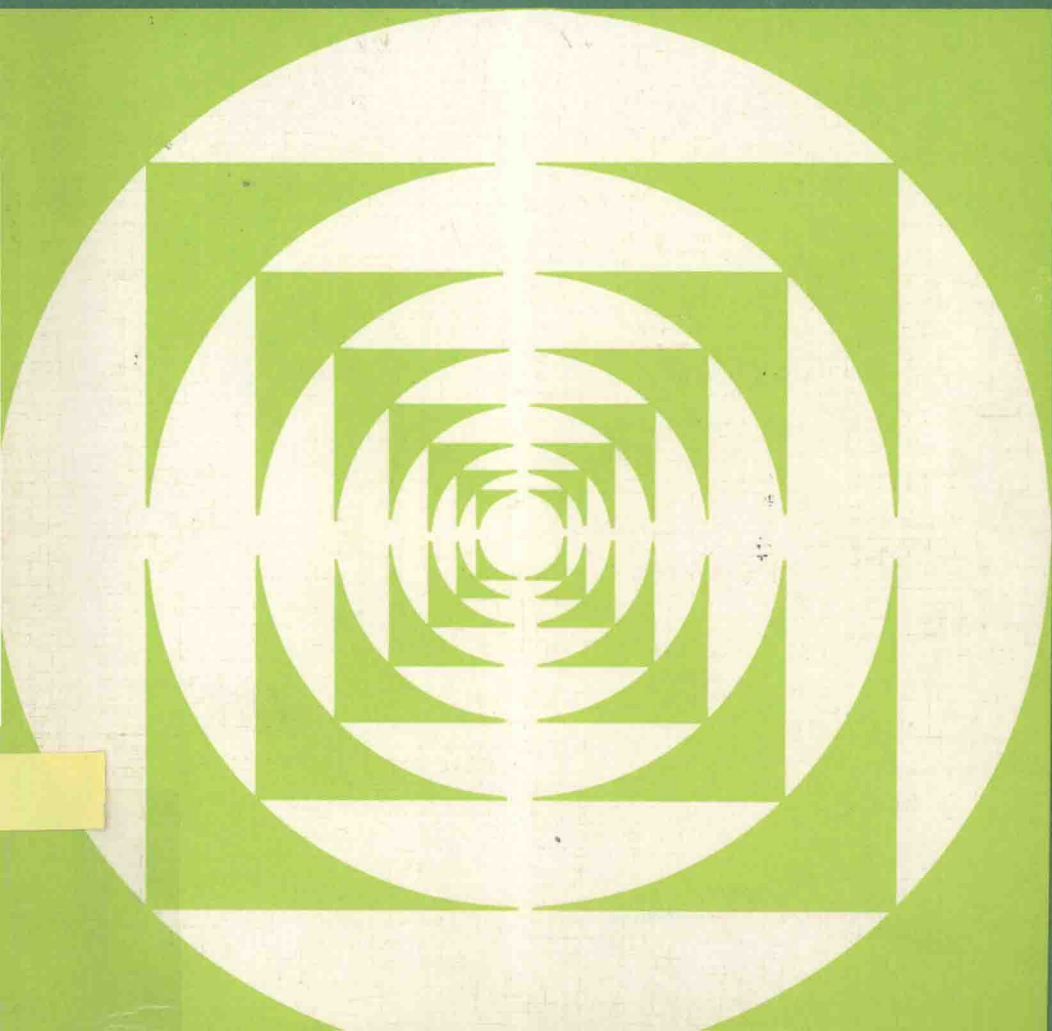


sentence composing

THE COMPLETE COURSE

DON KILLGALLON



Sentence Composing

The Complete Course

DON KILLGALLON

Baltimore County Schools

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Sentence Composing

The Complete Course

Preface

SENTENCE COMPOSING: *The Complete Course* emphasizes the most neglected unit of written composition: the sentence. Using four techniques—*sentence scrambling*, *sentence imitating*, *sentence combining*, and *sentence expanding*—the book teaches students structures they seldom use in their writing, but should and can easily use once they become familiar with them through many examples and practices.

The book concentrates on such structures by means of model sentences by professional writers. The rationale is based on the widely accepted mimetic theory of *oral* language acquisition, applied here to *written* language acquisition in the belief that continual exposure to structures used often by professionals in their sentences will produce attention to, understanding of, and, with practice, normal use of such structures by students in their sentences.

The book is an exercise in applied grammar, with theory and terminology of grammar subordinate to the major goal, composing sentences. The naming of parts and the parsing of sentences, the goals of traditional grammar study, are exercises in dissection. The practices in SENTENCE COMPOSING are exercises in production.

The four sentence composing techniques are easily learned. The practices based on them are interesting and challenging, and they can be done by any student. In addition, the teacher can readily give attention to the sentences students compose, with quicker, more constant, and more thorough feedback than with longer compositions.

Since the practices have proved successful for the great majority of students who have used them in all kinds of schools, it's demonstrably true that SENTENCE COMPOSING can work anywhere—in any school, with any student.

To students: the best, the brightest, the baddest, but,
most of all, to all the others—the ones for whom
nothing ever seems to work.

Introduction:

How Sentence Composing Works

How do professional writers learn to write their sentences? Often, ironically, not through writing but through reading. Good writers are also good readers. When professional writers read, they don't just read for meaning; they read for style, including how good sentences are composed. Their writing school is the pages between the covers of a book, and their writing teachers are the authors of those pages—the best writing teachers available. Unconsciously or consciously, good writers learn to write through imitation.

SENTENCE COMPOSING is based upon a similar process: learning by imitating. The theory that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery is rooted in the theory that imitation is often the best form of learning. Great writers of the past were routinely schooled in the imitation of master writers, often copying verbatim from their writings, hoping something would rub off. Many (including Shakespeare) learned the craft of writing partly through imitation. The same method, applied to composing sentences, is used exclusively in SENTENCE COMPOSING. This textbook is based on the principle that learning to compose good sentences can be greatly aided through the deliberate imitation of professionally written sentences.

In most grammar and writing textbooks since the nineteenth century, almost no use has been made of imitation, one of the methods used to teach writing in earlier times, even though that method proved effective. Common from the Renaissance through the nineteenth century, sentence imitation has largely been neglected in favor of sentence analysis. The diagramming, labeling, and classifying of sentences has been paramount. The hope was that sentence analysis would improve the composing of sentences, that “knowing” would result in “doing.” Students learned how to analyze sentences, but not how to improve their own. SENTENCE COMPOSING reverses the emphasis and the order, with imitation receiving major attention and analysis minor attention, with “doing” resulting in “knowing,” on the assumption that imitating the

sentences of professional writers also yields useful knowledge about grammar, about words, and about writing.

This is not a grammar book. Whether you can compose good sentences is the main concern of the textbook, not whether you can identify grammatical structures. The practices in this textbook contain professionally written sentences by authors whose works are frequently studied in English classrooms—instead of the artificially concocted sentences in grammar books, written for students to identify grammatical structures rather than to demonstrate the effective use of those structures in good writing.

Most grammar books emphasize identification, not application. SENTENCE COMPOSING emphasizes practicing, not identifying; applying, not memorizing. Even though there is constant practice, monotony is unlikely because the methods are varied. The many practices are crucial to learning and using the sentence composing techniques of professional writers.

SENTENCE COMPOSING teaches sentence structures seldom used by students in their writing, frequently used by professional writers in theirs. The aim is to bridge the gap. The method is to isolate the types of sentence structures associated with professional writing and practice them until they become second-nature.

"Practicing Professional Sentence Composing Techniques, " Part I of the textbook, introduces the four sentence composing techniques used throughout:

SENTENCE SCRAMBLING
SENTENCE IMITATING
SENTENCE COMBINING
SENTENCE EXPANDING

The purpose is to establish an awareness of the variety of sentence structures common in the hundreds of professionally written sentences used for the practices in this textbook. Once that awareness is established, you'll apply it by producing sentences with sentence structures resembling those of professional writers.

"Using Professional Sentence Structures," Part II of the textbook, builds upon the awareness established in Part I and focuses your attention on three important structures that are common in professional sentences: absolutes, appositives, and participles. Using the four sentence composing techniques, you'll have intensive practice in these three important structures that sharply differentiate the writing of professionals from the writing of most students.

"Achieving Professional Sentence Variety," Part III of the textbook, uses those three structures, adds others, and teaches the three positions within a sentence that professional writers use in ways much different from students: sentence openers, S-V splits, and sentence

closers. Using the four sentence composing techniques, the practices focus on how professional writers effectively use these three positions.

All of the textbook concentrates on sentence composing skills through the use of model sentences by professional writers. Constant exposure to their sentence structures will produce attention to, understanding of, and, with practice, natural use of such structures by you in your own sentences.

An important purpose of SENTENCE COMPOSING is to provide you with alternatives from which you can make appropriate choices for the sentences you compose. If you're like most students, you're unaware that there are alternatives, and may be puzzled by exactly what is meant by "sentence variety" and "sentence maturity." Choice requires awareness of alternatives. This textbook provides the awareness. It also provides the alternatives necessary to help you improve the way you compose sentences.

The section in the back of the textbook called "References" contains the original sentences by professional writers that were the basis for the practices. They're included so that you'll have immediate feedback on how you did in the individual practices. You should not, however, consider the References "answers in the back of the book." They're for comparison, not correction. The important thing isn't whether your sentence is like the professional writer's, but whether you learn anything from the comparison. You may decide that the professional writer's is better; in that case, study the differences. You may decide that yours is just as good; in that case, congratulate yourself. You may decide that yours is better; in that case, take a bow. In any case, the important thing to remember is that the References are not "answers."

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I

Practicing Professional Sentence Composing Techniques

When you write sentences and when professional writers write sentences, you both engage in a similar process. The results, however, are often different, sometimes dramatically so. The difference isn't spelling, capitalization, or other conventions of written English. It's true that many students have problems with such matters. It is also true that you rarely find mechanical flaws in published writing. Authors are not necessarily better in these respects; they may just have good editors.

A big difference (and the one this textbook deals with) is in sentence structure variety. You'll recognize this difference as you practice "sentence composing"—that is, producing sentences closely resembling in structure those written by professional writers. SENTENCE COMPOSING focuses on sentence structure as a major difference between the sentences of professionals and those of students. The text provides model sentences written by professionals. You'll practice writing your own sentences with structures similar to the ones in the models. The goal is to establish those structures in your own writing.

In this part of the textbook, you'll study four sentence composing techniques that will enable you to write sentences similar in structure to those of professional writers: sentence scrambling, sentence imitating, sentence combining, and sentence expanding. The techniques themselves are easy to learn; however, in order to apply them to your own writing, you must practice them frequently. The book provides numerous practices for that reason. Don't make the mistake of thinking that just because you can do the technique, you'll apply it in your own writing. The application of the skill to your own writing is more likely to occur if you do most of the practices on the particular sentence composing techniques emphasized in each part of the book.

You can learn much about writing in general, not only sentence structure, through the practices in this book. The study of the sentence has too often been neglected as a way of improving writing; instead the

study of the sentence was used mainly for analyzing grammar. SENTENCE COMPOSING studies the sentence as a way of improving your writing. Even though you'll be working mostly with sentences, there's much that you can learn about good writing of any length and type—paragraphs, essays, short stories, reports, and research papers.

1

Sentence Scrambling

DEFINING SENTENCE SCRAMBLING

Sentence scrambling simply means mixing up the parts of a sentence and then putting them back together to make a meaningful, well-written sentence. Sentence scrambling permits a close look at how professional writers assemble the parts of their sentences.

The sentence parts are listed in a different order from that in the original sentence. To illustrate, here's an original sentence, a list with the sentence parts in the same order as in the original, and a list with the sentence parts scrambled.

Original Sentence

When his father, who was old and twisted with toil, made over to him the ownership of the farm and seemed content to creep away to a corner and wait for death, he shrugged his shoulders and dismissed the old man from his mind.

Sherwood Anderson, Winesburg, Ohio

Original Order

1. When his father,
2. who was old
3. and twisted with toil,
4. made over to him the ownership
5. of the farm
6. and seemed content
7. to creep away
8. to a corner
9. and wait for death,
10. he shrugged his shoulders
11. and dismissed the old man
12. from his mind.

Scrambled Order

1. to a corner
2. from his mind.
3. and wait for death,
4. When his father,
5. he shrugged his shoulders
6. made over to him the ownership
7. who was old
8. and dismissed the old man
9. of the farm
10. and twisted with toil,
11. to creep away
12. and seemed content

PRACTICING SENTENCE SCRAMBLING

PRACTICE 1

In these two lists of scrambled sentence parts, the content is nonsense, but the structure is grammatically meaningful. The sentence parts are scrambled versions of the model sentence above the lists. Unscramble them to produce a sentence identical in structure to the model. Write out the completed sentences. Compare your sentences with the ones in the References on page 132.

Model

When his father, who was old and twisted with toil, made over to him the ownership of the farm and seemed content to creep away to a corner and wait for death, he shrugged his shoulders and dismissed the old man from his mind.

Sherwood Anderson, *Winesburg, Ohio*

List One: Nonsense Sentence Parts (in scrambled order)

1. and covered the floor
2. and feathered with grease
3. with its typewriters
4. which was solid
5. when the ashtray
6. sang for him the dance
7. and became encouraged
8. to an ocean
9. the crab blanked its pencil

10. and hope for mud
11. of the petunia
12. to jump up

List Two: Nonsense Sentence Parts (in scrambled order)

1. in an instant
2. which was crystal
3. the bun opened its halves
4. although the hamburger
5. ran down to him the story
6. in a dictionary
7. of the onion
8. and demented in town
9. and seemed reluctant
10. and study for words
11. to fly away
12. and embraced the cheese

PRACTICE 2

For each sentence there are two separate lists of equivalent sentence parts. The two lists, though structurally identical to each other and to the structure of the model sentence, are different in content. The first list is written in sense language; the second, in nonsense. The purpose of the use of nonsense language is to remove as much meaning as possible from the list of sentence parts. Without the possibility of being distracted by the meaning of each of the sentence parts, you can focus on the major aspect of sentence composing, that is, sentence structure. It will be more helpful to you if you write out the unscrambled versions rather than simply list the correct order of the sentence parts. Doing so will give you practice in writing the various sentence structures. Punctuate correctly, following the punctuation used in the model sentence in each case. Compare your sentences with the ones in the References on page 132.

Tom got his lantern, lit it in the hogshead, wrapped it closely in the towel, and the two adventurers crept in the gloom toward the tavern.

Mark Twain, *Tom Sawyer*

- 1a. ahead of the singer
- b. rehearsed it
- c. Bob wrote his song
- d. but the small orchestra played
- e. sang it beautifully
- f. in the play

- g. in the evenings
 - h. with the beat
- 2a. and the plimey peesto scrunted
- b. broded it
 - c. in the tunert
 - d. Snaze kurped its blander
 - e. crassed it frinkly
 - f. of a bleepert
 - g. from the marton
 - h. with the snart

To carry care to bed is to sleep with a pack on your back.

Thomas Haliburton

- 3a. in a state
- b. to bring work
 - c. of constant worry
 - d. is
 - e. from the office
 - f. to "relax"
- 4a. in a zipple
- b. to jeld crams
 - c. is
 - d. near town
 - e. from a zapple
 - f. to murd

The man who writes about himself and his own time is the only man who writes about all people and about all time.

George Bernard Shaw

- 5a. with great enthusiasm
- b. a sportscaster
 - c. and with solid knowledge
 - d. the choice announcer
 - e. is
 - f. who communicates
 - g. who communicates
 - h. and sports' top athletes
 - i. with fans
- 6a. and near forty bloops
- b. the blends
 - c. the best blends
 - d. and their brained nabort

- e. which croak
- f. are
- g. which croak
- h. near thirty bleeps
- i. from selfchoose

A leather handbag, extremely worn, but with a label inside it as impressive as the one inside Mrs. Snell's hat, lay on the pantry.

J. D. Salinger, "Down at the Dinghy"

- 7a. very dry
- b. in Grandma's eyes
- c. as appealing
- d. the wrinkled skin
- e. as the sparkle
- f. shone in the candlelight
- g. about it
- h. yet with a softness

- 8a. an oversized saltert
- b. in its woostem
- c. quite pritert
- d. as lumrious
- e. plazoned from a yambrod
- f. as a klanion
- g. on it
- h. and of a color

PRACTICE 3

To recognize that sentence parts are movable, do the following Practice. For each list of scrambled sentence parts, unscramble the parts three times, each time producing a sentence with the parts in a different order. Punctuate accordingly. Indicate which of the three versions you consider the most effective arrangement, and explain your choice. Then check the References on page 133 to compare your choices with the sentences as originally written.

EXAMPLE

Scrambled Sentence Parts

- a. so coldly burning
- b. falling upon his knees
- c. which was so huge