

Introduction

I am currently a primary school teacher and have been for 21 years – 17 of which have been in Year 6!

I started the idea for my 15-minute Daily Sentence Structures from pure frustration of marking literacy book after literacy book (especially boys') which fell short of good grammatical sentences. You all know the ones – then, and then and then!

After many nights of frustrating marking, I decided to think of a solution. I started to teach eight different sentence structures that learnt over time (approximately half a term) would empower pupils with varied sentences to create instant paragraphs in their writing. It provided immediate results across the whole class and helped to fulfil all the requirements of the old curriculum AF5 and AF6 in sentence structure and punctuation in assessing writing:

- ❖ More variety of sentence structure
- ❖ Uses clauses to develop complex sentences
- ❖ More control in the use of clauses
- ❖ Varies length, structure and subject of sentences to extend meaning and interest the reader
- ❖ Use wider range of conjunctions
- ❖ Uses a wider range of punctuation
- ❖ Confidently uses punctuation for effect
- ❖ Varies pace to create atmosphere

It also meets many of the Key Assessment Criteria of Being a Writer in the new curriculum:

- ❖ Use grammatical structures
- ❖ Make meaning clear and create effect
- ❖ Use a range of sentence starters to create specific effects
- ❖ Use commas to mark phrases and clauses
- ❖ Sustain and develop ideas logically
- ❖ Vary sentence structures
- ❖ Use the semi-colon and dash

It raises attainment across all abilities and appeals to the logic of boys in their writing. It also covers many of the teaching points for Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar (SPaG) from both the old and new framework.

From my experience – it does work! Pupils like the fact that they have a system at their fingertips that can create quantity and quality in their writing.

Don't take my word for it! Please look at the examples on pages 5–6 written by Year 6 pupils. The first examples were done in the first day of term. The second examples were done after just four weeks of tuition on Daily Sentence Structures.

Please see PCMs 21–27 for more examples.

I will not say that it is the complete answer to improving children's writing but it can go a long way to doing so. Like any educational scheme, it is a guideline. It is down to the individual teacher to decide how it best fits into their classroom and their pupils.

Sanaa's writing at the beginning of term:

Scary Forest

Once in a deep, dark scary forest something was happening something no one has discovered and and if they did they never came back to tell the tale, but some were was a girl and that girl can put a stop to this creature, and her name was Sarah. Some were in a town close to the dark forest lived Sarah with her mum siblings Emma and Sophie and their nana nana plum, When Sarah goes to sleep she dream of going into the dark forest and she'll have that dream every night untill she does

Sanaa's writing after four weeks of Daily Sentence Structures:

Her heart pounded! She gulped in fear as she continued her neverending trail. The rather frightened girl, who saw a dark figure, was holding something in his dark cold hand. As the girl panicked, she heard a drip, drip, drip behind her. Running, she heard a twig snapp. What was that noise - she thought to herself? You could tell she was scared because tears and sweat poured down her face. Her heart pounded - something touched her but it was too late...

Jack's writing at the beginning of term:

Scary Forest

James was a boy who loved to explore. But that might not be for so long, because there was a large scary forest and a beach right next to it, but what James does not know the tide is coming in, predators following, but most importantly he's going in! With nobody to stop him, his life is at risk! So James walks down to the beach and jumped into the water, without knowing there is a large amount of predators in the water.

Jack's writing after four weeks of Daily Sentence Structures:

His brown hairs stood up on his neck! The young boy's mouth turned dry as he passed the whistling bare trees. The little boy, who was inching along the path, took a deep, long breath. As he snapped the rough branches off the trees, he saw glooming smoke gathering around him. Climbing down the steep hill, he heard a creepy, mysterious noise. What is that shadow - he thought to himself? You could tell he was scared as sweat poured down his back. His brown hairs stood up on his neck - there it was...

How it Works

In the following pages, there are systematic instructions on how to deliver these eight different sentence structures to pupils.

Each sentence structure has been broken down into a series of sessions that build on each other. Each session should take 15 minutes approximately. The sessions should be completed daily at a time of day that suits your class. I have found that it works well straight after registration when the children are at their best.

The sessions build on each other but can be completed in any order and can be revisited at any time depending on the children's progress. It is completely at the teacher's discretion. Every class is different with a full range of abilities. What is important is that every class proceeds at their own pace. As soon as the teacher feels the current sentence is embedded, then they should move on. The beauty of the strategy is that the pupils always return to the different sentence types – so consolidation is built in.

Equipment

Allow the pupils to write their sentences on mini-whiteboards. It is extremely useful, as the children do not feel they are writing to a blank page and it is fantastic for on the spot assessment and ironing out misconceptions. However, periodic recording in their books will allow you to record and monitor progress.

Display

Create a 'learning wall' display of all the sentence structures. This can be completed by printing off PCMs 1, 9–13 and 15–16. This is important as it allows a reference point for your weaker writers and an area to celebrate good practice.

The display will also remind them of the sentence structure order. Any work completed on the main whiteboard, that is deemed outstanding by the class, should also be displayed here.

SPaG Teaching Points

Each sentence has a SPaG teaching point that should be taught. The sentence structures are designed to incorporate more sophisticated punctuation and its correct use. They also illustrate best practice of clauses, which should again be referred to. Make sure to continue to reinforce these points as each sentence structure is embedded.

Weaker Writers

To help maintain support for those who may still struggle – you could use various strategies. Although the pupils are writing independently, include sessions where they work in pairs (mixed ability). Pair up your stronger/weaker writers to support each other. This works particularly well when reflecting on their work.

Another strategy is to allow the children to pair up and work on one whiteboard. The children write sentences alternately until they have written all their sentences. It helps to keep it fresh and, again, they like to support each other.

However, most importantly, the pupils need an opportunity to reflect on each other's work.

Timings

The eight sentence structures should take slightly more than a half term (a sentence type per week) to be embedded. Let the children go at their own speed and let their grasp of the different types dictate the pace.