To Jen, for coaching, cheering, and often carrying the ball.

Boynton/Cook Publishers
361 Hanover Street
Portsmouth, NH 03801-3912

Offices and agents throughout the world

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Killgallon, Don.
Sentence composing for middle school: a worktext on sentence variety and maturity / Don Killgallon.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references.
1. English language—Sentences—Study and teaching (Elementary)
2. English language—Composition and exercises—Study and teaching (Elementary) I. Title.
LB1576.K485 1997
372.62'3—dc21 97-27433
CIP

Acquisitions editor: Peter Stillman
Production editor: Renée Nicholls
Cover designer: Jenny Jensen Greenleaf
Manufacturing coordinator: Louise Richardson

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper
09 10 ML 19 18 17
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Preface

This series— *Sentence Composing for Middle School, High School, and College*—emphasizes the most neglected unit of written composition: the sentence. Using four sentence-manipulating techniques— *sentence scrambling, sentence imitating, sentence combining, and sentence expanding*—these books teach students structures they seldom use in their writing but should, and can easily use once they become familiar with them through many examples and practices.

Each book concentrates on such structures, by means of model sentences by professional writers. The rationale is based on the widely accepted mimetic theory of oral language acquisition, applied here to written language acquisition, in the belief that continual exposure to structures used often by professionals in their sentences will produce attention to, understanding of, and, with practice, normal use of such structures by students in their sentences.

The books are exercises in applied grammar, with the theory and terminology of grammar subordinate to the major goal: composing sentences. The naming of parts and the parsing of sentences, the goals of traditional grammar study, are exercises in dissection. The practices in *Sentence Composing* are exercises in production.

The sentence-manipulating techniques are easily learned. The practices based on them are interesting and challenging, and they can be done by any student. In addition, the teacher can readily give attention to the sentences students compose, with quicker, more constant, and more thorough feedback than with longer compositions.

Since the practices have proved successful for the great majority of students who have used them in all kinds of schools, it is demonstrably true that *Sentence Composing* can work anywhere, in any school, with any student.

Don Killgallon

Baltimore, Maryland
Introduction

How Sentence Composing Works

When you or a professional write, you both choose words and arrange them in sentences, but often with very different results: variety and maturity in sentences written by professional writers are much more evident than in sentences written by students. Unlike professional writers, students tend to write sentences similar to sentences they speak.

The big difference in variety and maturity is what this worktext is all about. The idea of sentence composing is to bridge that gap, so that your sentences more closely resemble in structure those written by professional writers. Throughout the worktext, you will see how professional writers write their sentences. You will learn and practice writing similar sentences by using four easy-to-learn techniques: sentence unscrambling, sentence imitating, sentence combining, and sentence expanding.

You will learn by imitating the pros. Just as you used imitation as a child to learn to speak by imitating experienced speakers like your parents, you can learn to write better sentences by imitating how professional writers use written language.

Nothing in the worktext is difficult to learn. You don’t have to know a lot about grammar. You don’t have to learn lots of terms. You don’t have to study to take tests. But you do have to want to improve the sentences you write. This worktext will show you how.

First you have to learn something, and then you can go out and do it.

Mies van der Rohe

How to Use This Worktext

All practices in this worktext use model sentences written by professional writers. Throughout the worktext you will practice
sentence unscrambling, sentence imitating, sentence combining, and sentence expanding to learn to write sentences that have the kind of variety and maturity in the model sentences.

You can learn a lot about writing in general through the practices in this worktext, not just about how professionals write their sentences. Even though you will be working with sentences—the backbone of all writing—you can learn skills that will help you improve any kind of writing: paragraphs, essays, short stories, reports, and research papers.

The References section at the end of the worktext contains the original sentences by professional writers used as models in the practices throughout the worktext. Don’t consider them the answers in the back of the book, as in a math textbook.

When you look up the original sentences you may decide that the professionally written sentence is better than yours; if so, study the difference. You may, however, decide that yours is just as good; if so, congratulate yourself. You may even decide that yours is better; in that case, take a bow.
Sentence Unscrambling

In this part of the worktext, you will learn how to arrange sentence parts effectively within a sentence by unscrambling lists of sentence parts.

All of the sentences you will unscramble were written by professional writers. In unscrambling their sentences, pay attention to how they composed their sentences. Apply what you learn to your own sentences.
Activity 1

Understanding Sentence Parts

Practice 1

People read and write in sentence parts, that is, chunks of meaning. In one sentence below, sentence parts are divided into meaningful chunks. In the other, they are divided meaninglessly. Try reading both sentences. Identify the one that’s easier to read because sentence parts are divided into meaningful chunks.

1. Tobacco is a / custom loathsome to / the eye hateful to the nose harmful / to the brain dangerous / to the lungs and in the black stinking fume thereof nearest / resembling the horrible / smoke of / the pit that is / bottomless.

2. Tobacco is a custom / loathsome to the eye / hateful to the nose / harmful to the brain / dangerous to the lungs / and in the black stinking fume thereof / nearest resembling / the horrible smoke / of the pit / that is bottomless.

*James I, “A Counterblast to Tobacco”*

Practice 2

Read each pair of sentences, pausing at the slash lines, and then identify the sentence that is divided into meaningful chunks (sentence parts).

1a. I am not / ashamed to confess that / I am / ignorant of what I / do not know.

b. I am not ashamed / to confess / that I am ignorant / of what I do not know.

*Cicero*

2a. If you / put a chain around the / neck of a / slave the other / end fastens / itself around your own.
b. If you put a chain / around the neck / of a slave / the other end / fastens itself / around your own.
   
   Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Compensation"

3a. If a man bites / a dog that / is news.

b. If a man / bites a dog / that is news.
   
   John Bogart

4a. A pessimist / is one who feels bad / when he feels good / for fear he'll feel worse / when he feels better.

b. A pessimist is one who feels / bad when he / feels good for / fear he'll feel / worse when he feels better.
   
   Anonymous

5a. Optimism is a / cheerful frame of / mind that enables a tea / kettle to sing though / in hot water up / to its nose.

b. Optimism is / a cheerful frame of mind / that enables a tea / kettle / to sing / though in hot water / up to its nose.
   
   Anonymous

6a. There are three marks / of a superior man / being virtuous / he is free from anxiety / being wise / he is free from perplexity / being brave / he is free from fear.

b. There are three marks of a superior man being / virtuous he is free / from anxiety being wise / he is free from perplexity being brave / he is free from fear.
   
   Confucius

7a. To have and to hold from this day forward for better / or for worse for richer / or for poorer in sickness / and in health to love / and to cherish till death / do us part.

b. To have and to hold / from this day forward / for better or for worse / for richer or for poorer / in sickness and in health / to love and to cherish / till death do us part.
   
   Book of Common Prayer

8a. The only way / to keep your health / is to eat what you don't want / drink what you don't like / and do what you'd rather not.
b. The only way to keep your health is to eat what you don't want drink what you don't like and do what you'd rather not.

  *Mark Twain*

9a. There are three ways to get something done do it yourself hire someone or forbid your kids to do it.

b. There are three ways to get something done do it yourself hire someone or forbid your kids to do it.

  *Monta Crane*

10a. Perhaps the most valuable result of all education is the ability to make yourself do the thing you have to do when it ought to be done whether you like it or not.

b. Perhaps the most valuable result of all education is the ability to make yourself do the thing you have to do when it ought to be done whether you like it or not.

  *Thomas Henry Huxley*
Activity 2
Identifying Sentence Parts

Practice 1

The sentence parts below are chunked meaninglessly. Copy the sentences and reposition the slash lines to make meaningful chunks.

1. When fate hands / you a lemon try to / make lemonade.
   Dale Carnegie

2. Even if it's a little / thing do something for / others something for / which you get no pay but / the privilege of doing it.
   Albert Schweitzer

3. The best / way to / cheer yourself up is to / try to cheer somebody else up.
   Mark Twain

4. A sentence should contain no / unnecessary words a paragraph no unnecessary / sentences for the same reason that a / drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a / machine no unnecessary parts.
   William Strunk

5. Always be nice to / people on the way up because you'll / meet the same people on / the way down.
   Wilson Mizner

6. When you have a / number of disagreeable / duties to perform / always do the most / disagreeable first.
   Josiah Quincy

7. Keep five yards from a carriage ten / yards from a horse and a hundred / yards from an elephant but the / distance you should keep from a wicked / person cannot be measured.
   Indian proverb

8. Ask not what your / country can do for / you but ask what you can / do for your country.
   President John F. Kennedy
9. You can make more / friends in two months by becoming
interested in other people than / you can in two / years by
trying to get other / people interested in you.

Dale Carnegie

10. If you wish to / rest first work.

Anonymous

Practice 2

Copy each sentence twice. The first time, insert slash lines in
meaningless places. The second time, use the same number of
slash lines for meaningful sentence parts.

1. A politician thinks of the next election a statesman of the
next generation.

James Freeman Clarke

2. A politician is an animal who can sit on a fence and yet
keep both ears to the ground.

Anonymous

3. It is of great importance in a republic not only to guard
against the oppression of its rulers but to guard one part of
society against the injustice of the other part.

Alexander Hamilton

4. In a free country there is much clamor with little suffering in
a despotic state there is little complaint with much grievance.

Lazare Carnot

5. Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for
themselves and under a just God cannot long retain it.

Abraham Lincoln

6. I would rather sit on a pumpkin and have it all to myself
than to be crowded on a velvet cushion.

Henry David Thoreau

7. If you would not be forgotten as soon as you are dead either
write things worth reading or do things worth writing.

Benjamin Franklin
8. If you want to get along go along.  

   Sam Rayburn

9. Never do today what you can put off till tomorrow because delay may give clearer light as to what is best to be done.  

   Aaron Burr

10. To do anything in this world worth doing, you must not stand back shivering and thinking of the cold and danger but jump in and scramble through as well as you can.  

    Sydney Smith
Activity 3
Understanding Sentence Unscrambling

Practice 1

Choose the meaningful chunking of the sentence.

1. When his father / who was old / and twisted with toil / made over to / him the ownership of the / farm and seemed / content to creep away to / a corner and wait for / death, he / shrugged his shoulders and dismissed the old / man from his mind.

2. When his father / who was old / and twisted with toil / made over to him the ownership / of the farm / and seemed content / to creep away / to a corner / and wait for death / he shrugged his shoulders / and dismissed the old man / from his mind.

_Sherwood Anderson, Winesburg, Ohio_

Unscrambling professionally written sentences helps you to understand how effective writers arrange their sentence parts. Study these two lists of sentence parts: first, the original order of sentence parts; next, the scrambled order.

**Original Order**

1. When his father,
2. who was old
3. and twisted with toil,
4. made over to him the ownership
5. of the farm
6. and seemed content
7. to creep away
8. to a corner

**Scrambled Order**

1. to a corner
2. from his mind.
3. and wait for death,
4. When his father,
5. he shrugged his shoulders
6. made over to him the ownership
7. who was old
8. and dismissed the old man
9. and wait for death, 9. of the farm
10. he shrugged his shoulders 10. and twisted with toil,
11. and dismissed the old man 11. to creep away
12. from his mind. 12. and seemed content

Practice 2

Beneath the model sentence are two lists of scrambled nonsense sentence parts. Unscramble and write out each list to produce sentences with sentence parts arranged and punctuated like the model.

Model: When his father, who was old and twisted with toil, made over to him the ownership of the farm and seemed content to creep away to a corner and wait for death, he shrugged his shoulders and dismissed the old man from his mind.

_Sherwood Anderson, Winesburg, Ohio_

List One: Nonsense Sentence Parts (in scrambled order)

1. and covered the floor
2. and feathered with grease
3. with its pizzas
4. which was solid
5. when the ashtray
6. sang for him the dance
7. and became encouraged
8. to an ocean
9. the crab blanked its pencil
10. and hope for mud
11. of the petunia
12. to jump up
List Two: Nonsense Sentence Parts (in scrambled order)

1. in an instant
2. which was crystal
3. the bun opened its halves
4. although the hamburger
5. ran down to him the story
6. in a dictionary
7. of the onion
8. and demented in town
9. and seemed reluctant
10. and study for words
11. to fly away
12. and embraced the cheese

Match and then list the twelve sentence parts in all three sentences—the model and its two imitations. Here is an example for the first sentence part:

Example

From the model: When his father, . . .
From scrambled list one: When the ashtray, . . .
From scrambled list two: Although the hamburger, . . .
Activity 4

Unscrambling Sentence Parts

Practice 1

Sentence parts can often be put in various places within a sentence. Unscramble each sentence three times, and tell which versions are effective and which aren’t.

Example

Scrambled Sentence Parts

a. when looking out of her window
b. was a hearse
c. the first thing she saw

Unscrambled Sentences (Three Versions)

1. The first thing she saw when looking out of her window was a hearse.
2. The first thing she saw was a hearse when looking out of her window.
3. When looking out of her window, the first thing she saw was a hearse.

The first version is the original by Gaston Leroux in his novel *The Phantom of the Opera*. The third version is equally effective. The second version is ineffective because the order of information is wrong: The reader needs to know that she was looking out a window before being told what she saw.

1a. the boy’s father sat
b. the lantern still burning by his side.
c. at the foot of one of the trees

*William H. Armstrong, Sounder*
2a. a mortgage financier
   b. the father was respectable and tight
   c. and forecloser
   d. and a stern, upright collection-plate passer
      *From a sentence by O. Henry, “The Ransom of Red Chief”*

3a. for nothing can be done
   b. after Buck Fanshaw’s inquest
   c. without a public meeting
   d. a meeting of the short-haired brotherhood was held
   e. on the Pacific coast
   f. and an expression of sentiment
      *From a sentence by Mark Twain, “Buck Fanshaw’s Funeral”*

4a. the littlest
   b. with them
   c. I had ever seen
   d. carrying a gnarled walking stick
   e. oldest man
   f. was Elmo Goodhue Pipgrass
      *From a sentence by Max Shulman, “The Unlucky Winner”*

5a. over long woolen underwear
   b. he bounded
   c. around his chest
   d. out of bed
   e. and a leather jacket
   f. wearing a long flannel nightgown
   g. a nightcap
      *From a sentence by James Thurber, “The Night the Ghost Got In”*
6a. looked up from his scrambled eggs  
   b. once upon a sunny morning  
   c. who sat in a breakfast nook  
   d. quietly cropping the roses  
   e. with a gold horn  
   f. a man  
   g. to see a white unicorn  
   h. in the garden  

From a sentence by James Thurber, "The Unicorn in the Garden"

7a. grabbed my right foot  
   b. of patent-leather dancing pumps  
   c. then  
   d. and shoved it into one of them  
   e. as a shoehorn  
   f. she removed the gleaming pair  
   g. out of a box on the bed  
   h. using her finger  

Jean Shepherd, "Wanda Hickey's Night of Golden Memories"

8a. such as weather balloons  
   b. as a general rule  
   c. satellites  
   d. of the World Trade Center  
   e. careful on-the-scene investigations disclose  
   f. meteorites  
   g. that most "unidentified" flying objects are quite ordinary phenomena  
   h. who blew off the roof
i. named Lewis Mandelbaum
j. and even once a man

Woody Allen, “The UFO Menace”

9a. had been stowed
b. in which
c. the barnyard sounds
d. escaped from two crates
e. that we heard
f. and from a burlap bag
g. of hens
h. a small flock
i. that the Duvitches had fetched along
j. of ducks

Ambrose Flack, “The Strangers That Came to Town”

10a. in his trouser band
b. of age
c. I was fourteen years
d. that he carried
e. when a coward
f. plus two California gold pieces
g. shot my father down
h. going by the name of Tom Chaney
i. and robbed him of his life
j. in Fort Smith, Arkansas,
k. and his horse and $150 in cash money

Charles Portis, True Grit
Practice 2

The sentences below have movable sentence parts that are underlined. Reposition the sentence parts. Make sure that your sentence is as effective as the original.

Example

Original Sentence:

Tom was on his feet, shouting.

*Hal Borland, When the Legends Die*

Effective Rearrangements:

*Shouting, Tom was on his feet.*

*Tom, shouting, was on his feet.*

1. Taran cried, *his teeth chattering violently.*
   *Lloyd Alexander, The Book of Three*

2. The fog horn was blowing steadily, *once every fifteen seconds.*
   *Ray Bradbury, "The Fog Horn"*

3. He sat on a rail fence, *watching the night come over Gettysburg.*
   *Michael Shaara, The Killer Angels*

4. Slowly, *filled with dissatisfaction,* he had gone to his room and got into bed.
   *Betsy Byars, The Summer of the Swans*

5. There are boys from broken homes, and boys who have been in difficulty with the law, *studying in the classrooms, working in the fields and in the workshops.*
   *William E. Barrett, The Lilies of the Field*

6. Somewhere there, on that desolate plain, was lurking this fiendish man, hiding in a burrow like a wild beast, *his heart full of malignancy against the whole race which had cast him out.*
   *Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, The Hound of the Baskervilles*
7. Alan made a business of checking his own reflection in the mirror, giving Norris time to make a clean getaway, while Keeton stood by the door, watching him impatiently.

_Stephen King_, Needful Things

8. Standing in front of the room, her blond hair pulled back to emphasize the determination of her face, her body girdled to emphasize the determination of her spine, her eyes holding determinedly to anger, Miss Lass was afraid.

_Rosa Guy_, The Friends

9. She ate a great deal and afterward fell asleep herself, and Mary sat and stared at her and watched her fine bonnet slip on one side until she herself fell asleep once more in the corner of the carriage, lulled by the splashing of the rain against the windows.

_Frances Hodgson Burnett_, The Secret Garden

10. The garden was to the left of the barn and the pasture hidden from the house by the smokehouse and a pecan grove and a row of little peach trees that because of the drought had dropped hard knotty fruit not even fit to make spiced pickle with.

_Olive Ann Burns_, Cold Sassy Tree
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