

Grammar for High School

A Sentence-Composing Approach—
A Student Worktext

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WRITING LIKE A PRO

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An application of the entire worktext to your writing, focusing on sentence-composing tools, their variations, and special punctuation in the writing of William Golding, author of *Lord of the Flies*. After reviewing the sentence-composing tools, you will use those same tools and punctuation to write a new episode for *Lord of the Flies*, written in Golding's style.

Imitating the Grammar of the Greats

Why are the sentences of great authors more interesting, more memorable than the sentences of most people? One big reason is that their sentences are not monotonously alike. A huge difference is the ways those authors build their sentences. The purpose of this worktext is to teach those ways by focusing on the grammatical tools of great authors to build better sentences.

Look at the varied ways these ten sentences are built, all by William Golding, author of the novel *Lord of the Flies*. No two are built the same.

1. He stood knee-deep in the central grass, looking at his hidden feet, trying to pretend that he was in a tent.
2. Half-relieved, half-daunted by the implication of further terrors, the savages murmured again.
3. Percival was mouse-colored and had not been very attractive even to his mother; Johnny was well-built, with fair hair and a natural belligerence.
4. In front of them, only three or four yards away, was a rock-like hump where no rock should be.
5. There was a small pool at the end of the river, dammed back by sand and full of white water-lilies and needle-like reeds.
6. Evening was advancing toward the island; the sounds of the bright fantastic birds, the bee-sounds, even the crying of the gulls that were returning to their roosts among the square rocks, were fainter.
7. He was old enough, twelve years and a few months, to have lost the prominent tummy of childhood, and not yet old enough for adolescence to have made him awkward.
8. Here—and his hands touched grass—was a place to be in for the night, not far from the tribe, so that if the horrors of the supernatural emerged one could at least mix with humans for the time being.
9. The flame, invisible at first in that bright sunlight, enveloped a small twig, grew, was enriched with color, and reached up to a branch, which exploded with a sharp crack.
10. If there was no beast—and almost certainly there was no beast—well and good; but if there was something waiting on top of the mountain, what was the use of three of them, handicapped by the darkness and carrying only sticks?

In the pages of this worktext, you will analyze, study, and then imitate the sentences of many authors whose books are often read by high school students—

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including Harper Lee (*To Kill a Mockingbird*), John Steinbeck (*Of Mice and Men*), Ernest Hemingway (*The Old Man and the Sea*), and William Golding (*Lord of the Flies*)—to learn, practice, and use their grammatical tools for building better sentences. With the many practices in *Grammar for High School: A Sentence-Composing Approach*, you create your own personal toolbox of sentence-composing tools to use in writing of all kinds.

And guess what? By the end of the worktext, if you learn the tools covered, you will be able to write ten sentences built just like the ten by William Golding! How? The secret is learning to imitate the grammatical tools of our best writers for building good sentences. In this worktext, you'll learn how.

Okay, let's get started on your way to building better—*much better*—sentences. All you need is your determination to learn to build sentences like those of Harper Lee, John Steinbeck, Ernest Hemingway, and William Golding.

Writers learn to write by paying a certain sort of attention to the works of their great predecessors in the medium of written language, as well as by merely reading them.

—John Barth

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Chunking to Imitate

In these exercises you will become aware of meaningful divisions within sentences, an awareness you'll need to imitate model sentences. You will learn that authors compose their sentences one "chunk" or meaningful sentence part at a time.

Directions (Part One): Copy the sentence divided into meaningful chunks.

- 1a. She made stuffed pork chops / with applesauce and mashed potatoes / and it tasted / like cardboard.
- 1b. She made stuffed / pork chops with applesauce and mashed / potatoes and it tasted like / cardboard.

Frank McCourt, *Teacher Man*

- 2a. The family was grouped by / the front door the / mother's hands resting on her / children's shoulders.
- 2b. The family was grouped by the front door / the mother's hands resting / on her children's shoulders.

Ian McEwan, *Enduring Love*

- 3a. For more than a / century the big business of / Gravesend was lumber, which / was the first big business of New / Hampshire.
- 3b. For more than a century / the big business of Gravesend / was lumber, / which was / the first big business / of New Hampshire.

John Irving, *A Prayer for Owen Meany*

Directions (Part Two): Copy the model and then copy the sentence that can be divided into chunks that match the chunks in the model.

1. MODEL: Outside, I found a taxi for her.

Maya Angelou, *The Heart of a Woman*

- a. Slowly, the cat jumped and landed quietly.
- b. Nearby, Akeelah had a dictionary in hand.

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2. MODEL: The man toppled to one side, crumpled against the railing, dead.

Robert Ludlum, *The Prometheus Deception*

- a. The car, swerving to avoid the child, hit a guardrail, loudly.
- b. The winner jumped from her seat, overwhelmed by the applause, joyous.

3. MODEL: He turned slowly and stood a moment longer, a faceless silhouette against the light.

Morris West, *The Clowns of God*

- a. Morris spoke quickly and complained a while longer, a disgruntled customer in the manager's office.
- b. Beautifully, Clara sang, winning first place in the contest, her competitors not even close to her talent.

Directions (Part Three): Copy the model and then copy the sentence that imitates it. Then chunk both into the same sentence parts, using slash marks (/).

1. MODEL: It was dark when I got up in the morning, frosty when I followed my breath to school.

Julia Alvarez, "Snow"

- a. It was early when the bus came by from the school, late when it returned the children to their homes.
- b. It was a fine car, shiny with chrome and paint and sleek in shape, a red convertible designed to have a retro look from the 1950s.

2. MODEL: She wore her coarse, straight hair, which was slightly streaked with gray, in a long braided rope across the top of her head.

Maya Angelou, *Wouldn't Take Nothing for My Journey Now*

- a. They played the grueling, championship matches, which were completely unpredictable by forecasters, with an amazing energy from the weakest players to the strongest.
- b. The arrangement, beautiful, freshly picked from the garden, smelled of a combination of lilies, sage, and magnolia.

Imitating the Grammar of the Greats

In the following activities, you'll build your sentences like those by authors through imitating their sentence structure but using your own content. To think of what to write, first think of interesting content, maybe a situation or character from a book, movie, TV show, or news event—or use your imagination to create original content.

Directions (Part Four): Match the model and its imitation. Copy both sentences. Then chunk both, using a slash (/) between sentence parts. Finally, write your own imitation of each model.

1. MODEL: The elephant was dying, in great agony, very slowly.

George Orwell, "Shooting an Elephant"

2. MODEL: In the back room of the laboratory, the white rats in their cages ran and skittered and squeaked.

John Steinbeck, *Cannery Row*

IMITATIONS

- a. Near the old barn by the railroad tracks, the stray cat foraged and lived and slept.
- b. The sunset was happening, in silent splendor, quite colorfully.

Unscrambling to Imitate

The unscrambling of sentence parts helps you to see how those parts are connected within the model sentence. As a result, you will glimpse the mind of an author composing a sentence so you can go through a similar process when you compose sentences.

Directions: Unscramble the sentence parts to imitate the model. Then write your own imitation of the model.

1. MODEL: Dumpster diving is outdoor work, often surprisingly pleasant.

Lars Eighner, "On Dumpster Diving"

- a. sometimes quite costly
- b. is recreational activity
- c. mall strolling

2. MODEL: Near the cab, idling in front of the mortuary, was a huge Oldsmobile.

Stephen King, *Hearts in Atlantis*

- a. was a skittering gecko
- b. behind the pool
- c. zigzagging in back of the cabana

3. MODEL: Above the fields and pastures, the mountains were just becoming visible as the morning fog burned away.

Charles Frazier, *Cold Mountain*

- a. were just becoming interested
- b. when the fire alarm sounded
- c. after the cartoons and previews
- d. the kids

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4. MODEL: In the shallows, the dark, water-soaked sticks and twigs, smooth and old, were undulating in clusters on the bottom against the clean ribbed sand.

E. B. White, "Once More to the Lake"

- a. sweet and tasty
- b. were beckoning to children
- c. in their kiddie seats within their mom's grocery carts
- d. on that aisle
- e. the tempting, brightly colored candies and lifesavers

Combining to Imitate

These exercises ask you to combine a series of plain sentences into just one varied sentence by changing the plain sentences into sentence parts resembling the model sentence. As you do these exercises, you'll become aware that plain sentences can easily be changed into sentence parts of better, more varied sentences.

Directions: Combine the following sentences to create a sentence that has the same order of sentence parts as the model. Then write your own imitation of the model.

1. MODEL: Twisting and punching and kicking, the two boys rolled across the floor.

Lois Duncan, A Gift of Magic

- a. The winning team was laughing and yelling and celebrating.
- b. The team cavorted.
- c. The cavorting was inside the locker room.

2. MODEL: He fell back, exhausted, his ankle pounding.

Ralph Ellison, "Flying Home"

- a. She raced fast.
- b. She was determined.
- c. Her lungs were bursting.

3. MODEL: Alone, Tom looked around the room and knew that he was a stranger here.

Hal Borland, When the Legends Die

- a. Clark was afraid.
- b. Clark walked down the alley.
- c. Clark hoped something.
- d. Clark hoped that he was alone there.

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4. MODEL: The room was empty, a silent world of sinks, drain boards, and locked cupboards.

Frank Bonham, *Chief*

- a. The arena was full.
- b. The arena was a huge cavern.
- c. It was filled with fans.
- d. It was filled with bright lights.
- e. And it was filled with exciting music.

Imitating Alone

Once you have learned how to imitate professional sentences, you will be able to imitate almost any professional sentence just by seeing how the model is built and then building your own sentence in a similar way.

Directions: Write an imitation of each model sentence, one sentence part at a time. Read one of your imitations to see if your classmates can guess which model you imitated.

Models:

1. Quietly, / carefully, / she stepped around her / to wake the fire.

Toni Morrison, *Beloved*

2. To keep ourselves / from going crazy / from boredom, / we tried / to think of word games.

Barbara Kingsolver, *The Bean Trees*

3. All the American guests / were carrying their plates / into the living room, / while all the Iranian guests / remained standing / around the buffet table.

Anne Tyler, *Digging to America*

4. Before the store opened, / he sat on a step / of the loading platform, / observing a black beetle / struggling on its back / on the concrete / of the parking lot.

John Updike, *Terrorist*

Using the Sentence-Composing Toolbox

The sentence-composing toolbox is the heart of this worktext. It teaches fourteen grammatical tools authors use in their sentences that you can use within your own sentences. Although some tools may be new to you, all of them are easy to learn, practice, and use to enhance your writing.

Words

Review These Pages

Opening adjective

14–17

Example: **Powerless**, we witnessed the sacking of our launch.

Pierre Boulle, *Planet of the Apes*

Delayed adjective

18–21

Example: People under the helicopter ducked down, **afraid**, as if they were being visited by a plague or a god.

Barbara Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams*

Opening adverb

22–25

Example: **Unfairly**, we poked fun at him, often in his presence.

Sue Miller, *While I Was Gone*

Delayed adverb

26–29

Example: These crazy Saints stared out at the world, **wildly**, like lunatics.

Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*

Phrases

Review These Pages

Absolute phrase

34–38

Example: Two hard-faced men, **both cradling submachine guns**, stood watching him closely from the adjacent guard station.

Robert Ludlum, *The Moscow Vector*

Appositive phrase

40–43

Example: A **bald, slight man**, he reminded me of a baby bird.

Tracy Chevalier, *The Girl with a Pearl Earring*

Using the Sentence-Composing Toolbox

Prepositional phrase 44–47

Example: The angry man chased Mikey and me **around the yellow house and up a backyard path, under a low tree, up a bank, through a hedge, down some snowy steps, and across the grocery store’s delivery driveway.**

Annie Dillard, *An American Childhood*

Participial phrase 48–52

Example: **Clearing his throat loudly,** he stepped out from behind the bookshelves.

J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*

Gerund phrase 54–57

Example: **Making new friends** didn’t come easily, but in time he developed a skill at that.

Robert Ludlum, *The Prometheus Deception*

Infinitive phrase 58–62

Example: **To get his feet wet in such a freezing temperature** meant trouble and danger.

Jack London, “To Build a Fire”

Clauses **Review These Pages**

Clause types (independent, dependent) 68–73

Example: Suddenly, **Alfred**, **who had heard the fight from across the street,** attacked from the rear with his favorite weapon, an indoor ball bat. (*independent is underlined; dependent is bolded.*)

John Steinbeck, *Cannery Row*

Adjective clause 74–78

Example: Stunned, Jem and I looked at each other, then at Atticus, **whose collar seemed to worry him.**

Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*

Adverb clause 80–84

Example: One leg was gone, and the other was held by tendons, and part of the trouser and stump twitched and jerked **as though it were not connected.**

Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms*

Using the Sentence-Composing Toolbox

Noun clause

86–89

Example: The most insidious thing about Ronnie was **that weak minds found him worth imitating**.

Stephen King, *Hearts in Atlantis*

Format for the Tools

Definition—A concise, clear grammatical description of the tool, with tips to identify the tool.

Examples—Professional sentences containing the tool **in bold type**.

Varied Practices—After an introductory matching exercise, the sentence-composing techniques—unscrambling, combining, imitating, expanding—vary the ways in which the tool is practiced.

Section Tool Review—At the end of each section—words, phrases, clauses—you will review the tools by studying how they are used by a famous author: Harper Lee (*words*), John Steinbeck (*phrases*), Ernest Hemingway (*clauses*).

Creative Writing—After each review section, you will apply what you’ve learned to improve paragraphs by building better sentences. To improve the paragraphs, you’ll use your new tools plus others you’ve previously learned.

Sentence-Composing Tools: Opening Adjective

DEFINITION

An adjective at the opening of a sentence. An adjective is any descriptive word that can fit into this blank: *Sam is a _____ student.*

Here are a few possibilities to describe the student: *happy, sad, angry, glad, smart, sneaky, polite, disruptive*, etc. Jot down ten more.

An opening adjective may be a single word or the first word in an adjective phrase. An adjective phrase begins with an adjective and then continues the description. Here are examples: *happy to graduate, sad because her pet died, angry at not getting the job, glad about winning the spelling bee, smart as Einstein, sneaky at times, polite with both elders and children, disruptive because he was beside his best friend*, etc. A comma follows an opening adjective, whether a single word or a phrase.

Sentences can contain single or multiple opening adjectives:

Single opening adjective: **Powerless**, we witnessed the sacking of our launch.

Pierre Boulle, *Planet of the Apes*

Multiple opening adjectives: **Bloodthirsty** and **brutal**, the giants brought themselves to the point of extinction by warring amongst themselves during the last century.

Armstrong Sperry, *Call It Courage*

Opening adjective phrases: **Numb of all feeling, empty as a shell**, still he clung to life, and the hours droned by.

J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*

PRACTICE 1: MATCHING

Match the opening adjectives with the sentences. Write out each sentence, inserting and underlining the opening adjectives.

Sentences:

1. ^, I wanted to run away and be gone from this strange place.

Keith Donahue, *The Stolen Child*

Opening Adjectives:

- a. Alive

Using the Sentence-Composing Toolbox

2. ^, I felt behind me, my hand pleading for that rifle.
Theodore Waldeck, "Certain, Sudden Death"
3. ^, the elephant was worth at least a hundred pounds, but dead, he would only be worth the value of his tusks, five pounds, possibly.
George Orwell, "Shooting an Elephant"
4. ^, he rocked his own body back and forth, breathing deeply to release the remembered pain.
Lois Lowry, *The Giver*
5. ^, he came to our door and eased his heavy pack and asked for refreshment, and Devola brought him a pail of water from our spring.
Bill and Vera Cleaver, *Where the Lilies Bloom*
- b. Hot and dusty and over-wearied
- c. Lonesome
- d. Able to move now
- e. Frantic, never turning my head—because the water buffalo had started his charge

PRACTICE 2: UNSCRAMBLING TO IMITATE

In the model and the scrambled list, identify the opening adjective. Next, unscramble and write out the sentence parts to imitate the model. Finally, write your own imitation of the model and identify the opening adjective.

MODEL: Speechless, Bryson scanned the small living room, frantically.

Robert Ludlum, *The Prometheus Deception*

- a. hopefully
- b. spotted the soft inviting sofa
- c. Kendra
- d. uncomfortable

Using the Sentence-Composing Toolbox

PRACTICE 3: COMBINING TO IMITATE

In the model, identify the opening adjectives. Next, combine the list of sentences to imitate the model. Finally, write your own imitation of the model and identify any opening adjectives.

MODEL: Dark, velvety, the beauty of his mustache was enhanced by his strong clean-shaven chin.

Toni Morrison, *Beloved*

- a. His cautionary steps were slow.
- b. His cautionary steps were weary.
- c. His cautionary steps were caused by something.
- d. The cause was the surrounding overexcited horses.

PRACTICE 4: IMITATING

Identify the opening adjectives in the models and sample imitations. Then write an imitation of each model sentence, one sentence part at a time. Read one of your imitations to see if your classmates can guess which model you imitated.

Models:

1. Wordless, we split up.

Annie Dillard, *An American Childhood*

Sample: Wet, the napkin fell apart.

2. Cold, dark, and windowless, it stretched the length of the house.

Jessamyn West, "The Child's Day"

Sample: Hot, humid, and muggy, the weather exhausted the stamina of the bikers.

3. Afraid that we might hunt for a cheaper apartment for the next two weeks and find nothing better than this one, we took it.

Wallace Stegner, *Crossing to Safety*

Sample: Happy that we would escape to a lovely beach for the upcoming one month and have nothing but good times, we left home.

Using the Sentence-Composing Toolbox

PRACTICE 5: EXPANDING

The opening adjectives are omitted at the caret mark (^) in the following sentences. For each caret, add an opening adjective or adjective phrase, blending your content and style with the rest of the sentence.

1. ^, I began climbing the ladder's rungs, slightly reassured by having Finny right behind me.

John Knowles, *A Separate Peace*

2. ^ and ^, he wandered about the many tents, only to find that one place was as cold as another.

Jack London, "To Build a Fire"

3. ^ and ^, my limited reading helped me to know something of a world beyond the four walls of my study.

Christy Brown, *My Left Foot*