



MASTERING WRITTEN SENTENCES

Self-teaching Exercises
for College Writers

Mary Epes

Michael G. Southwell

Mastering

Written

Sentences

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York College/CUNY



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To the Teacher

Mastering Written Sentences: What It Is

This self-instructional workbook is designed to develop skills in analyzing, fixing, and revising sentences to make them correct, clear, and effective. This is its exclusive focus. Obviously, then, it's not a complete course text, but a **supplement** to be used along with instruction on other aspects of writing. As a supplement, it needs to be flexible—both adaptable to students' varying needs in this area and to the broader goals of the course, and easy for students to use on their own, and for teachers to assign and monitor. And to justify requiring students to buy and use it, possibly in addition to other texts or materials, it should address a significant and general need not addressed in these other materials, or not addressed as effectively.

Mastering Written Sentences fulfills these requirements for an effective supplemental workbook. To defend this assertion, we need first to discuss the student populations who need what it offers, the principles of written language acquisition it follows, its distinctive features, and the appropriateness of self-instruction as its delivery system.

Who Can Use This Book

In our experience, problems in generating clear, effective, and even basically correct sentences are more characteristic of average adult writers than are other problems of correctness. For developmental students such problems are perhaps their most persistent ones. Consequently, most of the more advanced students enrolled in developmental courses, ESL students with a good grasp of grammatical forms, and not a few students in regular college composition and beyond continue to need more help on the sentence level than writing instructors can afford to provide in class or in conferences. Yet the methods used in almost all available self-help writing workbooks make irrelevant distinctions, provide ineffectual, unsystematic practice, and fail to apply even the relevant rules to students' own writing. Such methods make it nearly impossible for students to learn syntax from these books. *Mastering Written Sentences*, in contrast, can meet these students' needs.

Why This Book Works: Its Guiding Principles

In writing this book, we have been guided by widely-held but too infrequently applied interdependent principles of written language acquisition. These underlying principles are:

1. English syntax is a **system** whose principles learners must grasp on some level before they can control the complex structures of written sentences in their own writing.
2. Only when learners have **objectified** their intuitions about the structure of written sentences, and have them clearly in their conscious lines of sight, can they move beyond them to write not only correct but also clearer and more effective sentences.
3. However, a thorough grasp of a few **absolutely basic principles** of sentence structure will serve the needs of novice writers far better than their attempts to learn most of the terms and concepts of traditional grammar.
4. Rules, even when fully mastered as such, will become operative only when reinforced by **extensive practice**.
5. To be effective, this practice must be **systematic and incremental**, and executed in **contexts of ever-increasing difficulty**.
6. Since meaning arises generally not from sentences in isolation, but from the relationships among them, and since focus on form is unrealistically easy when meaning is limited, it follows that sentences used for such practice should be **contextualized** within a framework of related meanings, and as often as possible be arranged in actual paragraph form.
7. If such practice, no matter how expertly devised, is to be ultimately effective, students must **apply its principles step by step to their own writing**, with some feedback from a teacher or tutor or from fellow students working in small groups.
8. **Self-instruction**, with some supervision and support, can be more effective in certain ways than whole-class instruction as a method of learning the basics of skills like sentence construction, governed as such skills are by invariant rules or by principles of limited variability.

How This Book Works: Its Distinctive Features

The principles of written language acquisition, as above formulated, have shaped our practice, including specifically its following distinctive features:

- **A new and powerful approach to sentence analysis**

Relying on Principles 1, 2, and 3, we devote Part 1 (Understanding Sentences, Units

1-6) to teaching students basically one thing – how to analyze sentences and discover how they work. Our approach, introduced in the fifth edition of *Mastering Written English*, is based on the same linguistic premise as sentence-combining pedagogy, namely, that all written sentences are composed of “kernel” (or “simple”) sentences connected by three kinds of “connecting” words (what we call joining, expansion, and noun-expansion words). Beginning with our reliable tense-test for identifying a verb (which they mark with a circle), and its subject (which they mark with a box), students go on to recognize and use every connecting word (which they mark with a +).

From the beginning, students learn that any word or group of words that’s not a verb or its subject or a connecting word usually tells more about a verb or its subject or another word in the sentence, and this we call “expansion.” We generally ignore the complement, because it rarely creates problems. In our system, then, four terms – *verb*, *subject*, *connecting word*, and *expansion* – replace a myriad of terms, with their many confusing distinctions useless to novice writers. The simplicity of the concept and method, along with its mode of dramatically clear marking, makes it instantly transferable to students’ own writing. They can apply it directly, without having to rewrite, diagram, or add any obtrusive clutter, in order to analyze, fix, and further revise all varieties of sentences.

In Part 2 (Writing Correct Sentences, Units 7-10), students learn to find and fix sentence faults by applying the overarching principle, growing out of our initial premise, that between a capital letter and a period the number of simple sentences always should be one more than the number of connecting words. However, we have found that even before they do specific work on run-ons and fragments, they often begin to recognize and correct these problems because they have grasped, basically, how sentences work.

Ultimately, this thorough understanding of how sentences work makes it possible for them to go on in Part 3 (Writing Better Sentences, Units 11-14) to write not only correct but also well-constructed, clear, and stylistically effective sentences.

- **Extensive systematic, incremental, and contextualized practice**

The extensive practice demanded by Principle 4 bridges the gap between students’ grasp of the rule and their ability to apply it to their own writing. But this practice, even though extensive, can help writers effectively internalize the rule only if the exercises are structured and sequenced as indicated by Principles 5 and 6. Hence each exercise is built on what has gone before and prepares for what follows, and each sentence in each exercise is contextualized within a web of larger meaning,

whether within a paragraph or as one of a series of separately numbered but related sentences. Pre-publication reviewers have noted that the content of these exercises is generally more interesting and informative than those in currently available sentence workbooks.

- **Transfer of syntactic skills to students' own writing**

Principle 7 is obvious and oft-repeated, but, as one pre-publication reviewer remarked, in all other sentence books the work on syntax and the work on composing are kept oddly distinct. In this book, however, at four key points, students write a paper on a topic that facilitates their use of the aspect of sentence construction that's just been introduced. As they learn more about that feature, they apply what they are learning to their own sentences in that preliminary paper. Then, at the end of the relevant section, they write another paper to demonstrate their control of that aspect and of all previously taught aspects of syntax. Teachers need to read and respond only to the four papers that should demonstrate control of aspects of syntax.

Transfer of skills from workbook exercises to students' own writing is one thing teachers have always been most skeptical about. Teachers who have field-tested the fifth edition of *Mastering Written English*, which uses a similar approach, have found that students experience increasing control over the revision and editing of sentences as they work through a unit. Reviewers also have expressed confidence that this approach, coupled with our powerful new sentence analysis system, will impact on students' own writing.

- **Self-instruction**

In accordance with Principle 8, all exercises, no matter how complex, have unambiguous answers at the back of the book. Students correct their own work, exercise by exercise, learning from their own mistakes, using the scoring charts on the cover pages of each unit to keep track of their progress, and periodically applying what they've taught themselves in order to revise and edit their own writing. The self-teaching approach is effective not only because it compels students' attention by making them responsible for their own learning, but also because it's combined with our systematic, step-by-step approach.

As we have stressed, since not all of the students in a particular class may need the work it provides, or some students may need only part of it, a supplementary workbook needs to be flexible. Perhaps more than any other feature, our book's self-teaching approach makes this flexibility possible. Because students are working on

their own, at their own pace, it's easy for teachers to individualize assignments to accommodate specific needs. Teachers may assign the units for homework, just spot-checking them for accuracy, and marking only the four "test" essays. If the entire class is using the book, instructors will find it useful to structure work in small groups so that students can apply the approaches they're all learning to revising sentences in each other's papers. And in teaching the process approach to writing, instructors can have students apply the book's methods at the revising and editing stages of that process.

The focus of our book may be limited, but the problem it effectively addresses is general and persistent among students in and beyond developmental courses. The population that needs this work is diffuse, but because our book is simultaneously supplemental and self-instructional, it can serve the needs of all these students and their teachers efficiently and competently, in whatever writing courses they're enrolled.

Mary Epes
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Instructor's Manual

The *Instructor's Manual for Mastering Written Sentences* can be obtained by writing to Faculty Services, Prentice Hall, One Lake Street, Upper Saddle River, NJ 07458.

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How to Use This Book

Mastering Written Sentences is a self-teaching book, designed so that you can learn from it by yourself, at your own speed. It aims to teach you to write the **correct, clear, and effective sentences** that college writing requires. It's not a complete textbook, but a **supplement** to other texts or other materials you will be using to learn different aspects of college writing.

Because it's **self-instructional**, this book places the responsibility for learning on you. If you accept this responsibility, and work carefully and thoughtfully, you'll soon find yourself solving sentence problems that may have bothered you for years. So it's important that you read this introduction carefully to find out exactly what you need to do to profit from the self-teaching approach.

What to Do First

Before you begin, get the tools you'll need to work efficiently and to keep your work in order. This is what you need:

- Two different colored pens (use a blue or black one to work with, and a green one to check your answers with);
- A folder with two pockets to keep your papers and completed exercises in. Notice that the pages of this book are perforated so that you can easily tear them out as you finish each one.

Don't go on until you have these three items.

What You Need to Know about This Book

Get your blue or black pen. Always have it in your hand as you read explanations and instructions. Write in the answers even when you feel that they are obvious. One generally recognized principle of learning is that **writing things down** helps you to pay attention and to remember what you have learned.

- Turn to the Table of Contents on page iii above. How many Parts (not Units) are there in this book? _____

According to the headings of the three parts, what are the three major activities in this book? _____ sentences

Writing _____ sentences, and

Writing _____ sentences.

- The Answers to all the exercises are at the back of the book. Find them now. What page do they begin on? _____
- At the beginning of each unit is a cover page on which you can keep a record of how many mistakes you make on each exercise. Turn now to the cover page of Unit 1. How many exercises are there in Unit 1? _____
- Turn to page 2. The words in boxes are important rules. The major rules are in large letters, and the sub-rules are in somewhat smaller letters. They are labeled systematically (1A, 1B, 1C, etc., 2A, 2B, 2C, etc.) to show what unit they are in, and the order (A, B, C, etc.) they appear in the unit. What is the label of the major rule on page 2? _____ The label of the sub-rule? _____
- Look again at page 2. Notice that before and after each rule there are short explanations and examples with comments under them. If you don't read these all carefully, the chances are you won't understand the rules or be able to do Exercise 1.1 correctly.
- Now look at Exercise 1.1. The point of each exercise – what the exercise is about, what you can learn from it – is in the shaded box with the exercise number. What is this exercise about? _____
- Read the instructions for Exercise 1.2. For this exercise, you should ☐ write your answers in the book ☐ use your own paper.
- Read the instructions for Exercise 1.6. For this exercise, you should ☐ write your answers in the book ☐ use your own paper.
- Turn to page 3. In the shaded box labeled Paper A are instructions for writing a paper of your own. Later on you can use this paper to find out how much you already know about using the rules in Units 1-2, and to get practice in applying them to your own writing.

Turn the pages of Unit 1 until you find a shaded box where you apply the rules of this unit to Paper A. What is the label on this exercise? _____

- Turn to the end of Unit 2. Just before the instructions for Paper B is a list of the rules you have learned in Units 1-2. What is this list called? _____
- Right after the Rules Summary are the instructions for Paper B. In this paper, you have a chance to show how much you have learned about using the rules in Units 1-2 in your own writing. How many steps are there in these instructions? _____

At the beginning of each of the three parts of this book, and at the beginning of Unit 3, you will write a paper (like Paper A), and then use it to practice applying the rules for correct and effective sentences in your own writing. At the end of each part, and at the end of Unit 2, you will write a paper (like Paper B) to demonstrate in your own writing how much you have learned. The four papers like Paper B are the most important part of the work in this self-teaching program, and the only part you can't mark yourself.

Getting the Most out of These Exercises

How much you learn from this self-instructional book depends very much on the following:

- how thoughtfully you read the rules and the material that explains them (this is the foundation for all that follows),
- how carefully you follow the instructions as you work through the exercises (there's a reason for every part of what you're being asked to do),
- whether you check each exercise **immediately** as soon as you finish it (each teaches what you need to know to do the next one correctly),
- whether you try to understand **why** an answer is wrong (you can reread the material before an exercise, or, if you still don't understand, **get help** from your teacher, or a tutor, or another student), and
- how faithfully you do the work on your own and resist the temptation to copy from the Answers in order to get everything right (remember, these exercises are not tests, and copying only deprives you of a chance to learn).

Finally, here's a word of advice for keeping your work in order and saving precious time. As soon as you have finished with both sides of a page, put it in your folder so it won't get lost. Keep your exercises in numerical order in the left-hand pocket, with the cover

page on top. And keep your own papers and the exercises you do to improve them in the right-hand pocket. Follow your teacher's instructions about handing in your work.

Start now to follow this last piece of advice. Carefully tear out the pages you just read and wrote your answers on, and put them in your folder for future reference.

Good luck with your work in *Mastering Written Sentences*! We hope that you will find this self-teaching method both helpful and interesting.

Table of Contents

To the Teacher	vii
How to Use This Book	xiii
Part 1: Understanding Sentences	
Unit 1: The Parts of a Sentence	1
Paper A: Discovering What You Already Know	3
Finding Verbs	4
Finding Subjects	9
Unit 2: More about Recognizing Verbs	15
Verb Phrases	16
Verbs in Contractions	20
Words Easily Confused with Verbs	21
Rules Summary for Units 1-2	26
Paper B: Demonstrating What You've Learned	27
Unit 3: Joining Words & Compound Sentences	29
Paper C: Discovering What You Already Know	30
Punctuating Compound Sentences	35
Unit 4: Expansion Words & Complex Sentences	39
Punctuating Complex Sentences	46
Unit 5: Noun-expansion Words & Complex Sentences	51
Punctuating Sentences with Noun-expansion Words	63
Unit 6: That & Complex Sentences	67
Rules Summary for Units 3-6	72
Paper D: Demonstrating What You've Learned	74
Part 2: Writing Correct Sentences	
Unit 7: Recognizing Run-ons	77
Paper E: Discovering What You Already Know	79
Understanding Transition Words	83

Unit 8:	Fixing Run-ons	87
	Fixing Run-ons by Using Periods	88
	Fixing Run-ons by Using Connecting Words	89
	Fixing Run-ons by Using Transition Words	97
Unit 9:	Recognizing and Fixing Fragments I	105
	Recognizing Fragments	106
	Fixing Fragments	109
Unit 10:	Recognizing and Fixing Fragments II	113
	Fragments Caused by Expansion Words	114
	Fragments Caused by Noun-expansion Words	119
	Rules Summary for Units 7-10	125
	Paper F: Demonstrating What You've Learned	127
Part 3:	Writing Better Sentences	
Unit 11:	Writing Clear Sentences I	129
	Paper G: Discovering What You Already Know	130
	Showing Relationships to Make Sentences Clearer	131
	Using Punctuation to Make Sentences Clearer	143
Unit 12:	Writing Clear Sentences II	149
	Using Verb Expansion Appropriately	151
	Using Expansion with <i>ING</i> Words	157
	Using Expansion with Past Participles	162
	Dangling Expansion	166
	Using Participles to Show Relationships	168
Unit 13:	Writing Effective Sentences I	173
	Emphasizing What Matters Most	174
	Using Parallel Parts	188
Unit 14:	Writing Effective Sentences II	193
	Varying Sentence Length	194
	Varying Sentence Structure	197
	Rules Summary for Units 11-14	207
	Paper H: Demonstrating What You've Learned	209
Answers		211
Index		265

Understanding Sentences

1

The Parts of a Sentence

NAME _____

After you finish checking each exercise, fill in your number of mistakes.

1.1 _____	1.4 _____	1.7 _____	1.10 _____	1.13 _____
1.2 _____	1.5 _____	1.8 _____	1.11 _____	1.14 _____
1.3 _____	1.6 _____	1.9 _____	1.12 _____	1.15 _____

☐ Incomplete

INSTRUCTIONS

- ☐ Followed carefully
- ☐ Not careful enough

CHECKING

- ☐ Careful
- ☐ Not careful enough
- ☐ Green pen not used
- ☐ Mistakes not corrected

COMMENTS

Unit 1: The Parts of a Sentence

Written English generally consists of a series of complete sentences, each beginning with a capital letter and ending with a period. In speech, it's not always necessary to use complete sentences, but in writing, complete sentences are almost always needed for a reader to understand what's written on the page. In the first two units, we'll work on understanding what the parts of a sentence are.

1A

Every sentence must have both a verb and a subject.

In writing, every sentence, even a very short one, must have both a verb and a subject.

Armies battled.
Countries collapsed.
Empires arose.

Even these very short sentences are correct because each has both a verb (the word that is circled) and a subject (the word that is boxed).

1A1

Almost all sentences also have expansion telling more about the verb or the subject or other words in the sentence.

Expansion can be one word or many words telling more about the verb or the subject or the other words in a sentence. Adding expansion to a sentence gives the reader more information.

Large armies frequently battled over territory.
Countries with fewer resources often collapsed.
Then great empires arose for a while.

These sentences have the same verbs and subjects as the two-word sentences above, but in these longer sentences expansion has added more information.

Exercise 1.1

Recognizing verbs, subjects, and expansion

These three sentences have even more expansion than the sentences above, but they still have the same verbs and subjects. Circle each verb, and box its subject.

1. In the course of history, great armies, led by ambitious generals, sometimes battled for supremacy over weaker countries.
2. These weaker countries, poorly armed and with meager resources, often collapsed before the superior forces of their attackers.
3. Then vast empires, like the Greek, the Roman, and more recently the British, arose to rule the earth for centuries.

Remember to use your green pen to check each exercise as soon as you finish it. Write in any necessary corrections, and then write your number of mistakes on the cover page.

Discovering What You Already Know

Use Paper A to discover what you already know about using verbs and subjects. In Units 1-2, you'll be checking this paper. Then in Paper B at the end of Unit 2, you can show what you've learned.

Paper A	Using verbs and subjects
Assignment	Describe someone or something that always makes you angry.
Get Ready	On scratch paper, list as many details about the person or event as you can think of. Make sure you have plenty of ideas to show what the person does or what happens, why it always makes you angry, and how you feel about your reaction.
Draft	<p>On another piece of scratch paper, write an introduction telling what your topic is.</p> <p>Write at least one paragraph telling what the person does or what happens. Give plenty of details, so that a reader could understand and believe what you are saying.</p> <p>Write at least one paragraph telling why this always makes you angry. Again, give plenty of details, so that a reader could understand and believe what you are saying.</p>