Sentences and Grammar

Knowledge and Understanding

The appropriate use of different sentence types will add an extra dimension to your pupils writing and its effectiveness. Yet there are no set rules on the number of sentence types to include in a piece of writing. Therefore, it is important that you are secure in your knowledge of different sentence types so that you can recognise when your pupils are using them in their writing successfully. You do need to realise when their inclusion within each child’s work can be improved.

SIMPLE SENTENCES

A simple sentence has one verb and a subject. It only has one clause.

Example 1: ‘The teacher walked to school.’ The teacher is the subject in the sentence and the verb is walked.

Example 2: ‘The teacher walked.’ This is also a simple sentence even though it is even shorter.

Example 3: ‘The cheerful teacher walked to the local primary school.’ This is still a simple sentence as it still only has one verb, a subject and therefore only one clause.

The appropriate use of different sentence types will add an extra dimension to writing. Therefore, it is important that you are secure in your knowledge of different sentence types to include in a piece of writing.

PURPOSE OF A SIMPLE SENTENCE

A simple sentence can make writing more effective in two ways:

• It can make its meaning clear;
  When you have lots of information to get across to the reader, it can help to break it down into shorter sentences for clarity. This is particularly useful for non-fiction writing including instructions and explanatory texts.

• It can help to build up suspense;
  When you are aiming to create tension in your writing, the use of simple sentences can assist: ‘Joe stopped. The footsteps continued. His heart pounded. Still, the footsteps continued. Joe waited. The footsteps were close now.’

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

Pupils sometimes classify simple sentences according to their length. This works well when it is a very short sentence. However, when the sentence is longer, they can fail to see that it is still a simple sentence. Be very clear in your teaching input/revision that the characteristics of a simple sentence are its verb and subject. Always provide a variety of sentence lengths for discussion which are simple sentences. Continually revisit simple sentences in quick-fire quizzes to remind children about their characteristics. Hopefully, these learning opportunities will allay such misconceptions.

COMPOUND SENTENCES

A compound sentence has two main or independent clauses which are joined together using a conjunction. If you took the conjunction out of the middle of the sentence, you would be able to make two simple sentences from the two clauses. Each sentence would make sense on its own.

The conjunctions which are used to join the sentences together are called co-ordinating conjunctions. A mnemonic which helps you to remember these are:

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<tr>
<th>And</th>
<th>For</th>
<th>So</th>
<th>Nor</th>
<th>Yet</th>
<th>Or</th>
<th>But</th>
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<td>A</td>
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PURPOSE OF A COMPOUND SENTENCE

It is often appropriate to include some compound sentences in your writing as they can give further information about a subject, idea or thought.

However, they often do not engage the reader as fully as other sentence types. You may find that they are more useful when writing non-fiction texts.

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS OF COMPOUND SENTENCES

When pupils first start to learn about longer sentences, they often rely on the coordinating conjunction ‘and’ to join their sentences together. Sometimes, they overuse the word and it actually decreases the quality of their writing. If a pupil in your class starts to do this, try and rectify it with them at the earliest opportunity. Then, it won’t become a tricky habit for them to break.

COMPLEX SENTENCES

A complex sentence is made up of two or more clauses. One of the clauses in the sentence is the main or independent clause and the other clause(s) are the dependent or subordinating clause(s). A dependent (or subordinating clause) does not make sense on its own – it needs the main clause with it to be understood.

Subordinating conjunctions are used at the beginning of dependent (subordinating) clauses. These include:

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<th>after</th>
<th>although</th>
<th>as</th>
<th>because</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>before</td>
<td>if</td>
<td>since</td>
<td>until</td>
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<td>when</td>
<td>whereas</td>
<td>while</td>
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</table>

PURPOSE OF A COMPLEX SENTENCE

Complex sentences make your writing effective. This is because the different clauses in the sentence relate to one another which makes them more interesting to read. The inclusion of subordinating conjunctions mean that the links between the clauses are more powerful than the more simplistic use of ‘and’ in compound sentences.

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS OF COMPLEX SENTENCES

The common misconceptions here relate to the use of commas. When children are learning about complex sentences, do teach them explicitly about the use of such punctuation in sentences. When the main clause is at the beginning of a sentence there is no need for a comma to separate it from the following subordinate clause. However, when the subordinate clause starts the sentence, there should be a comma before the main clause follows on.

PERIODIC SENTENCES

This is when a complex sentence starts with a subordinating clause and ends with a main clause. These can be especially useful in fiction writing as it means that the dependent clause can build up suspense before the independent clause finishes the message being given.

EXAMPLES

Here the independent clause is at the beginning of a complex sentence:

• Jeremy waited for his dinner while the chef prepared it.

Here the dependent clause is at the beginning of a complex sentence:

• While the chef prepared it, Jeremy waited for his dinner.
Captivating Your Class

There are many ways in which you can introduce/revisit the teaching and learning of different sentence types. You can create your own short PowerPoint presentations which demonstrate the different sentences. In fact, if you look online someone may have already created one which you can then modify according to your class’s interests. Children, using individual whiteboards, can then use these sentences as a basis for their understanding and to try out their ideas during whole class teaching and learning. However, you can also:

- Show your class a visual text such as a picture of something that appeals to them (it could be: a supercar, a sports activity, an animal or a pop group. Ask them to describe it in sentences and then classify the sentences into types. Then, give them a picture of their own and ask them to annotate it with certain sentence types. You can then revisit this activity as a revision activity with different pictures and set a time limit for writing a certain sentence type.
- Undertake the activity above but this time use a short film, animation or extract from a cartoon. When you show the class the film for the first time, just let them watch it and enjoy it. Then, they will be able to focus on writing certain sentence types to do with it. Do model an example of each sentence on the board before you start.
- Give each small group of children a picture which has been stuck onto a large sheet of sugar paper. Choose a sentence type to focus on. Ask each group to write sentences to describe the picture and then rotate the groups around the classroom. Alternatively, put different pictures around the classroom and ask the children to write sentences about the picture and then classify the sentences into types. Depending on the size of your classroom and the number of pupils, you could put the sentence types around the room and read out a sentence and then the pupils move to the sentence type you have read. Alternatively, choose ‘representatives’ to move around the room and swap them with each other to allow everyone to have a turn.

Cross Curricular Chances

There are ways in which you can incorporate learning and practice about sentence types into other lessons.

- In your guided reading sessions, identify different sentence types in your reading and discuss the impact that they have on the text.
- When you introduce a new topic or new information about the topic, ask children to find an example of each sentence type.
- Which is your favourite? Read out/display three sentence types related to the same topic which you are learning. Ask the children to choose which their favourite sentence is and explain why. Allow time for them to discuss their ideas. When children are writing in a subject across the curriculum, encourage them to include certain sentence types. Alternatively, in your plenary, ask the children to identify the number of particular sentence types in their writing.

Try it Out…at School

SIMPLE SENTENCES

Here are the SPaG Gang.

Underneath each picture write a simple sentence to describe what the different characters. For example, The girl has a red mask.

1. Sydney ate his meal...
2. Sydney laughed at the joke...
3. Sydney smiled at Pig...
4. Sydney looked down...
5. Sydney sang the song...

Complete these compound sentences by adding a conjunction and another main clause. For example, Sydney finished his meal... and asked to leave the table.

1. Sydney ate his meal... and asked to leave the table.
2. Sydney laughed at the joke... and asked to leave the table.
3. Sydney smiled at Pig... and asked to leave the table.
4. Sydney looked down... and asked to leave the table.
5. Sydney sang the song... and asked to leave the table.

Complete these complex sentences by adding a dependent clause.

1. Pig played the piano while...
2. Snake danced merrily as...
3. Goat smiled nervously when...
4. Pig found a good hiding place while...
5. Goat practised tai chi while...