

# Composition

TWO

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

TEACHER'S EDITION

C O M P O S I T I O N I I



T E A C H E R ' S E D I T I O N

# C O M P O S I T I O N   I I

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A N A L Y S I S   A N D   I N T E R P R E T A T I O N

**T E A C H E R ' S   E D I T I O N**

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# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	7	UNIT VI: INCORPORATE YOUR RESEARCH	
UNIT I: FIND YOUR VOICE		Overview .....	234
Overview .....	9	Outline .....	234
Outline .....	10	Ways to Help Students .....	235
Ways to Help Students .....	10	Student Pages with Margin Notes for Lessons 56–63 .....	238
Student Pages with Margin Notes for Lessons 1–9 .....	13	UNIT VII: WRITE BEYOND THE ESSAY	
UNIT II: RESPECT OTHERS' VOICES		Overview .....	270
Overview .....	49	Outline .....	270
Outline .....	49	Ways to Help Students .....	271
Ways to Help Students .....	50	Student Pages with Margin Notes for Lessons 64–80 .....	273
Student Pages with Margin Notes for Lessons 10–21 .....	52	LESSON SCHEDULES.....	345
UNIT III: REVIEW TEXTS		GRADING RUBRICS.....	354
Overview .....	103	ABOUT THE AUTHORS.....	360
Outline .....	103		
Ways to Help Students .....	104		
Student Pages with Margin Notes for Lessons 22–32 .....	105		
UNIT IV: WRITE A PERSUASIVE ESSAY			
Overview .....	145		
Outline .....	145		
Ways to Help Students .....	146		
Student Pages with Margin Notes for Lessons 33–47 .....	147		
UNIT V: GET TO KNOW THE RESEARCH			
Overview .....	201		
Outline .....	201		
Ways to Help Students .....	202		
Student Pages with Margin Notes for Lessons 48–55 .....	203		

## INTRODUCTION

What if skilled journalists, writers, professors, and teachers collaborated on a writing program? What if the resources of WORLD News Group and Veritas Press joined forces? They would produce the text before you.

Learning to write well is integral to a student's education. It's also one of the most challenging lessons students face. Training young writers takes time, practice, conversation, patience, and encouragement.

Learning to write well is only one of our goals, though. We also want students to *enjoy* writing. Reaching this goal will depend as much on quality teaching as on students' progress. Parents and teachers play a pivotal role in fostering this love of writing.

Too many young writers learn the opposite lesson—to dislike writing. They hear that writing is more about mechanics than message. They learn a great deal about rules but little about how to make writing come to life. They work page after page of exercises but don't learn how to apply their skills outside class.

*Composition* takes a different approach. It shows students many examples of effective writing, most from published authors. It gives students opportunities to practice their skills with purpose. Its assignments are developmental and thought-provoking. *Composition* provides students both helpful feedback and careful evaluations. It helps shore up their weakness so their strengths can soar.

*Composition* encourages students to love writing, and it trains them to write well. It prepares them to share their ideas—in fiction and nonfiction, stories and essays. It equips them to write with skill and passion in the service of both God and neighbor. *Composition* is the writing program none of us had in middle school but wish we had.

## DISTINCTIVES

### **Students benefit from a writing community**

Students need regular conversation with a community of teachers and writers. *Composition* provides this conversation. Every unit offers relevant advice and commentary. Most of it comes from published journalists, essayists, and educators. Writing teachers design units' lessons and offer teaching insights from their experience.

### **Students experience the curriculum as a living conversation**

Mediocre assignment prompts produce dull writing and disheartened writers. *Composition* gives students assignments that inspire quality writing. Assignments emphasize purpose, plans, message, and audience. They arise from time-tested literature, modern research, and today's headlines.

### **Students select from assignment options in many lessons**

Some lessons in *Composition* focus on developing basic skills. Other lessons build up to major writing assignments. Most of those lessons offer students assignment options.

Even in the best writing programs, some assignment prompts cause writer's block. When this happens, students and teachers need flexibility and options. Assignment flexibility helps

writers push through a slump. It inclines students to take ownership of options they've chosen, too.

### **Students become stronger writers when they learn to think critically**

Readers and writers need to consider their sources of information with great care. How credible are they? How likely are their claims to be true? The Information Age requires us all to be oh-so diligent. Students must be on guard against subtle deceptions and overt fabrications, of course. They also need to understand their own biases and irrationalities.

*Composition* equips students not to be deceived by sources that make unchecked claims. Only one source, the Bible, can justifiably claim not to lead us astray. All other sources are susceptible to bias, error, and deceit.

### **Students examine model writing to improve their own skills and style**

Students need more than grammar rules and style rubrics to write well. Checking off lists of elements to include in their writing will take them only so far. They need to see models of writing, both strong and weak and from various genres. Strong examples give them patterns to imitate; weak examples, patterns to avoid.

### **Students learn to read and write through the lens of a worldview**

Does God exist? What's really *real*? What's truth? How do we *know* what we *believe* we know? What's the difference between good and evil, and should we care? All writers—all people—make basic assumptions about these worldview questions.

Our worldview influences all our writing, from choice of topic to the conclusions we draw. Writers who view life as a gift from God will write one way. Those who believe life to be an accident with no ultimate purpose will write another.

*Composition* trains students to be discerning readers, to look for writers' "worldview clues." *Composition* helps students express their own voice and worldview, too. We want students to take part in the ongoing dialogue about life's most important matters. We want them to speak with words "full of grace, seasoned with salt." We want to prepare students to "know how to answer everyone" (Colossians 4:6).

## UNIT I

### OVERVIEW

“How are you?” We ask the question of family, friends, and acquaintances. We want to know how they’re doing, how life’s going for them. *How* we ask the question is as significant as *that* we’ve asked the question. Are we asking in a perfunctory way, like when greeting the cashier at a grocery checkout? Or do we ask with concern in our voice as we place a hand on a grieving friend’s shoulder? Before we ask how someone is, we consider whom we’re speaking to and what the situation is.

Those same considerations apply to writing. Before pens hit paper (or fingers hit keyboards), we need to envision our audience. Who will be reading this paper, this blog, or this report? What will the occasion be? Will I be trying more to inform readers or to persuade them, get them to think or to act? Answers to these questions will shape both the language we use and how we deliver it.

We begin our lessons focusing on ways to write for any audience without losing our voice. Students gather tools to communicate their content, whatever it is, with personality. These early lessons should become a reference for them. They discover concrete ways to express their ideas. We want them to experiment with rhetorical devices, as well. We want them to discover new ways of reaching an audience.

Middle-school students tend to fit into one of two writing categories: the rebel or the robot. “Why can’t I just write how I speak?” rebel writers complain. They resist the notion of adjusting their voice for an audience. Shouldn’t their audience accept them as they are? Rebel writers don’t realize that such an attitude limits their reach. The better we adapt our voice to an audience, the wider the audience we’ll reach.

Other students, the well-meaning robots, aim to write with the exact voice they’ve been taught. They avoid risks by trying to write like others they’ve read. The more they attempt to sound “correct,” the more robotic they come across. These students need time, space, and encouragement/prodding to be adventuresome. Readers won’t listen to someone who sounds like everyone else. They won’t read on, either, if they can’t connect with the writer. Who wants to engage with a personality-less android?

Unit I introduces students to the idea of shaping their voices to an audience and an occasion. They learn that “Show don’t tell” should become their writing style’s guiding principle. Some teachers reserve the phrase for fiction and informal writing. Unit I’s lessons will show students that the phrase applies to all types of writing.

Toward the end of the unit, we ask students to write a blog post. This may seem a rather informal assignment for a typical composition text. It is, but our aim is to meet students where they are. They come into this course more comfortable with informal writing than with formal. We meet students where they are, and then we challenge them to step outside what’s comfortable. We challenge them to grow.

## OUTLINE

### **Lesson 1: Audience**

This lesson introduces students to the idea of audience. They learn to distinguish between formal and informal writing. They consider the best language to use. At the end of the lesson, they practice writing to different audiences.

### **Lessons 2–6: Show-Don't-Tell Tools**

Students learn and practice ways to enhance content to engage readers. Students begin on the word level. They learn the value of concrete nouns and vibrant verbs. Lessons work their way to the use of rhetorical devices. We challenge students to use rhetorical devices they've observed in great writers. In lessons 5 and 6, students begin a personal-topic writing assignment. This becomes the foundation for their blog post.

### **Lessons 7 & 8: The Blog**

These lessons introduce blogs and prepare students to write their own blog article. Students review three blog types: personal, how-to, and hobby/fan. First, students organize their ideas. Then they use a template to guide their writing process. By the end of lesson 8, students see how the template works in an example how-to blog article.

### **Lesson 9: Revise and Rewrite**

Students will see “revise and rewrite” lessons throughout the textbook. This first one explains what it means. We emphasize four areas for revision: content, organization, style, and mechanics. This lesson has a revise-and-rewrite checklist for their blog post. It also has an example article with color-coded revisions. The color code shows students what changes the writer made.

## WAYS TO HELP STUDENTS

### **Review Basic Grammar**

Students should understand what simple subjects, simple predicates, phrases, and clauses are. If they don't, they should review them.<sup>1</sup> Often, students can identify these on a worksheet, but not in their own writing. The unit may use grammar terms students don't know, but lessons will give clear examples.

Before each lesson, review its grammatical terms and give students a quick check-up. Doing so will relieve some term anxiety while covering the lesson. Regular check-ups will also emphasize that grammar isn't isolated. We don't study grammar for the sake of grammar. We study it to enable better communication.

### **Encourage Outside Reading**

Better readers make better writers.<sup>2</sup> When we read good material, we're seeing models of how to write well. Students read outside their composition class, whether for other classes or for

<sup>1</sup> Veritas Press offers materials that teach these concepts. See <https://vpress.us/32iOdo> for information.

<sup>2</sup> Here's an interesting article that elaborates on the idea: [http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/classroom\\_qa\\_with\\_larry\\_ferlazzo/2020/01/writing\\_directly\\_benefits\\_students\\_reading\\_skills.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/classroom_qa_with_larry_ferlazzo/2020/01/writing_directly_benefits_students_reading_skills.html).

pleasure. Encourage them to look for examples of what's discussed in composition. Invite them to share with you what they find.

Students will notice what some authors do well. They'll see concrete nouns or effective similes. Challenge them to pay attention to the smallest details. Where does George Orwell put his commas and why there? Does he use only simple sentences or compound and complex sentences, too? Students' observations will promote fruitful dialogue about different writing styles. They'll even discover that the best writers are (occasional) rule breakers. Allow students to critique poor writing, as well as celebrate great writing.

### **Establish the Expectation of Revision**

Do a quick Internet search for what famous authors say about writing. Most often, they talk about writing and rewriting, over and over. Writing, that is, is a process—most of it, decluttering and clarifying. The thought of revising something they've worked hard to create can be daunting for students. Conscientious/perfectionistic students will question whether their work's *ever* finished. Struggling students may experience the revising process as a slow death. Both sorts of student need to understand a balance.

Our goal for middle-school revision is to grow as writers. It's not to become Pulitzer Prize-winners. As in all areas of life, writing comes more naturally to some than to others. Revision, though, is less inborn, more inculcated. All levels of writer need it. When students submit a final copy of an assignment, it should be much better than its first draft.

### **Provide Specific Feedback**

Writers need helpful feedback—younger writers, especially. Below are guidelines for the kind of feedback students need:

- *Be specific.* If you like a sentence, circle it and explain why. Not “Good job!” but “Great use of concrete nouns in this sentence!” If you see a grammatical error, circle it and state the problem. “This is a comma splice. How can you correct it?” Specific comments show students a path to improvement.
- *Ask questions.* Instead of making corrections, ask students questions. If a particular kind of mistake shows up repeatedly, correct it the first time. Next time you see it, tell students to refer to your earlier comment. “I corrected a sentence fragment in your introduction. How can you fix this one?”
- *Balance concerns with kudos.* It's easy to point out what students do wrong. We may have good intentions, but a constructive-critical focus can be counterproductive. Students may focus on their poor writing, not on the writing we want them to model. This doesn't mean teachers should soften or avoid constructive-critical feedback. Students won't grow as writers without it.
- Still, we want them to build on what they're doing well. Look for areas of success as much as for areas of struggle. Limit how much you critique a paper, especially for struggling writers. Focus first on major obstacles impeding student progress. Don't emphasize a missing comma when a student struggles to write a complete sentence. For the unit's writing assignment, we'll provide a checklist to help prioritize issues.

- *Assess their best work.* Before assessing an entire paper, make sure it's been thoroughly revised. Units build in plenty of checklist-guided opportunities for revision. Remind students that your eyes should never be the first pair to review their papers. Encourage them to get feedback from peers and other adults. We don't want to have to comment on mistakes that should've been caught.
- *Don't comment on everything.* You read that right. We don't need to comment on, or even read, everything students write. This is especially true of their prewriting. (Of course, students will need guidance to organize and begin their writing.) Our time is better invested giving them feedback on more developed work. Students' first complete draft is where to give them the most feedback.
- *Verbal feedback counts.* Feedback doesn't have to be in writing. Working one-on-one with students, feel free to talk through their papers. In a larger setting, make teacher-student conferences part of the class routine. We'll have more to say about these in a later unit.

## STUDENT PAGES WITH MARGIN NOTES FOR LESSONS 1–9

## U N I T I

## FIND YOUR VOICE

## LESSON 1

## UNDERSTAND YOUR AUDIENCE

If you're part of an audience, then you're anticipating something. You expect to see, hear, or otherwise experience an event. Football fans expect to see tackles and touchdowns. Moviegoers expect to see famous faces and special effects.



A reading audience is no less an audience. Readers expect an experience, so writers need to remember whom they're addressing. Writers need to consider how they want their readers to react. Your essay, blog, article, or poem is a stage. Make sure your writing is ready to go—skillful and engaging—before raising the curtain.

When considering how you should relate to your audience, try this. Think of how you would dress for a particular occasion. Can you imagine showing up to a bonfire in a tuxedo or a ball gown? You'd be awkwardly conspicuous among the flannel shirts and jeans. You'd be as conspicuous wearing cutoffs and flip-flops to a black-tie affair. Give some thought to this analogy before you compose any sort of writing. Who is the audience, and what's the occasion? Are you expected to dress up or dress down?

How you relate to the audience, what you show up wearing, depends on what you're writing. The following chart shows examples of formal and informal writing assignments.

FORMAL	INFORMAL
research paper	journal
abstract	personal narrative
persuasive essay	blog
literary analysis	personal letters
book report	reaction papers

1a



1a

**Some students won't understand** that we should dress to fit an occasion. Nor will they understand that writing should suit the audience and the occasion. Some feel that they should dress and write in the way most comfortable for them. They forget, or haven't been taught, that we (dress and) write for others as much as for ourselves. That is, when our (attire and) words suit the occasion, we show our audience respect. The opposite is also true.

## 2 COMPOSITION II

Certain characteristics distinguish formal from informal writing. **Point of view** is one of them. Which of three perspectives should we write from: mine/ours; yours; or his/hers/its/theirs? Authors need to consider their audience before choosing the appropriate point of view.

Grammarians call these three points of view the first, second, and third persons. The chart below shows the pronouns we use for each point of view.

## POINTS OF VIEW

FIRST PERSON	SECOND PERSON	THIRD PERSON
<i>Singular:</i> I, my, mine, me, myself <i>Plural:</i> we, our, ours, us, ourselves	<i>Singular/plural:</i> you, your, yours, you, yourself (singular), yourselves (plural)	<i>Singular:</i> he/she/it; his/her/its; his/hers/its; <sup>†</sup> him/her/it; himself/herself/itself <i>Plural:</i> they, their, theirs, them, themselves

\* Yes, this *you* is identical to the first *you* in the list. We duplicate it here only for chart consistency.

† Most grammarians would consider this use of *its* ungrammatical. We'd say, "The book is hers" or "The book is his." If the book belongs to the library, though, we'd rarely or never say, "The book is its."

For this *Composition II* text, for example, *we're* writing to *you*, the student. We want to be conversational, addressing you as though sitting in your living room. We ask, "What do you think?" instead of "What does Chuck think?" You answer, "I'm not sure," instead of "Chuck isn't sure." (Referring to yourself by name sounds comedic in most settings.) Often in this text, we'll use *we/us/our* when talking about perspectives or experiences we share.

Another characteristic that distinguishes formal from informal writing is intended objectivity. Formal writing requires authors to write as objectively as possible. They refrain from tossing in their opinions as though they were fact. They also refrain from addressing readers directly. These writers want readers to focus on their evidence, research, or other content. Formal writing says, "Evidence suggests that..." It avoids saying, "You will see how the data prove my point." That would be wearing a bathing suit to a ball.

Some authors choose to use the first-person point of view in formal writing. This may be at odds with what previous writing teachers taught you. They may have discouraged the use of "I" and "we" pronouns (and their other grammatical forms). Those instructors' advice was sound.

A writer's "right" to use the first person grows with his or her knowledge and writing experience. Say you're a research scientist who has collected her own data or conducted an original study. In that case, you should use the first person. You should also pair your first-person pronouns with vivid verbs and precise details. You might write, for example, "I collected 183 surveys over a 28-day period." The word *collect* shows readers a clear action. They imagine that you distributed and then gathered the surveys, filing them for later use.

Now imagine writing something vague, like this: "I'm pretty sure there were more than 180 surveys during the month." Readers struggle to imagine anything specific. Who conducted the survey? Did anyone collect the results, and if so, who? How long is a month: 28, 29, 30, or 31 days? With so vague a statement, readers may question the reliability of your results.

1b



1b

**We introduce the scientific voice here**, but unit VII discusses it in detail. Students often wonder how they can be personal or give their opinion without the use of "I." Ask them to give an opinion about ice cream. "I love strawberry ice cream," one might say. Then, show them how this can be reframed into an "I"-less opinion. "There's nothing like sweet and creamy strawberry ice cream on a hot summer day." Both statements convey the speaker's opinion.

Formal writing requires writers to pay attention to style also. Young writers often believe they must sacrifice creativity for formality. But that's not true, and your teachers don't want to read dry essays. Formal writing deserves as much style as a poem.

One aspect of writing style is knowing which language practices to use and which to avoid. Dads don't speak to their colleagues at work as though they were five-year-old children. Formal writing doesn't speak like informal writing, either. Formal writing avoids the following:

- contractions (can't, don't, wasn't...)
- idioms and clichés (such as “raining cats and dogs” and “fish out of water”)
- colloquial language (e.g., gonna, y'all, wanna)
- loaded language (horribly, outrageous measures, always/never...)
- slang (such as ROTFL, deal with, idk)
- conjunctions as sentence starters (e.g., “And then Mr. Crimini said something funny.”)

With this talk of formality, objectivity, and evidence, let's dispel a suspicion you may have. Formal writing does not mean writing like a robot. Teachers want to hear your voice and opinion. Still, you need to respect the distance between you and your reader.

Expressing an opinion in formal writing doesn't require the use of “I.” You may want to write, “I believe eating chocolate reduces stress.” What you *should* write omits the “I believe.” Your opinion, that eating chocolate reduces stress, remains clear. Now all you need to do is find the evidence that supports your claim. (Please say there's evidence!)

### ASSIGNMENT

#### ACTIVITY 1

You want to be the next class president at school. Write three versions of the first paragraph of your campaign speech. You'll “dress” each version for a specific audience: peers, teachers, and administrators.<sup>1</sup>

#### ACTIVITY 2

Choose a book, article, or any other kind of interesting writing. Find something with a single author. Answer the following questions about the writing:

1. Who is the author? What's the name of the book (article, blog post, etc.)?
2. What type of writing did you choose (e.g., fiction, nonfiction, comic book, magazine article)?
3. How does the work start? How does the author try to engage you?
4. Whom is the author trying to reach? Who is the intended audience?

<sup>1</sup> If schooled at home, you can still imagine you're writing for a handful of teachers and a few administrators.

**Remind students** that these are three versions of *the first paragraph only*. For greater emphasis, have students read their paragraphs aloud. Call their attention to how their tone changes with each version.

5. How would you describe the author's voice? To answer that, imagine what the author's personality might be like and try to describe it. What would he or she be like if you met in person?

### ACTIVITY 3

Let's take another look at the writing you chose for activity 2. What would the author need to change to address a different—and unexpected—audience? Would vocabulary need to change? Would sentences need to shorten or lengthen? Would serious writing need to take on some humor or vice versa? Pretend, for example, you chose a *Sports Illustrated* article about NBA playoff games. How would the writer need to change the content or voice to address middle-school girls? How could a scientist change an article about artificial intelligence to address musicians? In a paragraph, do this:

- Choose a new audience for the writing you read for activity 2.
- Explain why that audience would be “unexpected.” Why is that audience not a typical audience for the writing you chose?
- Summarize changes the writer would need to make to address the new audience.

## LESSON 2

### SHOW DON'T TELL WITH CONCRETE NOUNS



Which young children don't enjoy show-and-tell? Little Johnny uncovers a cage to show the class his pet iguana. Little Jane places

her gymnastics medal around her neck. Their classmates ooh and aah. They pet the iguana and examine the engravings on the medal.

Now imagine a different scene. Little Billy stands in front of the class to share definitions of *courage* he found in a few dictionaries. Not to be outdone, little Donna volunteers to share her own definition of *poverty*. The kids in the class squirm on their carpet squares, and the teacher looks for a way to end the show-and-tell. Little Billy and little Donna failed to show their classmates what they wanted to share. They told, but they didn't show.

1d



1d

**You may need to brainstorm** here with the students. Whatever writing they chose, it's likely they chose it because they're interested in the topic. They may find it difficult to imagine someone who doesn't share their interest. For that reason, ensure that they're not offensive in their portrayal of a different audience.

Like an effective show-and-tell, effective writing paints a picture in our readers' minds. We can discuss abstract ideas, but we make them understandable by appealing to the senses. If Billy wants to talk about courage, he needs to paint an illustration in our imaginations. He should aim to activate our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and touch.

Let's look at an example from novelist and short-story writer Flannery O'Connor. She begins her short story "The River" by showing us an unhappy child named Bevel. Rather than tell us he's miserable, O'Connor paints a picture: "The child stood glum and limp in the middle of the dark living room while his father pulled him into a plaid coat."<sup>1</sup> You can see the downcast little boy's facial expression and body language. You feel the weight of the jacket on his back and the gloominess of the room around him.



O'Connor goes on to describe how "his right arm was hung in the sleeve but the father buttoned the coat anyway and pushed him forward toward a pale spotted hand that stuck through the half-open door."<sup>2</sup> The writer doesn't have to tell us the boy resents the suit coat and his destination. We can almost touch the nouns she uses. The plaid of Bevel's coat reminds us of a thrift-store special, and we can feel the twisted sleeve around his arm. O'Connor sharpens the image by describing the hand that holds the door. We imagine the "pale spotted hand" reaching out toward Bevel, and we feel his reluctance to leave the house.

For our writing to show, not tell, we need to use concrete nouns and vivid verbs. We learned how to write this way in elementary school. What did Fido the dog do? Fido ran. How does a bunny move? A bunny hops. Three-word sentences work in first grade, but we don't want to fill an essay with them. Our readers will feel like they're bumping down a stairway.

As we grow up, our thinking becomes more abstract. We may think about running dogs and hopping bunnies, but we also think about courage and poverty. The more abstract our thoughts become, the less attention we tend to pay to sensory details. This is unfortunate because these

2a



<sup>1</sup> Flannery O'Connor, "The River," in *A Good Man Is Hard to Find and Other Stories* (New York: Harcourt, 1976), 25.

<sup>2</sup> O'Connor, 25.

2a

**Make sure students understand** these terms by reviewing some basic grammar. It's helpful to emphasize that nouns and verbs are a sentence's basic building blocks. A "sentence" isn't a sentence without a noun (or pronoun) and a verb. Consider having students find several sentences' simple subject and simple predicate. The simple subject is the basic who or what the sentence is about. The simple predicate is what's being said about the subject.

details help us grasp and describe abstract ideas. How can we keep the description of our ideas more concrete, then?

Start by focusing on the subjects of your sentences. Ask yourself who the subjects are and what they're doing. Joseph Williams and Joseph Bizup suggest writers view their sentences' subjects as characters. They challenge you to "make the subjects of most of your verbs the main characters in your story."<sup>3</sup> Concrete nouns make strong main characters.

You've known for years what a noun is. When you hear the word, you think person, place, thing, or idea. We think of nouns as the easiest part of speech to understand and master. We learn how to use them in elementary school, and then we should grow up. Sophisticated writers depend on elaborate adjectives and long verb phrases, right? If you're shaking your head no, good call. Great writers make their nouns and verbs the stars of their sentences.



Think of a concrete noun as a noun with skin on. You can grab a handful of sunflowers, but you can't grab a handful of self-righteousness. In His parables, Jesus uses concrete images to convey abstract ideas. He commands us not to judge others' souls, but He illustrates the idea with a speck and a plank.<sup>4</sup> When He describes the kingdom of heaven, He compares it to the growth of a mustard seed.<sup>5</sup> Jesus knew His audience understood the language of woodworking and farming. He chose images that people understood. As Jesus did, we need to consider our audience. We need to think of words and images they can understand and appreciate.

Before you start writing, whatever you're writing, create a word bank of concrete nouns and images. The following chart shows a word bank for a persuasive essay about the benefits of caffeine. We intended the words to resonate with our target audience: tired, overworked

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Williams and Joseph Bizup, *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace* (Boston: Pearson Education, 2017), 47.

<sup>4</sup> See Matt. 7:1-5.

<sup>5</sup> See Matt. 13:31, 32.

students. You might be able to relate. We listed caffeine-related nouns for people, places, and images. You could create your own categories, of course.

#### CAFFEINE WORD BANK

PEOPLE	PLACES	IMAGES
teens	coffee shop	soda
college students	Starbucks	chocolate
high school students	Dunkin'	coffee beans
barista	kitchen	tea
researchers	school	bleary eyes
doctors	sports	energy
parents	home	sleep
teachers	convenience store	coffeemaker
	cafeteria	French press
		aroma
		steam
		energy drinks
		migraines
		Keurig
		deadlines

As you look at this chart, you start to think of actions. The barista brews the coffee. A high school student rubs his bleary eyes. Steam rises from a cup of Earl Grey. You note that where there's a concrete noun, a vivid verb is sure to follow.

#### ASSIGNMENT

##### ACTIVITY 1

Choose a topic of interest to you. Pretend you're writing a letter, blog entry, essay, or speech to the audience of your choice. Create a word bank of concrete nouns like the example in the lesson.

#### TOPIC

CATEGORY	CATEGORY	CATEGORY

**Before students do this** on their own, do a practice round with another topic. If in a traditional classroom, ask students to contribute. If you're working with a single student, have him or her choose a topic and then complete it together.

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2b

2c  
↳**ACTIVITY 2**

Read the following excerpt from Flannery O'Connor's "The River." Afterward, go back through the excerpt and highlight its concrete nouns.

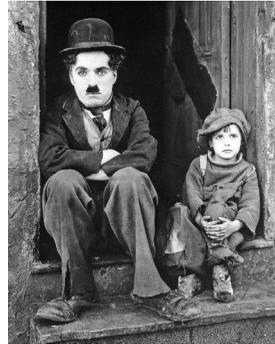
They walked on the dirt road for a while and then they crossed a field stippled with purple weeds and entered the shadows of a wood where the ground was covered with thick pine needles. He had never been in woods before and he walked carefully, looking from side to side as if he were entering a strange country. They moved along a bridle path that twisted downhill through crackling red leaves, and once, catching at a branch to keep himself from slipping, he looked into two frozen green-gold eyes enclosed in the darkness of a tree hole. At the bottom of the hill, the woods opened suddenly onto a pasture dotted here and there with black and white cows and sloping down, tier after tier, to a broad orange stream where the reflection of the sun was set like a diamond.<sup>6</sup>

**ACTIVITY 3**

Illustrate the above passage from "The River." You can sketch, paint, collage, or use any other medium. Your finished product should show us what you see when you read her words.

**LESSON 3****SHOW DON'T TELL  
WITH VIBRANT VERBS**

Actions can speak louder than words. If you want an example, watch the lion's cage scene from Charlie Chaplin's 1928 film *The Circus*.<sup>1</sup> Chaplin finds himself trapped in a circus train car with a sleepy lion. We don't need narration or dialogue to make his predicament clear. He tiptoes, he crawls, and he scales walls in an attempt to escape. Chaplin conveys meaning with actions we can see—no words necessary.



<sup>6</sup> Flannery O'Connor, "The River," in *The Complete Stories* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1971), 4.

<sup>1</sup> Charlie Chaplin, "The Lion Cage," in *The Circus* (United Artists, 1928). YouTube video, 3:25. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=79184xYelZI>.

2c

They walked on the dirt **road** for a while and then they crossed a **field** stippled with purple **weeds** and entered the **shadows** of a **wood** where the **ground** was covered with thick pine **needles**. He had never been in **woods** before and he walked carefully, looking from side to side as if he were entering a strange **country**. They moved along a bridle **path** that twisted downhill through crackling red **leaves**, and once, catching at a **branch** to keep himself from slipping, he looked into two frozen green-gold **eyes** enclosed in the **darkness** of a tree **hole**. At the **bottom** of the **hill**, the **woods** opened suddenly onto a **pasture** dotted here and there with black and white **cows** and sloping down, **tier** after **tier**, to a broad orange **stream** where the **reflection** of the **sun** was set like a **diamond**. (We didn't highlight every noun, only the important, concrete ones.)

3a



ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION 9

Writers can't depend on live actors to do their bidding. They must rely on words to capture the warmth of a sunset, the crackling of talking trees, or the cries of the wounded. **Concrete nouns** engage readers' senses, but **vivid verbs** bring these nouns to life.

Every complete sentence needs a verb. As our ideas become more abstract, we tend to rely less on vivid verbs. We gravitate toward *be* verbs (e.g., am, is, are, was, were, will be). These verbs are necessary (we just used one), but the more we use them, the more we tell instead of show. Vivid verbs do the opposite.

To illustrate the difference, let's meet Tamar, the star of a short story we're writing: "Tamar is a secret agent." Is that a satisfying introduction of a character? Of course, not! We learned what her profession is, but that's it. The verb in the sentence that introduces Tamar, *is*, acts like an equal sign. Grammarians have a fancy description for this type of sentence construction. They say it connects a subject (Tamar) to a predicate nominative (secret agent) using a linking verb (*is*).<sup>2</sup> *Be* verbs serve a purpose, but omitting them can sometimes add more power, especially to a secret agent.

Let's reintroduce our star character: "A mist settled in over the river just after midnight. Tamar's sunglasses hid her eyes, but her walk revealed purpose. She slipped her hand into her pocket and pulled out a curious scrap of paper."

Why is Tamar out at midnight? Why is she wearing sunglasses? Where is she going, and why is she so intent on getting there? What's on the paper: a name, a number, an address, a message?

Mysteries remain. Still, our new introductory sentences paint a picture a reader can imagine. Each sentence's subject pairs with a vivid verb. Mist settled, sunglasses hid, walk revealed, and she slipped and pulled. We share details about Tamar, but we don't tell readers too much. We invite them, require them, to use their imaginations.



When Barbara Kingsolver writes about beachcombing, she invites us to Bahamian beaches. She uses the proper names of the shells she describes, but the names may be unfamiliar to many readers. She pairs the names with familiar actions, though.

<sup>2</sup> A predicate nominative is a noun or noun phrase that renames the subject of a sentence and usually comes after a *be* verb.

3a

**We use the term *vivid verbs***, instead of *action verbs*, so we don't confuse students about a verb's *voice*. Most English verbs have two voices, active and passive. When a verb's in the active voice, the subject is who or what's "doing" it. For example, "The dog bites the man." The verb, "bites," is in the active voice because the subject, "the dog," is what's doing it. In "The man is bitten by the dog," the verb, "is bitten," is in the passive voice. The subject of the sentence, "the man," isn't doing the action; he's receiving it. Students review this further in activity 2 below. (We'll discuss active and passive voices again in unit VII.)

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10 COMPOSITION II

I had spent a week in the Bahamas, and while I was there, wishing my daughter could see those sparkling blue bays and sandy coves, I did exactly what she would have done: I collected shells. Spiky murexes, smooth purple moon shells, ancient-looking whelks sand-blasted by the tide—I tucked them in the pockets of my shirt and shorts until my lumpy, suspect hemlines gave me away, like a refugee smuggling the family fortune. When it was time to go home, I rinsed my loot in the sink and packed it carefully into a plastic carton, then nested it deep in my suitcase for the journey to Arizona.<sup>3</sup>

Kingsolver's paragraph reads like a how-to manual. If you didn't know how to transport seashells, you do now.

Using vivid verbs engages the imagination. That's one reason to prefer them to *be* verbs. Here's another reason. The more you use *be* verbs, the more likely you are to use the passive voice. Writing teachers love to bully sentences that use the passive voice. Students try to avoid using it, but many struggle because they don't understand what the passive voice is.

When you use **active voice**, the opposite of **passive voice**, the subject of the sentence *does* the action. When you use passive voice, the subject *receives* the action of the verb that follows. Let's look at an example: Venison was hung in the hollow tree. You understand the sentence, but you wonder who hung raw meat in a tree. (If you've read any of Laura Ingalls Wilder's books, you've learned that hanging raw meat in a tree preserves it.) The subject of the sentence, venison, wasn't doing the verb's action. It was receiving it. Raw meat doesn't saunter up to a tree and hang itself; someone has to do it.

Let's change the sentence into active voice: Pa hung the venison in the hollow tree. The subject of the sentence, Pa, performed the action. When we use the active voice, we have a clear view of who does the action of the verb. Who hung the venison? Pa did.

Writers do sometimes need to use *be* verbs and passive voice. A well-placed "is" can offer readers a moment of clarity. Some authors use a *be* verb's simplicity to shock the reader. Ray Bradbury begins *Fahrenheit 451* with a disturbing sentence: "It was a pleasure to burn." You got chills, right? When Moses asked God for His name, He replied, "I AM" (Exod. 3:14). It's as though He said, "I am the one who exists, period." His response was perfect. He didn't need to follow it up with a predicate adjective or predicate nominative.



<sup>3</sup> Barbara Kingsolver, *High Tide in Tucson: Essays from Now or Never* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Anyone catch the irony in the question?

3b

**If students need extra** grammar practice, use this Kingsolver excerpt. Ask them to find its vivid verbs/simple predicates. They should spot "tucked," "rinsed," and "nested," among others.

Passive voice creates distance between the writer and the reader. Sometimes, we need to create distance. Scientific writing often does.<sup>5</sup> When writing a lab report, scientists prefer the passive voice. It gives their writing a more objective tone. It emphasizes the object of a verb's action rather than the subject performing it. Scientists want readers to focus on their evidence, not on those presenting it: "The ions from the plasma were sampled for unusual electron configurations." The focus here is the ions, not who conducted the experiment.

Even if you're not writing a screenplay or a mystery, provide readers something they can see. Show them your thoughts instead of telling them what to think. Consider how you can put a little Charlie Chaplin into your writing.

### ASSIGNMENT

#### ACTIVITY 1

The *be* verbs we've been discussing have eight forms: *am, is, are, was, were, be, being, been*. Review a few paragraphs you've written recently or a short excerpt from a book. Count how many times you see these words. Choose at least three sentences to rewrite using vivid verbs.

#### ACTIVITY 2

Passive voice can be tricky to identify. Finding a *be* verb in a sentence isn't a sure sign that the writer used passive voice. Many reputable sources can give you guidance on how to identify passive voice. Your local library will likely have books on grammar and writing. Also, many colleges and universities have helpful online writing centers.<sup>6</sup>

Here's a two-step method to catch most passives. First, look for the sentence's complete verb phrase. Is it a *be* verb plus a past participle (like "was eaten" or "has been found")? If yes, then you've likely found a passive. To be sure, take this second step. Ask yourself whether the subject of the sentence is doing the action of the verb or receiving it. If it's receiving it, then you've found a sentence in the passive voice: "The unlucky fellow was struck by lightning twice in the same day." Checking both steps confirms that this sentence is in passive voice.

Now it's time to show what you've learned about the active and passive voices. Explain in writing how to identify the passive voice. Include three to five examples of each, the active voice and the passive voice. Be sure to use your own ideas and your own words.

<sup>5</sup> Nathan Sheffield, "Passive Voice in Scientific Writing," Duke University Graduate School Scientific Writing Resource, accessed June 2, 2020, [https://cgi.duke.edu/web/sciwriting/index.php?action=passive\\_voice](https://cgi.duke.edu/web/sciwriting/index.php?action=passive_voice). The writer presents a balanced approach to scientific writing's uses of passive and active voices. We'll discuss this further in unit VII.

<sup>6</sup> One such writing center is at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Here's its concise explanation of passive voice, complete with examples: "Use the Active Voice," Writing Center—University of Wisconsin–Madison, accessed May 4, 2020, [https://writing.wisc.edu/handbook/style/ccs\\_activevoice/](https://writing.wisc.edu/handbook/style/ccs_activevoice/).

3c



3d



3c

**Encourage students to use technology** to help. In a Word document, for example, they press CTRL F (⌘F on a Mac). This will open a search dialog. They can type in each *be* verb to see how often it's used.

3d

**Many students will need** to see several examples before they can do it on their own. The easiest way to spot a passive verb is to look for its formula: *be* verb + past participle. You'll also want to emphasize that not all sentences with a *be* verb are in the passive voice. Compare "Caleb is eating the apple pie" to "The apple pie is being eaten by Caleb." The first sentence is active; the second, passive. Notice the *be* verb + past participle ("is being eaten") in the second.

**ACTIVITY 3**

Write six to eight sentences about some aspect of your life. Below are writing prompts to help you get started. Don't use any *be* verbs in your sentences. Focus on concrete nouns and vivid verbs.

Prompts:

- What childhood experience do you remember most? Why is it so memorable?
- What's the funniest thing that's ever happened to you?
- Who or what has impacted your life the most? Why?
- What important lessons have you learned from a sport, hobby, trip, or relationship?

**LESSON 4****WORD VARIETY**

We've met the stars of the writing process—concrete nouns and vivid verbs. Now let's get to know the supporting players. A supporting role doesn't mean a lesser role. Where would Juliet be without her nurse? How would Simba survive without Timon and Pumbaa?



Word variety, the first supporting role we'll consider, impacts both what you say and how you say it. Aim to use words that are precise, that say exactly what you mean. When a wife asks her husband how she looks, he could shrug and say, "Good." If he does, though, she might glare at him. She wants him to be more expressive with his words, more precise. She wants him to embrace the rich variety of the English language. (She won't mind a more generous compliment, either!) A better response from him might have sounded like this: "That top accentuates the azure of your eyes."

Concrete nouns and vivid verbs need to take center stage in your sentences. Young writers sometimes overwhelm their writing with adjectives and adverbs. A mere litany of adjective and adverb modifiers isn't word variety; it's fluff. To *modify* means to tweak something. You can modify a car to give it a louder muffler, or you can modify a game of kickball so your younger sister can play. In grammar, **modifiers** "limit or restrict the meaning" of the word or phrase to

4a



4a

**Most students can identify** adjectives and adverbs and use them well. This familiarity, though, is what leads to their overuse. Adjectival and adverbial modifiers play an important role in clear, engaging communication. Problem is, we sometimes use them to tell instead of show.

which they attach.<sup>1</sup> What kind of car? A red car. How much candy? Too much. Like *be* verbs, simple adjective and adverb modifiers serve a purpose.

Their overuse, though, leads to vague writing. Imagine asking Henry David Thoreau to describe Walden Pond.<sup>2</sup> What if he responded this way: “It’s pretty nice. It has blue, wet water and tall, brown trees. I even saw some furry animals eating little, red things by some fallen leaves.” This anemic description could fit any pond anywhere.

Fortunately for us, Thoreau wrote with detail. In the following passage from *Walden*, he describes his walk next to the pond. He admits he sees “nothing special to attract me,” but this ordinariness appeals to him. As you read the passage, observe his varied language. Instead of saying that a “bird” sang, he identifies the type of bird. Instead of saying that the trees swayed, he names the types of trees and focuses on their leaves. His choice of verbs fits the scene. Bullfrogs trump, wind blows and roars, waves dash, and creatures lull and roam.



As I walk along the stony shore of the pond in my shirt sleeves, though it is cool as well as cloudy and windy, and I see nothing special to attract me, all the elements are unusually congenial to me. The bullfrogs trump to usher in the night, and the note of the whippoorwill is borne on the rippling wind from over the water. Sympathy with the fluttering alder and poplar leaves almost takes away my breath; yet, like the lake, my serenity is rippled but not ruffled. These small waves raised by the evening wind are as remote from storm as the smooth reflecting surface. Though it is now dark, the wind still blows and roars in the wood, the waves still dash, and some creatures lull the rest with their notes. The repose is never complete. The wildest animals do not repose, but seek their prey now; the fox, and skunk, and rabbit, now roam the fields and woods without fear. They are Nature’s watchmen.<sup>3</sup>

Thoreau uses simple modifiers, but he doesn’t depend on them to create his image. He chooses a specific word first, adding modifiers to enhance its meaning. Had he omitted “stony” in the first sentence, we might have imagined a muddy or sandy shore. Describing some of the

1 Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online, s.v. “modifiers,” accessed December 20, 2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/modify>.

2 We tend to pronounce his last name /thuh Roh/; his contemporaries said it more like /Thor oh/.

3 Henry David Thoreau, *Walden; and, Civil Disobedience* (New York: Penguin, 2017), 104.

animals as “wildest” leads us to understand he is not talking about house pets. Thoreau’s words show us around Walden Pond’s wild and stony shore.

Thoreau’s language reflects his learning and his experience. He knows the names of the trees and the birds, but his readers may not. Before he wrote, Thoreau considered his audience, “dressing” his writing appropriately. A writer’s word variety reflects his or her knowledge about a topic or situation.

Writing requires us to know our stuff, but don’t worry. God gave us remarkable word sponges we call brains. The writers we’ve met so far—O’Connor, Kingsolver, and Thoreau—appear to choose words with ease. They sometimes may, but if so, they learned from other writers how to do it. Excellent writers read a lot, collecting words for their mental word banks. Kingsolver doesn’t cite a composition class that transformed her writing. Instead, she “learned to write by reading the kinds of books [she] wished [she’d] written.”<sup>4</sup> The more good material you read, the better you will write.

### ASSIGNMENT

#### ACTIVITY 1

Rewrite the following paragraph, adding more precise language and more word variety. Don’t change the meaning of the paragraph, only how it’s written. Consider how you can make this (boring!) little story come alive.

The good boy is going to eat dessert after he eats something good for him. He likes ice cream because it is yummy. Unfortunately, ice cream makes him feel bad. The good boy can’t decide whether the ice cream is worth it. He stands in line and looks at the nice ice cream sign. At the bottom of the sign, he notices another type of dessert. It looks yummy. He is happy about the other option. After he buys and eats the treat, he is satisfied. Now he will enjoy a sweet without getting sick.

#### ACTIVITY 2

In the previous lesson, you wrote two or three paragraphs about your life. You avoided *be* verbs and focused on concrete nouns and vivid verbs. Revisit these paragraphs, re-writing them according to how you answer the following questions. Do you use any word or phrase too much? Do you depend too much on simple, one-word modifiers? Find any places where you could be more specific? For example, you may have written, “I stood by the pretty tree.” You could revise it to say, “I stood by the trunk of the towering poplar.”

<sup>4</sup> Barbara Kingsolver, “About Writing,” Barbara Kingsolver—The Authorized Site, 2018, accessed June 2, 2020, <http://www.kingsolver.com/faq/about-writing.html>. You may not be used to seeing brackets in quoted text. The brackets mean that the original text has been changed *slightly*. Writers need to do this sometimes to make a quote fit into a sentence’s grammar or context.

4b



4b

**Call special attention** to tired adjectives and adverbs, such as “good,” “nice,” “really,” and “very.” For a helpful handout on overused language, check out [https://www.mrsmuellersworld.com/uploads/1/3/0/5/13054185/banned\\_words\\_cheat\\_sheet.pdf](https://www.mrsmuellersworld.com/uploads/1/3/0/5/13054185/banned_words_cheat_sheet.pdf).

**ACTIVITY 3**

Create a word wall. You can do this on poster board, on index cards, or in electronic form. Challenge yourself to add to your word wall at least five times a week. If reading a book, jot down words you like or memorable words you did not know. You can even pick up words from conversations, movies, or anywhere else. If you don't know what a word means, be sure to look it up before writing it on your word wall.

**LESSON 5****SENTENCE VARIETY**

You've included a variety of concrete nouns and vivid verbs in your writing. You've even weeded out some pesky *be* verbs. Now it's time to plant some sentence variety in your writing garden.

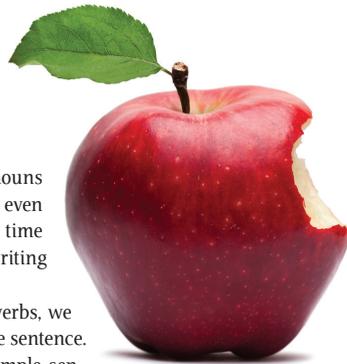
When we want to showcase our vivid verbs, we often rely on one type of sentence: the simple sentence. Readers welcome the ease and clarity of simple sentences. Reading a simple sentence is like grabbing an apple for a snack. Sink your teeth in, chew and swallow, repeat. No fuss, no muss.

Sometimes, though, you hanker for something different, something more engaging. Readers are like that, too. They want some sentences to read more like apple pie than raw fruit. They want to read sentences that provide both cadence and change to your writing voice. Without sentence variety, you limit your readers to eating a healthy *but bland* diet.

English has a dizzying variety of words, but it uses them in only four types of sentences. Writers learn how to construct the four types and how best to use each. One consideration writers keep in mind is how their sentences will look on the page. They know readers brace themselves when they see long sentence after long sentence. These thickets of words can deter even the most eager reader. When readers see a series of short sentences, by contrast, they assume it'll be a quick and easy read. Of course, we don't want readers thinking that about *all* our writing. Each type of sentence has its value and place.

The first of these types, the simple sentence, lays the foundation for *all* sentences. Simple sentences are the basis of the other three types. Well-placed simple sentences invite your readers to pause. Sometimes, these sentences shock us. The Apostle John understood this when he described how Jesus was moved by Lazarus's death. "Jesus wept" (John 11:35), John writes. In two words, he conveys Jesus's love, humanity, and compassion.

A **simple sentence** contains one independent clause and no dependent clauses. You'll recall that a **clause** is a meaningful cluster of words that contains a subject and a verb. When



5a



16 COMPOSITION II

the group of words can stand alone as a sentence, we call it an **independent clause**. If the cluster can't stand on its own as a sentence, we call it a **dependent clause**. For now, simply tuck these definitions away. You'll see some examples below.

Before we see them, let's define the other three sentence types. A **compound sentence** joins two independent clauses. These clauses are joined with a coordinating conjunction (*and, or, nor, for, but, yet, or so*) or a semicolon. A **complex sentence** connects an independent clause to one or more dependent clauses. The dependent clause will start with a subordinating conjunction. Common **subordinating conjunctions** are *although, when, if, since, as, and because*. A **compound-complex sentence**, as you might suspect, is both compound and complex.

Eyes crossing or head spinning? Don't worry. These examples should dispel the dizziness:  
independent clause independent clause independent clause

Simple sentence: Lily paused by the bridge.

independent clause

Compound sentence: Lily paused by the bridge, but she looked over her shoulder.

independent clause

independent clause

Complex sentence: As the car approached, Lily paused by the bridge.

dependent clause

independent clause

Compound-complex sentence:

Lily paused by the bridge, and she looked over

independent clause

independent clause

her shoulder as the car approached.

dependent clause

We've discussed clauses, but let's not forget the importance of **phrases**. Phrases aren't clauses, but that doesn't mean they're insignificant. Independent clauses and dependent clauses come from the same family. The DNA they share is that they both have a subject and a verb. Think of the phrase, then, as the family pet. You include him in your family Christmas photo, but he's not one of your parents or siblings. Pets liven our family life as phrases enliven our writing.

5a

**Have a dry erase board** or scrap paper ready while teaching this lesson. The more examples of sentence types students can find or create, the better. One way to help them find examples is to open any book. Better yet, have them dissect their own writing. They'll see instances of all four types of sentences.

5b



ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION 17

There are seven kinds of phrases, and all add details to our clauses. We use five of them often enough not to discuss them here.<sup>1</sup> We use the other two kinds far less often, but they give our sentences sophistication and depth.

One is the **participial phrase**. This kind of phrase begins with a *participle*, a verb form usually ending in either *-ing* or *-ed*. All present participles end in *-ing*, and most past participles end in *-ed*. You'll notice that the past participle of a verb looks like the verb's past tense. The past tense of most verbs ends in *-ed*, but many don't. The ones that don't, we call irregular. Verbs that have an irregular past tense also have an irregular past participle.

lifting (present)	spending (present)	teaching (present)
lifted (past)	spent (past)	taught (past)

Participial phrases act like adjectives. They give more details about nouns, pronouns, and noun phrases. Take a look at this example: "*Lifting the heavy rock*, Sebastian strained his muscles." The first four words make up a (present) participial phrase. The sentence doesn't need those words to stand on its own as an independent clause. Still, the phrase gives us details about Sebastian, the subject of the sentence.

A participial phrase can appear at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of a sentence. Placement depends on the writer's style and on what makes the phrase's meaning clearest. Be careful how you punctuate sentences with participial phrases. Consider these two sentences:

The fearful lad noticed the coal-colored birds, glancing up at a gray and gloomy sky.

The fearful lad noticed the coal-colored birds glancing up at a gray and gloomy sky.

In the first example, the boy is looking up; in the second, the birds are. The only formal difference between the sentences is the comma. To make clear that it's the boy who is looking up, we could move the participial phrase to the start of the sentence: "Glancing up at a gray and gloomy sky, the fearful lad noticed the coal-colored birds."

Don't confuse a participial phrase with a **verb phrase**. You'll know which one you have when you try to remove the *-ing/-ed* word or phrase from the sentence. Look at this example: "Sandy is lifting the heavy rock." What happens if we remove either "lifting" or "lifting the heavy rock"? The sentence falls apart; it no longer means what it *should* mean. "Is lifting" is a verb phrase, not a participial phrase.

The rarest type of phrase is the **absolute phrase**. Absolute phrases are "almost-sentences." They have a subject and part of a verb phrase. Adding a *be* verb to an absolute phrase creates an independent clause. Unlike a participial phrase, an absolute phrase modifies

<sup>1</sup> They are noun phrases, verb phrases, prepositional phrases, infinitive phrases, and gerund phrases. You may not recognize their names, but you're used to speaking and writing them all.

5b

**This lesson offers something** for every level of writer. Still, some students won't be ready for grammatical sophistication and depth. If a student struggles to find subjects and predicates, keep your focus there. Struggling writers tend to overuse one type of sentence, so their goal should be to add variety. Give them a list of subordinate conjunctions and show them how to create a few complex sentences. Advanced writers will be ready for a greater challenge. Encourage them to experiment with different types of phrases. You'll also want to remind them not to discount the power of a simple sentence.

an entire clause. They perch with grace on the front or back of sentences, but they can pack a punch.

"George played his violin in the park, his notes dancing from tree to tree." In that sentence, the absolute phrase follows the independent clause. The absolute phrase has a subject (notes) and part of a verb (dancing). We say *part* of a verb because "his notes dancing from tree to tree" can't stand alone as a sentence. The first part of the sentence tells us what George is doing. The absolute phrase at the end invites us to hear what his music is doing.

As you consider how to add variety to your writing, think about the notes you want your readers to hear. English poet William Cowper had it right: "Variety is the very spice of life." The right word in the right place in the right sentence makes all the difference.



### ASSIGNMENT

5c



#### ACTIVITY 1

For each quotation below:

- Identify the main subject and the main verb of each independent clause.
- Label each quotation as S (simple), CD (compound), CX (complex), or CC (compound-complex).
- Imitate it. Using the same structure, create a similar sentence using your own language. Don't use a thesaurus to replace each word. Instead, seek to understand the meaning of the sentence. You can create a sentence with a similar meaning, or you can create a sentence with a new take on the original idea.
  1. "We all owe death a life." —Salman Rushdie
  2. "If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world." —C. S. Lewis
  3. "She had waited all her life for something, and it had killed her when it found her." —Zora Neale Hurston

5c

### Answer Key

1. "We owe" – S
2. "explanation is" – CX
3. "She had waited" and "it had killed" – CC
4. "Men can be" – CX
5. "intuition knows" and "(you) get" – CD

4. "Men can only be happy when they do not assume that the object of life is happiness." —George Orwell
5. "Your intuition knows what to write, so get out of the way."<sup>2</sup> —Ray Bradbury

## ACTIVITY 2

Review the seven different types of phrases. Then look for two or three examples of each. Look in favorite books, a reading assignment for another class, or an online article. (Finding an absolute phrase may prove challenging, so one or two examples will do.) The equations below—their examples, at least—should help you get started.<sup>3</sup> If needed, read up on the different types of phrases. You could consult a favorite grammar book or a reputable online resource.

1. Noun phrases: optional modifier(s) + noun + optional modifier(s)  
Example: *The four jubilant runners* donned their team's gold medals.
2. Verb phrases: auxiliary verb(s) + main verb + verb ending when necessary  
Example: Although he *had burned* the last three batches of cookies, Paulo decided to try again.
3. Prepositional phrases: preposition + noun, pronoun, gerund, or clause or preposition + modifier(s) + noun, pronoun, gerund, or clause  
Example: Commander Zabok targeted the ship's phasers *at the enemy vessel*.
4. Infinitive phrases: "to" + infinitive + object(s) and/or modifier(s)  
Example: *To swallow a fish whole*, you need either a small fish or a large mouth.
5. Participle phrases: participle + object(s) and/or modifier(s)  
Example: *Stretching out on the hot sand*, Ben and Jerry took giant licks of their ice cream cones.
6. Gerund phrases: gerund + object(s) and/or modifier(s)  
Example: *Mowing the lawn* meant getting paid.<sup>4</sup>
7. Absolute phrases: noun + participle + optional object(s) and/or modifier(s)  
Example: *The younger boy stifling a giggle*, Omar watched Khalil perform an accidental belly flop.

## ACTIVITY 3

Soon you'll be writing a blog entry as a *Composition II* unit assignment. The prompts in lesson 3 helped prepare you for this assignment. You wrote two or three paragraphs on a personal topic. Here were the prompts:

<sup>2</sup> Can't identify which type of sentence this is? The second part uses the imperative, or command, form of the verb *get*. Think of the sentence with a slight rewording. "Your intuition knows what to write, so [you must] get out of the way."

<sup>3</sup> Robin L. Simmons, "The Phrase," Chompchomp.com, 1997, <https://www.chompchomp.com/terms/phrase.pdf>. This resource includes more information about verb phrases.

<sup>4</sup> "Mowing the lawn" is the subject of the sentence. It's not to be confused with a participle phrase. Consider a different example: "Mowing the lawn, Billy looked forward to getting paid." In this sentence, "Mowing the lawn" is a participle phrase.

- What childhood experience do you remember most? Why is it so memorable?
- What's the funniest thing that's ever happened to you?
- Who or what has impacted your life the most? Why?
- What important lessons have you learned from a sport, hobby, trip, or relationship?

It's time to expand on that topic. Add at least one more paragraph. After you add another paragraph, review and revise your work in the following areas. Add or improve:

- concrete nouns
- vivid verbs
- sentence variety

## LESSON 6

### RHETORICAL DEVICES

We've been working on finding our writing voice. The last few lessons focused on showing, not telling. You've seen the power of concrete nouns, vivid verbs, and sentence variety. You've begun to see how writers can draw readers in with the turn of a phrase. Now it's time to explore the magic and methods of style. It's time to enter the world of rhetorical devices.

**Rhetorical devices** are creative uses of language designed to engage an audience. You may not know them by name, but you already love rhetorical devices. What's not to love? Novelists and screenwriters use them to add color to black-and-white stories. Advertisers and songwriters use them to win our attention. Politicians and lawyers weave them into their speeches. Rhetorical devices give us creative ways to convey our message.

The term **rhetoric** has a long and complex history. For our purposes, we'll define it as the art of using language to persuade an audience. Focus on the word *persuade*. As we fill our toolbox with rhetorical devices, we'll consider how we can use them to persuade others.

You might be wondering whom we're trying to persuade and about what. After all, how many essays can students write about extending their weekend curfew? That's one use of rhetoric but not the only one. It's not even the most basic or most important one. Instead, think of rhetoric's primary goal as persuading an audience to read on. You can't persuade your parents to extend your curfew if they aren't interested in hearing your message.



6a



Rhetorical devices do more than color your writing. They keep your readers anticipating, wanting to read, your next line. Now that we've talked them up, let's look at some examples and put them into practice. We'll focus on several common rhetorical devices, but there are dozens and dozens.

Many rhetorical devices owe their effectiveness to the use of **figurative language**. The term *figurative* means "not literal." Though you ate a meal only hours earlier, you tell your mom you're starving. She rolls her eyes because she knows how much you've eaten that day. Next time you tell her how famished you are, you could inform her that you're practicing hyperbole. The rhetorical device of **hyperbole** uses exaggerated speech for emphasis.

**Similes** and **metaphors** compare unlike objects to emphasize an unexpected similarity. The simile softens the comparison with the use of "like" or "as." You tell your sister she's as angry as a hornet when woken from a nap. A metaphor's comparison is starker, stronger. You wake your sister from a nap, and she clenches her teeth and gets a fiery look in her eyes. You say to her, "Don't be such a hornet! I woke you because it's dinner time."



Similes and metaphors are effective, but they can fall prey to overused comparisons. Hackneyed similes litter common language: good as gold, sweet as honey, bright as the sun. "Never use a metaphor, simile or other figure of speech," wrote George Orwell, "which you are used to seeing in print."<sup>1</sup> We'll do well to follow his advice.

Adding rhetorical devices can intimidate even the strongest writers, but it need not. Get to know a few of the more common "crowd-pleasing" techniques. See the chart below.

Whatever you write, focus first on vivid verbs and concrete nouns. For your second draft, ask yourself some questions. Are there comparisons that could enhance the content? Are there important ideas that would benefit from a creative use of language? Where do I most need to engage my readers? Once comfortable using one rhetorical device, try another. Allow your readers to sit back and enjoy the reading ride. (Notice which device we just used?)

DEVICE	DEFINITION / EXAMPLE
<b>Imagery</b>	Using language that appeals to the five senses <i>His hands gripped the frozen railing, his eyes squinting from the glare of the winter sun.</i>
<b>Personification</b>	Giving inanimate objects human characteristics <i>The violent winds relented, and the sea breathed a sigh of relief.</i>

<sup>1</sup> George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language," in *A Collection of Essays* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1946), 170.

6a

**Using figurative language** is as natural as wrinkles on an elephant. We give an example here in the text (and we used one in the last sentence). Ask students for more. They'll see that figurative language isn't the stuff of scholars and poets only. It's integral to the way we all communicate.

It's been a delight for our journalistic team at World News Group to work with the folks at Veritas Press in creating this writing manual. This combination of sponsors offers an intensely practical perspective on the writing task while simultaneously meeting curricular requirements. Students and their families will find here the helpful preparation they will need as Christian wordsmiths, both in their undergraduate and more advanced studies, and later on in the workplace. In those regards, this manual has no equal.

—JOEL BELZ

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