

Handouts

Teaching Sentence Skills

Gateway Resource TSS0001

Teaching Conventions in Context: Using Model Sentences

The following instructional practices for teaching written conventions in context use model sentences to help students learn how authors use conventions to clarify and convey meaning in their writing.

Notice

- Display the sentence with the targeted grammatical point.
- Ask: What do you notice?
- Ask (repeatedly, as needed): What else?
- Nudge students in the right direction to focus on the targeted grammatical point. For example:
 - What works in the text?
 - Where is good writing?
 - What is the effect?
 - What does the punctuation do?
 - What changes if we remove the punctuation? What if we use something else?

Imitate

- Look closely at the model sentence. Deconstruct the sentence, identifying its prominent features, including the targeted grammatical point. Provide a sentence pattern or frame as a visual scaffold (especially for struggling writers and English language learners).
- Model your own imitation (use the targeted grammatical point in your own sentence) and connect back to the prominent features.
- Show students how to insert their ideas and experiences and still imitate the grammatical point in their own sentences.

Share

- Share the imitation sentences sparked by the model.
- Listen, clap, and praise, but most of all, be sincere—create a positive environment that lets students know you value what they have to say.

Collect

- Have students look at the texts they have already read and see how other authors use the targeted conventions (grammatical points).
- Have students write appropriate sentences they find.
- After sentences are collected, share a few and celebrate the most powerful ones that exemplify the targeted grammatical points.
- Display sentences on the wall as models.

Write/Revise

- Imitate a powerful model sentence that uses the targeted grammatical point in a longer composition.
- Try a freewrite that uses the targeted grammatical point.
- Revise a sentence you have already written by adding the targeted grammatical point.
- Use the targeted grammatical point when responding to or summarizing readings.

Break Apart/Combine

- Together with students, demonstrate how to break apart the ideas in a model sentence into several simple sentences. Read and reread the sentence, noting the conventions the author uses.
- Provide students with opportunities to combine a set of simple sentences into one sentence that includes the targeted grammatical point. Have students compare their attempts with those of the authors and/or the combined sentences of their peers.

REFERENCE: Adapted from Anderson, 2007.

Supporting English Language Learners

The following suggestions are intended to serve as guidelines in support of English language learners in the classroom. It is important to linguistically accommodate instruction according to the English proficiency level of students.

Create a safe environment in which English language learners can feel comfortable writing and sharing.

- Provide opportunities for meaningful discourse and interaction.
- Have students collaborate in small groups or pairs.
- Allow for risks to be taken; do not overly correct student writing.
- Use model sentences from a variety of genres and cultures.

Provide ample modeling and distributed practice.

- Model a strategy more than once.
- Provide multiple opportunities to practice the strategy.

Scaffold instruction.

- Focus on one point at a time. For example, when introducing how introductory words, phrases, and clauses are set off by a comma, model for students and have them practice imitating each separately. Refer to the wall charts provided for the grammar resources. Each of the bulleted guidelines could be modeled and practiced separately.
- Preteach or define in context potentially difficult words or words with multiple meanings found in model sentences.
- Use model sentences that do not require extensive background knowledge or provide support in building needed background knowledge prior to using the model sentence.
- Provide sentence stems to allow students the opportunity to practice correct use of sentence skills and structure, working toward independence.
- Use student-friendly definitions when defining words.
- Provide specific prompting—for example, ask students “What do you notice about the author’s word choice or punctuation here?” rather than the more general “What do you notice?”
- When modeling how to notice use of conventions in a sentence, initially focus more on the function of the conventions (i.e., “What is the punctuation doing?”) rather than grammatical terms.
- Model the use of graphic organizers.
- Provide graphic organizers to help students organize their thinking.

Supporting Students With Learning Disabilities

The following suggestions are intended to serve as guidelines in support of students with learning disabilities in the classroom. It is important to accommodate instruction according to students' individualized education programs.

Create a safe environment in which students with learning disabilities can feel comfortable writing and sharing.

- Provide opportunities for meaningful discourse and interaction.
- Have students collaborate in small groups or pairs.
- Set a tone that it is OK to make mistakes.

Provide ample modeling and distributed practice.

- Provide explicit instruction and extensive modeling.
- Provide many opportunities to practice a strategy.
- Break down large ideas into smaller instructional concepts and steps.

Scaffold instruction.

- Focus on one point at a time. For example, when introducing how introductory words, phrases, and clauses are set off by a comma, model for students and have them practice imitating each separately. Refer to the wall charts provided for the grammar resources. Each of the bulleted guidelines could be modeled and practiced separately.
- Preteach or define in context potentially difficult words found in model sentences.
- Use model sentences that do not require extensive background knowledge or provide support in building needed background knowledge prior to using the model sentence.
- Use student-friendly definitions when defining words.
- Provide specific prompting—for example, ask students “What do you notice about the author’s word choice or punctuation here?” rather than the more general “What do you notice?”
- When modeling how to notice use of conventions in a sentence, initially focus more on the function of the conventions (i.e., “What is the punctuation doing?”) rather than grammatical terms.
- Provide support for the planning and organizing phase of writing (i.e., additional time, explicit instruction, use of graphic organizers).
- Explicitly instruct how to use graphic organizers and model their use.

Using Commas After Introductory Words, Phrases, and Clauses

Certain words, phrases, and clauses that come at the beginning of a sentence are almost always set off from the rest of the sentence by a comma. The comma tells readers where to pause for a moment to avoid confusion of meaning. The comma also indicates to the reader that the introductory part of the sentence is finished and the main part of the sentence (independent/main clause) is about to begin.

Correct comma usage:

After the rain stopped, thunder could be heard in the distance.

No comma:

After the rain stopped thunder could be heard in the distance.

A sentence pattern or frame can provide a visual scaffold to help students imitate and write sentences that begin with introductory word(s), phrases, or clauses.

	,		.
Introductory word(s), phrase, or clause		independent clause.	

Examples of Comma Usage With Introductory Words, Phrases, and Clauses

Note: This section includes some common examples that signal to a writer that a comma is usually needed after an introductory element. These examples are based on the ELAR TEKS for grades 6–8. This section does not represent all of the different types of introductory words, phrases, or clauses that may be included in your grade-level curricula materials.

Words, phrases, and clauses that function as adverbs are the most common type of introductory word groups used by writers. They usually tell when, where, how, why, or under what circumstances the action of the sentence occurs. The following examples include introductory word groups that function as adverbs as well as other parts of speech.

Introductory Words

Words such as adverbs or transitions are often used at the beginning of sentences to “link sentences and paragraphs together smoothly so there are no abrupt jumps or breaks between ideas” (ELAR TEKS Glossary, p. 28).

meanwhile, afterward, later, first, finally, generally, still, however, yet, next, furthermore, basically, yes, no, well, actually, eventually, now

Comma Usage with Introductory Word(s)

Set off the introductory word(s) with a comma to separate it from the rest of the sentence.

Reporters from all of the area newspapers interviewed the basketball coach. *Meanwhile*, photographers took pictures of the team practicing on the court.

Introductory Phrases

A phrase is a group of related words that function as a single part of speech. A phrase does not have a subject and a verb.

Prepositional Phrases

A preposition is a word that shows the relationship between a noun or pronoun and another word in the sentence. A prepositional phrase begins with a preposition (e.g., *about, as, in, on, of, to, with*) and ends with a noun or pronoun (may include modifiers). Prepositional phrases can function as adjectives that modify a noun or pronoun, or they can function as adverbs that modify a verb, adjective, or other adverb.

An introductory phrase may include more than one prepositional phrase. Place the comma at the end of the entire introductory phrase and before the independent clause begins.

On our walk in the woods, we saw a variety of birds.

Comma Usage with Introductory Prepositional Phrases

A comma is used after a prepositional phrase of four words or more.

After six hours on an airplane, I couldn't wait to walk around and explore the village.

The use of a comma varies for shorter phrases. A comma may be used if it helps to clarify the intended meaning of the sentence.

On the floor rugs of all sizes were on sale. (Meaning is unclear.)

On the floor, rugs of all sizes were on sale. (Comma helps to clarify meaning.)

Never place a comma after a phrase that is immediately followed by a verb.

Into the raging river plummeted the raft with its frightened occupants.

Comma Usage with Other Common Types of Introductory Phrases

Use a comma after an introductory participial phrase (verb ending with *-ing, -ed, -en* + object) that functions as an adjective or an adverb. A participial phrase may include a prepositional phrase.

Looking back on the experience, I learned a valuable lesson about friendship.

Use a comma after an introductory infinitive phrase (*to* + present-tense verb + object) that modifies a noun or a verb. An infinitive phrase may include a prepositional phrase.

To trick its enemies, the opossum lies completely still and appears to be dead.

Introductory Clauses

A clause is a group of words that has a subject and a predicate. A complex sentence includes “an independent clause and at least one dependent clause” (ELAR TEKS Glossary).

An independent clause is “a group of words containing a subject and a verb that can stand alone as a complete sentence; also called a main clause” (ELAR TEKS Glossary).

However, a subordinate (or dependent) clause cannot stand alone because it does not express a complete thought (even though it contains a subject and verb). In a sentence, a subordinate clause may be used as an adverb, an adjective, or a noun. It modifies the “main or independent clause to which it is joined” (ELAR TEKS Glossary).

Comma Usage with Introductory Adverb Clauses

A comma is used in complex sentences after an introductory subordinate (or dependent) clause that functions as an adverb. Adverb clauses begin with subordinating conjunctions.

after, although, as, when, while, until, because, before, if, since

Since it was raining, my family cancelled our picnic in the park.

Note: Some words—such as after, before, and until—can be used as both subordinating conjunctions and prepositions.

Teaching Grammar in Context: Sentence Workspace

Use the space below to complete the sentence activities.

Imitate

Imitate the following sentence.

When our class visits the city aquarium, I am reminded of my childhood vacations at the beach.

When _____,

I am reminded of _____.

Collect

Write sentences below that you collected from the readings that include a comma after introductory words, phrases, and clauses.

Write/Revise

Select one of the three quick writes that you drafted. Revise your quick write by adding the targeted grammatical point to one of your sentences, or you may add a new sentence that begins with an introductory word, phrase, or clause.

The demand for big houses declined even while the new home builders were madly adding more square feet.

Now there are no longer children on our street, although adult kids are still living in two of the homes.

Break Apart/Combine

Break apart the model sentence into three sentences.

When the weather was nice, the two women would drink their aunt's peach tea and sit in the garden having long, meandering conversations.

Break Apart/Combine

Combine the following sentences into one sentence.

Some people argue that pets are a waste of time and money.

Pets can actually alleviate stress.

Pets can increase the longevity of their owners.