

THE GRAMMAR
PLAN BOOK

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A Guide to Smart Teaching

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As Katherine Baer (a secondary English resource teacher for the Howard County Public School System in Ellicott City, Maryland) and I began to correspond about integrating literature and grammar with writing instruction, she made this apt characterization in an email dated May 26, 2005: “Many experienced teachers need to ‘unlearn’ the tactic of drilling parts of speech, many mid-career teachers usually incorporate only small doses of language instruction because of their uncertainties about syntax, and many of our young teachers know precious little about grammar.”

Precisely, I thought.

Teachers who have long taught traditional grammar need to be persuaded, perhaps through examples, that teaching less grammar but teaching it throughout the writing process can do much more for students’ writing than teaching grammar in isolation. Midcareer teachers have likely heard the slogan “teach grammar in the context of writing,” but they may be concerned about the adequacy of their own grammar knowledge or at least uncertain how, exactly, to start teaching grammatical options and skills while helping students draft, revise, and edit. And many younger teachers have little or no conscious knowledge of grammar to draw on as they attempt to help students enrich and enhance their writing.

This book is designed for all three audiences. Part 1 includes many examples of how less grammar can do more for students’ writing when taught throughout the writing process and over time. The section concludes with a chapter on making smart decisions about what editing skills to teach and—with regard to test preparation—includes an informal examination and weighting of what kinds of grammar items typically are included on one such test, the ACT. Part 2, the Grammar Planner, is both a handbook of grammatical concepts and a planning document where teachers can indicate what aspects of grammar they intend to teach and when. It is followed by a brief planning checklist (a “scope” and potential sequence) that teachers—working individually or together—can use to record their decisions about teaching grammar.

Part 2 is organized according to what needs to be taught first in the writing process—expanding and enriching content—and afterward attending to revision and editing. This Grammar Planner includes most of the grammatical concepts that middle school and secondary teachers need to know as teachers of writing, along with advice for distinguishing between what constitutes good writing and what is required for scoring high

on some standardized tests of revision and editing skills—like the ACT and the SAT. I argue that writing instruction should not be limited by such tests, which include items on “rules that do not rule” (Schuster, 2003); see Section D.

Those who have contributed to this work are many:

- My colleague Jonathan Bush, who has not only offered valuable insights but inspired the book’s subtitle and the focus of Chapter 1.
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5

Teaching Editing Skills and (Gasp!) Standardized Tests of Grammar Skills

Today's smart teachers have learned that red-inking (or blue-inking or green-inking) students' papers with corrections is not an effective way to teach editing skills. But the swing of the pendulum back toward teaching grammar has brought with it increased pressure to teach numerous editing skills. We must resist. We do not have to repeat either of the devastating learning experiences of this unnamed teacher:

My own research has convinced me that red-inking errors in students' papers does no good and causes a great many students to hate and fear writing more than anything else they do in school. I gave a long series of tests covering 580 of the most common and persistent errors in usage, diction, and punctuation and 1,000 spelling errors to students in grades 9–12 in many schools, and the average rate of improvement in ability to detect these errors turned out to be 2 percent per year. The dropout rate is more than enough to account for this much improvement in ability to detect these errors if the teachers had not even been there. . . .

When I consider how many hours of my life I have wasted in trying to root out these errors by a method that clearly did not work, I want to kick myself. Any rat that persisted in pressing the wrong lever 10,000 times would be regarded as stupid. I must have gone on pressing it at least 20,000 times without visible effect. (Farrell 1971, p. 141)

We now know that we must teach a limited number of editing skills in conjunction with the writing process, and teach them an inch wide and a mile deep. But how do we decide exactly what skills to focus on?

Deciding what editing skills to teach

The short answer is to teach what our students' writing suggests they need most. All too often, though, we haven't analyzed our students' writing to see what they need but instead have taught our pet peeves, whether they are major issues or not. My own pet peeves in the writing of upper-level college and graduate students are these: using the wrong spelling for

homophones like *its/it's* and *their/their/there*; spellings like *would of* for *would have* and *should of* for *should have*; confusion about the uses of *affect* versus *effect*; using the apostrophe in nonpossessive nouns and even in verbs (*he run's*); comma splices; and lack of parallelism. I want students to avoid the first three kinds of errors because they are so distracting, but do they warrant much teaching time and effort? No. On the other hand, avoiding comma splices and using parallelism (and avoiding unparallel constructions in a series) both warrant more instructional time.

So perhaps we can include some of our pet peeves in our list of what to teach, but we have to be careful. After conducting a massive study of teachers' marking of student errors, Connors and Lunsford (1988) found:

Teachers' ideas about error definition and classification have always been absolute products of their times and cultures. . . . Teachers have always marked different phenomena as errors, called them different things, given them differing weights. Error-pattern study is essentially the examination of an ever-shifting pattern of skills judged by an ever-shifting pattern of prejudices. (p. 399)

Wow. Do you as an English teacher (or perhaps even as an intern teacher) feel justifiably indicted? I certainly do.

Are there any research studies or other factors that can help us draw on more than our own pet peeves in making decisions about what editing skills to teach? Yes, up to a point. Of course, examining our own students' editing needs is the best strategy of all.

Maxine Hairston's landmark study (1981) sought to determine what kinds of writing errors were responded to most negatively by businesspeople who were responsible for hiring company employees. Though her methodology was less than ideal, no one questions that certain kinds of errors are "status marking": that is, they tend to suggest that the person is uneducated, whether or not this is true. Here is Hairston's list of status-marking errors, based on her selective questionnaire:

- Nonstandard verb forms in a past or past participle: *brung* instead of *brought*; *had went* instead of *had gone*.
- Lack of subject-verb agreement: *we was* instead of *we were*; *Jones don't think it's acceptable* instead of *Jones doesn't think it's acceptable*.
- Double negatives: *There has never been no one here*; *state employees can't hardly expect a raise*.
- Objective pronoun as subject: *Him and Richard were the last ones hired*.

Clearly these grammatical constructions would suggest to middle-class America that the writer is uneducated or undereducated. Writers need to learn to eliminate these errors from informational and persuasive writing that's to be made public. A longer "shopping list" of such items can be found in Wheeler and Swords (2006), described in Section D1 of the

Grammar Planner. (There I also briefly allude to the successful teaching method they describe in their book.)

What other editing issues might we be well advised to address? As previously mentioned, Connors and Lunsford (1988) undertook a large-scale study to determine which “errors” college teachers of writing marked most often. Jeff Anderson cited the top twenty in Figure 2–7. Below I’ve divided these twenty errors into categories. Much to my surprise, many of them deal with the use of commas:

Punctuation

- Missing comma after an introductory element
- Missing comma in a compound sentence
- Comma splice
- Missing comma in a series
- Missing comma(s) with a nonrestrictive element
- Unnecessary comma(s) with a restrictive element
- Sentence fragment
- Fused sentence
- Missing or misplaced possessive apostrophe

Verb and pronoun issues

- Lack of agreement between subject and verb
- Lack of agreement between pronoun and antecedent
- Wrong tense or verb form
- Wrong or missing verb ending
- Unnecessary shift in tense
- Unnecessary shift in pronoun
- Vague pronoun reference

Other

- Wrong word
- Wrong or missing preposition
- Misplaced or dangling modifier
- *Its/it’s* confusion

A more recent study by Kantz and Yates (1994) used methodology much more likely to produce an accurate picture of college teachers’ reactions to various kinds of errors than the Connors and Lunsford study. Kantz and Yates presented college teachers with a well-designed survey that covered twenty-nine different kinds of errors, including eleven errors with homophones like *its/it’s*, *their/there*, and *affect/effect*, or with commonly misspelled words. The errors in the sentences (78 items, 6 containing no errors) were not specified, but respondents were asked to mark on a 6-point scale their response to whatever error they identified (or thought they did). A rating of 6 equaled “highly irritating,” while 0 equaled “no irritation.” The survey was returned and completed correctly by 141 faculty members from various disciplines.

While there were significant differences among individuals and certain groups in the responses (e.g., women identified the errors much more accurately than men), there was a definite hierarchy of errors. Certain of them were consistently among the more irritating: The top five were non-standard verb forms, confusion between *you're* and *your*, confusion between *their* and *there*, sentence fragments, and subject-verb agreement. (As you can see, the more irritating items do not necessarily warrant the most instructional time.)

Overall the survey included four facets of comma use: the comma splice (which ranked 18 in severity), failure to use commas with parenthetical or nonrestrictive elements (ranked 27), no comma in a compound sentence (ranked 29), and no comma after an introductory element (ranked 33). (The latter two issues were rated less irritating than two of the error-free sentences that were misperceived as having errors!)

Kantz and Yates conclude not only that there is “cross-disciplinary agreement about a hierarchy of error” but also that the individual differences in identifying—and misidentifying—errors suggest that “the lack of accuracy in doing the survey means that we should perhaps express our judgments about correctness with a bit of humility.”

Taking into account such studies but not being enslaved by them, we still have to make choices about what editing skills to teach. If many or most of our students use status-marking features in their writing, are we going to leap into teaching them the finer points of comma use? Definitely not. We have to prioritize, based on our knowledge of our students' most serious needs. Unfortunately, the makers of the ACT English tests—analyzed in this chapter—may have been highly influenced by the Connors and Lunsford study, which many teachers of English (as well as other disciplines) believe overstates concerns about comma use.

Using appropriate connecting words and the associated punctuation is another crucial issue, especially for teaching informational and persuasive writing—and these kinds of things are tested the most heavily of all on the ACT. Why didn't any of these factors show up on the Connors and Lunsford list? It's my hunch—and theirs too—that the items marked most often by college teachers were simply the items they found easiest to mark! We must keep this in mind and not limit our teaching of editing skills to Connors and Lunsford's top twenty—though they should be included if your state, like Jeff Anderson's Texas, tests those skills. Instead of emphasizing them, teach the more important skills that make ideas, sentences, paragraphs, and whole pieces of writing flow logically, with appropriate punctuation.

Teaching revision and editing skills for the standardized tests

First, we need an accurate picture of what our students are being tested on. Once in a teacher workshop, someone objected that teaching adjectival phrases as I was recommending wouldn't help his students identify

parts of speech on the state test. Fortunately I had done my homework and knew that his state didn't test the ability to identify or label grammatical elements. Extra fortunately, someone from the state department of education was there to reinforce the point and explain with all her authority what *was* tested: writing and, to some extent, the use of editing conventions as part of holistic scoring. She also backed up my assertion—based on their state writing rubric, which I had projected on a transparency—that helping students expand sentences with modifying details would address the rubric categories of idea development, style/voice, and sentence sense/fluency.

This story has a happy ending: When I ran into this young teacher again a couple of months later at the National Council of Teachers of English convention, he told me he'd been teaching some of those adjectival constructions, with wonderful results in students' writing. But the story should serve as a warning: *Don't assume what your students will be tested on; find out!* The ACT and SAT tests of revision and editing skills, for instance, are just that: They, too, do not require identifying any kind of grammatical element or construction by name.

Don't assume what your students will be tested on; find out!

Should we even try to teach to the tests?

My quick response to that is yes—and no. Let me explain. As caring and responsible teachers, we can't just ignore the tests. They are a reality and, sadly, a factor by which not only our students but also we—and our schools and school systems—will be evaluated. Still, what to do, what to do? Here are suggestions, balancing the current mania for assessment with the need to reserve most of our instructional time for productive instruction in the various aspects of writing.

1. Don't abandon best practice in the teaching of writing (or the teaching of writing entirely!) in favor of test preparation. It doesn't help anyway—especially if actual writing is assessed and you take time away from the teaching of writing to teach skills tested on multiple choice tests.
2. Make the most of the overlap between the revision and editing skills your students really need and the skills tested on the standardized tests. There are too many kinds of items tested on the ACT and SAT, for example, to reasonably teach them all during the writing process—and many of your students may have little need for some of those skills as writers. Those students motivated enough to learn the finer points of editing skills can be given special help and directed to grammar books they can study—and/or to the explanations in practice test books.
3. Reserve for test preparation sessions the items that seem relatively unimportant to your students, not only as writers but also as test takers. (This may require some investigation into what the tests do and don't emphasize.) Skills that students consider irrelevant are rarely retained

for long, and skills that are taught in isolation are rarely retained anyway, by most of our students. This double whammy suggests last-minute teaching may be best.

4. Do use practice tests or test items with students. Without severely curtailing the teaching of writing in order to teach to any test of English skills, make the practice proportionate to the difficulty of the test and its importance in student assessment. For example, Michigan has decided to use the ACT as its overall assessment instrument in the junior year. Frankly, I think the test is difficult, both in content and in the multiple-choice format, which can often trick even good student editors—and their teachers—into answering incorrectly. Some experience with practice tests *and the skills assessed* will be necessary.
5. Don't limit your students' writing or your teaching of writing to the "rules" tested on these large-scale tests. The tests are extremely conservative with regard to grammar. They test "rules" that many or most published writers don't follow, "errors" that aren't considered errors by most publishers, and "no-nos" that never should have found their way into English grammar books in the first place, since they were based on the structure of Latin rather than English—or simply made up by the books' writers. Teach students to write like published authors and then teach the standardized tests' "rules" as part of test preparation. Students are usually able to understand the need to do things differently under different circumstances: After all, they've been doing that for years, when this year's English teacher has expectations different from last year's or Mom's expectations are different from Dad's. You might try giving students credit for being able to "code switch" from good writing to successful test taking.
6. Always keep firmly in mind that even excellent writers, even excellent editors of their own writing, may not be able to do well on such multiple-choice tests of writing skills.

With these recommendations as background, I'll informally analyze the ACT English test as an example of how teachers can come to better understand the demands of any standardized test of writing skills that their students might be required to take. (Obviously not every teacher needs to do this individually; it could be done at the grade, school, system, or even state level, as relevant.)

Inside the ACT: What's heavily tested and what isn't?

First, to reinforce the last point, consider what the Princeton Review's *Cracking the ACT* (2005) practice book bluntly admits:

No matter how well or how poorly you do on the English test, you should not feel that your ACT English score truly represents your ability to write. . . . We don't mean that ACT is doing a bad

job. It's tough to measure English skills, and we think the test writers have constructed a fair test. In the end, however, what the ACT English test measures is how well you take the ACT English test.
(p. 25)

Enough said?

In an attempt to help teachers in my state understand the ACT's multiple-choice questions on writing skills, I examined several practice books from 2005 and 2006. I particularly liked *The Real ACT Prep Guide* (ACT, 2005) because it was written by the test makers and included tests previously given. Also, I found the *The New ACT* (SparkNotes, 2005) breakdown on the division and subdivision of items on the ACT revealing:

- Usage/mechanics questions (40 items)
 - Punctuation (10)
 - Basic grammar and usage (12) (but *not labeling* any aspects of grammar)
 - Sentence structure (18)
- Rhetorical skills questions (35 total)
 - Writing strategy questions (12)
 - Organization (11)
 - Style (12)

This was a good start, I thought, yet still not specific enough to be really helpful to teachers and students.

So I analyzed all the items in six tests (two previous real ones and four practice ones), which was more difficult than I imagined, because two or three skills might be tested at once. Here, from *The Real ACT Prep Guide* (2005, p. 154), is a fairly common example of a complex test item. The underlined portion of the sentence is the part addressed by the four options:

Down the street from the college, I attend, the Save-U Laundromat is always open and someone is always there.

Options:

- F. NO CHANGE
- G. college, I attend
- H. college I attend,
- I. college I attend

While test takers may indeed get the question right through a hunch or their intuitive sentence sense, the question is designed to test two things: recognition that *I attend* is a restrictive clause that shouldn't be separated by a comma from *college*, the preceding noun that it modifies; and recognition that, on the other hand, a comma is needed after *attend*, which concludes the introductory phrase. The correct answer is H, but how best to categorize the question? Sometimes I put a question in more than one category.

It proved difficult to generalize about the kinds of items tested because the frequency of some items varied considerably from one practice test to another (though there was more consistency among the previous real tests in the ACT's own guide). Also, I'm sure I did not always characterize the items the way the test makers did, because I did not come up with the requisite number of items in the categories offered by the SparkNotes book (2005).

Keeping all this in mind, plus the fact that this is only one teacher's analysis of six tests, I nevertheless think the following breakdown of items is quite helpful. Mostly, of course, it's helpful to teachers whose students are all going to be required to take the ACT. But it should also be useful in suggesting some of the kinds of editing skills that really should be taught; it's a corrective to the limitations of Connors and Lunsford's top twenty. Moreover, this analysis suggests the kind of breakdown you and your colleagues might do on another standardized test, such as the SAT. (I was tempted to include even more detail about the relative frequencies I found, but the more detailed, the greater the likelihood that the patterns won't carry over to future tests.)

If you feel intimidated or overwhelmed by terms and concepts that you don't understand, keep in mind that the Grammar Planner in Part 2 briefly discusses most of these issues and that the most esoteric-sounding items are sometimes the least important to teach.

Rhetorical skills: Content, organization, connection, and flow—highest emphasis

Together, these rhetorical skills received by far the greatest emphasis.

All the passages on the ACT tests are informative, with or without a persuasive edge. They vary in degree of formality and tone. Within that context, what the ACT calls "rhetorical skills" includes nearly half of the test items: 35 out of 75. Even though the way I characterized test items sometimes produced fewer than 35 in this category, in almost every test I examined, this category received the greatest emphasis. Repeatedly, there were items dealing with these issues:

- Order of sentences within a paragraph
- Order of paragraphs within the whole piece
- Topic of the passage
- Consistent focus of the passage on the topic
- Whether and/or where to add a sentence giving details
- Deletion of a redundant or irrelevant sentence
- Sentences to make transitions within paragraphs

Questions on transitions within and between clauses, sentences, and paragraphs were so numerous that they are also listed as a separate category, as follows.

Connectors, punctuation, and sentence structure relating to flow—high emphasis

While relating to meaning, organization, and flow, each of the following were major categories themselves and received substantial attention.

- Brevity: that is, eliminating wordiness
- Comma use, including numerous questions requiring elimination of commas when no specific rule requires their use (I have included comma splice sentences in this category)
- Connectors:
 - Choices appropriate to meaning and/or sequencing or logical flow
 - Choice between kind of connective word or phrase, given the grammatical structure and punctuation
- Ordering of elements within sentences for clarity and flow (includes items on “misplaced” or “dangling” modifiers, both of which occurred rarely)

Phrase-level and sentence-level constraints—moderate emphasis

These items received moderate emphasis.

Some of these items—especially parallelism—were assessed frequently on one practice test, but less often on others. The categories are listed in descending order of importance:

- Verb tense or form, with many questions focusing on consistency of tense as appropriate to fit with other verbs or overall tense of the passage
- Subject-verb agreement, under varied circumstances
- Ordering of sentence elements for clarity and flow, including “misplaced” or (rarely) “dangling” modifiers
- Parallelism, especially of verb tenses, sometimes of noun forms

Phrase-level and sentence-level constraints—low emphasis

These items received low emphasis.

- Pronoun issues as an entire category, including agreement in number with antecedent, appropriate case, and appropriate person
- Sentence fragments, along with grammatically malformed and therefore incomplete sentences (these were clearly awkward and ineffective fragments)

Phrase-level and sentence-level constraints—minimal emphasis

Few, if any of these items were directly assessed on any given test. In fact, there were probably no more than a half dozen of all these items taken together.


- Adjective or adverb issues: choice of adjective or adverb form to modify a noun or verb; choice between commonly confused adjective and adverb forms; conventional comparative or superlative forms
- Avoidance of double negatives like *can't hardly*, *won't never*
- Uses of punctuation other than the comma, including:
 - Colon (few items on appropriate or inappropriate use, but many more instances of a colon as a wrong choice in a comma question)
 - Semicolon (same distribution as with colon)
 - Everything else as one category: apostrophes in possessives and not in simple plurals or verbs; dashes, parentheses, and such (periods, exclamation marks, and question marks were almost never tested directly)
- Other word issues:
 - Choice of spellings for a homophone (*there/their/they're*; *its/it's*)
 - Choice between *that* or *which* to introduce an adjective clause
 - Choice between *who* or *whom*
 - Choice between commonly confused pairs (*affect/effect*)
 - Choice of preposition within idiomatic expressions
 - Choice of “standard” past tense or past participle forms (not *brung* for past tense)

What aspects of editing should we teach in the context of writing?

This decision needs to take into account various factors:

1. What aspects of editing will help the overall quality of students' writing the most? Perhaps the “rhetorical” skills tested on the ACT?
2. Do your students need help in learning to code-switch from their informal language to the formal language considered acceptable in the marketplace? If so, such issues need attention before the kinds of editing issues that Connors and Lunsford found were marked the most by college teachers.
3. Do your students' writings exhibit mostly the editing issues listed in Connors and Lunsford's top twenty?
4. How important is it for your students to focus on eliminating wordiness and redundancy, as stressed in the ACT?

As you think about these issues and use the Grammar Planner, keep in mind that we cannot do it all. We really do have to prioritize.

 As smart teachers, we realize it's better that little yellow grammar modules *don't* rain down from the sky, no matter how much we might wistfully yearn for such “weather.” We can judiciously draw examples and ideas from various resources, though, including some grammar sites found on the Web, if we keep in mind what research and recent experimentation suggest:

1. Teaching grammar in isolation doesn't improve writing—nor does teaching a grammar book, including this Grammar Planner. (See the York study [Andrews et al., 2004b], which was described in Chapter 1.)
2. Teaching everything amounts to teaching nothing, while teaching fewer things deeply and in the context of writing holds more promise for long-term gains.
3. Teaching less grammar but teaching options and skills *as we help students use these tools* to enrich and enhance their writing can generate stronger and more interesting writing, as well as writing that meets the conventional expectations of the marketplace.
4. Teaching grammatical analysis (such as determining subject and verb, for agreement) warrants much less time than producing sentences with interesting details, organizing and combining elements within and beyond sentences, and establishing appropriate tone for purpose and audience.
5. Testing the naming of parts is not necessary, and indeed contraindicated and counterproductive, even though we and our students may be using a few grammatical terms in discussion.
6. Good writing does not necessarily follow all the grammar-book rules, so teaching students to write well and teaching them to perform well on standardized tests are not synonymous and should, to some extent, be separate instructional enterprises (a point to be demonstrated more fully in Section D).

When these principles guide our teaching of grammar for writing, it is much more likely to be successful. *We* are more likely to be successful, and *our students* are more likely to be successful as writers.

How can the following Grammar Planner help you as a teacher? First, it can help you understand the structure of the language if you have little or no background in English grammar. This is important, because best-practice teaching doesn't play it safe by teaching grammar books with answer keys. Teachers need to be able to answer students' questions about grammar as well as plan and teach lessons directly relating grammar to writing and perhaps literature. Engaging in close encounters of the third grammatical kind requires us to know more than we plan to teach, as we start helping students enrich their writing by using modifying constructions and parallelism. In particular, we need to know more in order to teach editing skills. Second, the Planner is designed to nudge you into considering whether certain topics need to be taught at all and, if so, within what genres and during what aspects of the writing process. It may be best to teach some skills only in preparation for standardized tests, if then.

Here are some questions to provoke thoughtful decision making:

1. What aspects of grammar do your students already command in their writing? Even if a grammatical construction or skill is listed in your state or local standards for your grade level, do you really need to teach that construction or skill for writing, or do students' writings already demonstrate its use?
2. What aspects of grammar for enriching writing—such as modifiers and the use of parallelism—will your students most benefit from?
3. What editing skills do *your* students most need to learn as writers—and in what areas do these needs dovetail with the standards and/or with skills assessed on a standardized test, if your students are required to take one?
4. What editing skills are so minor, and what kinds of errors occur so infrequently, that you can justifiably omit them from what you teach during the writing process?
5. What is actually tested on the state or standardized test(s) used in your state, district, or school, and what additional aspects of grammar will you need to review as part of preparing students to take such a test or tests?

Whether you're making these decisions individually or as part of a committee, the Planner can help.

This Grammar Planner section has been designed to make it easy to record your decisions about teaching grammar. The wide column in the outer margin is for indicating the writing phase or phases during which you'll teach a concept—if you plan to teach it in conjunction with writing. At each new section is a yes/no option to indicate whether you plan to

review the concept for test-taking. There is plenty of space for you to make other notes as well.

Do keep in mind, however, that simply teaching the Grammar Planner as a text to be mastered is not the best way to help students *use* the resources of the language in their writing. They need the kinds of teaching described in Part 1, namely, to teach grammar “an inch wide and a mile deep.”

Grammar to Expand and Enrich Writing

Putting First Things First



Addressing ideas, voice, sentence fluency, and conventions (adding, placing, reordering, and punctuating modifiers and parallel elements)

This section on modifiers and parallelism precedes the section on the sentence in order to emphasize the point that we need to help students elaborate on content and write effective sentences before we address editing. In other words, the Grammar Planner begins with grammatical options rather than conventions. You may find it useful to review the basic grammatical definitions in Chapter 3 before approaching this section—or to look ahead at Section B. Note that the issues listed below each section title refer to categories in the six traits of writing system (Spandel, 2005; Culham, 2003).

Adverbials, being less complicated than adjectivals, are discussed first.

A1 adverbials

An *adverbial* is any single-word adverb or adverbial phrase or clause—that is, any word or group of words—that describes the verb or the whole subject-plus-verb as a unit. Adverbials usually tell *how*, *when*, *where*, or *why* with respect to an action. The *how* category includes in what manner, by what means, how far, how long (for what length of time), and so forth, but always in relation to an action rather than a person or thing.

Use a comma after an introductory adverbial element if you want your reader to make a substantial pause.

Cautiously, Amanda turned the knob and opened the door.

Three years later, the bridge was completed.

In the middle of nowhere, our car suddenly sputtered and died.

Thanks to their heroic efforts, not one piece of furniture was scratched.

Review for Test? **Y** **N**

Phase of writing process
in which to teach:

To make my sentences flow more smoothly, I often move adverbial modifiers to the front of the sentence when editing my writing.

Clara's directions being vague, we got lost almost immediately.

Whenever you have the time, please come for a week to visit.

Notice that the internal structure of an adverbial can be almost anything, even a nominal (*three years later*), but it's the external function of the group of words that makes it adverbial.

Some handbooks offer arbitrary advice like "use a comma if the introductory adverbial is five words or longer," which means that not all introductory adverbial phrases require a comma after them. In practice, authors usually put a comma after a shorter introductory element, too, if they want their readers to pause.

Review for Test?

Y N

Phase of writing process
in which to teach:

A1-a adverbial clauses

A *clause* consists of a subject + a complete (or properly formed) verb. An *adverb clause* (*adverbial clause*) works like an adverb, to modify the verb or the main subject-plus-verb unit. Adverbial clauses are dependent on a main clause; they usually tell when or why (*after, because, etc.*), indicate under what condition, or express contrast with respect to the major action.

Sometimes an adverbial is almost a clause, but not quite: Notice, for example, the underlined construction in Clara's directions being vague, we got lost almost immediately. This underlined part does not fit the requirement for a clause, adverbial or otherwise, because the verb is not properly formed: *being* cannot stand alone as a verb.

We can make an independent clause into a subordinate (dependent) one simply by putting a subordinating conjunction in front of it. The clause must then ordinarily be attached to the preceding or following main clause.

He bought lottery tickets every week. He never won anything.



although he bought lottery tickets every week

Possible resulting sentences:

He never won anything, *although* he bought lottery tickets every week.

Although he bought lottery tickets every week, he never won anything.

Notice that a comma is required after an introductory subordinate clause. The comma is usually—but not always—omitted before a final adverbial clause. A comma was included in the first of the previous pair of sentences to signal a significant pause, giving the reader time to think about the main clause before going on to the subordinate *although* clause.

Published writers sometimes punctuate a subordinate clause as if it were a complete sentence when it is clear from the preceding context: *I benefit from exercising. When I do it.* Stylistically, this strategy can sometimes be effective. But on standardized tests, punctuating a subordinate clause as a complete sentence (*Although he bought lottery tickets every week.*) will be considered wrong. In either case, the writer has created a sentence fragment.

**WORDS THAT COMMONLY FUNCTION AS
SUBORDINATING CONJUNCTIONS**
(some have other functions as well)

TIME	CAUSE	CONDITION	CONTRAST
after	as	as if	although
as	because	assuming that	even though
as soon as	in order that	if	rather than
before	since	in case	though
since	so that	unless	whereas
till		when	while
until		whether	
when			
while			

A1-b movable adverbials

Adverbial modifiers are often moved from one place in a sentence to another in order to make the sentence flow more smoothly. Such modifiers frequently set the stage for the main subject + verb unit and therefore are best placed at or near the beginning of the sentence.

I often move an adverbial modifier to the front of a sentence, in order to make it flow more smoothly.

To make my sentences flow more smoothly, I often move an adverbial modifier to the front of the sentence.

To set the stage for what I want to emphasize, I often move an adverbial modifier to the front of the sentence.

When editing my writing, I often move adverbial modifiers to the front of a sentence, in order to make it flow more smoothly or to set the stage for what I want to emphasize.

Review for Test? **Y N**

Phase of writing process
in which to teach:

Authors often move adverbial modifiers to the beginning of a sentence in both narrative and explanatory writing, to set the stage for what is to come.

In both narrative and explanatory writing, authors often move adverbial modifiers to the beginning of a sentence, to set the stage for what is to come.

You'd better hurry up if you want to go to lunch with me.

If you want to go to lunch with me, you'd better hurry up.

I'll even treat you to lunch, as soon as I finish this last paragraph.

As soon as I finish this last paragraph, I'll even treat you to lunch.

“Fronting” some modifiers is especially helpful when the sentence includes several adverbials needed for clarity.

Adverbial modifiers that are movable can be considered “free” modifiers, whether or not they are set off by commas.

Review for Test?

Y N

Phase of writing process in which to teach:

A2 adjectivals that are “bound” modifiers

An *adjectival* is any single-word adjective or adjectival phrase or clause—that is, a word or group of words—that describes and is said to “modify” a noun. Often, but not always, single-word adjectivals occur right before the noun they modify. Otherwise, they typically occur after a form of the verb *to be*: *am*, *is*, *are*, *was*, *were*, *been*, *being*, or *be* itself. In both situations they are “bound” to the noun they modify.

They pulled up the enormous turnip.

My terrier snuggled comfortably in his warm bed.

The protestors hugged the gnarled tree trunks.

Gravity is the dominating force.

I am tired, hungry, and sleepy. (Three single-word adjectivals in a series.)

Grover is absolutely starved. (Single-word adjectival modified by *absolutely*.)

That solution will be fine.

Usually, single words that can work as adjectivals will fit comfortably into this test frame: The [noun] is very _____.

Words that can introduce a noun are called *noun determiners*. These include the articles *a*, *an*, and *the*; the possessives *my*, *our*, *your*, *his*,