



The Lantern English Co.
The Growing Writer

Growing the Essay Practice – Syllabus

Course Description: This course briefly reviews concepts taught in *Growing the Essay* while allowing the student to practice one complete essay each week, in order to gain confidence in essay writing skills before moving on to our advanced classes. This class is for students who have already completed our *Growing the Essay* material, or who have experience but need additional practice in writing descriptive, narrative, expository, and basic persuasive essays of 7-10 paragraphs.

Course Outline:

Week One: Reviewing Writing Voice

Week Two: Reviewing the Descriptive Essay – An Object, Person, or Place

Week Three: Reviewing The Descriptive Essay – An Idea

Week Four: Reviewing the Narrative Essay

Week Five: Reviewing the Expository Essay

Week Six: Reviewing the Expository Essay

Week Seven: Reviewing the Persuasive Essay

Week Eight: Final Practice

Grading Information: All assignments will be graded using *The Growing Writer Rubric* and averaged to receive a final course grade.



Growing the Essay Practice

Lesson One: Reviewing Writing Voice

SAMPLE LESSON

Knowing the basic components of an essay is the important first step in writing a successful essay, but there are other ways to grow your skills that do not involve introductions, conclusions, organizational methods, or outlines.

In fact, one of the best ways to grow your essays is to improve your writing voice. This is the way you structure your sentences, choose your vocabulary words, and develop details. Writing voice is very difficult to teach, perhaps because a natural and engaging writing voice does not come from rules or methods, but from practice and growing in confidence as a writer.

Still, there are several things you can begin to focus on more that will take your writing to the next level. This week and next, we will be learning about and practicing how to improve writing voice through sentence length, sentence variety, vocabulary choice, and sentence detail.

SENTENCE LENGTH –

Perhaps you have seen this as an image on social media. Gary Provost's popular “This sentence has five words” perfectly explains and demonstrates the need for variety in sentence length. Read below:

“This sentence has five words. Here are five more words. Five-word sentences are fine. But several together become monotonous. Listen to what is happening. The writing is getting boring. The sound of it drones. It’s like a stuck record. The ear demands some variety.

Now listen.

I vary the sentence length, and I create music. Music. The writing sings. It has a pleasant rhythm, a lilt, a harmony. I use short sentences. And I use sentences of medium length.

And sometimes, when I am certain the reader is rested, I will engage him with a sentence of considerable length, a sentence that burns with energy and builds with all the impetus of a crescendo, the roll of the drums, the crash of the cymbals—sounds that say *listen to this, [for] it is important* [emphasis added].”

The way that a composer arranges music has a profound effect on the listener. Songs for children or commercial lyrics are generally very simple and often very catchy. However, they do not create a story. They do not usually create emotion. The simple use of instruments, melody, and lyrics make them easy to sing along to and easy to remember, yet they do not usually inspire us, create a story, or help us imagine things in our minds. Simple children's songs or commercial lyrics don't usually *move* us.

In the same way, when we use our words in their most simple form, repeating the same words or the same sentence lengths over and over again, we might create something easy to read and catchy, but we are not creating a powerful story with powerful description. This is not to say that short sentences with simple words cannot be effective, but a mixture is the better choice.

When you vary the length of your sentences, you are building power sentences by creating music with your words. You are telling your reader, “Hey, I have something important to say. You should listen.”

SENTENCE VARIETY –

Besides varying the length of each sentence, another way to build power sentences is to use different beginnings for your sentences. Some young or inexperienced writers have the habit of beginning every sentence with a subject or the word *the*. This is certainly correct in terms of grammar, but it can become boring for your reader. Remember, writing power sentences is like creating a powerful, inspiring piece of music. Choosing different ways to begin your sentences can go a long way in making your writing voice more interesting.

Here are eight different ways to begin a sentence:

1. **Begin with a common noun, either singular or plural. (*don't begin with a, the, or pronouns.*)**

EXAMPLE: Raindrops rapidly hit my face as I walked out into the rain.

2. **Begin with an adjective.**

EXAMPLE: Nervous and excited, I got into position on the stage.

3. **Begin with a phrase that tells when.**

EXAMPLE: Just as the music began, I dashed into the concert hall.

4. **Begin with a verb ending in -ing.**

EXAMPLE: Huffing and puffing, Bobby proudly crossed the finish line.

5. **Begin with a phrase that tells where.**

EXAMPLE: Sitting on the edge of my bed, I waited anxiously for the phone to ring.

6. **Begin with a phrase that tells how/why.**

EXAMPLE: By pretending I left my daily folder at school, I was able to put off showing my parents my failing grade until the next day.

7. **Begin with an adverb ending in -ly.**

EXAMPLE: Sluggishly, the dog dragged himself out of his bed and down the stairs.

8. **Begin with a prepositional phrase.**

EXAMPLE: On top of the refrigerator, my black cat, Olivia, napped peacefully.

In addition, practice utilizing different sentence structures. Remember, you can choose from simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences. (If you need a grammar refresher, ask your teacher for some review documents!) Again, there is nothing wrong with using simple sentences, but repetition of the same sentence structures and the same sentence beginnings can make your writing sound choppy and boring.

VOCABULARY CHOICE –

The words you choose have a big impact on the style and readability of your writing. Another important way to grow your words is to choose more mature vocabulary. In this way, consider that you are not growing your words by spreading them *out* (sentence length and sentence variety) but by building them *up* (going from lower-level vocabulary to upper-level vocabulary).

Below, you can see a brief list of some common elementary-level word choices in comparison to some ideas for upper-level word choices.

COMMON Elementary Word Choice	GROW YOUR WORDS Middle & High School
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • good/great • bad • said • fun • things • small • big • got • want • happy • sad • pick • walked • pretty • nice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • excellent, brilliant, amazing, wonderful • dreadful, despicable, awful, wicked • exclaimed, interrupted, suggested • amusing, enjoyable, entertaining • objects, belongings, items • tiny, miniature, slight, compact • immense, gigantic, enormous, colossal • received, obtained, acquired • desire, long, prefer • overjoyed • sullen, heartbroken • select, choose • ambled, strolled • attractive, beautiful, appealing • benevolent, kind, gracious, agreeable

If you are not familiar with using a **thesaurus**, you should spend some time this week practicing. Simply, a thesaurus provides synonyms (and antonyms) for a word. If you look up the word *soft*, for example, you might find synonyms such as *cushioned, comfortable, fluffy, squishy, supple, or velvety*.

EXAMPLE:

- The chocolate was **soft**, melting in my mouth.
- The couch is **soft**. When I sit down, it feels almost like I am falling on a cloud.

- The chocolate was **velvety**, melting in my mouth.
- The couch is **squishy**. When I sit down, it feels almost like I am falling on a cloud.

Choosing a more poignant vocabulary word conveys your meaning more exactly and again makes your writing voice more appealing.

SHOWING SENTENCES –

Your words have the power to paint pictures for your reader. However, the success of your word pictures depends on how well you use your words. Many beginning writers do a lot of *telling*. On the other hand, you can stretch your sentences and greatly improve your writing by *showing* instead.

Think about it this way. My young son loves to paint pictures. In any given week, he might paint several pictures, but they always end up looking very much the same. He asks for all eight colors from our paint collection but then mixes them into a muddy purple/brown and smears the paint all over the page. In the end, he tells me that one picture is a painting of the ocean; another is a painting of a train; another is a painting of a hamburger. He TELLS me what his paintings are, but the paintings do not actually SHOW me an ocean, a train, or a hamburger. They show me a big blob of muddy purple/brown paint.

Now, think about it in terms of a sentence:

- “She was excited to see her dad.”

This is a proper sentence, but it just TELLS me that the girl was excited to see her dad. When I am reading, I am not actually there to see the girl's emotions, facial expressions, or body movements. I cannot hear the noises she makes or hear the words she is saying. So, although you are telling me that she was excited to see her dad, *I don't see it*. This sentence is okay, but it is not great because it does not SHOW me the girl's excitement.

Now, try this:

- “When she saw her dad enter the auditorium, she sprinted across the room, jumped into his arms, and buried her head in his chest.”

Notice how the verbs and additional phrases create description and emotion. Knowing that the girl *sprinted* and *jumped*, we can FEEL her excitement. When she buries her head in his chest, we feel her emotion and connection with her father. This sentence shows us the girl's delight in seeing her father, and we understand exactly how this scene played out.

Telling sentences tell the reader something. Although they provide information, this information is usually general, not very specific, and often unclear. Telling sentences provide general ideas but leave out the action, emotion, experiences, and sensory detail. Without these elements, the reader is much less likely to

believe or be engaged in your writing.

On the other hand, it is better to show the information by using the five senses, adding emotional components, creating action, and forming conversations.

Here is another example: Imagine you are in a movie theater. Suddenly, the screen goes black and you can only hear the soundtrack, which includes the dialogue, a few sound effects, and the music. You would be frustrated, right? Watching a movie can only be so worthwhile if you cannot see anything. With only the sound, you might get bored quickly and leave the theater.

The same is true with writing. Telling sentences leave the reader bored. Showing sentences describe scenes, actions, emotions, and experiences. This use of specific details creates clear, strong, and lasting pictures in the minds of your readers. Again, let us study some examples:

TELLING SENTENCE	SHOWING SENTENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I was hungry.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• My stomach was growling like a dog.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• She ran.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• She was as fast as a shooting star.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The classroom was a mess.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Books, papers, and tools were scattered everywhere across the classroom, making it look like a disaster had happened.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We lost the game.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The team left the field slowly, our heads hanging low, our feet dragging in disappointment.

Often, it is even beneficial to turn a single telling sentence into a showing paragraph. Look at some of the following examples to see this in action.

TELLING SENTENCE	SHOWING PARAGRAPH
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• My room was very messy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I walked into my crowded room, only to see that my clothes were thrown everywhere. The sheets were crumpled up in a pile on my unmade bed, and my comforter was hanging over the foot board. My soccer shoes and socks were sitting in the corner, letting out a smell like a mixture of rotten eggs and Cheetos. I guess I had been so excited about leaving for vacation that I had forgotten to clean up my room.

- My Saturday mornings are crazy, and sometimes I get behind and show up late to dance class.

- I awaken to the annoying buzz of my alarm clock at 7:00 a.m. I don't want to wake up this early on the weekend, but I did sign up for this dance class! I drag myself to the bathroom, where I brush my teeth, take a quick shower, and wash and dry my hair. After changing outfits three or four times, I run down the stairs, let my dog out, and inhale my breakfast bagel while my dad casually sips his coffee and reads a book. He smirks at me. I scramble for my dance bag and shoes. I barely make it out the front door when my friend and her mom arrive to pick me up. Once I am at the studio, I heave a sigh of relief because I will not be late for class today.

Remember that telling sentences can leave the reader disinterested. Instead, showing sentences help the reader remain interested. Showing sentences leave a lasting impression with the reader. Thus, make it your goal to draw your readers in. Make them a part of what is happening. Show the scene, get the reader involved, create a dramatic impact. Show the reader what is happening now or how things happened by painting a picture with words.

From this lesson, let your main takeaway be this: a mixture of sentence lengths, beginnings, and structures along with vocabulary choices will make your writing that much more engaging and powerful.

Assignment 1: Using the prompt below, plan and write a seven (7) to ten (10) paragraph essay.

PROMPT: Choose something that you could imagine being (an asteroid, a cactus, a volcano). Then, write an essay describing that thing and explaining WHY you would want to be that thing.

Craft an introduction that avoids any listing or method-style writing. Remember to include a fitting hook and a clear thesis with a bridge that gets the reader in the door!

Then write the body of the essay. **Throughout, focus on varying sentence length and beginning, choosing vivid vocabulary, and using your words to show rather than simply to tell.**

Finally, write a conclusion. Avoid rewording the introduction, summarizing only, or introducing new ideas. Remember to restate the thesis and synthesize the main ideas while also providing closure that sells your ideas and moves the reader to a meaningful ending.

Ensure that the essay is formatted properly. Include your name and the date in the upper left-hand corner of the page and a title centered above the essay. Properly format the paragraphs with an indent or a full space between each, and left-align the text. Justified text is optional but not required. Content should be typed in one of the standard fonts, size 12.

NOTE: Although this prompt is interesting, some students have trouble getting started. For this reason, we have attached two examples to give you some ideas about how this essay might be written.