ELA Virtual Learning

Creative Writing

April 27, 2020

Creative Writing
Lesson: Mon., April 27

Objective/Learning Target: Students will implement varied sentence structures in their own writing.

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Warm-up / Review: On April 10, we practiced combining simple sentences to make more complex ones. If you missed it, check out that video, or as a warm-up, review the slides and try the example about the Kansas City Chiefs.

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Lesson (1/5): We know that combining sentences can make our writing more fluid (and readable). Today, let's focus on varying the *structures* of our sentences to avoid redundancy (or repetition). This is what students often refer to as the "flow" of the writing. It sounds good to our ear, but we often have a difficult time understanding how to achieve that effect.

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Lesson (2/5): In his collection of essays, *The Art of Fiction*, John Gardner shows us that, in English, sentences "tend to fall into meaning units or syntactic slots—for instance, such patterns as:

1	**2**	**3**
subject	verb	object,

	1	**2**
or	subject	verb-modifier

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Lesson (3/5): "Where variety is lacking, sentences can all run to the same length, carry over and over the same old rhythms, and have the same boring structure. Subject-verb, subject-verb, subject-verb-object, subject-verb."

Lesson (4/5): For example (mine):

Harry went to the drugstore. He went inside. The cold medicine sat on the shelf. Harry slid it in his pocket.

Subject-verb, subject-verb, subject-verb-object, subject-verb.

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Lesson (5/5): Gardner advises "loading up" one or maybe two of those syntactic slots *in each sentence* with details. However, he issues a warning as well: "if the sentence is to have focus—that is, if the reader is to be able to make out some clear image...the writer cannot cram all three syntactic slots."

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Practice: Choose a short passage from your own writing, or pick mine from the previous slide, and "load up" 1-2 of the syntactic slots of each sentence to add variety and make the image clearer.

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Model: With the few wadded dollars and the list his mother had pressed into his hand, Harry walked alone to the drugstore. He shuffled his feet across the hard gray mat as he went inside, nodding to the cashier who was too busy to glance up from another customer. The cold medicine sat on the shelf in clear view of the pharmacist's register had anyone been standing there. Harry removed it from the shelf, then slid the box awkwardly into his pocket.

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Review: In the first sentence, I loaded up the first syntactic slot (leading up to the subject). In the second sentence, I added details to the first and third. Then, in the next two sentences, I went back to loading only one slot.

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Review: Remember, you want to maintain focus on what's important. Is the cashier or the customer critical? Maybe, but only insofar as Harry's concerned with them noticing him. If we had gone into great detail about their clothing or hair, the writing would lose focus and, according to Gardner, energy.

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Additional Practice: Try another sentence! Here's one from *The Art of Fiction* with Gardner's examples in the following slides:

The man walked down the road.

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Model (Gardner): *syntactic slot 1 loaded with detail*

The old man, stooped, bent almost double under his load of tin pans, yet smiling with a sort of maniacal good cheer and chattering to himself in what seemed to be Slavonian, walked slowly down the road.

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Model (Gardner): *syntactic slot 2 loaded with detail*

The old man walked slowly, lifting his feet carefully, sometimes kicking one shoe forward in what looked like a dance, then slamming the foot before the sole could flop loose again, grinning when it worked, muttering to himself, making no real progress down the road.

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Additional Resources/Practice:

Purdue Owl on Sentence Variety

"Common Errors," from *The Art of Fiction* by John Gardner.
    (see pp. 104-106)