiveness of specific words in conveying the message. Introduce word denotations and connotations. Word denotations are the literal meanings of the words; word connotations are the implicit or suggested meanings. Ask students to describe the connotations of selected words from the travel brochures.

Once they have read the brochures, challenge students to create their own with specific attention to word connotations **OR** have students revise a piece of writing to improve the connotations of selected words.

Tired Old Words

Purpose: To encourage students to employ specific, colorful vocabulary appropriate to purpose and audience.

Ask students to identify and underline the three most tired words in a piece of their own writing (e.g., good, bad, excellent, great, mad, sad).

Students should then insert alternatives for the tired words, alternatives that are appropriate for purpose and audience. If students use a thesaurus, they should verify their word choice with a partner.

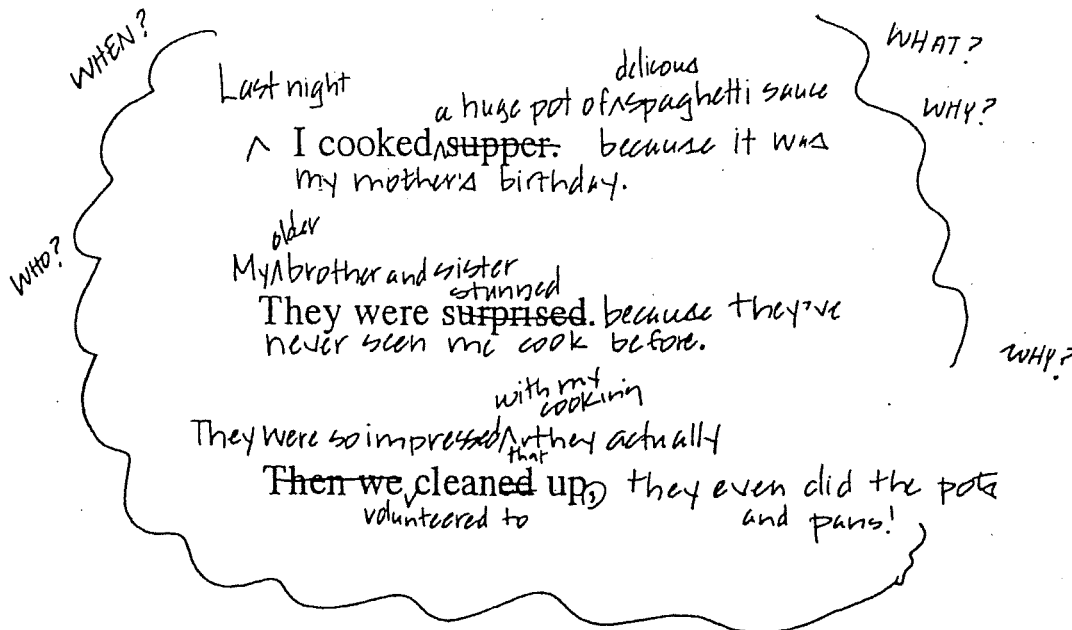


Stretch-a-Sentence

1. Read each "bare bones" sentence.
2. Think – "What details does this sentence need?" Think about the questions your reader might have and try to answer them in an interesting way.
3. **Stretch** each sentence by adding at least five words to make the sentence more detailed and/or descriptive.
4. Rewrite the **new** and **improved** sentences as a paragraph.
5. Write a catchy title that expresses the main idea of the paragraph.
6. Proofread your work.

First draft: *I cooked supper. They were surprised. Then we cleaned up.*

Stretch the sentences...



Revised draft: Last night I cooked a huge pot of delicious spaghetti sauce because it was my mother's birthday. My older brother and sister were stunned because they'd never seen me cook. They were so impressed with my cooking that they actually volunteered to clean up. They even did the pots and pans!

Try these yourself:

Bare bones *1

It was dark.
I walked down the street.
I was nervous.

Bare bones *2

I dressed up.
I went trick or treating.
I got candy.

Bare bones *3

I went on a bike ride.
I went fast.
It was fun.

Bare bones *4

Lifting weights is cool.
It's good for you.
I like it.

Bare bones *5

A dog barked at me.
I barked back.
The dog ran away.

Choosing Precise Words

*Replace vague or overused words with synonyms that are more precise. In each sentence, cross out the word **went** and choose a better word from the box below. Use each word only once and say the sentence aloud to see which word sounds best.*

marched	romped	stomped	tiptoed
lumbered	charged	sped	twirled
skipped	ran	jumped	bumped

1. The bear went toward the trembling hunter.
2. The ballerina went across the stage.
3. The soldiers went through the streets.
4. The bull went across the field.
5. The new puppy went across the field chasing the butterfly.
6. The bicycle messenger went across town with the top secret document.
7. Jay went up the stairs and loudly slammed the door.
8. The teacher went quietly across her classroom so she wouldn't wake her sleeping students.
9. The old car went along the road leaving clouds of dust and smoke in her wake.
10. My little sister was so happy she went all the way to school.



SENTENCE VARIETY IN WRITING

In the following exercises, you will engage in a three-step process designed to improve your control of varied sentence patterns. First, you will re-write a paragraph written in simple sentences into one which has more varied sentence patterns. Then you will compare the three versions to determine the advantages of each in the light of the author's purpose. Obviously, you will have to change wordings to achieve the sentence variety. However, you may not omit any particular point.

Part One

1. SUBJECT: WINTERS IN TORONTO - PAST AND PRESENT

The winter climate has not changed. Our approach to it has. There was no snow removal in those days. Runners took the place of wheels on all vehicles. Everyone had sleighs of one sort or another. Loads of hay on sledges came from farms to stables in the city. The sledges offered good sport to boys and girls. Boys and girls clambered aboard them and stole rides.

In your version with varied sentences, remember to begin some of your sentences with something other than the subjects of the sentences.

2. SUBJECT: A HOCKEY GAME

A stout French Canadian was shouting imprecations in bewilderingly rapid French. He suddenly broke into English. Twelve thousand people were also screaming. He imagined he would get the referee to listen to him shifting to English. His jaw trembled. His eyes rolled back in their sockets. He was ready to weep. His face became red and swollen. He cried out passionately, "Blind man! Idiot! All night you are a blind man! A thief, a cheat! . . ." He cupped his hand around his mouth. He let out a gigantic moan.

In your version with varied sentences, remember to begin some of your sentences with something other than the subjects of the sentences.

III. SUBJECT: DESCRIPTION OF A VILLAGE

The village was not far from the company camp. It stood on the northern slope of a gradual hill. It looked down over a broad, sweeping valley. The valley was patchworked with tiny hedged farms. A deep forest was on the south side of the hill. A lane wandered through this forest . . . Two tiny churches stood on the brow of the hill. The churches faced each other.

In your version with varied sentences, remember to begin some of your sentences with something other than the subjects of the sentences:

Part Two: Original Versions

- I. The winter climate has not changed, although our approach to it has. In those days there was no snow removal; runners took the place of wheels on all vehicles. Everyone had sleighs of one sort or another. Loads of hay on sledges, coming from farms to stables in the city, offered good sport to boys and girls who clambered aboard them and stole rides.

Vincent Massey

Indicate whether you prefer this original version or your version. Why? Which better shows the relationship among the details in the paragraph?

Choose a paragraph from your own writing, probably part of a longer work. The paragraph should be one which could be improved through more varied sentence patterns. Re-write the paragraph to demonstrate sentence variety.

- II. The stout French Canadian who had been standing up shouting imprecations in bewilderingly rapid French, suddenly broke into English. Twelve thousand people were also screaming but by shifting to English he imagined he would get the referee to listen to him. His jaw trembled; his eyes rolled back in their sockets; he was ready to weep. Then his face became red and swollen, and he cried out passionately, "Blind man! Idiot! All night you are a blind man! A thief! A cheat! . . . He cupped his hands around his mouth and let out a gigantic moan.

Morley Callaghan

Note the short sentences joined by semi-colons: "His jaw trembled; his eyes rolled back in their sockets; he was ready to weep." Note how the series of short, simple sentences suggests speed or quick action. Note that Callaghan controls other sentence patterns as well. Choose a paragraph from your own writing, probably part of a longer work. The paragraph is one which could be improved by using a series of short, simple sentences to suggest speed or quick action. Re-write the paragraph below.

- III. The village was not far from the company camp. It stood on the northern slope of a gradual hill and looked down over a broad, sweeping valley, patchworked with tiny hedged farms. On the south side of the hill was a deep forest . . . On the brow of the hill, facing each other across a road, stood two tiny churches.

Edward Meade

Indicate whether you prefer this original version or your version. Why? Which better shows the relationship among the details in the paragraph?

Choose another paragraph from your writing, probably part of a longer work. The paragraph should be one which could be improved through more varied sentence patterns. Re-write the paragraph to demonstrate sentence variety.



Sentence Options

Purpose: To encourage students to employ varied sentence patterns to show the relationship between ideas and to add interest for the reader.

Remind students that sentence patterns show the relationship among ideas.

Example: I was late for supper **and** it was cold when I ate it.

And suggests that the two ideas are of equal importance.

To show the relationship between the ideas, another sentence pattern is preferable.

Since I was late for supper, it was cold when I ate it.

or

Arriving late for supper, I had to eat cold food.

Encourage students to focus on the sentence patterns in literature that they are reading; they will note the connections between patterns and meaning.

Ask students to each re-write a section of one of their compositions so that they more clearly demonstrate how ideas are connected.

Periodic Sentences

Purpose: To encourage students to employ periodic sentences effectively when they wish to create suspense or to build to a critical point.

Most sentences begin with the subject (what the writer or speaker is discussing) and then say something about the subject - what the subject is or does. These are called loose sentences.

Example: The thief crept into the dark, silent study.

To create interest and suspense, writers sometimes use periodic sentences which delay the subject and predicate.

Example: Into the dark, silent study crept the thief.

Challenge students to find a periodic sentence in literature and to judge its effectiveness. They can then transform one of their own sentences in a piece of writing. Once again, students should judge its effectiveness.

Active and Passive Voice

Purpose: To encourage students to consider transformation of sentences from passive to active voice.

If you find that passive voice is overused in students' writing, teach about active and passive voice, stressing that the active voice is usually preferable.

Active voice construction is more direct and less awkward. In passive voice construction, the subject is the receiver of the action.

Examples:

Passive Voice

- The prize was received by many.
- The villain was foiled by Sherlock Holmes.
- The Internet was used by the president to proclaim his message.

Active Voice

Many received the prize
Sherlock Holmes foiled the villain.
The president proclaimed his message on the Internet.

Encourage students to identify examples of passive voice in their writing and to re-cast sentences in the active voice.

From Observation to Varied Sentences

Purpose: To encourage students to employ varied sentences to indicate the relationship among events.

Ask students to use a notepad to record in point form, observations about what happened at a school event such as a pep rally. Later, challenge students as a whole class to combine the points into sentences to show relationships.

Example:

- at pep rally, Mary pushed pie into principal's face
- principal screamed and jumped
- principal chased Mary out of the gymnasium

After Mary shoved the pie into the principal's face at the pep rally, the principal screamed, jumped and chased her around the gymnasium.

TEACHING STRATEGY 2 ▶▶▶▶▶▶▶ Opening Sentences

Opening sentences can be a killer. They can make or break a piece of writing. The first sentence of a story can invite a reader to continue, or it can throw up a roadblock that hinders the reader. Many writers prefer short openers; others use a variety of different first sentences to grab the reader's interest. Most writers, however, don't automatically know how to write a first sentence. Many young writers begin their writing with sentences that tell the entire story in one fell swoop. All writers, however, can learn how to write catchy first sentences. Learning how to write good opening sentences is a part of style that can be learned.



Directions

1. Tell students that the first sentence in a piece of writing can either invite readers to continue reading or keep them from reading more of the piece.
2. Write the following sentence on a chalkboard or on an overhead transparency.

It was a dark and stormy night.

3. Many students have heard this famous opening sentence. Ask students to discuss what makes that sentence interesting or boring.
4. Read to students several opening sentences from familiar books or write the first sentence of *Drummond* (Odgers, 1990) on the chalkboard or on an overhead transparency. Read the sentence with students. Discuss why this sentence is a good opening. Explain that writers consciously determine how to begin a piece of writing.

Sarah Jordan and her brother Nicholas were perfectly ordinary people until the day they met Drummond.

5. Ask students to find other opening sentences that they like, either from published books or from their own writing. Have students share these sentences with the class.
6. Tell students that writers can choose to use a variety of opening sentences. Explain that there are ten types of opening sentences that writers most frequently use. Duplicate the list of Opening Sentences on the following page and distribute it to students.
7. Read and discuss the ten opening sentences with the class. Then divide the class into groups of three or four students. Have each group choose two types of opening sentences. Ask each group to write a sample sentence for the two types of opening sentences they chose.



8. Invite students to share their sample opening sentences. Post the sentences along with the sentence type on a display in the room. Encourage students to use the display as they compose opening sentences for their next piece of writing.

Some Ways to Write Introductions

- ♦ **Open with a question** – “Have you ever wondered if you could survive a plane crash in the wilderness?”
- ♦ **Open with an announcement** – “This is the first novel I’ve ever written!”
- ♦ **Open with a bold and challenging statement** – “Contrary to what everybody might think, eating chocolate is beneficial to your health!”
- ♦ **Open with a quotation from somebody** – “You’re going to regret this.” That is what my best friend Sara said when I decided to dye my hair blue.
- ♦ **Open with a riddle or a puzzle that the reader can grapple with** – What is black and white and red all over? That right – a newspaper.
- ♦ **Open with a personal experience** – “I’m still glad that I didn’t scream and yell at Josie, even though I did later in my room.”
- ♦ **Open with how you felt** – “I was shaking. My whole body was shivering. My mouth began to quiver. What would happen next?”

Lead On

There are many different ways to begin a story. Try out each of these different types of leads.

Story topic: *Working in a Circus*

Question lead →	Have you ever wished you could run away and join the circus? Well, this is just what...
Suspense lead →	He is a man with no address and he moves from town to town in the middle of the night.
Surprise lead →	His roommate weighs almost a ton and likes classical music and peanut butter.
Dialogue lead →	"Tiger on the loose! Tiger on the loose!" yelled the young man.
Sensory description →	The buttery smell of popcorn, the sticky delight of a candied apple...

Story topic: _____

- Question lead: _____

- Suspense lead: _____

- Surprise lead: _____

- Dialogue lead: _____

- Sensory description: _____

Whenever you write a narrative or essay, your lead paragraph is critically important. In it you want to introduce what is happening as well as where and when it is happening and, of course, to whom it is happening. You also want to make your reader interested enough to continue reading.

Here are two possible opening paragraphs for the same story. Both provide background information.

Paragraph 1

Once there was a little girl whose name was Victoria. She lived a hundred years ago in a house in the country. One winter she went to visit her grandmother who lived in the city. It was the first time she'd ever been to the city.

Paragraph 2

The coachman's head felt cold against Victoria's sleeve as he helped her down to the snowy pavement. She paused next to her small travelling case and squinted down the gaslit street at the rows of stone steps and heavy wooden doors with brass knockers. Never before had she seen houses like these, one up against the other, with no meadows or pastures in between, no rose vines curling at windows. Which door, she wondered, was her grandmother's?

Which arouses your interest? The first merely states facts, one after another. The second suggests them so that the reader can picture as well as learn what is going on. If your reader can do that, he will probably stay with your story.

ASSIGNMENT

This assignment will challenge you to write a lead which shows without telling. Just for practice, write an opening paragraph of your own. You needn't complete the story, although your beginning may be so good that you may want to add to it. Look over the following three lists. Pick out a character from the PEOPLE column, a locale from the PLACES column and a kind of day from the WEATHER column. Then choose a time (morning, noon, night; past, present or future). These will be the background elements in your story.

PEOPLE	PLACES	WEATHER
Penelope, a girl your age	Secret Cove	Sunshine
Hector, a boy your age	Department Store	Hurricane
Alexander, a man old enough to be your father	Submarine	Rain
Daphne, a woman old enough to be your mother	Spaceship	Fog
Mrs. Petty, a grandma	Circus Train	Snow
Mr. Petty, a grandpa	Gas Balloon	Wind
	Abandoned House	Flood
	Roof Top	Earthquake

After briefly discussing possibilities with a partner, write an opening paragraph containing all of the facts you have chosen, **but don't actually state them. Hint at them.** Instead of saying that Penelope is a young girl or that Mr. Petty is in a gas balloon, suggest these details by describing their clothing or behaviour.

Example: Penelope wore a T-shirt with a picture of a ketchup bottle on the front and her name stamped in green letters on the back.

Mr. Petty looked over the edge of the basket at the town on thousand feet below. Overhead, the huge bubble of blue and white nylon filled the wind, and he began to sing as he soared out toward the sea.

You can refer to the weather, even if the scene takes place in an elevator, by mentioning a dripping umbrella or snowflakes on a collar, wind-tousled hair or drops of sweat behind the knees.

When you revise with a partner, check to ensure that your lead paragraph contains no direct statements.

The following are lead paragraphs from similar personal response writing. Examine each of the leads and indicate the technique used by the authors. You may complete the assignment individually, in a small group or in full class discussion.

1. I saw it coming, but I couldn't really believe it was happening. The Blackrobe's open hand came up, drifted through a lazy semi-circle, and exploded violently in my face. The blow slammed me, dazed and shaken, into the rough cloister wall and blood spurted from my nose and mouth.
2. "Cowards die many times before their deaths. The valiant never taste of death but once." One way that I have kept my tally own to 463 deaths is by avoiding going to the doctor for a checkup for 15 years. The one time I had to go into the hospital, I managed to get in without a complete medical examination. It's almost worth breaking a leg.
3. I often thought it would be a blessing if each human being were stricken blind and deaf for a few days at some time during is adult life. Darkness would make him more appreciative of sight; silence would teach him the joys of sound.
4. The thoughts of childhood are very long and deep. Birth, death, love and safety are all intertwined and if we brush aside one of those questions because we aren't ready, we may never get to hear of others.

Which of these techniques do you prefer? Why? Can you think of other techniques?

Show Don't Tell

ASSIGNMENT

Mark a **T** over the sentences which mostly **tell** and an **S** over the sentences which mostly **show**.

Note how John Steinbeck in *The Red Pony* did not just tell his readers that Billy Buck was a ranch hand. Instead he shows us through specific details which appeal to the senses.

At daybreak Billy Buck emerged from the bunkhouse and stood for a moment on the porch looking up at the sky. He was a broad, bandy-legged little man with a walrus mustache, with square hands, puffed and muscled on the palms. His eyes were a contemplative, watery gray and the hair which protruded from under his Stetson hat was spiky and weathered. Billy was still stuffing his shirt into his blue jeans as he stood on the porch. He unbuckled his belt and tightened it again. The belt showed, by the worn shiny places opposite each hole, the gradual increase in Billy's middle over the years. When he had seen to the weather, Billy cleared each nostril by holding its mate closed with his forefinger and blowing fiercely. Then he walked to the barn, rubbing his hands together.

ASSIGNMENT

1. Once again, mark the sentences which mostly **tell** with a **T** and the sentences which mostly **show** with an **S**.
2. How do you think that Steinbeck became a master of showing rather than telling?

Several writers have indicated that one of their most important secrets is careful observation of the world around them. No doubt Steinbeck was a keen observer of people, places and events. Your writing will be enhanced if you take time to look closely and to note the details that a busy world misses.

Several assignments follow. With your teacher's guidance, choose at least two of them to develop your ability to show rather than just to tell.



Show Don't Tell

A good writer creates a picture for the reader. Good writers don't just tell, they show the reader what is happening. For example, you could tell your reader that you missed the bus by simply writing:

I missed the bus.

Or you could show your reader what happened by including details such as:

Just as I turned the corner, the bright-yellow school bus pulled away from the curb and I could see my friend Johnny waving at me through the back window.

The bare bones sentences below **tell**, rather than **show**. Add details that show the reader what is happening. The first two sentences are started for you.

1. I am afraid of dogs.

When I see a dog I _____

2. I made a delicious sandwich.

To make my sandwich I _____

3. It is cold outside.

4. The dog barked at me.

5. My coat is too small.

6. My friend is nice.

7. I like the colour orange.

8. I have a cold.

Using Specific Nouns and Precise Verbs

Nouns and verbs give sentences power. The secret to showing, not telling lies in writing with nouns and verbs.

Try This! (A focus lesson)

Nouns

Crowd
Coliseum
Pucks
Sticks
Forwards
Defencemen
Goalie
Referees
Net
Calgary Flames
Drinks
Hot dogs
Goals
Scoreboard

Verbs

roars
glitters
fly
smack
streak
stand up
blocks
signal
waits
bomb
slurp
drip
explode
flashes

After choosing such specific nouns and precise verbs write a group paragraph using them.

For Example

Examples help to make our ideas clear to the reader. Below are several statements. Use your imagination to write an example that illustrates each one. Write in complete sentences. The first one has been done for you.

A. My brother is very strange. For example, he sleeps with an open book under his pillow because he thinks it will help him to learn.

1. Big brothers can be a pain, but sometimes they are good to have around. For example, _____

2. Having a substitute teacher can be fun. For example, _____

3. My mom packs great lunches. For instance, _____

4. My friend could not live without her computer. _____

5. I love a good argument. _____

6. My dog is quite the clown. _____

Voice in Writing

Purpose: To have students use literature that has a strong voice to develop a strong voice in their own writing.

- a. Choose a literary work or piece of student writing that is strong in voice. The novels ***Angel Square*** by Brian Doyle and ***Ellen Foster*** by Kay Gibbons are two possibilities.
- b. After reading, engage students in discussion about how the voice is distinctive and whether the voice makes the writing effective. Throughout the discussion, list features that create voice in writing on the blackboard or on chart paper. For example:
 - honest, personal expression;
 - the sound of how people speak;
 - insight into the personality of the writer;
 - unique expression.
- c. Challenge students to compose or to revise a piece to emphasize voice. In revision activities, ask students to identify precisely where the piece is honest, personal and unique in expression.

To Be or Not To Be

Purpose: To encourage students to employ specific, colorful vocabulary appropriate to purpose and audience.

Have students re-write a section of composition replacing all forms of the verb **to be**, for example, **am, is, are, was, were**, and **will be** with an alternative.

Examples

Sunlight spread across the city.

NOT: It was a sunny day.

Clara, the protagonist of the story, faces an identity crisis.

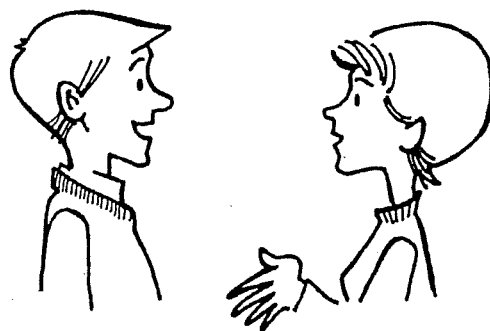
NOT: Clara is the protagonist of the story.

You can also encourage students to explore alternatives for all forms of **to have, to go**, or **to get**.



Types of Writing

3. Dialogue



What it is

Dialogue is conversation involving two or more people. Good dialogue adds description and colour to writing and helps the writer to show rather than tell. Dialogue can advance the plot of a story and make the story come to life for the reader.

Functions

Dialogue:

- helps define characters in stories
- provides description in stories

Forms

- story dialogue
- readers' theatre
- play script
- cartoon or comic strip
- monologue
- famous quote from history

Related concepts

formal versus informal language, monologue, footnoting and quoting sources

Teaching grammar and usage in this writing context

- use periods and question marks as end punctuation in own writing (grade 2)
- use exclamation marks as end punctuation in own writing (grade 3)
- use capitalization to designate clubs, teams and organizations and to indicate the beginning of quotations in own writing (grade 4)
- use quotation marks and separate paragraphs to indicate passages of dialogue in own writing (grade 5)

- use periods and commas with quotation marks that indicate direct speech in own writing (grade 7)
- use commas to separate phrases and clauses in own writing (grade 7)
- use a variety of subordinate clauses, correctly and appropriately in own writing (grade 7)
- use correct subject-verb agreement in sentences with compound subjects (grade 7)

Specific terms

dialogue, quotations, direct and indirect speech, characters, speakers, point of view, monologue

Examples from literature

Any story, play or book that includes interesting conversation.

Planning tools

Student tip sheet #3: Writing dialogue

What students need to do

To write successful dialogue:

1. Put quotation marks around the words the speaker is saying.
2. Put commas between the spoken and unspoken words, before quotation marks. For example:

"I usually have porridge for breakfast," retorted Angus, "and I like to have sugar on it!"
3. Identify the speakers so that readers understand who says what. When characters are clearly established, it should not be necessary to identify the speakers every single time they say something. As a rule of thumb, don't write more than three dialogue lines without identifying the speaker.
4. Use alternate words for *said*, such as *whispered, shouted, answered, etc.* Make a list of these words so they are handy for reference.

5. Start a new paragraph (indent) each time the speaker changes.
6. If the speaker says more than one paragraph of dialogue, begin the additional paragraphs with opening quotation marks but only put closing quotation marks at the end of the final spoken paragraph.
7. Use dialogue that suits the characters and their situations. For example, shy people speak differently than aggressive people; really young children speak differently than older people.
8. Use dialogue to move the story along and provide details.
9. Don't make the dialogue so realistic that it bores the reader. In real life, we often repeat ourselves or use small talk just to get comfortable. In a piece of writing, avoid small talk and use the dialogue to show the reader what is happening.

Sample teaching strategies

1. **Give them words**

Have students draw a scene from a favourite story and add speech balloons for each of the characters.

2. **Talk about it**

Find several passages from favourite novels and challenge students to turn the narratives into dialogue.

3. **Another point of view**

Write a short dialogue between two six-year-old boys who are visiting a museum and looking at a display of a dinosaur. Then write another dialogue between two paleontologists looking at the same display. Note how the tone and word choice would be different.

4. **You are there**

Ask students to write an imaginary conversation between two historical characters that they are learning about.

Student Tip Sheet #3: Writing Dialogue

What it is

Dialogue is conversation between two or more people. Good dialogue adds description and colour to writing.

What it can look like

- story dialogue
- reader's theatre
- monologue
- play script
- famous quote from history
- cartoon panel of characters

What dialogue looks like

"Hi, there!" Josh exclaimed as he came into the classroom. "Guess what I found out last night?"

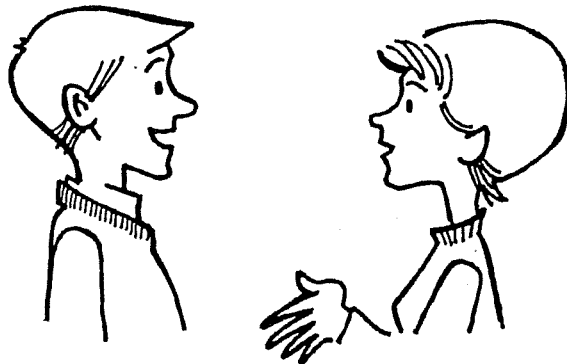
"I give up. What?" I replied.

"My parents are taking us to Mexico for a week," he replied.

"How do you get all the luck?" I asked.

"Hey, I recall that you got to go to the Smashing Pumpkins concert last November. Now it's my turn."

"Well, I still wish I could go with you!"



To write effective dialogue

1. Put quotation marks around the words the speaker is saying.

"Help!" yelled John. "Somebody call the police!"

2. If there are no other punctuation marks, commas go between the spoken and unspoken words. The commas go before the quotation marks.

"Today we're going to learn how to use commas," announced the teacher.

3. Identify the speakers so your readers understand who says what. When you've clearly established your characters, you don't have to identify the speakers every single time they say something.

4. Use alternate words for *said* such as *whispered*, *shouted*, and *answered*. Make a list of these words to use in your writing.

5. Start a new paragraph each time the speaker changes. For example:

"What do you want?" shouted the boy.

"I want to know what you're doing here," replied the girl.

"It's none of your business!" shouted the boy. "I don't have to tell you anything!"

6. If the speaker says more than one paragraph of dialogue, begin the additional paragraphs with opening quotation marks but only put closing quotation marks at the end of the final spoken paragraph. For example:

"This is my special place," the girl explained. "I come here every recess. It's the only place I feel like I can be me.

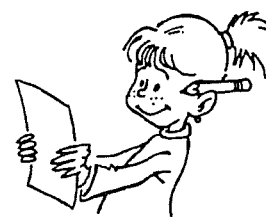
"Some days I just hate coming to school. I moved here in November and I don't really have any friends yet. Nobody even bothers to talk to me in the class. This place is the one place I don't feel lonely."

7. Use dialogue that suits the people you are writing about and their situation. For example, shy people speak differently than aggressive people; young children speak differently than older people.
8. Use dialogue to move the story along and provide interesting details.
9. Don't make the dialogue so realistic that it bores your reader. In real life we often repeat ourselves or use small talk just to get comfortable. In a piece of writing, leave out small talk and use the dialogue to show the reader what is happening.

Check your writing

In my dialogue...	Excellent	Okay	Needs work
1. I put quotation marks around all spoken words.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I put commas between spoken and unspoken words.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I identify the speakers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I change paragraphs each time the speaker changes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I use dialogue suitable to the speaker.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I use the dialogue to move the story along.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. My dialogue is interesting to the reader.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Some words I could use instead of "said"...





Sample Lesson Plans

Color-coded paragraph lesson plan (time 30-45 min)

Description: Students will examine the components that make up a well constructed paragraph

Objectives: Alberta Program of Studies (2.4.1.3, 4.2)

- Experiment with ways of generating and organizing ideas prior to creating print
- Draft ideas and information into short paragraphs, with topic and supporting sentences
- Write complete sentences, using capital letters and periods
- Use phonic knowledge and skills and visual memory to spell words of more than one syllable, high frequency irregular words and regular plurals in own writing
- Use the conventional spelling of common words necessary for the efficient communication of ideas in writing.

- 1 Whole class discussion - Review with the whole class what they know about a paragraph.
- 2 Students will need a pen or crayon in one of the following colors: red, yellow, green, and blue. Each student is given one COLOR-CODED PARAGRAPH sheet with several paragraphs, and the paragraph wheel like the one below.
- 3 Use a model paragraph, one written by the teacher, or the one below titled "Pizza". The teacher's copy can be on a chart, chalkboard, or overhead projector. The students will also need a copy of the paragraph.

Pizza

My favorite food is pizza. It can be a whole dinner. With cheese, vegetables, or meat in it, pizza is quite healthy. I enjoy making my own pizza because I can put the toppings on that I like. If I am in a hurry I can buy it at the market and warm it up. The Canadian bacon pizza is my favorite. Going out to get pizza at Boston Pizza is fun. What a great meal pizza makes.

- 4 As we read, we underline each of the four main parts of a paragraph in the pizza paragraph, one at a time.

- Underline the title in red.
- Underline the main idea sentence in yellow.
- Underline any sentences that prove, support, describe, or explain the topic sentence in green.
- Underline the concluding sentence in blue.

As each part of the paragraph is highlighted discuss their function in the paragraph, and relate back to the color-coded wheel visual.

- The title is compared to the axle in the wheel. (red)
- The topic sentence is the "I'm going to tell you" sentence. It is the hub or the main idea/topic sentence. (yellow)
- The supporting details are compared to the spokes of a wheel. This supports the outside of the wheel to keep maintain its shape. (green)
- The concluding sentence ties it all together. (blue)

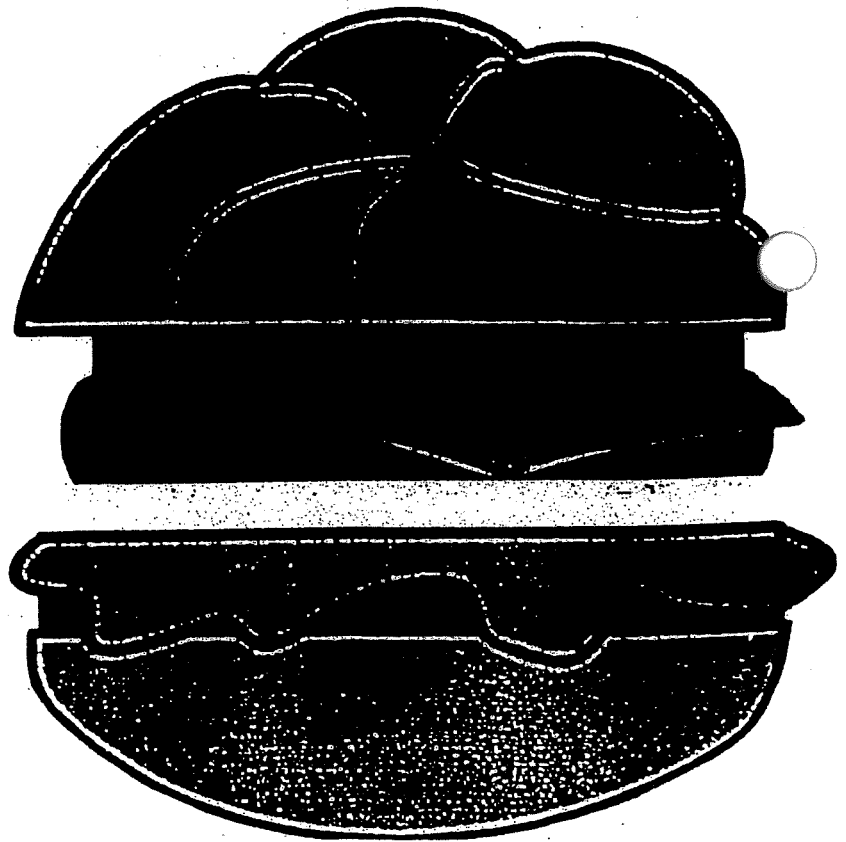
The Hamburger Paragraph

The Bun: Introductory Sentence

The Meat: Important Facts/Information

Condiments(pickles, lettuce,etc.): Details

The Bun: Summary (Concluding) Sentence



Outlines in Reverse

Purpose: To encourage students to employ outlines after they draft to improve the logic and flow of their writing.

Rather than having students complete outlines **before** they write, have them complete them **after** they write. The exercise should focus students on the organization of their writing:

- a. Are separate ideas developed in separate sections?
- b. Do any sections require expansion?
- c. Should sections be combined?
- d. Does the writing have an introduction and a conclusion?

