

JOHN LANGAN

FIFTH
EDITION

FORM B

Sentence Skills

A WORKBOOK FOR WRITERS



SENTENCE SKILLS

A Workbook for Writers

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JOHN LANGAN

Atlantic Community College

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About the Author

John Langan has taught reading and writing at Atlantic Community College near Atlantic City, New Jersey, for over twenty years. The author of a popular series of college textbooks on both subjects, he enjoys the challenge of developing materials that teach skills in an especially clear and lively way. Before teaching, he earned advanced degrees in writing at Rutgers University and in reading at Glassboro State College. He also spent a year writing fiction that, he says, “is now at the back of a drawer waiting to be discovered and acclaimed posthumously.” While in school, he supported himself by working as a truck driver, machinist, battery assembler, hospital attendant, and apple packer. He presently lives with his wife, Judith Nadell, near Philadelphia. Among his everyday pleasures are running, working on his Macintosh computer, and watching Philadelphia sports teams or *60 Minutes* on TV. He also loves to read: newspapers at breakfast, magazines at lunch, and a chapter or two of a recent book (“preferably an autobiography”) at night.

To the Instructor

Sentence Skills will help students master the essential rules of grammar, mechanics, punctuation, and usage needed for clear writing. The book contains a number of features to aid instructors and their students.

- **Coverage of basic writing skills is exceptionally thorough.** The book pays special attention to fragments, run-ons, verbs, and other areas where students have serious problems. At the same time, a glance at the table of contents shows that the book treats skills (such as dictionary use and spelling improvement) not found in other texts. In addition, entire sections of the book are devoted to editing, proofreading, and sentence variety.
- **The book has a clear and flexible format.** Part One presents and gives practice in all the essential basic writing skills. Part Two then reinforces those skills through mastery, editing, and proofreading tests. Part Three uses sentence-combining exercises to help students achieve variety in their writing. Part Four presents writing assignments that enable students to transfer the skills they have learned to realistic writing situations. Since parts, sections, and chapters are self-contained, instructors can move easily from, for instance, a rule in Part One to a mastery test in Part Two to a combining activity in Part Three or a writing assignment in Part Four.

- **Practice materials are numerous.** Most skills are reinforced by activities, review tests, and mastery tests, as well as ditto masters and tests in the *Instructor's Manual*. For most of the skills in the book, there are over one hundred practice exercises.
- **Practice materials are varied and lively.** In many basic writing texts, exercises are monotonous and dry, causing students to lose interest in the skills presented. In *Sentence Skills*, exercises involve students in various ways. An inductive opening project allows students to see what they already know about a given skill. Within chapters, students may be asked to underline answers, add words, generate their own sentences, or edit passages. And the lively and engaging practice materials in the book both maintain interest and help students appreciate the value of vigorous details in writing.
- **Terminology is kept to a minimum.** In general, rules are explained using words students already know. A clause is a *word group*; a coordinating conjunction is a *joining word*; a nonrestrictive element is an *interrupter*. At the same time, traditional grammatical terms are mentioned briefly for students who learned them earlier and are comfortable seeing them again.
- **Self-teaching is encouraged.** Students may check their answers to the introductory projects and the practice activities in Part One by referring to the answers in Appendix B. In this way, they are given the responsibility for teaching themselves. At the same time, to ensure that the answer key is used as a learning tool only, answers are *not* given for the review tests in Part One or for any of the reinforcement tests in Part Two. These answers appear in the *Annotated Instructor's Edition* and the *Instructor's Manual*; they can be copied and handed out to students at the discretion of the instructor.
- **Diagnostic and achievement tests are provided.** These tests appear in Appendix A of the book. Each test may be given in two parts, the second of which gives teachers a particularly detailed picture of a student's skill level.
- **Valuable learning aids accompany the book.** A set of *thirty ditto masters*, ready to run, enables instructors to check students' progress on most of the skills in the book. A *software disk* will help students review and practice many of the skills in the text. The *Annotated Instructor's Edition* includes answers. The comprehensive *Instructor's Manual* includes (1) a complete set of additional mastery tests, (2) a model syllabus along with suggestions for teaching the course and using the software, and (3) an answer key. The manual is 8½ by 11 inches, so that both the answer pages and the added mastery tests can be conveniently reproduced on copying machines.

These aids are available by contacting the local McGraw-Hill representative or by writing to the College English Editor, College Division, McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1221 Avenue of the Americas, New York, New York 10020.

CHANGES IN THE FIFTH EDITION

The helpful comments of writing instructors who have used previous versions of *Sentence Skills* have prompted some important changes in this new edition.

- 1 The convenient *Annotated Instructor's Edition* is identical to the student book except that it includes answers to all the activities and tests.
- 2 A revised set of ditto masters, free to instructors adopting the book, provides more tests and activities than were available previously.
- 3 Additions have been made to key chapters:
 - The chapter on sentence fragments provides additional hints on using the comma when correcting fragments.
 - The chapter on run-ons has been expanded to show subordination as a method of correcting run-ons.
 - The chapter on the apostrophe has simplified the use of the apostrophe with words ending in *s*; also, it now provides more practice in distinguishing between possessive words and simple plurals.
 - The chapter on commas now offers practice from the very start with the problem of unnecessary commas.
 - The chapter in Part One on paper format has been reinforced by the addition of two combined editing tests in Part Two.
- 4 Three chapters ("Misplaced Modifiers," "Dangling Modifiers," and "Faulty Parallelism") have been resequenced; changes have been made in the format of certain tests; and practice materials have been updated, corrected where necessary, and in general freshened throughout.
- 5 Part Four, "Writing Assignments," has been almost completely rewritten. It now provides step-by-step instructions to beginning students on how to write a variety of simple paragraphs and an essay.

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John Langan

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Sentence Skills

Part One

INTRODUCTION

Part One explains the basic skills needed to write clear, error-free sentences. Before you begin working with these skills, however, you will want to read the first chapter—"Learning Sentence Skills"—which explains how you will benefit personally from writing standard English. While the skills are presented within four traditional categories (grammar, mechanics, punctuation, and word use), each section is self-contained so that you can go directly to the skills you need to work on. Note, however, that you may find it helpful to cover "Subjects and Verbs" before turning to other skills. Typically, the main features of a skill are presented on the first pages of a section; secondary points are developed later. Numerous activities are provided so that you can practice skills enough to make them habits. The activities are varied and range from underlining answers to writing complete sentences involving the skill in question. One or more review tests at the end of each section offer additional practice activities.

Learning Sentence Skills

WHY LEARN SENTENCE SKILLS?

Why should someone planning a career as a nurse have to learn sentence skills? Why should an accounting major have to pass a competency test in grammar as part of a college education? Why should a potential physical therapist or graphic artist or computer programmer have to spend hours on the rules of English? Perhaps you have asked questions like these after finding yourself in a class with this book. On the other hand, perhaps you *know* you need to strengthen basic writing skills, even though you may be unclear about the specific ways the skills will be of use to you. Whatever your views, you should understand why sentence skills—all the rules that make up standard English—are so important.

Clear Communication

Standard English, or “language by the book,” is needed to communicate your thoughts to others with a minimal amount of distortion and misinterpretation. Knowing the traditional rules of grammar, punctuation, and usage will help you write clear sentences when communicating with others. You may have heard of the party game in which one person whispers a message to the next person; the message is passed, in turn, along a line of several other people. By the time the last person in line is asked to give the message aloud, it is usually so garbled and inaccurate that it barely resembles the original. Written communication in some form of English other than standard English carries the same potential for disaster.

To see how important standard English is to written communication, examine the pairs of sentences on the following pages and answer the questions in each case.

1. Which sentence indicates that there might be a plot against Ted?
 - a. We should leave Ted. These fumes might be poisonous.
 - b. We should leave, Ted. These fumes might be poisonous.
2. Which sentence encourages self-mutilation?
 - a. Leave your paper and hand in the dissecting kit.
 - b. Leave your paper, and hand in the dissecting kit.
3. Which sentence indicates that the writer has a weak grasp of geography?
 - a. As a child, I lived in Lake Worth, which is close to Palm Beach and Alaska.
 - b. As a child, I lived in Lake Worth, which is close to Palm Beach, and Alaska.
4. In which sentence does the dog warden seem dangerous?
 - a. Foaming at the mouth, the dog warden picked up the stray.
 - b. Foaming at the mouth, the stray was picked up by the dog warden.
5. Which announcer was probably fired from the job?
 - a. Outside the Academy Awards theater, the announcer called the guests names as they arrived.
 - b. Outside the Academy Awards theater, the announcer called the guests' names as they arrived.
6. On the basis of the opening lines below of two student exam essays, which student seems likely to earn a higher grade?
 - a. Defense mechanisms is the way people hides their inner feelings and deals with stress. There is several types that we use to be protecting our true feelings.
 - b. Defense mechanisms are the methods people use to cope with stress. Using a defense mechanism allows a person to hide his or her real desires and goals.
7. On the basis of the following lines taken from two English papers, which student seems likely to earn a higher grade?
 - a. A big problem on this campus is apathy, students don't participate in college activities. Such as clubs, student government, and plays.
 - b. The most pressing problem on campus is the disgraceful state of the student lounge area. The floor is dirty, the chairs are torn, and the ceiling leaks.

8. On the basis of the following sentences taken from two employee reports, which worker is more likely to be promoted?
- The spring line failed by 20 percent in the meeting of projected profit expectations. Which were issued in January of this year.
 - Profits from our spring line were disappointing. They fell 20 percent short of January's predictions.
9. On the basis of the following paragraphs taken from two job application letters, which job prospect would you favor?
- Let me say in closing that their are an array of personal qualities I have presented in this letter, together, these make me hopeful of being interviewed for this attraktive position.

sincerly yours'

Brian Davis
 - I feel I have the qualifications needed to do an excellent job as assistant manager of the jewelry department at Horton's. I look forward to discussing the position further at a personal interview.

Sincerely yours,

Richard O'Keeney

In each case, the first choice (a) contains sentence-skills mistakes. These mistakes range from missing or misplaced commas to misspellings to wordy or pretentious language. As a result of these mistakes, clear communication cannot occur—and misunderstandings, lower grades, and missed job opportunities are probable results. The point, then, is that all the rules that make up standard written English should be a priority if you want your writing to be clear and effective.

Success in College

Standard English is essential if you want to succeed in college. Any report, paper, review, essay exam, or assignment you are responsible for should be written in the best standard English you can produce. If not, it won't matter how fine your ideas are or how hard you worked—most likely, you will receive a lower grade than you would otherwise deserve. In addition, because standard English requires you to express your thoughts in precise, clear sentences, training yourself to follow the rules can help you think more logically. And the basic logic you learn to practice at the sentence level will help as you work to produce well-reasoned papers in all your subjects.