

An abstract painting with a dark, moody background. The top features a large, irregular red shape. Below it, there are patches of green, blue, and orange. The bottom half is dominated by a large, textured orange and red shape, possibly representing a face or a landscape feature. The overall style is expressive and painterly.

John Langan

SENTENCE SKILLS

A Workbook for Writers

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McGraw-Hill Book Company

New York St. Louis San Francisco Auckland Bogotá Düsseldorf
Johannesburg London Madrid Mexico Montreal New Delhi Panama
Paris São Paulo Singapore Sydney Tokyo Toronto

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Langan, John, date
Sentence skills.

Includes index.

1. English language—Rhetoric. 2. English
language—Grammar—1950— I. Title.

PE1408.L3183 808'.042 78-26361

ISBN 0-07-036255-6

SENTENCE SKILLS: A Workbook for Writers

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890 DODO 832

This book was set in Times Roman by Monotype Composition Company, Inc.
The editors were William A. Talkington and Susan Gamer;
the designer was Merrill Haber;
the production supervisor was Dominick Petrellese.
R. R. Donnelley & Sons Company was printer and binder.

Cover: Painting by James Nelson, 1976.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Selection *c* on page 219, selection *a* on page 223, and selection *a* on page
226: Rita K. Baltus, adapted from *Personal Psychology for Life and Work*.
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Selection *a* on page 219: Al Brooks, adapted from *Car Crime Prevention*.
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Preface

This book has two main concerns. First, it will help you master the basic writing skills you need to be successful in your schoolwork or career. Second, and just as important, the book will show you how to transfer these basic skills to realistic writing situations. All too often, people can demonstrate such skills in isolated practice activities, but they cannot apply the same skills in their own writing. This book will make you a skillful editor and proofreader—a person able to recognize and correct errors in writing.

Part 1 presents all the basic skills needed for writing clear, error-free sentences. Each skill is self-contained so that you can turn directly to the areas that give you trouble. Explanations are brief and clear, and formal terminology is kept to a minimum. Typically, the main features of a skill are presented on the first page of a section; secondary points appear later. Numerous and varied activities are provided so that you can practice skills enough to make them habits. To help you transfer basic skills to your own writing, you are asked not just to supply correct answers but to write sentences applying the skill in question. An answer key starting on page 188 allows you to check your answers to the practice exercises in Part 1. To encourage you to use the answer key as a learning tool only, answers are *not* given to the review tests at the end of each skill section.

While Part 1 gives you practice on skills within individual sentences, Part 2 gives you practice on many of the same skills within full compositions. You are asked to rewrite a series of compositions, correcting in each of them a number of mistakes involving a single sentence skill. The rewriting activities serve as a middle ground between isolated sentence work and your own compositions. In short, the activities increase your chances of transferring the sentence skills to your everyday writing. Part 2 also helps you to develop the habit of careful proofreading. A progress chart on page 232 will help you track your performance as you move through the sequence of steps in Part 2.

The mastery and editing tests in Part 3 reinforce the basic writing skills in the first part of the book. The mastery tests may be used as homework assignments, supplementary activities, in-class quizzes at the end of a section, or review tests at any point during the semester. (Such review helps ensure that skills covered at earlier points in the semester will not be forgotten.) The editing tests offer practice in a variety of sentence skills and further work in proofreading. A progress chart on page 281 makes it easy for you to score your answers to the tests in Part 3.

The first three parts of the book help you to write clear sentences; Part 4 shows you how to write varied and interesting sentences. Through work in sentence combining, you will develop a sense of the many different options open to you when expressing a given idea. You will learn to compose sentences that impart variety and ease to your writing style.

Part 5 provides a number of writing assignments so that you can apply the basic writing skills you have learned. The surest way to achieve a transfer of such skills is to apply them in actual writing situations. A progress chart on page 336 encourages you to rewrite assignments as often as necessary to achieve error-free compositions.

While the five parts of the book have been described in sequence, the format is extremely flexible. For example, practice in a given skill in Part 2 can be followed by a guided composition activity in Part 2 or a mastery or editing test in Part 3. Sections of Parts 4 and 5 may be covered at any point during the semester. Or, you and your instructor may choose to do extensive work at one time in a single part of the book.

Sentence Skills, in sum, will help you learn, practice, and apply the basic writing skills you need to communicate clearly and effectively. You know that competent writing is important—not just in your English classes but in your other courses, in everyday life, and in your career. What remains is your personal determination to do the work needed to become an independent writer. If you decide—and only you can decide—that you want to learn to write effectively, this book will help you reach that goal.

Acknowledgments

Reviewers who have contributed to this book through their helpful comments include Marian C. Bashinski, Florida State University; Elaine Newman, Queens College; Eric Hoem, Mount Hood Community College; Anna Y. Bradley, C. S. Mott Community College; and Cecilia Macheski, LaGuardia Community College. I am grateful also for the assistance of Ruth K. Crozier. And I owe special thanks to my wife, Judith Nadell, whose own work in the teaching of writing has helped shape sections of this book, and whose extraordinary editing gifts have made *Sentence Skills* a stronger text than I could have managed by myself.

John Langan

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PART 1

Sentence Skills

INTRODUCTION

Part 1 explains the basic skills needed for you to write clear, error-free sentences. 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 correct answers to writing complete sentences involving the skill in question. One or more review tests at the end of each section offer additional practice opportunities.

Use the answer key that begins on page 188 after you finish each practice activity. You want to learn right away if you have understood and applied correctly the skill in question. Talk to your instructor about any answers that do not seem clear. Answers are *not* given for the review tests at the end of each section or for the mastery tests in Part 3. These tests will evaluate your final mastery of the skills.

Section 1: Grammar

Subjects and Verbs

The basic building blocks of English sentences are subjects and verbs. Understanding them is an important first step toward mastering a number of sentence skills.

Every sentence has a subject and a verb. Who or what the sentence speaks about is called the subject; what the sentence says about the subject is called the verb.

People gossip.

The truck stalled.

He waved at me.

That woman is a millionaire.

A SIMPLE WAY TO FIND A SUBJECT

To find a subject, ask *who* or *what* the sentence is about. As shown below, your answer is the subject.

Who is the first sentence about? People

What is the second sentence about? The truck

Who is the third sentence about? He

Who is the fourth sentence about? That woman

A SIMPLE WAY TO FIND A VERB

To find a verb, ask what the sentence *says about* the subject. As shown below, your answer is the verb.

What does the first sentence *say about* people? They gossip.

What does the second sentence *say about* the truck? It stalled.

What does the third sentence *say about* him? He waved.

What does the fourth sentence *say about* that woman? She is (a millionaire).

A second way to find the verb is to put *I, you, he, she, it, or they* in front of the word you think is a verb. If the result makes sense, you have a verb. For example, you could put *they* in front of *gossip* in the first sentence above, with the result, *they gossip*, making sense. Therefore you know that *gossip* is a verb. You could use the same test with the other three verbs as well.

PRACTICE 1 Adding Subjects

In the following sentences, the verbs are underlined twice. The subjects (the *who* or *what* words) have been omitted. Fill in your own subjects to make the sentences complete.

1. The _____ shouted.
2. _____ gave me a stereo receiver as a birthday present.
3. The _____ slipped out of my hand and fell into a puddle.
4. Using matches, _____ lit up the gas stove.
5. The _____ must be emptied.
6. The _____ is turned on too loud.
7. The elderly _____ rested on the park bench with his eyes closed.
8. While _____ painting the living room, _____ was downstairs paneling the basement.
9. _____ were so high in the store that _____ refused to buy anything.
10. The _____ pushed the old lady and grabbed her purse, but _____ surprised him with a karate chop.

PRACTICE 2 Finding Subjects

Underline the subjects in the following sentences. Verbs have already been underlined twice. Remember that you find a subject by asking *who* or *what* the sentence is about.

1. Most students took one hour to finish the essay exam.
2. My socks wore thin after only three months.
3. Melanie has driven her car across the country on three separate occasions.
4. The windstorm blew over the storage shed in the backyard.
5. The video game was played by the entire family.
6. Pretzels and chips are his favorite evening snack.
7. The window fan made a clanking sound and kept them awake at night.
8. The wind blew our storm door off its hinges.
9. The children stared in wide-eyed wonderment at the Thanksgiving Day floats.
10. The shrubs are growing too close to the side of the house.

PRACTICE 3 Adding Verbs

In the following sentences, the subjects are underlined. The verbs have been omitted. Fill in your own verbs to make the sentences complete.

1. I _____ an entire pizza by myself.
2. Barracuda _____ in that lake.
3. Clyde _____ down to the playground with his son.
4. Sally _____ the biology test.
5. The television movie _____ suddenly.
6. The dancer _____, badly twisting her ankle.
7. Brian and Sue _____ the fence in one weekend.
8. I _____ three books for that course.
9. The man suddenly _____ to the ground, as if a bullet
_____ him.
10. The sky quickly _____ overcast, so we _____
indoors.

PRACTICE 4 Finding Verbs

Draw a double line under the verbs in the following sentences. Subjects have already been underlined. Remember that you find a verb by asking what the sentence *says about* the subject.

1. Barbara believes in extrasensory perception.
2. Most of my friends like my new hairstyle.
3. The drawer of the bureau sticks on rainy days.
4. The sun reflecting off the lake blinded my eyes.
5. Her part-time job limits her study time.
6. The game was called because of darkness.
7. The picture fell suddenly to the floor.
8. The checkout lines at the supermarket moved very slowly.
9. An old newspaper tumbled down the dirty street.
10. He starts every morning with a series of yoga exercises.

PRACTICE 5 Finding Subjects and Verbs

In each of the following sentences, draw one line under the subject and two lines under the verb.

Ask *who* or *what* the sentence is about to find the subject. Then ask what the sentence *says about* the subject to find the verb.

1. Carol works for a candlestick maker.
 2. My Timex watch never loses time.
 3. His car broke down on the freeway.
 4. Cotton shirts feel softer than polyester ones.
 5. The fog rolled into the cemetery.
 6. Sparrows live in the eaves of my porch.
 7. My car needed a tune-up for weeks.
 8. A green bottle fly stung her on the ankle.
 9. Russ expected a better grade on the paper.
 10. I ran ten miles in my first week of jogging.
-

MORE ABOUT SUBJECTS AND VERBS**Distinguishing Subjects from Prepositional Phrases**

The subject of a sentence never appears within a prepositional phrase. A *prepositional phrase* is simply a group of words that begin with a preposition. Following is a list of common prepositions:

about	before	by	in	on	through
above	behind	during	inside	onto	to
across	below	except	into	out	toward
among	beneath	for	of	over	under
around	beside	from	off	past	with
at	between				

Cross out prepositional phrases when looking for the subject of a sentence.

~~Under my pillow~~ I found a quarter left ~~by the Tooth Fairy~~.
~~One of the yellow lights at the school crossing~~ began flashing.
 The funny pages ~~of the newspaper~~ disappeared.
~~In spite of my efforts~~, Bob dropped out ~~of school~~.
~~During a rainstorm~~, I sat ~~in my car~~ reading magazines.

PRACTICE

Cross out prepositional phrases. Then draw a single line under subjects and a double line under verbs.

1. The attractive woman over there in the corner is my former wife.
 2. The dishes in the sink must be washed before tomorrow.
 3. Both of my house keys are missing.
 4. The hamburger on sale at 89¢ a pound looks several days old.
 5. In the middle of the movie, the screen suddenly went blank.
 6. The water stain on her suede shoes disappeared with brushing.
 7. The last rays of the sun faded into darkness.
 8. During the baseball game, my twin brother ate five hot dogs.
 9. Without the help of a calculator, I could not balance my checkbook.
 10. Over the river and through the woods to Grandmother's house we will go.
-

Verbs of More Than One Word

Many verbs consist of more than one word. Here, for example, are some of the many forms of the verb *talk*:

talk	were talking	will be talking
talks	have talked	must talk
does talk	has talked	would talk
is talking	had talked	can talk
are talking	had been talking	should have talked
talked	should talk	could be talking

Following are sentences that contain verbs of more than one word:

Diane is not working overtime this week.

Another book has been written about the Kennedy family.

We should have stopped for gas at the last station.

The game has just been cancelled.

Note: Words like *not*, *just*, *never*, *only*, and *always* are not part of the verb although they may appear within the verb.

PRACTICE

Draw a single line under subjects and a double line under verbs. Be sure to include all parts of the verb.

1. He has been sleeping all day.
 2. The wood foundations of the shed have been attacked by termites.
 3. Sally should have gone Christmas shopping earlier.
 4. The teacher had not warned us about the quiz.
 5. Carol and Arnie have both received raises in their salaries.
 6. You should not pet that temperamental hamster.
 7. I have not washed my car for several months.
 8. He could make a living with his wood carvings.
 9. The bus must have been delayed in Atlanta.
 10. They have just been married by a justice of the peace.
-

Compound Subjects and Verbs

A sentence may have more than one verb:

My heart skipped and pounded.

Frank drove home from work, showered, and then walked over to Julie's house.

A sentence may have more than one subject:

Psychology and history are my favorite subjects.

The radio and the tape player were stolen from Clyde's car.

A sentence may have several subjects and several verbs:

Dave and I prepared the report together and presented it to the class.
Judy, Carol, and Will met for lunch together and then went to a movie.

PRACTICE

Draw a single line under subjects and a double line under verbs. Be sure to mark off *all* the subjects and verbs.

1. The mother and daughter wore identical outfits.
 2. Many people laughed and cried during the movie.
 3. Tuna and dolphins were trapped in the fisherman's net.
 4. The hospital will serve you only decaffeinated coffee with your meals.
 5. The first hundred people at the theater will be admitted at half price and be given a mystery gift.
 6. My sister and I often play games like Monopoly and chess.
 7. John and Marilyn looked back in disbelief at the flashing lights of the police car behind them.
 8. I sprayed the trees with insecticide and spread weed killer on the backyard lawn.
 9. During the baseball season the Dodgers, Reds, and Giants all occupied first place for several weeks.
 10. One student sat quietly and never volunteered answers to the teacher's questions.
-