

# Superb Sentences

This chapter provides some excellent tools to help students expand and vary their sentences. It is a good idea to work on this chapter early in the school year, but it also helps to revisit it as you teach students how to revise longer pieces. Lessons taught in this chapter include word choice and vocabulary, synonyms, capitalization, punctuation, and sentence combining.

## Special Tips for Sentences

- Teaching punctuation concepts along with sentence construction gives students a jump on becoming editors of their own and others' work.
- Word choice exercises work well when included with sentence instruction because sentences are compact and easy to play with. Searching for the best word will be more automatic if it is practiced early on.
- As students work on sentences, also take the opportunity to teach the standards of grammar and spelling that writers must adhere to so that their papers are readable. It is easier to start focusing on these with shorter writing exercises.
- For many young writers, even short, simple sentences will be hard work for a while. Be patient and offer lots of practice and praise.

## Sentence Reproducibles

- The **Choosing Better Words** reproducible (page 32) helps students learn to replace some commonly overused or "tired" words with more descriptive ones. Introduce the new vocabulary words to the class. Have students work with partners and use the words listed on the right in sentences before they complete the reproducibles.
- The **Banking Some Words** reproducible (page 33) is a programmable vocabulary page that helps students work on sentences for any subject area. On a blank copy of the page, fill in the coins with words you would like students to use in a writing assignment. As a student incorporates one of the featured words in her writing, she may cut out and glue that coin on the bank.
- Have students complete the **Describe It!** reproducibles (pages 34 and 35) to practice writing sentences. By scaffolding the skills, students move towards generating their own sentences for open-ended subjects.
- The **Writing Interesting Sentences** reproducibles (pages 36–39) incorporate the six question words (*when, where, who, what, how, and why*) to guide students in expanding sentences. To use this activity with other sentences, cover the sentences on the reproducibles, write your own, and copy the page for students. Add a fun element by asking each student to write one of his new sentences on the back of the page and then illustrate it. (The **Planning Your Story** reproducible on page 123 also features the question words.)
- Use the **Missing Capital Letters** reproducibles (pages 40 and 41) to help students learn which words are traditionally capitalized. Read the directions with students and go over the different types of words that need capitalization (names, the pronoun *I*, specific places, initial words in sentences, etc.). To scaffold these skills, introduce one type of capitalization at a time and then review by completing Parts A–D in increments.



- The **Please Punctuate** reproducible (page 42) is a simple exercise in adding correct punctuation. Review the different types of ending punctuation before assigning Part A or B.
- The **You Be the Editor!** reproducibles (pages 43 and 44) offer more practice on capitalization and ending punctuation. If students are feeling overwhelmed by the task, edit one or two sentences at a time or have them first focus on filling in the missing ending punctuation. These exercises are a great review for Chapter 11: Convening with Conventions.
- Let students practice inserting commas by completing the reproducibles **Commas Needed** (page 45) and **Come On, Commas!** (page 46). Review comma usage before assigning the reproducibles. On page 45, Part A focuses on the need for commas to separate names in a series. Part B addresses the use of commas to separate distinct thoughts (between two independent clauses or between a dependent clause and an independent clause) in sentences. On page 46, students apply both of these skills.
- Students can complete the reproducibles **Prepositions on the Page** (page 47) and **Add a Prepositional Phrase** (page 48) to learn what prepositions are and how they can be used to expand sentences. Many students in this age group naturally use prepositional phrases in their speech. They do not need to recognize the word *preposition* and be able to list many examples. However, point out how easy it is to use prepositional phrases in their writing.
- The **Sentence Combo** reproducibles (pages 49 and 50) demonstrate how to combine short, choppy sentences to make longer, more interesting sentences. When introducing this skill, first have students make sentences that have compound subjects or predicates before moving on to other types of sentence combinations. Also, point out that not all sentences need to be long; a variety of sentence lengths also works well.
- Consider having students learn the symbols on the **Proofreaders' Marks** reproducible (page 140). They will be able to use some of the marks with the activities in this chapter.

## Sentence Writing Activities

- Assess students' sentence writing abilities by having them write 10 interesting sentences about a topic of their choice. When you collect the papers, you will immediately be able to tell who needs help with particular skills.
- Have an overused-word brainstorming session. On the board, make a list of overused words such as *fun*, *pretty*, and *happy*. Call them "tired" words. Have the class call out synonyms as you write them in a different color around the tired words. Next, instruct students to write sentences using each synonym.
- Let each student write a short sentence that contains an overused word of her choice. Ask students to pass their papers to classmates. Have each student write a synonym for the overused word on his classmate's paper. Trade papers several more times until each student has a list of four or five synonyms on his paper. Let students record the overused words and their synonyms in their journals to create their own thesauruses.
- This fill-in-the-blank activity works for many different parts of speech. Have each student copy these sentences on a piece of paper: *That was the \_\_\_\_\_ meal I have ever eaten* and *This is the \_\_\_\_\_ day of my life!* Challenge each student to come up with five words to fill in the blank for each sentence, but they cannot use *best* or *worst*. Let students share their funniest choices. Examples of other sentences might include *That smells \_\_\_\_\_!* (cannot use *good* or *bad*) and *The car \_\_\_\_\_ down the street* (cannot use *drove*).



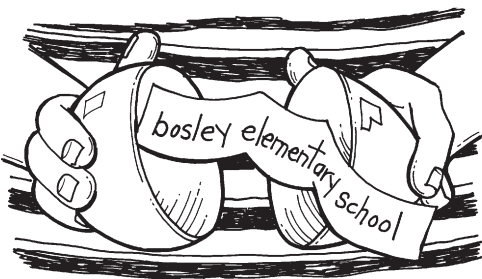
## Superb Sentences



- Demonstrate how a sentence changes with punctuation. On the board, write the sentence *Stop the car* three times without any ending punctuation. Let a student punctuate the first copy of the sentence and then include a sentence that goes with that punctuation. For example, the first pair of sentences might say *Stop the car! There's a cat in the road!* The second one might say *Stop the car. My house is right here.* The last sentence could say *Stop the car? But, we aren't there yet!* Provide students with a few sentences to work on independently, such as *Jump off the steps*, *Liam got sick yesterday*, and *Close the door*.
- Use plastic eggs to teach capitalization. On small pieces of paper, write a selection of words in lowercase letters. Some of them should be words that are always capitalized, like titles, days of the week, months of the year, I, classmates' names, the name of your school, etc. The remaining words should be improper nouns. Put each prepared piece of paper in a plastic egg. Make enough eggs to have two for each student. Hide the eggs around the room. Instruct each student to find two eggs, open them, look at the words, and decide whether they should be capitalized. Let students turn in their words and tell you which, if any, should be capitalized. Hide the eggs every day for several days until students recognize the capitalized words easily. Wrap up the activity by filling the plastic eggs with small treats to reward students' work and have them find those hidden eggs.
- Write some statements, questions, and exclamations on sentence strips. Leave off the ending punctuation. Create one strip for each student and one for yourself. Next, draw a large period on one index card, an exclamation point on another card, and a question mark on a third. Give these cards to a chosen student. Distribute the sentence strips to all students. Stand at the front of the room and hold up your sentence strip as you read the sentence. Have the student with the punctuation cards come to the front of the room and hold the appropriate punctuation mark at the end of your sentence strip. (There may be more than one right answer.) Next, let that student hold up his sentence, read it, and choose a classmate to hold up the appropriate punctuation card. Continue until all students have held up their sentence strips and a punctuation card.



- Add an art element to sentence combining. Have each student draw a self-portrait and then write descriptive sentences about herself based on the portrait: *My hair is dark blond. My eyes are blue. My hair is long. I am tall. I do not have bangs. My teeth are straight.* Tell students to combine their sentences so that there are fewer, longer sentences. For example, combine the sentences above to say: *My dark blond hair is long, and I don't wear bangs. I am taller than most kids in the class. I have straight teeth and blue eyes.*
- Do a sentence expander exercise with you as the subject. Write *The teacher* on the board and let students add verbs, prepositional phrases, adjectives, and clauses to expand it. You may want to recruit a teaching assistant to add to the sentence as you act out students' additions.




☆ Name



**Describe It!**



 Make sentences. Include words that describe. Write the sentences on the lines.

1. My puppy

My brown puppy licked my face.



2. The rabbit

3. My toys


4. Her kitten

☆ Name



**Describe It!**



 Make sentences. Include words that describe. Write the sentences on the lines.

1. The lion

2. My mom

3. The boys


4. Some trucks

★ Name



## You Be the Editor!

★ A

 Fix the sentences. Read the story and find the errors. Fill in the missing capital letters and punctuation. Use tally marks to keep track of the errors you find.



What's Needed	Tally Marks
12 capital letters	
3 periods	
2 question marks	
1 exclamation point	

Can you guess what I did this summer? My Aunt Liz and Uncle Jon own a camp. It is on Lake James. It is called Camp Canyonlands. Last August, I was finally old enough to go. I stayed in a cabin with five other boys. Their names were Ian, Caleb, John, Andre, and Evan. My bunk was over Ian's bunk. It was next to John's bunk. The first night, we all wrote letters. I wrote to my sister Katie. The other boys were a little homesick. My aunt and uncle came to see me, so I was not sad. They brought us cookies. In the morning, Ian helped me make my bed. I helped John make his bed. We all sat together at breakfast. We played basketball. We went swimming in Lake James. After lunch, we rode horses. My horse was named Snowball. What color do you think she was? She was a black horse! We had a campfire at dinner. We toasted hot dogs and marshmallows. We were very tired and went to sleep fast. My first day of camp was great.